

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Refugees in Denmark;  
a Multimedia Report Project

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Mass Communication

By  
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August, 2016

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## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my committee chair, Dr. Melissa A. Wall, who has encouraged and guided me through this process and been of tremendous help. I would further extend my gratitude to involve Professor Richard Chambers who, through his teaching, has helped me gain the necessary skills to produce the videos that play a big part of my thesis.

I would also like to give a special thanks to the two refugee camps, Toftlund Asylcenter and Fredericia Asylcenter, and the refugees and officials working within the camps, who all welcomed me and took part of this project. This thanks should be extended to include everyone who helped as participants or contributors to this project including photojournalist Rasmus Degnbol and music composer Anthony Ragus.

In addition, a thank you to everyone who has been ready with encouraging words the last couple of years, particularly, all my fellow mass communication graduates who have supported and helped me throughout this degree.

Lastly, a warm and grateful thank you to my parents and sister for supporting me economically and mentally. I could not have done this without their continuous support.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the millions of refugees, especially the refugees who took part in this project, who have all fled war and other forms of violence to reach a place of peace and security. Their struggles will not be forgotten. Although this project is a small contribution to improve the conditions refugees live under, I sincerely believe it is an important contribution as reaching a better understanding of refugees' information practices is the first step to improve distribution of information in the future to help the refugees as well as host countries, volunteers, media and other actors affected by the crisis.

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## List of Abbreviations

CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CoE	Council of Europe
CSR51	The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
EEC	European Economic Community
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUCFR	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IRL	International Refugee Law
OIM	The International Organisation for Migrations
PRS	Protracted Refugee Situations
PSR67	The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## Abstract

### Refugees in Denmark and Their Experience of Information Precarity; a Multimedia Report Project

By

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Master of Arts in Mass Communication

Based on 14 interviews with asylum seekers in two refugee camps in Denmark and six officials, this study found that refugees rely mainly on their cellphones for communication, news about their home country and Denmark, practical information, and personal entertainment. Although the refugees are now safe from violence, they continue to experience difficulties accessing information due to various barriers.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

By mid-2015 the total number of refugees worldwide reached 15.1 million, the highest number in 20 years. While the majority of refugees stay in neighboring countries, the number of refugees fleeing to Europe is increasing. Like most of Europe, Denmark has experienced an increase in asylum seekers especially when it comes to asylum-seekers from Syria (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2015). However, according to the International Organisation for Migrations [OIM], how the public perceives the extent of an issue is often inadequate (Retis, 2013).

One of the biggest players in distributing information to the public is the media. As the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI] has noted, on several occasions, the role of Danish media in "... creating negative images of ethnic minorities, thereby contributing to a general climate of intolerance and discrimination against ethnic minorities and, in particular, Muslims in Denmark" (Jacobsen, Jensen, Vitus and Weibel, 2012, p. 53). As explained by Retis (2013), in order to have a well-functioning society where a multiethnic population can coexist, it is crucial to have a well-informed debate. Migration brings with it this aspect of diversity, and the media plays a particular big role on how migrants, in this case specifically refugees, are perceived by the public.

### Aim and Importance

The main focus of this project is refugees' communication practices, specifically, their cellphone usage. As Giovanni et al. (2013) argue, when people are going through humanitarian crisis such as war, people need more than just food and water. They need information and they need the information at the right time. Based on this, the study of media usage is important in order to understand refugees' information practice to improve

distribution of information in any future refugee crisis – to help both refugees as well as host countries, especially, in an age with a steady increase of technological advantages. After visiting refugee camps and interviewing camp officials, it is clear that refugees are misrepresented by media accounts frequently. Further, information is often presented without any context or accompanying background that is easy to access to help provide greater understanding. This project seeks to correct those tendencies.

Hereby, this project aims to offer an alternative view of refugees in Denmark and provide a more human look at their experiences seeking asylum. It does so by creating a website, Refugees in Denmark, that answers the following research questions:

RQ 1: What was their journey to Denmark like?

RQ 2: How do refugees in Denmark view their communication practices, particularly their use of cellphones?

RQ 3: What are their dreams for the future?

## Roadmap

Following this section, Chapter 2 contains the literature review, which is comprised of different sections discussing first the background knowledge of the European Union [EU] and the asylum legislations, as well as a discussion of the challenges that have derived with the increasing number of asylum applications – both within the EU and Denmark specifically. Hereafter, this paper will assess the theoretical framework of media practice and media dependency as well as an in-depth examination of Wall et al.'s (2015) study of information precarity.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology of in-depth one-on-one interviews used in this study. This section is presented in different sections first explaining the preliminary

preparations, then the actual interview process, and lastly the post-production, where to any limitations and challenges have been taken into considerations.

Chapter 4 contains the website, Refugees in Denmark, including texts and transcripts from the short-videos created from the interviews created for the purpose of shedding light on the experiences the refugees have had in relation to the journey, their cellphone usage, and their dreams for the future.

Lastly, chapter 5 is a conclusion, discussing the findings, as well as a reflection on future research opportunities.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will first provide the contextual setting to the current refugee/migrant crisis, including background information on how the refugee crisis started, how the EU works, and the asylum legislation within the EU as well as in Denmark specifically. Hereto, the new challenges the EU and Denmark have faced in light of the current refugee crisis will be discussed. This section of the literature review will also contain a discussion of the media in Denmark, where two media theories will be considered. First, media practice, how the cellphone works in the hands of the refugees, and hence media dependency, how and to what extent refugees depend on media. Lastly, the literature review will address precarity in relation to refugees, especially the term information precarity, a state of information vulnerability.

### Framework for Understanding the Refugee/Migrant Crisis

#### The Unrest in the Middle East

Armed violence and chaos for civilians has escalated in the Middle East and Northern Africa the last decade, especially, since 2011 where a number of ‘pro-democracy movements’ spread throughout the Middle East and led to wars in Libya and Syria (Fisher and Taub, 2015). Prior to this, the U.S. invasion of Iraq unleashed more than a decade of violence and destruction in that country, contributing to the current regional instability. Currently, nine civil wars are taking place in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, southeast Turkey, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and northeast Nigeria (Cockburn, 2015). It is estimated that half of Syria’s 23 million inhabitants have been displaced, four million of them outside of the country. In Iraq, the number is estimated to be about 2.6 million people forced to flee by Islamic State (ISIS), whereas, in Sudan about 1.5 million people have been displaced. Additionally, many of the wars seem to be never-ending, resulting in massive numbers of the

refugees who first fled to neighboring countries for safety reasons, now seeking to move to other countries, especially Northern Europe, for both safety but also economic reasons. The wars in the Middle East involve complex and shifting alliances with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. While previously most of the regional refugees have been from Afghanistan, most refugees today are from Syria; in fact, one in four new refugees is from Syria. Together with Iraqi refugees, the number of Syrians fleeing by sea to Greece jumped from 45,000 to 239,000 from 2014 to 2015 (Cockburn, 2015).

By mid-2015 the total amount of people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] worldwide had reached 58 million. This number includes refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, returnees, and stateless people. According to UNHCR Mid-Year Trends for 2015, the total number of refugees under the UNHCR mandate had reached 15.1 million by mid-2015, the highest number in 20 years and an increase of nearly 45 per cent in just 3.5 years. While the majority of refugees stay in neighboring countries, only about 10% reside in Europe, whereas the remaining almost 90% reside in 'developing countries' (Bendixen, 2015, my translation). These host countries are themselves poor and lack the necessary resources to cope with the newcomers. As of mid-2015, a total of 3,489,600 refugees had made it to Europe. Although these numbers are highly affected by the increasing numbers of Syrian refugees, additional refugees from Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine and others have contributed to this trend (UNHCR, 2015). Like much of Europe, Denmark has experienced a dramatic increase in asylum seekers especially when it comes to asylum-seekers from Syria (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2015).

## The Setting of the European Union

In order to understand the ways Denmark has responded to the current refugee/migrant crisis, this project will first layout the broader context of the EU environment. Considered within this area are the host countries measures to control migration, asylum legislations both within the EU and in Denmark, and the media framework in Denmark.

The European Union is not easily defined but many scholars agree that the EU is more than an international organization but less than a ‘United States of Europe’. Thus, the EU is somewhere in between these two but a clear definition is non-existent and debatable. As former European Commission President Jacques Delors once said, it is “simply an unidentified political object” (in McCormick, 2014, p. 1). Observers agree its origin was economical when The European Economic Community (EEC) was established in 1957. Its goal was to enhance cross border trade, in part to avoid political and military conflicts, though, its policy-making procedures were consistently described as not being accompanied by ‘sufficient democratic control’ in its early days. In 1979, the first direct election of the European Parliament (EP) took place. The EU now had two branches: the European citizen, represented by the Parliament; and the member states, represented by the Council but comprised of several different institutions.

The European Council and the Council of Europe are both made up of democratically elected officials from the national governments within the EU while the European Parliament consists of members directly elected through EU elections. The European Commission and the European Court of Justice (CJEU) are both there to ensure the treaties are ‘observed and respected’ as well as ensuring that the content of these treaties are actually made into policies (McCormick, 2014). While nation states have autonomy in regards to some aspects of

legislation, the EU has the overriding power in other aspects, although the degree of power is debatable. As Andrew Moravcsik (2008) puts it:

Far from being a technocratic superstate filled with arbitrary officials immune from procedural limitations and democratic constraints, the EU is narrowly constrained by its narrow substantive mandate, limited institutional power and tight requirements of democratic accountability – more so, in fact, than its constituent member states (p. 336).

