ARCHITECTURE AND ASYLUM
A Critical Analysis of the Segregation/Integration of Asylum Seekers in Denmark

Simona Schroeder
Architecture and Asylum

A Critical Analysis of the Segregation/Integration of Asylum Seekers in Denmark

Simona Schroeder

UCL Bartlett, MArch Thesis BENV GA05

Thesis Tutor: Ben Campkin
Contents

5 Introduction

11 Architecture and asylum
   A claim for an architectural discourse on asylum

13 Concepts of segregation and integration in theory

17 The spatial segregation of asylum seekers in Denmark
   Discussing Denmark’s integration and immigration policies
   The accommodation centres - locations, responsibilities, context
   The phases of the asylum application and the respective centres

35 The case studies:

41 The spatial articulation of isolation from the society /
   Building a sense of belonging
   Site context: location/infrastructure; facilities/program;

53 The spatial manifestation of hierarchy and heteronomy /
   Building identity through self-determination
   Social Context: the neighbourhood; provisions for asylum seekers;

59 The spatial articulation of limited privacy /
   Building a sense of being home
   Design/Materiality: typology/standards/configuration; interiors/exterior;

67 Conclusion

71 Bibliography

Illustrations
Introduction

Currently there is a growing debate in Europe about the reception of asylum seekers. Politicians as well as the media portray the asylum seekers, with diverse personalities and backgrounds, as a mass of uniform individuals. The asylum seekers do not only lose their identity, but are discriminated and stereotyped negatively, as they are increasingly perceived as a threat to the social cohesion within the population. In Denmark, as in other countries, they are isolated from the society through the segregation of asylum centres from the cities, which means that they become invisible for the society. Ironically the architecture profession does participate in the discussion of how to ensure a meaningful and dignified stay in the asylum centres.

Thus in my thesis I would like to expose the influence of architecture on the segregation of asylum seekers in Denmark, examine the resulting defects for them and claim the importance of an architectural discourse on the accommodation of asylum seekers.
The research is focusing on the spatial investigation of asylum accommodations and related facilities. Immigration flows, especially of asylum seekers, are often unpredictable and therefore the numbers of asylum seekers can vary significantly.\(^1\) An immediate demand for accommodation in consequence of an increased number of asylum application, often results in temporary, provisional architectures such as mobile containers, or the re-use of vacant, often state-owned buildings like military bases or hospitals. The latter are especially convenient for the government as they possess an infrastructure to accommodate a large group of people and are preferably in a state of readiness so they can be opened any time if needed. To date there has been no involvement of architects in the process and there is no such thing as an asylum typology. Thus literature about asylum and architecture is rare to date. On the contrary numerous research has been conducted on the health implications of accommodating asylum seekers in segregated asylum centres and camp-like structures. These health implications can include ‘loss of liberty, uncertainty regarding return to country of origin, social isolation, riots, forceful removal, hunger strikes and self-harm’ (Robjant, K. Hassan, R. Katona, C. 2009). Yet there has been no investigation of the causes in regards to the impact of the architecture on these.

Thus my claim is, that the architecture profession needs to take a position in the political debate about accommodating asylum seekers, and establish an architectural discourse! Once an asylum seeker applied for asylum in Europe, he/she becomes our neighbour and needs to be integrated in the society. It is our social responsibility to improve the situation of this minority group!

---

\(^1\) see the chart in the chapter ‘The Segregation of Asylum Seekers Denmark’
The following research questions will be addressed in my thesis:

*How is the segregation from the society manifested and articulated spatially?*

*How can the spatial articulation of the segregation of asylum seekers, which results in isolation, heteronomy and limitation of privacy, be resolved, while simultaneously creating a sense of belonging, identity and home?*

*What are the challenges and chances for architects? How can architecture facilitate the needs of asylum seekers and what are they?*

**Methodology**

Building on my research and the visits of the asylum centres I defined the defects of segregation, contrasting them with indicators for integration. The dichotomies are: isolation/belonging; heteronomy/identity; limitation of privacy/home. A literature review explores the possible articulation of the architecture/migrancy pairing in literature and reveals the absence of a serious architectural discourse about spaces of refuge for asylum seekers. After that I will discuss the defects of isolation, heteronomy and a limited privacy and argue the importance of developing the sense of home, belonging and identity for immigrants in order to build a new life, by introducing theoretical concepts for the integration of minority groups. I will give an overview of the ideas and will discuss the concepts of Wirth, Amin, Sandercock, Jacobs and Borden in relation to the asylum context.