#### Host Countries' Measures to Control Migration

Verdirame and Harrell-Bond (2005) explain that many 'rich' countries have developed measures to control migration flows as they claim it is better to 'prevent, interrupt or stop' these people before they cross any borders. The desire to keep refugees in their country over providing asylum has led to an increasing desire to provide aid in the country where human disasters are taking place. Therefore, European countries generally encourage humanitarian operations on site or in the surrounding areas to limit the number of people fleeing to Europe. While these interception practices have been made to diminish flows of migrants, including refugees, the refugee crisis became noticeably larger in 2015 with increasing numbers of refugees seeking to enter European countries, according to numbers from the UNHCR. The vulnerability experienced by the refugees is greatest upon arrival in the country where asylum is sought because the asylum-seeker's legal status is unknown and still to be determined. While the number of official actors is high, ranging from UNHCR officials and NGO workers to border police and local officials, networks to help them get information and support are lacking (Verdirame & Harrell-Bond, 2005).

## Asylum Legislation in the European Union

The EU asylum law has to consider both the international refugee law and international human rights law, as they constitute the two components to international law providing for international protection. The history of the modern framework for international protection of asylum seekers dates back to the 1930s when Europe experienced a large flow of refugees and displaced people as a result of WWII (Guild & Moreno-Lax, 2013).

The EU refugee legal system is based mainly on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [EUCFR] and EU asylum regulations and directives. It is important to keep in mind that member states are not all legally bound by all parts of the asylum regulations. The authoritative body in the EU, responsible for interpreting EU law, is the Court of Justice of the European Union [CJEU]. In 2000, the EUCFR ‘codified’ many of the human rights principles and in 2009 the charter became binding on both the EU- and at the state level.

The international refugee law [IRL] has its roots in legal policies dating back to the 1950s Convention and Status of Refugees. Guild and Moreno-Lax (2013) explain that there are three elements to the Refugee Convention; first it defines what makes a refugee a refugee, second it requires all the contracting states to “respect the principle of non-refoulement” (p. 4), third the Convention lists the “rights and obligations of state parties in respect of the treatment of refugees” (p. 4). The Charter also contains an injunction on refoulement (Article 19), meaning the return or rejection of asylum seekers to a country where they are at risk of ‘persecution, torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’. Further, the Charter is the first outlet stating the right to (restricted) asylum within Europe (Article 18) (Orchard & Miller, 2014). Although the charter establishes a (limited) right to apply for asylum it does not establish a ‘mechanism’ to enter Europe lawfully. Thus, the right to apply for asylum is not in effect until the asylum seeker has reached the EU (Orchard & Miller, 2014).

It is the job of the UNHCR to enforce the Refugee Convention, protect refugees, and explore ‘lasting solutions’, although there are no legal routes to actually reach a host state to apply for asylum. While nation states have their own asylum systems and laws, the European Union is capable of creating common and binding legal instruments although the 1951 Convention’s Status of Refugees is framed in a way that can be interpreted differently (Byrne, Nollid & Vedsted-Hansen, 2004).

The Dublin Regulation is another important aspect to European refugee law and to which all EU member states are parties. The Dublin Regulation articulates the responsibilities of member states in relation to asylum applicants as well as stating the process of relocating an asylum seeker to the state that has the responsibility of said asylum seeker (Orchard & Miller, 2014). Some of the EU states return asylum-seekers to the country where they first entered the EU. As Orchard and Miller (2014) suggest, the legal routes mostly used by refugees are ‘family reunification and humanitarian admission’ although they underline that few of the refugees can actually enter the EU legally. The complexity of these different legal aspects arguably calls for improved communication to the people affected as well as citizens of destination countries, local governments, nonprofits, activists and members of the media. In light of the current refugee crisis, the EU has faced several challenges with the main one being able to protect the people entitled to asylum. Member states increasingly deny this responsibility and have also failed to differentiate between refugees and migrants adding to the scope of the issue (Guild & Moreno-Lax, 2013).

### Asylum Legislation in Denmark

In 2015 alone more than 1 million migrants and refugees reached Europe with Scandinavia being one of the most popular end destinations. While Sweden has accepted the most asylum applications per capita than any other EU state in 2015 (more than 160,000 with

about 9,5 million inhabitants), Denmark used a stricter policy and only received 10,856 in 2015 (with a population of roughly 5,5 million). However, Denmark still came in ninth per capita in Europe (Tanner, 2016; Ny i Danmark, 2016). Due to the increasing number of refugees and migrants, the countries in Scandinavia began an unprecedented tightening of their policies in order to decrease their appeal as a destination country. The growing number of asylum seekers in Denmark has created change both within the public as well as in the political arena. In the election in June 2015, Dansk Folkeparti (Danish Folk's Party, DF), which is largely seen as the anti-immigration party in Denmark, came in second with 21 per cent of all the votes.

DF's increased popularity reflects the changing attitudes towards the refugee crisis among some members of the public of Denmark. After the new government came into office in the summer of 2015, asylum policies were significantly tightened. The Danish government further put out an ad campaign in Lebanon telling people not to seek asylum in Denmark as benefits had been cut substantially also highlighting that rejected applicants would be returned to their country promptly. Another controversial governmental change was made in January 2016 when the Danish government decided to confiscate valuables, such as jewelry in order to pay for the asylum seekers' stay, a move some associated with the Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews. Asylum applicants in Denmark are required to stay at refugee camps while their applications are being processed. During this time, they get cash allowances to pay for necessities; an allowance, which was cut 45 per cent after the new government took office (Tanner, 2016).

All these restrictions make it hard for refugees to both reach Denmark as well as gain approval from the government to stay in the country. Since 2002, it has not been possible to apply for asylum in Denmark outside of the Danish borders, meaning refugees have to actually be present in Denmark to apply for asylum. Because documents are hard to

get for a lot of the refugees and airlines receive large fines for taking on undocumented people, getting to Denmark via legal routes is practically impossible for a lot of the refugees. This has resulted in a lot of refugees paying smugglers large amounts to take them through Europe (DFH, 2016). Nonetheless, Denmark received 21,225 asylum applications in 2015, 2,068 from unaccompanied minors. 15,986 had applied for family reunification. By far most of these applications (8,604) have been submitted by refugees from Syria. (Ny i Danmark, 2015).

As with several other European countries, Denmark has applied a ‘refugee dispersal policy’, which has severe negative effects. Wren (2002) argues that these negative effects include ‘social exclusion’ and ‘social segregation’. The dispersal policy places the refugees in specific areas with ‘social deprivation’, which has resulted in an increasing ‘hostile and xenophobic climate’ in Denmark and, further, the policy often breaks up existing networks resulting in isolation.

It should be noted, however, that the reception of the refugees may be influenced by more than the laws and regulations. Media representations can also play a role in this regard.

## Media in Denmark

While media in Denmark are among the freest in the world, they have also struggled to balance freedom of expression with responsibility to minority groups. In addition, their public service mission, as elsewhere in Europe, has lessened over the last two decades with greater corporate control and values in reporting. This struggle between different values is well-illustrated with the now well-known controversy with the publication of 12 editorial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. The cartoons resulted in the worst crisis in foreign affairs in Denmark since WWII, resulting

in attacks on Danish embassies, burnings of the Danish flag and pictures of the then prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, boycotting of various Danish goods, and many violent demonstrations ultimately leading to hundreds of casualties. In a first instance, it sparked debate on the relationship between freedom of speech and respect for other cultures. However, the crisis arguably created deeper divides between Muslims and Arabs and the remaining Danish citizens (Grøndahl, 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI] has noted on several occasions the role of Danish media in “creating negative images of ethnic minorities, thereby contributing to a general climate of intolerance and discrimination against ethnic minorities” in Denmark (cited in Jacobsen, Jensen, Vitus and Weibel, 2012, p. 53).

According to the The International Organisation for Migrations, negative attitudes toward outsiders, such as migrants and refugees, poses a threefold risk:

1. Continued politicized debate will only serve to foster sectarian agendas, rather than promoting broader national, regional and international interests. One of the greatest challenges for those who seek to foster a rational debate is to prevent migration from being used as a platform for other political, social and economic issues.
2. Negative attitudes and reactive approaches are likely to continue to dominate over positive attitudes and proactive approaches.
3. Both integration and reintegration efforts will inevitably be undermined unless migrants themselves become active participants in the migration debate, rather than being the subject of debate (Retis, 2013, p. 36).

Research on the representation of groups perceived as “outsiders” in Danish media reflect general tendencies in the Danish media to present minorities, in particular Muslims, as

irrational, oppressive, and traditional, which creates dichotomies between being Danish ('modern' and 'liberal') and being Muslim ('traditional' and 'oppressing') (Jacobsen et al., 2012). Since many of the refugees are from predominantly Muslim countries, this pattern is likely to be replicated.