Hereafter I will explore and illustrate the segregation of asylum seekers in Denmark by elaborating Denmark’s political attitudes behind the segregation. The asylum
procedure and the respective centres are introduced.

To investigate the influence of architecture on the segregation/integration process I will contrast two concepts of accommodating asylum seekers in case studies - the current system is represented through the accommodation concepts of Centre Avnstrup and Centre Auderød, and the pilot project in Vollsmose, introduces a new concept for the accommodation of asylum seekers.

For my research I visited the two Danish asylum accommodations Centre Avnstrup and Centre Auderød in October 2013 – unfortunately I couldn’t visit Centre Vollsmose, as it was a time-limited project (07/12-12/12) and was closed again by the time I conducted my research.

I spent a whole day in both of the centres, getting an in-depth sight into the situation of asylum seekers by interviewing the Danish Red Cross staff and asylum seekers themselves. I got shown around by the staff, attended - with permission of the asylum seekers – personal meetings between them and the Red Cross, spoke to former asylum seekers, who already got their refugee status and came back to visit friends or act as a translator in the meetings. I visited the ‘café’ in Auderød that is run by the asylum seekers, were they can spend their afternoons and get free tea and coffee. Here I also spoke to rejected asylum seekers who were living for years in various asylum centres and were now waiting for their deportation.

In my case study on the current system I will investigate both, Centre Avnstrup and Centre Auderød, as they are two different architectural typologies (sanatorium and military base) and two different accommodation types (accommodation and detention centre). This also implicates that different groups of asylum seekers (official applicants and rejected asylum seekers) with different access to support, are living in these centres.

Centre Vollsmose, a pilot project in 2012 accommodating asylum seekers in an
apartment block in a suburb of Odense, was according to the Danish Red Cross a success in regards of integration (Vinther, 2013; Awad, 2013) and will therefore be my second case study as a contrasting position to the segregation of asylum seekers in my first case study. Vinther stated in the interview that this pilot project showed that: ‘They [the asylum seekers] don’t need us [the Danish Red Cross]. What they need is the society’ (Vinther, 2013).

The spatial manifestations of the two concepts of segregation and desegregation of asylum seekers from the city and the society will be described, analysed and compared in different categories. These pairings are built on the earlier defined deficits as a result of segregation contrasting with conditions of feeling integrated – isolation/belonging; heteronomy/identity; limitation of privacy/home.

On different scales I will demonstrate the sphere of influence ranging from the city, to the neighbourhood, to the building, to the bedroom.
As previously exposed there is no asylum typology and therefore literature about asylum and architecture is rare to date. Another reason for an absence of an architectural discourse is of political nature. Stephen Cairns points out in his publication about Architecture/Migrancy, that the objections of professionals range from anxiety for the reputation of the architecture profession to resentment against the national and international legislations on asylum (Cairns, 2004: 25). He states by quoting Mattenklott that the discussion around architecture-for-migrants\(^2\), often builds on prejudices and the anxiety that these marginal architectures ‘cannot embody signs of ‘culture’’ and should not be ‘conflated with the positive aesthetics’ constituted by the multicultural architecture influenced by permanent immigrants (Mattenklott 1994, as cited in Cairns, 2004: 23). Mattenklott argues that this architecture forms are therefore unsuitable to ‘be reduplicated on high gloss paper’ (Ibid., 23). Cairns notes these tendencies without taking position for a

---

\(^2\) Cairns distinguishes between three possible articulations of the pairing of architecture and migrancy: architecture-by-migrants (e.g. Ethnopolis [18], Expat-town [19] and Colonial Hybrids [20]); architecture-for-migrants and architects-as-migrants
greater commitment of architects.

In his definition of *architecture-for-migrants* Cairns is contrasting the architectures of emergency shelters in the home country of the refugee and the architecture of detention centres in the host countries. He continues that the shift between humanitarianism and security, issues of aesthetics and technique, and the differentiation between shelter and incarceration makes it difficult to define architecture’s place in this context (Ibid., 28)

While emergency shelters are designed to immediately ‘respond […] to a mass displacement enforced by either natural disaster or war’ (Ibid., 23) and are coded in terms of economic, logistical, structural and material efficiencies, detention centres are established and designed to control and deter the unauthorized travel of refugees and asylum seekers across national borders. (Ibid., 24).

This distinction is according to Cairns, a different technique in the same geopolitical logic, aiming to protect national borders, also far beyond the geographical limit (Ibid., 28). Nevertheless the commitment of architects to these two categories of *architecture-for-migrants* diverges significantly. Therefore many architectural contributions to the accommodation of refugees in their home countries can be found in theory and praxis, while architectural literature on accommodating asylum seekers is almost absent.

What Cairns does not address in his writings is the segregation/integration paring and forgets to critically question the attitude towards asylum policies and the accommodation of asylum seekers. I would like to highlight what in my opinion is our social responsibility for asylum seekers as soon as they are claiming asylum in our country and hence becoming our neighbours: to integrate this new part of the community into the society the day they arrive and not the day they get a refugee status after being segregated for years in asylum centres.
Concepts of segregation and integration in theory

In the following paragraph I will introduce theoretical concepts for multicultural communities and discuss them in context of asylum seeking.

Denmark's attitude towards persecuted individuals seeking asylum, in other words protection, has changed in the past decade. It shifted from hospitality towards negative stereotyping and discrimination, as asylum seekers nowadays are perceived as a threat to the social cohesion within a group or the population. This is reflected in Denmark's political agenda on integration by distinguishing between cultural integration and social integration resulting in an exclusion of asylum seekers from the cities. I shall discuss this notion later in depth.
In ‘The Ghetto’ (1928) Wirth described the significant physical, social, and psychological influences of a life in isolation. Although he is referring to the Jewish ghetto in his book, many of his findings and ideas can be applied to the situation of asylum seekers. Wirth conceptualises that the individuals are not just physically, but even more psychologically isolated. By stating “it has been the type of isolation produced by absence of intercommunication through difference in language, customs, sentiments, traditions, and social forms. The ghetto [...] is not so much a physical fact as it is a state of mind.” (Wirth 1928: 287), he reveals the importance of the interaction and communication within a group to integrate newcomers.

Derrida (1996: 55) reveals the potential of a city for integration and the embodiment of hospitality. He argues that this potential not just derives from the architecture of ‘the residence, one’s home, the familiar place of dwelling’, but from the ‘experience of hospitality’ in the city through social interaction.

In reality immigrants and refugees are invisible and unrecognized in everyday landscapes far too often (Hou, 2013: 5). In order to build a sense of belonging, identity and home, the asylum seekers need to be recognized as equal members of the society, even though they have not the same political status and therefore the same rights as a citizen. Therefore ‘all ethnic groups in society should be able to exercise equal rights without having to give up their own culture, religion and language’ (Castles and Miller 2009, as cited in Hou, 2013: 5).

A number of concepts have been developed to meet the challenges of integrating diverse cultural groups in the city. The two concepts my argument is building on are multicultural approaches reversing Denmark’s idea of cultural integration in the practice of assimilation to undermine cultural identity.

The first concept is building on Ash Amin’s idea of the ‘city’s micro-publics of banal multicultures’ (as cited in Sandercock, 2003: 94) facilitating diverse groups and creating places for intercommunication between these. Amin names ‘workplaces,
schools, colleges, community centres, and neighbourhood houses’ as examples for such micro-publics but also notes that these require ‘organisational and discursive strategies that are designed to build voice, to foster a sense of common benefit, to develop confidence among disempowered groups, and to arbitrate when disputes arise’ (Ibid., 94).