Through a mix of content analysis and discourse analysis, Jacobsen et al. (2012) have investigated how Danish media frames issues of Muslims and Islam and, furthermore, how Danish media has represented issues of racism and discrimination. The first part of their study (examining the agenda setting and framing in Danish media), is based on a two-month period of observing four of the most widely read Danish newspapers varying both in their political orientation and ideology (Jacobsen et al., 2012). The second part of the study (examining racism and discrimination in Danish media) is based on a two-week period observing the same four Danish newspapers. The study found that media in Denmark represent Muslims and Islam in either a neutral or negative way with fewer incidents representing Muslims and Islam in a positive way. The negative representations were further said to add to a hostile climate towards Muslims and Islam. This can arguably affect how refugees from predominantly Muslim countries are perceived once inside Denmark.

However, having migrants as 'active participants in the migration debate' might change the integration and reintegration in a positive way. One step in this direction was arguably taken by Information, a Danish newspaper, on Friday October 9, 2015. Here, all stories had a connection to the refugee situation and were written by refugees (in corporation with the journalists working on Information). Editor in chief Christian Jensen and the administrating director Mette Davidsen-Nielsen explained their strategy as following:

They are numbers in a statistic, and they are extras in a political debate, where they often have to feel like strangers. We all talk about refugees, but today the refugees talk to us. Each of them has their own story, their own destiny, their own professionalism,

and their own dreams for the future. But seldom do we hear them and only sporadically (Ritzau, 2015, own translation)

## Media Theory

### Media as Practice

In this section, two different frameworks for thinking about media will be considered; the ways people use and relate to them. Later in the paper, how these different concepts might apply to refugee media practices will be assessed.

Media practice is a relatively new concept, which seeks to move away from the study of media as ‘texts or structures of production’ and instead looks at media as a practice (Couldry, 2004, p. 115). In his assessment of the media practice framework, Couldry (2004) emphasizes what Swidler has named routine activities, which is a concept explained as activities not chosen intentionally by the carriers of such practices. Couldry (2004) says the study of media practices and how they are used lead to two questions: “What types of things do people do in relation to media? And what types of things do people say in relation to media” (Couldry, 2004, p. 121). Couldry (2004) explains that what people think and believe is implied by what they do and say. Related to this, Reckwitz (2002) defines practice, or *Praktik*, to be:

A “practice” (*Praktik*) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice ... forms so to speak a ‘block’ whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements (pp. 249-250).

Thus, media practices are seen as routinized activities springing from this compilation of bodily and mental activities, or bodily-mental routines. Additionally, Reckwitz (2002)

argues that routines are seen as qualities of the practice, as opposed to qualities of the individual. Thus, in relation to media practice theory, it is important to look at these mental patterns as part of a social practice not an aspect of individuality.

Further, Christensen and Røpke (2010) argue that practices require performance in order to exist and that the routines may consist of different components, objects and knowledge. Objects are essential components to many practices and can both “enable and limit certain (...) activities” (p. 237). Knowledge brings a way of understanding, know-how, and a way of wanting and feeling. Conclusively, Christensen and Røpke (2010) agree that there are three criteria to identify a practice:

- 1) bodily-mental activities (individual and social interactions) are routinised and repetitive;
- 2) activities incorporate components such as understanding, know-how, states of emotion, motivational knowledge, and usually also objects, which are all interconnected;
- 3) interconnected activities and components are perceived as meaningful entities in a given society or culture (p. 238).

Knowing the criteria to identify a practice, the findings in the study conducted by Christensen and Røpke (2010) will now be summarized briefly. The study investigated nine Danish families and their practices involving computers, the internet and cellphones. Several different practices involving the usage of computers, the internet and/or the cellphone were found, however, only five practices were discussed in greater detail. These five practices are the following: “shopping, ‘holding things together’, ‘maintaining social networks’, entertainment and personal documentation” (p. 242).

The category of shopping in relation to practice involves both texts-messages to coordinate who will do the shopping and what to get but also to do research on products

before making final purchases. ‘Holding things together’ is everything from making ‘to-do lists’, to making use of a virtual calendar, to interpersonal communication coordinating who does what so all tasks have been completed by the end of the day. ‘Maintaining social networks’ is found to be done both through regular usage of the cellphone (text-messages, phone calls) and the internet (emails, internet based message services, and internet based phone calls). The importance of social interaction is clear as a successful practice here depends on the activity from more than one person. A big part of the fourth category of entertainment is, naturally, playing games. The study mentioned that while you can play against yourself or a computer-generated player, games often involve social interactions at some level. While gaming was found to be the biggest part to this category, other things are found to be part of this entertainment category, e.g. text messages, thus, overlapping other categories. With the entertainment category, it was moreover found that some individuals used this as a way to ‘kill time’ and to overcome boredom. The last category, personal documentation, is everything that is stored both automatically and purposely such as text messages/emails and photos/videos. Due to technology these are all easy to circulate amongst friends and family.

### Media Dependency Theory

The media system dependency model developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in 1976 suggests that “under conditions of ambiguity, as in the case of social system disruptions resulting from natural human-made disasters, the mass media will become the public’s primary information source, and media effects will become more pronounced” (Hindman 2009, p. 29). Hindman (2009) further explains that ‘acts of war’ can lead to media dependency, whereas, this becomes of importance in the case of the current migration crisis, which has been called Europe’s worst humanitarian disaster since World War II. Media

system dependency theory [MSD] works on both a micro- and a macro/social system level. While the macro-level focuses on the “interdependencies among audiences, media, and society and offers propositions about the effects of media on audiences”, the micro-level focuses on “the relationships individuals develop with mass media that in turn predict exposure,” (p. 30).

As discussed by Lowrey (2004), individuals have an extraordinary high need for ‘information and sense-making’ during ‘severe social disruption’. MSD suggests that mass media best meet these needs as mass media offer speed and a connectedness to ‘experts’. Lowrey (2004) further argues that the individual media dependency varies across various factors including “demographics, social context, media use patterns and goals, and perceptions of threat” (p. 339). Further, according to Hindman (2009), media use increases significantly during disasters, such as the current refugee crisis.

It is important to keep in mind, that while disasters, such as the current refugee crisis, have disastrous consequences for the people directly influenced, other people might be beneficiaries to such disaster. As Hindman (2009) suggests, public officials can “reap political rewards from media coverage of political disasters” (p. 32). Furthermore, as paraphrased in Hindman (2009), Molotch and Lester (1974) propose that disasters, such as the current refugee crisis, becomes news because it serves the news promoters:

Accidents and disasters become news because the reports serve the needs and purpose of news promoters (public officials) and fit into the routines and organizational constraints of news assemblers (radio news directors, television reporters). They argue that all events, even natural disasters, are socially constructed, and the events’ news worthiness is not contained in their objective features (p. 32).

According to MSD, individual social groups rely more on mass media than interpersonal information, as society has grown more complex. Lowrey (2004) suggests that

when ‘perceptions of threat’ during a crisis increase, so does the need for understanding and orientation hence the dependency on TV and newspapers increase as well. In a negative way, micro-MSD theory suggests that “the greater the media dependency in connection with a particular message, the greater the likelihood the message will alter individuals’ cognitions, feelings, and behaviors” (Lowrey, 2004, p. 341). Studies have suggested that the higher education a person has, the less dependent that person will be on ‘governmental-controlled information’. The first hypothesis Lowrey (2004) present is “The higher the socioeconomic status, the weaker the dependency on media during crisis” (p. 343). ‘Perception of threat’ is further an indicator of level media dependency and additionally for a threat to have an effect on the level of individual media dependency, “it must interrupt the individual’s normal assumptions about the everyday world as well as the routines necessary to survive in this world. Individuals require information to resolve the ambiguity that results from this disruption” (Lowrey, 2004, p. 344).

Of course MSD theory was developed during a period in which mass communication was dominated by newspapers, television, and radio. Today, a networked communication sphere exists with millions of people relying mostly on personal communication devices such as cellphones. From an infrastructural aspect, one of the most important aspects in migration is the telephone network. “Telephones (especially mobiles), their extension and the decreasing cost of international calling have enabled the most fundamental social aspects of transnational life, namely everyday communication across long distances and around the world” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 54). As of such, technology can keep refugees in connection to their home and sometimes help them reach new connections in their new country. While the study conducted by Wall et al. (2015) showed a need for better and more trusted information, Vertovec (2009) explains that there has been an increase in global connections, especially, among “non-elite social groups” such as refugees due to a “boom in ordinary, cheap

international telephone calls” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 54). These changes suggest MDS theory may explain refugees’ media usage.

### Refugees, Social Networks, and Communication

Banki (2013) explains that three attempts have recently been made to define situations of precarity within refugee literature. First is the concept of ‘warehousing’ explaining the state when refugees are denied asylum in the new state while unlikely regaining membership in their home community. Such ‘warehoused’ refugees do not have ‘internationally recognized rights’ such as freedom of movement. Secondly, Banki (2013) considers precarity in terms of ‘protracted refugee situations’ [PRS]. Citing the UNHCR, Banki (2013) defines PRS as refugees who have lived “5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions” (pp. 16). She further states:

Today two-thirds of the entirety of the global refugee population reside in protracted refugee situations, conditions that describes precarity in the geographic, legal, temporal, and identity-related realms for the individuals who remain therein (pp. 16).

The third and last way Banki (2013) says refugees are precarious is through “the social forces that guide their lives” wherein social networks are the key aspect (pp. 17). The scholar further argues that social networks can both minimize the risk of experiencing precarity and at the same time contribute to levels of exclusion. Here, she suggests that family power relations, religious traditions, and gender traditions are important elements that should be taken into consideration when considering refugees’ experience of precarity. Finally, Banki (2013) defines precarity as: “Forms of vulnerability and impediments to security and stability that stem from both formal (legal, political) and informal (social, cultural) processes” (pp. 19).

In her study, Banki (2013) argues the existence of four different levels of precarity, low precarity, mid precarity, high precarity, and extreme precarity. Low precarity concerns ‘legal and permanent status’, hereby, access to citizenship. Mid precarity depicts a situation where refugees only informally or temporarily are able to ‘reside, move, and transact openly’. High precarity describes a situation in where refugees have limited ability to ‘reside, move, and transact openly’. Here, refugees have some protection but experience vulnerability. Registered camp refugees are placed in this category. The last category of extreme precarity represents a situation where the refugees are extremely insecure and have no access to documentation of any effective networks (Banki, 2013).

Expanding hereon, precarity is described by Butler (2009) as a state of mind influenced by ‘unpredictability and insecurity’, wherein people may be relocated as well as become subjects to violence. Furthermore, “[p]recarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (p. 25).

### Information Precarity

The majority of refugees are fleeing from three countries, primarily Syria, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan; others are coming from Africa, particularly Somalia and Eritrea. While each of these countries has its own history, culture, social practices, etc. what they have in common is an oppressive government that exerts high levels of control over communication. This has led all of these groups to experience a great deal of mistrust towards media as well as officials. Particularly these refugees in terms of their ability to receive accurate information as they are fleeing countries with a reputation of being among the world’s most media-oppressed countries (Giovanni et al., 2013). While there is a range of educational levels amongst the refugees, many are, as Giovanni et al. (2013) wrote about Syrian refugees, “poorly educated and unsophisticated in their understanding of the situation in which they

find themselves” (p. 2). This means that such refugees not only need more information, but also “information about information” (Giovanni, et al., 2013). This suggests refugees are extremely vulnerable to experience information precarity.

Information precarity is described by Wall et al. (2015) as: “[T]he condition of instability that refugees experience in accessing news and personal information, potentially leaving them vulnerable to misinformation, stereotyping, and rumors that can effect their economic and social capital” (p. 1).

One of the few studies about Syrians refugees and their communication practices found that refugees experience information precarity in five different forms, which will be discussed in-depth in the following sections:

- (1) technological and social access to information;
- (2) the prevalence of irrelevant, sometimes dangerous information;
- (3) lack of their own image control;
- (4) surveillance by the state; and
- (5) disrupted social support (Wall et al. 2015, p. 2).

The study found that refugees viewed the cellphones as a “vital tool”, and while accessing phones were found to be relatively easy, the ability to use the phones within the camp was found to be limited. The first category, technological and social access, is the ability to connect to a telephone network. Although the refugee camp provided an ‘official’ way to make phone calls, it included limitations (supervision and time limit). To overcome this, some of the refugees applied a form of ‘technological appropriation’, swapping SIM cards from different countries depending on whom they were calling due to security reasons and/or coverage reliability.

Additionally, in terms of social access, it was found that younger, unmarried women often did not use cellphones for communication and that some female refugees described

their information sources as ‘inadequate, sporadic, and random’. For this reason, some female refugees in the camp were found to seek out information by walking to the shop area in the camps to watch the televisions and overhear strangers converse, which left less mobile refugees feeling less connected to the ‘camp information’. This method of ‘overhearing’ information resulted in partial, not always correct, and not entirely trustworthy information.

In terms of the category of irrelevant, dangerous information, it was found that the refugees 1) did not get enough information and 2) the credibility of the information was lacking. Oftentimes, the refugees have to verify the information about the war and the status of relatives themselves, which was usually done by calling home. The refugees were found to seek out personal information first and foremost, hereto, information about the well-being of family and home communities.

The third category, lack of image control is another problem to the refugees. Refugees often experience having their picture taken by journalists, visiting organizations, etc. without permission or used with a different story, thus, mis-representing the refugees and sometimes even putting them in danger. In order to exert some control, the refugees posted their own pictures and even created Facebook pages to “publicly challenge these narratives” and to make themselves “part of the global narrative about the conflict they are actually experiencing themselves” (Wall et al, 2015, p. 11; p. 10).

The fourth category of surveillance is hereby another important category of refugees’ experience of information precarity. As the mobile network in Syria is both controlled and tracked by the Syrian government, the Syrian refugees were found to take certain safety precautions; using coded language and/or applying self-censorship. Some refugees completely avoid certain topics, thus, applying self-censorship.

As the fifth and last category, disrupted social support was another way the refugees were found to experience information precarity. The refugees would ask relatives important

questions to ensure their well-being, thus, “the phone calls seem to serve not so much as a solution—what after all could the refugees do to help—but as the personal witnessing of a loved one’s plight” (Wall et al, 2015, p. 12).

Conclusively, the study found that cellphones were viewed as ‘vital tools’ and as a means of communication to upkeep social and economic networks. Cellphones played a big role in shedding light on what was going on in Syria and allowed for the refugees to “counter, supplement, or reinforce professional news with their own networks of cell phone-connected family and friends” (Wall et al, 2015, p. 13-14).

Considering the ways refugee used and talked about their phones further suggest concepts, such as media dependency, do not consider how traditional information systems often fail to benefit vulnerable people and how those groups may appropriate new technologies to create their own media routines.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This research project is based on in-depth one-on-one interviews with refugees residing in refugee camps in Denmark during the winter of 2015-2016 (see Appendix b for full list of question asked). This chapter consists of 4 sections first going over why the methodology of interviews was chosen, followed by an explanation of the data collection, the data analysis, and lastly challenges and limitations to the project.

### Interviews

In order to answer the above outlined research questions, one-on-one in-depth interviews was conducted in two Danish refugee camps during the winter of 2015-2016. In-depths interviews are used when personal experience and thoughts on a topic is the research purpose. As explained by Boyce and Neale (2006) “in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation” (p. 3).

From December 19 2015 – January 15 2016, researcher conducted a total of 20 interviews, 6 of which were with officials while the remaining 14 were with refugees from the following countries: Syria (6), Iraq (4), Afghanistan (1), Iran (1), Eritrea (1), and Somalia (1). 2 interviews were with couples and most of the interviewees were male: 5 officials and 12 refugees (1 female official and 4 refugees, 2 single and 2 with their husbands). The duration of the interviews varied depending on the need for translation and how much the interviewee wanted to add to each question.

## Background

The following summary of the camps' overall operating practices and conditions are based on interviews with officials and observations of the camps.

As per April 5<sup>th</sup> 2016, there are 88 refugee camps in Denmark,<sup>1</sup> interviews from two of these camps are used for this project. I attempted to access one other camp, however, due to recent negative experience with journalists, only two of the three camps allowed me to conduct interviews. Both camps this researcher visited had 'self-serving' programs meaning the refugees got allowance from the individual 'kommune' (smaller regions under the government) to buy and prepare their own meals in either private kitchens (Toftlund Asylcenter) or common kitchen areas (Fredericia Asylcenter). The refugees were found to be very open hearted despite their great losses of most of their possessions. Although the interviews were conducted in an office provided by the camps, this researcher did visit some of the homes as per invitation by the refugees - in one instance, the invitation included tea and snacks.

In Denmark, refugees have to comply with various rules in order to have their asylum applications processed as well as receive money for food and other necessities. Various things are expected of the refugees, like cleaning common areas after use and returning back to camp everyday (although this was seen as one of the areas the refugees received some leeway). On top of these expectations, refugees are required to go to school and work in a "praktik" (internship), unless in special circumstances (children, older refugees and/or refugees with disabilities). Ditte Hald, the networker at Fredericia Asylumcamp, explained that until recently, the refugees could work their "praktik" both in and outside the camp, however, after the government made further restrictions, the refugees are now only allowed to 'work' inside the camp unless their asylum application is so far along that they

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nyidanmark.dk/da-dk/Ophold/asyl/asylcentre/hvor\\_ligger\\_centrene.htm](https://www.nyidanmark.dk/da-dk/Ophold/asyl/asylcentre/hvor_ligger_centrene.htm)

can get special permission to work outside the camp. Hald explained it as: “they can [get an off-camp “praktik”] after they have reached stage 2 when Udlændingestyrelsen [the Danish Immigration Service] has accepted and processed their asylum case and after they’ve been in Denmark for six months” (my translation). The “praktik” inside the camp can consist of many different things ranging from cleaning, helping in the shops (bike, second-hand clothing etc.) and translating. The camps visited in this project made sure to assign translation “praktik” to everyone with English language proficiency as quickly as possible after arrival to the camp. However as one employee stated: “for important or personal cases we will utilize qualified interpreters” (my translation).