The second guiding concept for my argumentation is Sandercock’s own vision that is building on Amin’s concept and defines multiculturalism as a political and social practice (2003). Referring to Amin, Sandercock defines that the social level of integration in the form of intercultural exchange and interaction is facilitated through micro-public spaces.

Political practice means ‘upholding the right to difference and the right to city.

The right to difference can be defined as the right to maintain and express unique cultural identities, and the right to city can be understood as the right to occupy and participate in public space as an equal’ (Ibid., 103).

Borden explores in his essay ‘Thick edge: architectural boundaries in the postmodern metropolis’ how, what Sandercock calls the right to difference and the right to city, are undermined by socio-spatial interventions. He builds his argument on the theoretical reconceptualization of architecture in the 1970’s by several theorist, that architecture is a space of flows and not an object in space, ‘the product of, and interrelation between, things, spaces, individuals and ideas’ (Borden, 2000: 224). He continues that architecture is a system of power relations (Ibid., 224) and introduces categories of boundaries that are segregating groups. He names the programme, the design/materiality but also the time as examples of boundaries. I will apply these concepts to my case studies and explore how architecture is segregating asylum seekers.

Jane M. Jacobs demonstrates in her essay ‘Too many houses for a home: Narrating the house in the Chinese Diaspora’ how the sense of home is
constituted in the immigration context. She states that ‘one’s sense of home is not a geographical given, but emerges out of various building activities (Jacobs, 2004: 165) such as interaction, communication, orientation, arrangements that are made for feeling homely. Building on her ideas I will discuss the importance of privacy and building a sense of home for asylum seekers and how these things are constituted spatially.

The importance of belonging, identity and feeling home that are fostered through these concepts, becomes super elevated in relation to the situation and destiny of an asylum seeker. Cultural identity becomes even more important to someone who has lost everything. More than any other migrant group, the asylum seekers want to build a new life and contribute to the society as they have left behind or lost everything, and therefore the multicultural city should be seen as an opportunity to enrich and enliven the community culturally and not as a threat.
The spatial segregation of asylum seekers in Denmark
Discussing Denmark’s integration and immigration policies
The accommodation centres - locations, responsibilities, context
The phases of the asylum application and the respective centres

In the following chapter I will expose the political intentions behind Denmark’s immigration policy versus their integration policy and point out the spatial segregation of asylum seekers as a consequence of these policies. Afterwards I will give a brief overview of the asylum procedure and the respective accommodation centres related to the different stages in the asylum application.
Discussing Denmark’s Integration and Immigration Policies

From 2001 one of the Danish government’s main objectives was to reduce the immigration from third-world countries – respectively decreasing the number of refugees – while at the same time increasing the immigration of qualified workers from EU and other countries (Skifter Andersen et al., 2010: 120). To achieve the goal of a decrease in the number of asylum applications and to secure the social cohesion in Denmark, the priorities of the integration policies were shifted in the last 20 years. While in the late 1990s the emphasis of the integration politics lay on social integration of immigrants, which included ‘participation in the labour market, participation in social life and political participation’, the government focused in recent years on a cultural integration demanding ‘the sharing of norms and values’ (Ibid., 103). This manifested in the government’s view that ‘refugees should not from the beginning be allowed to establish a normal life’ and ‘they should not get work and not be socially integrated in the Danish society.’ (Ibid., 122). By making life for newly arrived immigrants as unattractive as possible, they should be encouraged to return to their home country voluntarily and potential immigrants should be discouraged to come to Denmark (Ibid: 104). The result of this new government agenda is the perception of immigration as threat and not as chance. This perception disregards the fact that many refugees are ‘very resourceful’ and often ‘highly educated’ people according to Michala Clante Bendixen, the spokesperson of Refugees Welcome3 (in Terp, 2012) and therefore could be ‘a benefit to the society’.4

3 Refugees Welcome is a small humanitarian organisation offering free legal counselling and assistance to asylum seekers. Their goals are to ensure the rights of refugees and to inform the public of the conditions for refugees in Denmark.