In December 2015, the researcher travelled to Denmark to carry out the interviews for this project. Although one camp denied me access, it was not difficult to gain access to the remaining two camps. The camps were open to the public, and not enclosed by any gates. Via email, contact had been established with the networker at Toftlund Asylcenter, Dennis Schrøder Hansen, who put me in contact with the networker at Fredericia Asylcenter. Dennis Schrøder Hansen had arranged for a meeting with his assistant and the translator on site, a female refugee from Syria who was also the first interviewee. Having this sponsor, or gatekeeper, not only helped with accessing the two camps but further helped establish a degree of trust between refugees and researcher.

### Setting up Interviews

In preparation for the interviews, the first step to take was to gain access to one of the refugee camps to be able to conduct the interviews. A ‘letter’ was first written in English explaining the project idea, reasons and importance of conducting the interviews, as well as practical info such as time- and language availability (see appendix a). Thereafter, I translated the ‘letter’ to Danish and had it translated to Arabic. The ‘letter’ was sent off (via e-mail) to

all refugee camps in somewhat close proximity (2h drive) to my base in Denmark (Kolding). The 'letter' was further given to friends and family members that might be able to gain access to camps or other organizational workers. The access to the refugee camps was expected to go smoothly, and furthermore, it was foreseen that the refugees would speak enough English to conduct the interviews in this language. However, Danish was also provided as an option.

An important next step was to get a 'sponsor' or 'gatekeeper', someone who was trusted within the refugee camps, both by officials and the refugees, who would vouch for the researcher and ultimately get access to the camps. It was important that the gatekeeper was trusted by both sides, officials and refugees, as this project seeks to interview both refugees as well as organizational workers in order to compare findings and examine whether the experience organizational workers have would match those of the refugees. Additionally, it was the goal to get a sponsor that was positively known by both officials inside the refugee camps and the refugees so rapport could be developed easier and quicker. Due to time limits and refugees' arguably unstable emotional level, getting the right sponsor was key so that the interaction between interviewer and interviewees would go smoothly.

Equipment was checked out at the Journalism Department who agreed to lend all the equipment for the entire duration of the trip (December 17, 2015 -January 18, 2016). The flight was from LAX to Billund (45 min. drive from Kolding) with two layovers (London and Munich going there and Oslo and London coming back). This project is partially self-funded, however, with help from three donations; CSUN's Graduate Program (\$1000), The Associated Students at CSUN (\$600) and CSUN's Journalism Department covering the travel insurance (\$140).

## Interviews

The shortest interview being 3min and 44 seconds with one of the workers at Fredericia Asylum and the longest being an interview with a Syrian couple (48 min and 26 seconds; for further details see Analysis, Ch. 4)

Before arrival to Denmark, a meeting in one of the two refugee camps in Toftlund, Toftlund Asylum, had been arranged for December 22, 2015 for breakfast. Since I had a few days with no plans I decided to show up at a recently opened refugee camp in my city, Vonsild Asylum. I came on a Sunday, where the person in charge was not working. We arranged for me to come back the next day to meet with her. Next day I arrived with a copy of the 'letter' as well as questions I would ask. Unfortunately, they had had some negative experiences with journalists 'snooping' around uninvited trying to get stories for their respective papers. Therefore, although wishing me luck, they turned down my proposal.

My second visit to an refugee camp was the following day, Tuesday, where I had a meeting set up, and knew they were positive about my project, so the turndown at Vonsild Asylum had not affected my enthusiasm. Toftlund is a small town and public transportation would not be easy so it had to be reached by car. I arrived at a small camp where it was easy to find the administration office. Originally the meeting was supposed to be with the networker, Dennis Schröder Hansen, however, his assistant took over, which I had been notified of through email by Mr. Hansen in advance. The assistant had invited one of the refugees to sit in on the meeting. The refugee was a girl from Syria who was currently the only refugee at the camp who could speak English. Therefore, the girl worked as a translator on the camp as part of her "praktik" (internship; see Analysis, Ch. 4).

There were a couple of obstacles getting interviews at this camp on this day. First off, since it was two days before Christmas (Christmas is celebrated December 24<sup>th</sup> in Denmark), a lot of the refugees staying in the camp were out visiting family in other cities in

Denmark. Secondly, while all the refugees at this specific camp were Syrians, the ‘translator’ spoke a kind of Arabic, that not all the refugees understood, therefore, some refugees were simply not able to conduct the interview due to language barrier. Thirdly, a lot of the refugees were scared to talk of fear of what would happen to them and more importantly their family. I only visited this camp this day, and I got interviews with three refugees and one official. Before leaving the camp in Toftlund the networker, Mr. Hansen, came to give me an interview. Furthermore, he called the networker at another, bigger camp where he had previously worked. Being put in contact with a networker this way, made it a lot easier to get her on board and welcome me at the camp.

The first meeting at Fredericia Asylum was going to be me selling the idea to the networker and hopefully get her on board. Fredericia is a lot bigger than Toftlund, so public transportation would not have been impossible, but I was able to continue borrowing the car, which made both transporting me, and all the equipment, a lot easier. The refugee camp was a lot bigger than the two I had visited prior and I found myself a bit lost. Luckily I had borrowed a phone, since mine did not work abroad, and was able to call my contact at the camp. She guided me to the office building where she would arrive shortly after. The office building was located straight across from the entrance on the second floor. Going up the stairs, a monitor was centered on the wall displaying information to the refugees like how to access the free Wi-Fi. Opening the door to the office, I found a big room that looked somewhat like a library. However, the room was completely empty. To my right, down a narrow hall, I saw a glass door with, what looked like, a waiting room on the other side and some doors displaying names of, what I assumed to be, workers. The glass door was locked with a key panel. After a couple of minutes, a worker came and asked me my name and what I was doing there. I explained my purpose and provided the name of my contact. The young man told me to wait in the waiting area and offered me some coffee in the meantime. About

15 minutes after, my person of contact, Ditte Hald, showed up. She smiled but looked a little stressed. This first meeting was unrecorded and I presented my idea and why it would be important to get interviews from the camp. Fortunately, she liked the idea and was excited to be part of the project. She asked me more specifically what I needed (who and how many). While I initially sought to interview refugees from Syria, I quickly realized that she would only be able to get me a couple of interviews with Syrian refugees but a lot of interviews if I would talk to refugees from other parts of the world. I told her that any interview she could get me would be of interest to me and important to my project. I underlined that any interviewee had to be over 18 years and either able to speak English/Danish or have someone to translate for him/her. We exchanged further contact information, and while I promised to send her a copy of the 'letter' once I got back, she would begin finding refugees willing to talk to me.

After a few emails, we arranged for me to come back for the first interviews on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I had no expectations, as she had not informed me how many interviews she had lined up. An office was assigned to me to conduct the interviews and while I would have preferred to interview them in their room, where they would be more comfortable, I gladly accepted the office. To see an outline of the questions asked during the interviews see Appendix.

Initially, this project sought to interview only Syrian refugees as they have taken up most of the asylum applications in Denmark (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2015). However, arriving to the refugee camps, finding refugees who were both willing and capable (language barriers and scared for their own and their families' safety) turned out to be easier said than done. Therefore, this project contains interviews with refugees from multiple countries with most of them being from Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, the clear majority of the interviewees were

single males and their age ranged from 21 to 47, most being in the group of 21-25 (for further details, see Analysis section).

### Multimedia Project

In order to reach more people, my research is presented through a multimedia project on a website. In order to gain skills for this process, I took a multimedia class (J464) in the Spring 2016. Using [www.wix.com](http://www.wix.com), I bought a domain and created a website where articles and videos were posted. Using Adobe programs including, but not limited to, Adobe Premier, Adobe Photoshop, and Adobe After Effects, videos were put together. For the music, I reached out to CSUN's music department where I got in contact with a music student who produced original music for my videos.

Furthermore, I reached out to refugees through social media, both refugees I had met during my research and others, to get content for my website feature "Denmark through the eyes of the refugees".

Besides interviewing refugees and officials working inside the camps, this project also draws on interview with independent photojournalist Rasmus Degnbol, who has recently won the 2016 PDN Photo Annual for the category documentary/photojournalism. According to Degnbol he focuses on "new-age storytelling". In relation to the refugee crisis, Degnbol explains that he mainly focuses on human rights issues and social rights issues. As of December 2015 he has travelled four times to cover the refugee crisis, documenting along the trail from Greece and all the way to Denmark and Sweden. When asked why he decided to go in the first place, Degnbol explains as the following:

Because it is the most important story there is right now, at least in Europe, and I think, as a storyteller and a photojournalist, you have to tell the story. That is what we are here for. And you have to be part of the story, at least to give your point.

Furthermore, as Degnbol explains, he does not so much focus on the actual refugees but more so on the different borders along the trail, both externally and internally. This is to document how the borders are changing due to the refugee crisis.

In addition to the interview, Rasmus Degnbol is the photographer behind most of the footage used in the videos as well as on the website. The photos were taken three different places along the trail. First off, some of the photos were taken on the Greek island Lesbos or Lesvos, depicting the refugees arriving from the dangerous journey over the Mediterranean Sea coming from Turkey. Other photos were taken in a refugee camp in Slavonski Brod, Croatia, a border town between Bosnia and Croatia. Lastly, the black and white photos were taken in a refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece.

### Challenges and Limitations

The number one challenge in this project was the huge language barrier. Since this research was conducted in the winter of 2015/2016 the interviewees consisted of what the networkers in the refugee camps referred to as 'second-wave refugees'. According to both networkers, generally, the more time that passed, the less proficient they became in English. This was clear when speaking to the refugees, as most of them needed a translator there. It was a challenge in the sense, that some asylum seekers spoke a dialect that no translator could speak, which limited the number of participants. Furthermore, the language barrier potentially affected the outcome of the interviews as the interviewees/translators could have misunderstood some questions and further not be able to articulate their answers completely and/or in-dept. Another limitation was the refugees' general fear of their and/or their families' lives. This fear might have limited their responses out of fear of accidentally revealing information that could identify the location of their families.

## Chapter 4: Findings, Multimedia Project

As mentioned in the introduction, this project seeks to correct the tendencies in the media where information about refugees is presented with limited context or background. To offer an alternative view on refugees in Denmark, this project has created online content, including written texts and three videos, to be available on [www.refugeesindenmark.org](http://www.refugeesindenmark.org). Along with offering an alternative view on the refugees in Denmark, the aim of the website is further to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What was their journey to Denmark like?

RQ 2: How do refugees in Denmark view their communication practices, particularly their use of cellphones?

RQ 3: What are their dreams for the future?



For the homepage of the website, I have chosen a clean look with alternating photos and easy access to the different content. Visitors can either go directly to the content they are interested in by pressing the top menu or they can scroll down on the homepage to go over all of it.

# THE PROJECT

This project is made as part of my graduate thesis for the degree in Mass Communication at California State University, Northridge.

The purpose of this project is to offer an alternative view on refugees in Denmark.

The goal is to answer the following three research questions:

- RQ 1: What was their journey to Denmark like?
- RQ 2: How do refugees in Denmark view their communication practices, particularly their use of cellphones?
- RQ 3: What are their dreams for the future?

From December 19 2015 – January 15 2016, I conducted a total of 20 interviews, 6 of which were with officials while the remaining 14 were with refugees from the following countries: Syria (6), Afghanistan (1), Iraq (4), Iran (1), Eritrea (1), and Somalia (1).

The interviews with refugees as well as some officials took place at Toftlund Asylcenter and Fredericia Asylcenter (Refugee Camps)

The first thing visitors will find, if scrolling down, is the ‘about’ page. This explains the purpose and the goal of this project, as well as how it was carried out.



Next, is ‘Denmark’s Response’, which offers articles about ‘Asylum Legislations’, ‘Controversies’ and ‘Important Actors’. The goal is to continually update this part of the website, if new legislations are made that affects the refugees.



# The Refugees' Journey to Denmark

**Read more** **See more**

**50.5m** **3.5m** **10,856** **2,068**

Total number of forcibly displaced worldwide Total number of asylum applications received by Europe in 2015 Total number of refugees in Denmark in 2015 Total number of unaccompanied minors in Denmark in 2015

Hereafter, visitors will find the first part of the goal of the project; answering research question 1 of how the refugees got to Denmark. Visitors will either be able to watch an edited video answering this question, or read an article about the matter. Transcript of this video:

File: Refugees\_and\_Their Journey to Denmark, Video 1  
 Duration: 4:14  
 Date: 06.11.2016

Music fades in and continues through out video  
 Title: Refugees and Their Journey to Denmark shows

Syrian refugees: Every country we arrive to after Syria, we loose something

Title card: Refugees arriving on the Greek island Lesbos

Rasmus Degnbol: Lesbos is one of the worst experiences I've had in my life, I think. Especially, the last time I was there in

October was the worst week of all. There were something like almost 100 dead during 6 days. And 40 just in one night. And we saw that ship go down. So that's really tough.

It's only 4km from Turkey to Greece, but the Sea is really dangerous. So they come in completely wet and cold, because they have been sleeping outside, normally, in Turkey for a couple of days. So they are cold going to the water. A lot of the boats flip, once they hit the beach, they flip, and everybody goes into the water. And once you have the water, and this is really cold, like, every boat had somebody with hypothermia. Every single boat had.

But once they reach Lesbos, or whatever beach they reach, it's this weird mix of peoples' relief and happiness and fear. But it's a good experience that at least there are somebody there to greet them in some way. Even though I am there to take pictures.

Title card: How did you get to Denmark?

Afghani refugee: In Iran, one day. And after that I came to Istanbul  
Syrian refugee: Turkey  
Iraqi refugee: From Turkey to Greece  
Syrian refugees: We stayed in Greece 2-3 months trying to go by fake ID's  
Iraqi refugee: Then from Greece to Macedonia, walking  
Syrian refugee: Serbia  
Iraqi refugee: Hungary  
Iraqi refugee: Then from Hungary to Germany  
Syrian refugee: Then Germany and Denmark  
Iraqi refugee: Then from Germany to Denmark  
Iraqi refugee: Then Denmark  
Iraqi refugee: Denmark

Title card: The trip usually took between one and two months

Rasmus Degnbol: The general story is that they spent some time in either Lebanon or Turkey. And decided to move because there was not any work, not any money, not any rations. There wasn't food enough and there wasn't money enough and it just got worse and worse and worse. To the point where, like a lot of them, when you ask them, they do this [clapping hands], Syria is finished.

And that's the story from everybody; it wasn't possible to sustain life at all. And once you realize your country is gone, why should you stay?

Title card: Why do the refugees cross the dangerous Mediterranean Sea?

Rasmus Degnbol: In 2011, they started migrating over the land and then we built a fence. And all the research said, if we build this fence, they will start going over the sea instead. And look what happened.

Title card: Although having a 'fixed' route has made it easier to control the migration flow

Title card: It has also let to a lot of people taking advantage of the refugees

Rasmus Degnbol: Even just living costs are way more expensive, than if you and me took a trip to Greece. For a refugee, everything is at least double or triple the price

Title card: According to UNHCR, over one million crossed the dangerous Mediterranean Sea in 2015

Title card: Between September 2015 and February 2016 an average of two children died every day

Title card: Video and story by Trine Bay Larsen

Title card: Original score by Anthony Ragus, composer

Title card: Pictures of the trail by Rasmus Degnbol, photojournalist

Title card: Special thanks to  
Toftlund Asylcenter  
Fredericia Asylcenter



Next, visitors will be able to find out how the refugees use their cellphones – and why it is so important to them. Once again, this can be done either by watching a video or reading an article. Transcript of this video:

File: Refugees\_and\_Cellphones, Video 2  
 Duration: 4:14  
 Date: 06.11.2016

Music fades in and continues through out video  
 Title: Refugees and Cellphones shows

Title card: What communication device is the most important to you?

Iraqi refugee:	Cellphone
Syrian refugee:	Cellphone
Iraqi refugee:	Cellphone
Iraqi refugee:	iPhone
Eritrean refugee:	Yea, smartphone. iPhone
Syrian refugee:	This is only phone
Syrian refugee:	All Syrians they have smartphones. We have sometimes, back in Syria, we don't have food to eat, but we have smartphones. And people here are amazed, I mean in Europe. When they see some refugees, or they will visit some refugee camps, or seeing refugees in the street or in the market. They say: "How are you refugees and have iPhones?" And I say: "We have it from back home"
Yahye Abdikarim:	De kan ligge i deres soveværelser. Og så bare side der I flere timer og bruge det (Translation: They can be in their bedrooms for hours using it[cellphones])
Rasmus Degnbol:	Most have phones. And it's the most important tool and possession they have. I think they would drop anything but their phone
Title card:	Why is the phone so important?
Eritrean refugee:	Friend is your phone, family is your phone. Yea, so phone is very important for me
Somali refugee: phone	If you don't have a phone, you feel bored. That's why I have a phone
Rasmus Degnbol:	They use phones for communication to back home. Like on Lesbos it's the first thing they do. Because they are wrapped in a ton of, what do you call it, ducktape, it's wrapped close so it wouldn't get wet. So once they get off the boat, that's the first thing. They wrap the tape off and then they call home. I made it to Greece or Europe or whatever they say
Yayhe Abdikarim:	De har jo familier rundt omkring som de skal tage kontakt til og lige høre hvordan det går med deres land, om der er krig eller et eller andet (Translation: They have families all around, they need to stay in touch with, to hear how their country is doing, if there is unrest or something)
Ditte Hald:	De bruger rigtig meget internet-baseret communication; Viber, WhatsApp, Messenger og den slags ting. Fordi det jo er for dyrt for dem at holde taletidskort. Øh, de bruger dem også til at læse nyheder. Øh. Hente nyheder ned fra hjemlandet osv. Jeg tror faktisk det er det vigtigste. Og så har vi jo selvfølgelig også unge mennesker der sådan ser Youtube videoer øh... og du ved. Hvad hedder det. Sociale medier bruger de rigtig meget. Jeg tror alle herude har en Facebook. (Translation: They use a lot of internet-

based communication, Viber, WhatsApp, Messenger, and those sort of things. Because it is too expensive to use a SIM-card. They also use their phones to read the news, get news from their home country. I think that is the most important. And then, of course, the young people who watch Youtube videos And they use social media sites a lot. I think everyone out here has a Facebook account)