4 “If you welcome people from the beginning and taught them about the system and the society, gave them a chance to earn money and educate themselves, then they would be a benefit to society in many cases - because the refugees coming to Denmark are very resourceful. They are not fleeing from poverty. They are highly educated people usually, who have spent a lot of money and a lot of energy on getting all the way up to Denmark.” (Clante Bendixen, M. in Terp, 2012 24:13min)
One has also to consider the motivation and destiny of asylum seekers in comparison to labour immigrants. In almost all cases the asylum seekers have nothing to return; they are fleeing persecution and war. Instead of breaking the negative stereotyping and discrimination of asylum seekers, they should be helped to develop their potential and contribute to the cultural and economic life of the city, which requires not just a social integration but also a spatial integration. According to Vinther, rejected asylum seekers are more willing to cooperate with the authorities in regards to repatriation, if they were integrated into the society previously (Vinther, 2013).

In the past decade the political agenda resulted in a social isolation and spatial segregation of asylum seekers. To achieve the goal of decreasing the number of asylum application, the asylum seekers are accommodated in camp-like centres in remote locations. In the following section I will explore the current accommodation system in Denmark, highlighting the spatial segregation.

*The accommodation centres - locations, responsibilities, context*

Currently Denmark is running 18 asylum centres to accommodate the asylum seekers while their application is being processed. Seven of these centres are located on Jutland, ten centres on Zealand and one on Funen. Nine of these [1-9] are run by the Danish Red Cross organisation. The focus of my investigation will be on these and additionally on the centre in Vollsmose that was also run by the Danish Red Cross for a period of 6 Months (July-December 2012) [10].

Besides indicating the type of asylum centre, the map is also showing the municipalities that are not receiving asylum seekers, as well as refugees in their first three years after they got their residence permit. In accordance with the Danish Immigration Act, this is in interest of ‘successful integration’ (*Danish Immigration Service, 2014*) and to avoid geographical concentration of immigrants (*Skifter Andersen et al., 2010:107*). This applies to areas ‘where there are already
Asylum Centres in Denmark
Locations of the Danish Red Cross Asylum Centers

In total there are 18 Asylum Centres which can be categorised in different institutions.
Seven centres are located on Jutland and ten centres are located on Jutland and one on Funen.
Nine of these are run by the Danish Red Cross organisation. On our fieldtrip to Copenhagen I visited two of the asylum centers. On Tuesday, 29th of October 2013 I visited Center Avnstrup and on Thursday, 31st of October 2013, Center Auderød. Centre Vollsmose will be my comparative case study.
Asylum Centres in Denmark

Locations of the Danish Red Cross Asylum Centers

In total there are 18 Asylum Centres which can be categorised in different institutions. Seven centres are located on Jutland and ten centres are located on Jutland and one on Funen. Nine of these are run by the Danish Red Cross organisation.

On our fieldtrip to Copenhagen I visited two of the asylum centers. On Tuesday, 29th of October 2013 I visited Center Avnstrup and on Thursday, 31st of October 2013, Center Auderød.

Centre Vollsmose will be my comparative case study.

Asylum Applications in Denmark

Statistics Denmark,
[Data: http://www.statbank.dk/statbank5a/default.asp?w=1920 (accessed 18 February 2014)]
many resident foreign nationals’ e.g. Copenhagen (European Commission op. cit.). Obviously this aims to accelerate assimilation processes and undermine the development of multicultural cities. Through this, asylum seekers and even worse accepted refugees are spatially restricted, as they cannot choose where to live.

A tendency can also be noticed that less, but bigger asylum centres are in operation in 2013 in comparison to the number and capacities of asylum centres in 2001 (European Commission, 2001). This has to be seen in relation of the number of asylum applications and therefore the related number of required accommodation facilities, but this still shows a shift towards higher surveillance through secluded, institutionalized centres. While in 2001 a number of 12,512 new asylum seekers were allocated to 55 accommodation centres, in 2013 the 7,540 applicants were accommodated in 18 centres.
As previously exposed, in consequence of Denmark’s immigration policies, the asylum centres are often situated in remote locations in order to not only segregate the asylum seekers spatially, but also socially. The segregation through remote asylum centres can be visualized most successfully by mapping the asylum centres within their context. These show the absent locations on the outskirts of villages or within the countryside.
`Centre Sandholm`
Sandholmgårdsvej 40, 3460 Birkerød
* Phase 1+3
* reception and detention center
* 1,5km to local supply