Title card: But when you depend on something, you become vulnerable

Ditte Hald Jeg har haft en for nylig, han sagde knapt "hej" før han sagde "hvad er Wi-Fi kodeordet?" De er dybt, dybt, dybt afhængige af det. Dybt.  
(Translation: I had one recently, he barely said "hi", before he asked for the Wi-Fi password. They are deeply depended on it. Deeply)

Rasmus Degnbol: SIM-cards are a big problem. At least once arriving on Greece, they can reach the Turkish network still. But once they go from there, they need a SIM-card from Greece. Once they go from there, you know. That gets a bit problematic

Ditte Hald: Når de sådan sidder i klynger, så er det fordi de har fundet stedet hvor Wi-Fi fungerer bedst. Det er faktisk meget synd. Det er simpelthen, det er krise, når der er nogen der er blevet stjålet et access point. Så er der krise. (Translation: When they sit in big groups, they found a spot where the Wi-Fi works the best. It's actually really sad. It's a crisis, when someone has stolen the access point

Title cards: Even when the refugees have access, they have to censor what they say

Title cards: To protect their families back home

Title cards: From punishment by their government

Title card: Video and story by Trine Bay Larsen

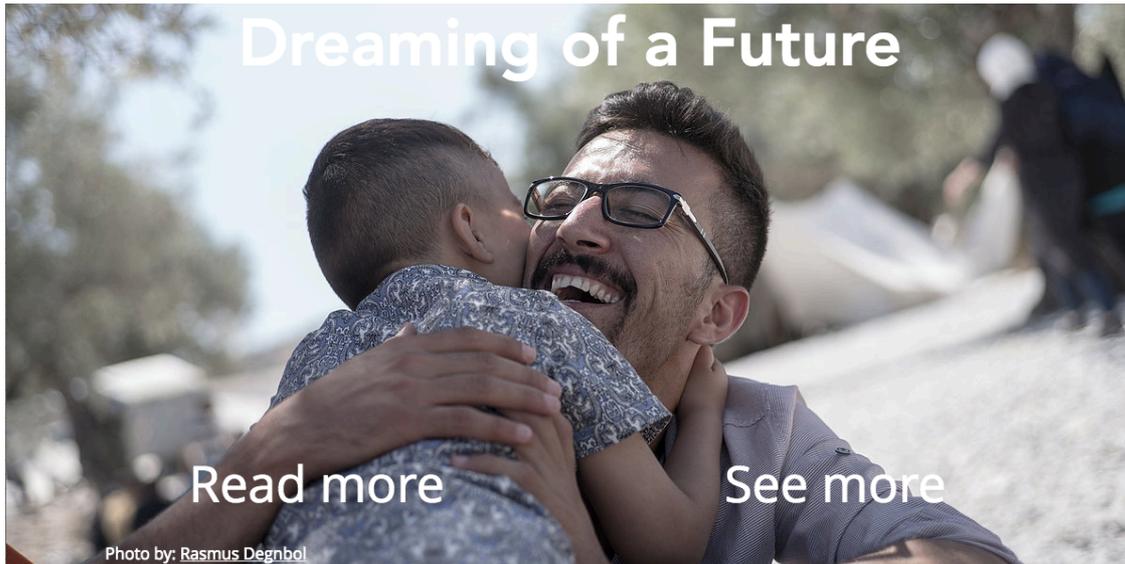
Title card: Original score by Anthony Ragus, composer

Pictures of the trail by Rasmus Degnbol, photojournalist

Title card: Special thanks to

Toftlund Asylcenter

Fredericia Asylcenter



Up next is the third and last part of the thesis; the refugees' dreams for the future.

Again, this can be assessed through a video or a written article. Transcript of this video:

File: Refugees\_and\_Their Dreams, Video 3  
 Duration: 4:18  
 Date: 05.05.2016

Music fades in and continues through out video  
 Title, Refugees and Their Dreams

Syrian refugee: The important thing is that I am safe  
 Ditte Hald: Det siger de tit til mig: "Det eneste jeg ønsker mig, det er bare fred"

Title card: But it is not that easy being in Denmark for the refugees

Ditte Hald: Vi kan ikke sige noget der trøster efterhånden, "Det skal nok blive bedre", "Det skal nok snart gå hurtigere", "I det mindset kan du få din familie herop når du har fået din opholdstilladelse". Det kan de  
 ikke, nu skal der gå 3 år. Der begynder at mangle positive ting at sige.

Det gør der (Translation: We can't give them any reassuring news anymore, "Everything will get better", "Soon, it will speed up", "At least, you can get your family up here once you get your residence permit". They can't. Now, they have to wait for three years. There's almost no positive things to tell them anymore)

Title cards: Although being safe was important to all the refugees  
 They all expressed how much they need to work  
 To feel useful  
 And to avoid the unbearable boredom they feel in the camps

Afghan refugee: For the food we are okay. But if do some Praktik [work], outside or inside, to be busy

Eritrean refugee: I don't want to stay in camp, I want to work

Syrian refugee: I need work here

Iraqi refugee: I just want to work or do something for people who pay taxes and their taxes going to, part of them to me., to my food So I must do something for them.

Video of city while application title shows  
 In Denmark, refugees have to work to have their asylum processed  
 Until recently, refugees were allowed to work outside of the camps

Iraqi refugee: Unfortunately, I finished my Praktik and the government they decided that there is no Praktik outside the camp.

Title card: Now, they can only work inside the camps  
 Until their application has reached phase two  
 And they have been in Denmark for six months

Iraqi refugee: And this is bad, very bad for me. I want to do something.

Title card: Refugees who got to Denmark alone have to share rooms with other refugees  
 ... Up to 12 people in one room  
 This room houses 6 refugees

Iraqi refugee: This is mine, and this is a gift, I will open it in Sunday

Interviewer : What's happening Sunday.

Iraqi refugee: Uh, my birthday

Title card: But getting work to stay busy is one thing  
 Most travelled with big dreams  
 Like getting an education and opening their own business

Iraqi refugee: You know what the dream, open the all shop, iPhone World

Syrian refugees: I want to open [uhhh] small shop for coffee

Iraqi refugee: My goal is to finish my school, and have a degree, and be an engineer

Title card: Another dream was learning the culture and the language  
 To find a job but also to communicate with the locals

Iraqi refugee: The most important thing that I need to do is learn Danish. I just like to talk

Title card: While safety and finding work was extremely important to the refugees  
 The number one dream they all shared  
 Was bringing their family to Denmark...  
 To safety

Eritrean refugee: My plan, I will bring my family

Afghan refugee: Just if my family is with me in here and that's it [uhhh] I think is enough for me

Syrian refugee: Denmark, I hope help me, for mother and my father

Title card: ... Or they dreamt of starting a family

Iraqi refugee: [Uh] marriage and have children is my dream all my life but [uhh] I just wait

Title card: Video and story by Trine Bay Larsen

Title card: Original score by Anthony Ragus, composer

Title card: Pictures of the trail by Rasmus Degnbol, photojournalist

Title card: Special thanks to  
Toftlund Asylcenter  
Fredericia Asylcenter

## About the Author

Create a WIX site!

### Trine Bay Larsen

#### Education:

- Bachelor in English and International Studies from Aalborg University in Denmark
- Master in Mass Communication from California State University, Northridge (CSUN) in USA

This project is part of my graduate thesis for my master's program at CSUN.

### Special Thanks To:

- Fredericia Asylcenter and Toftlund Asylcenter, especially, the participating refugees and networkers Ditte Hald and Dennis Hansen for welcoming me to the camp and being part of this project for welcoming me to the camp and being part of this project
- The very talented and awardwinning photojournalist Rasmus Degnbol for allowing me to use his amazing photographs. Please check out his website here:



The last point on the homepage is the 'About the Author'. Here, I explain my educational background for creating the website along with a special thanks to the participating interviewees.

In addition to the homepage, the website has further created a blog where the above listed articles are posted. Visitors are also able to click the blog link at the top menu bar and read all articles. Furthermore, additional articles will be posted here along with feature stories under the theme 'Denmark Through the Eyes of a Refugee'. Here, refugees will be able to post their own content, both written words and pictures.

### Denmark Through the Eyes of the Refugees

## Refugee #1; Meet Dhurgham

April 12, 2016

[Read More](#)

### Udvalgte blogindlæg

I'm busy working on my blog posts. Watch this space!

I'm busy working on my posts. Watch this space!

## Asylum Legislations; what happens when the refugees reach Denmark

March 30, 2016 | Trine Bay Larsen



The asylum legislations in Denmark makes it an extremely difficult country to reach for the refugees. Since 2002, it has not been possible to apply for asylum in Denmark outside of the Danish borders, meaning refugees have to actually be present in Denmark to apply for...

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### Følg os



### Denmark's Response

## The Controversies of Danish Asylum Policies

March 30, 2016 | Trine Bay Larsen



In 2015 Denmark experienced a huge increase in asylum seekers and perhaps for...

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Although doing this project was extremely challenging, it brought useful data for current and future research. Interviewing the refugees not only broadened my horizon, but also taught me a lot about the personal strength people can find in times of crisis. All the refugees had gone through a lot, both physically and emotionally, to get to Denmark. However, somehow, they remained hopeful for the future. It was eye opening to have refugees, who had gone through so much and lost most of their things, offering me snacks, tea, and other things. Of course, interviewing the refugees was not easy, but posed many challenges that will be explained in the following.

First of all, there was a huge language barrier. Getting refugees that spoke enough English to feel comfortable doing an interview in this language was difficult. Therefore, some of the refugees used in these interviews, had a translator with them. Because there were no professional translators available, the refugees who needed translators used a friend or roommate to help them. Needless to say, these were not experts in English. While having some form of translation helped tremendously, it limited the interviews not having professional translators. A lot of the answers came out very short and impersonal both because the interviewees did not want to burden their friend helping them out, but also because the translator was not able to fully translate. Adding to this, were the refugees' fear of what could happen if they accidentally said something they were not supposed to. Getting the refugees to trust that I would not publish their names or anything they said on accident that could hurt them was challenging to say the least. Other refugees did simply not want to relive the horrible journey they had been on to get to Denmark.

Not only was it difficult to find participants, getting through the interviews were demanding for the above stated reasons, but also because of the subject itself. The interviews were extremely emotional and were therefore hard on all the refugees. Most refugees kept a

somewhat straight face, but in most cases it was obvious that they were fighting to hold back their tears.

As explained previously, this project builds on interviews regarding personal experiences. Therefore, each refugee had their own experience that varied somewhat from the others. However, a lot of the refugees had similar experiences during their journey to Denmark. Those similarities can be used for research on the already stated research questions. Although a few people had flown to Denmark, the majority, had been on an exhausting journey before getting to Denmark ranging somewhere between one and two months. While the people who flew had more comfort as well as the ability to bring more personal belongings, their struggles were still very much exciting and each and everyone had to leave family behind. All of the refugees, no matter how they had gotten to Denmark, depended deeply on their cellphones for various reasons explained on the website and summarized below. Everyone who had to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Greece, had to leave behind all of their belongings except what they could carry on them. All except two participants brought a cellphone (although two did not bring their own but used husband's or sister's husband's respectively). The two who did not even have access to a cellphone on the journey came from Africa (Somalia and Eritrea). They both told the story of smugglers not allowing them to bring their cellphones and collected them before continuing the journey. They both made sure to get a cellphone as soon as it was possible upon arrival to Denmark.

The interviews were conducted in two refugee camps in Denmark (Fredericia Asylum and Toftlund Asylum) and it sheds light on (1) the struggles the refugees had to go through to get to Denmark, (2) the importance of cellphones to the refugees, and (3) refugees' dreams and needs for the future. In terms of their cellphone needs, as the networker in Fredericia, Ditte Hald, said: "They are deeply depending on it" (my translation). All of the

refugees had to leave family behind and since they all use their cellphones to communicate with them the cellphones are vital tools. Among other things, the refugees use their cellphones to ensure that their family remains safe and to share their own progress. They mostly use internet-based communication applications because using regular cell-service is too expensive. Although communication was the number one usage, they also use the phones to access important news and keep themselves entertained in the boring camps among other reasons.

However, when you depend on something, you also become vulnerable. The refugees had all experienced some sort of difficulty both on their journey as well as after they had reached their destination country. Most of the difficulties related to technological difficulties including lack of charging areas and no Wi-Fi accessibility and/or access to SIM cards. Additionally, a lot of the refugees had to apply some degree of self-censorship to communicate with their families left behind in the war torn countries. Of fear for government control, they either kept their questions on a strictly general level or talked in codes. One couple explained that they would often ask about the weather as a code for the situation in that specific area where the family member was. If the response was warm and sunny, they were safe, but if they responded that there was a storm it meant they were in danger.

As mentioned above, and as other studies have likewise found, cellphones are seen as vital tools to the refugees, especially, for communication purposes. Furthermore, the refugees utilize their cellphones to access news they are interested in and in the language they want. Specifically, through Facebook groups, which enable communication with people in similar situations from the same nationalities, even the same cities. This way, the refugees are able to seek out information of relevance to their situation—to find out what is going on back home where the refugees still have family and friends.

Another important finding is the way the refugees use their phones to entertain themselves to get by on a day-to-day basis. Hereby, they were found to use their cellphones to keep them entertained in order to deal with the extreme boredom they are dealing with everyday in the refugee camps.

Although the cellphones are an empowering and lifesaving tool, as it enables the refugees to keep in touch with family and friends, access important news, avoid boredom, learn a new language and culture and so forth, the cellphones also make the refugees vulnerable to technological difficulties. As stated above, most of the refugees had experienced some issues on their way to Denmark, either with connecting or charging their cellphone batteries. After getting to Denmark, most of the refugees had not experienced network or charging issues. However, trying to reach family and friends back home were explained by most as problematic as some of the national networks are monitored by the respective governments. Therefore, connection was either impossible or had to be censored one way or the other (speaking generally or talking in codes).

The study of information precarity experienced by refugees enables researchers to study the various needs and difficulties transnational populations face in regards to communication. As all refugees had experienced some issues, it is clear that future research is important in order to be able to improve both distribution of information as well as the technology surrounding cellphone usage. Ideas and advice for future research will be stated below.

#### Future Research

When interviewing refugees, it would definitely be beneficiary to be able to conduct the interviews in their native tongue. It was pretty clear, in most cases, that having to speak English made them feel less comfortable and likely to answer as short as possible. Therefor,

for future, I will recommend to conduct the interviews in the refugees' native tongue, even if they do speak English. If possible, I will further recommend to set aside time to spend with the refugees to get to know them and establish rapport before the actual interview process. Spending preliminary time with the refugees will most likely increase the refugees' trust and believe in the agenda of the interviewer. Thus, it will increase the likelihood of longer and more in-depth responds.

In order to get more data for this relatively unstudied aspect, thus, a better base for comparative research, it would be beneficial to study more refugees from a more variety of countries. When data paints a close picture of how reality is, better strategies can be made to improve the situation for the refugees, both in relation to their actual journey and their information practices. Improving the situation for the refugees will arguably also benefit others such as host countries, volunteers, and media.

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## Appendix A



English

Hi,

I'm a Danish graduate student at California State University, Northridge in the U.S. and I'm looking for Syrian refugees currently in Denmark to interview for my master's thesis. My research questions are about how they get news and information.

If you know of any Syrian refugees or others working with Syrian refugees or perhaps are a refugee yourself, please contact me through Facebook or email.

Thank you,  
Trine Bay Larsen  
[Trine.larsen@csun.edu](mailto:Trine.larsen@csun.edu)



Dansk

Jeg er kandidatstuderende på California State University, Northridge i USA. Jeg leder efter syriske flygtninge som på nuværende tidspunkt opholder sig i Danmark for at interviewe til min kandidatafhandling. Min afhandling drejer sig om hvordan flygtninge modtager nyheder og informationer.

Hvis du kender nogle syriske flygtninge, nogle som arbejder med syriske flygtninge eller måske du selv er en flygtning, så kontakt mig venligst gennem Facebook eller email

På forhånd tak!

Med venlig hilsen,  
Trine Bay Larsen  
[Trine.larsen@csun.edu](mailto:Trine.larsen@csun.edu)



مرحباً

أنا طالبة دراسات عليا من الدانمارك ادرس حالياً في جامعة ولاية كاليفورنيا نورثريج في الولايات المتحدة الامريكية .

مقابلة معهم وذلك متعلق بأطروحة الماجستير. ابحث عن لاجئين من سوريا في الدانمارك لعمل الأسئلة التي سوف أطرحها عن كيفية الحصول على المعلومات و الأخبار.

إذا كنت تعرف اي لاجئ سوري او شخص يعمل مع لاجئ سوري او كنت انت لاجئ سوري يرجى التواصل معي عن طريق البريد الشخصي او الفيسبوك

شكراً جزيلاً  
ارسون تريني باي ل  
[Trine.larsen@csun.edu](mailto:Trine.larsen@csun.edu)

## Appendix B

Questions that will be asked during the interviews (done in corporation with Dr. Wall)

- What is your age?
- What is your educational level?
- What was your occupation before you left your country?
- Could you please tell me how you came to Denmark? Did you travel alone or in a group? Had you ever been to Europe before? Had anyone in your group?

Now, I am going to ask more specific questions about your information practices – involving your cellphone and other mediums --- since you left your country

- Do you have access to:
  - Television? If so:
    - Where?
    - How often do you watch television?
    - What types of shows do you mainly watch on television?
    - Which shows or channels do you watch to get news?
    - Do you find helpful information on television such as locating houses and other resources?
  - Computer and/or laptop? If so:
    - Do you use it to access the internet?
    - Where do you access the computer/laptop?
    - What are some of the main websites you visit for information such as for locating housing and other resources?
    - What websites do you spend the most time on?
    - What websites have the most helpful information?
  - Cellphone? If so:

- Is it a smart phone?
  - Did you bring the phone from your country? If so, why?
  - What apps do you use?
  - Other social networking sites you find helpful?
  - What do you use them for?
- What is the most important communication device for finding out helpful information?
  - What sort of information is most important to you? Why?
  - How do you get information about events back home? Family back home?
  - How do you get information about your new life in Denmark?
  - Which information source do you trust the most? Why?

For those who brought a phone on the journey?

- How did you (and your group) use cellphones during the trip?
- How was the quality of the service outside of your country compared to inside?
- What else did you bring with you besides your phone?
- How important is the phone to your life in Denmark? How are you using it