`Centre Kongelunden`
Kalvebodvej 250, 2791 Dragør
* Phase 2
* people who need special care;
  single women with or without children
* 16km to Copenhagen
‘Centre Avnstrup’
Avnstrupvej, 4330 Hvalsø

* Phase 2+3
* mix of all asylum seekers
* 6km to local supply

‘Centre Auderød’
Auderødvej, 3300 Frederiksvaerk

* Phase 1, 2+3
* asylum seekers waiting for deportation
* 4.5km to local supply
‘Centre Avnstrup’
Avnstrupvej, 4330 Hvalsø
* Phase 2+3
* mix of all asylum seekers
* 6km to local supply

‘Centre Vipperød’
Roskildevej 264, 4390 Vipperød
* Phase 2
* Center for unaccompanied children
* 1.1km to local supply

‘Centre Sigerslev’
Mandehoved 9, 4660 Store Heddinge
* Phase 2
* Center for single man
* 5.7km to local supply
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Close Relationship</th>
<th>Distance to Local Supply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jelling</td>
<td>Søndervang 2, 7300 Jelling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jelling+Center</td>
<td>0.4km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thyregod</td>
<td>Thyregodsvej 44, 7323 Give</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Single man; Using Services of Center Jelling</td>
<td>1.3km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigerslev</td>
<td>Mandehoved 9, 4660 Store Heddinge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Center for single man</td>
<td>5.7km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Centre Vollsmose
Vollsmose Alle 12, 5240 Odense
* Phase 2+3
* accommodation of families
* direct connection to Vollsmose Torv

* Centre Elbetoft
Mariesmindevej 1, 8400 Ebeltoft
* Phase 2
* only single man
* 1,6km to local supply

* Centre Thyregod
Thyregodsvej 44, 7323 Give
* Phase 2
* Single man; Using Services of Center Jelling
* 1,3km to local supply
The phases of the asylum application and the respective centres

The asylum centres can be categorised in different institutions for the respective phases in the asylum process. For a detailed description of the phases in the asylum process see the following illustrations. Unless otherwise stated, I will refer to the information given on the website of the Danish Immigration Service.\(^5\)

Reception Centre (PHASE 1)

After arriving in Denmark and registering with the police and the Danish Immigration Service, all asylum seekers will be accommodated for 4-6 weeks in Centre Sandholm, located 35km away from Copenhagen. The asylum seeker will be provided with clothes and will normally be supplied with meals in the cafeteria (‘food allowance’ programme). This means that the asylum seeker does not get cash allowances to buy and prepare his/her own food. Additionally the asylum seeker has to participate in an introductory course on Danish language, society and culture.

Accommodation Centre (PHASE 2)

For the processing of the application, which can last, depending on the case, up to a few years, the asylum seeker is moved to an accommodation centre. Next to the general accommodation centre, the Danish Red Cross is running accommodation centres for asylum seekers with special needs e.g. unaccompanied minors or a special need for care as a result of an illness. In addition to the accommodation the asylum seeker gets support (provisions) from the Danish Immigration Service in form of access to health care, cash allowances (to buy food, clothes and toiletries), child education and education and other activities for adult asylum seekers. The spatial manifestation of hierarchy in providing these provisions will be another subject of my investigation besides the spatial analysis of the accommodation facilities.

Departure Centre (PHASE 3)

As soon as the asylum seeker receives a final rejection of his/her application, he/she will be moved to a departure centre. In 2013 Centre Auderød and partly Centre Avnstrup were run as departure centres accommodating asylum seekers until their deportation. As a part of the systematic process of sending people home, Denmark has introduced ‘motivating measures’ (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2011 as cited in Clante Bendixe, 2011: 5) to speed up this process. If an asylum seeker refuses to assist with the deportation, he/she will put on ‘food allowance’ programme and may need to report weekly to the National Danish Police and in some cases will be imprisoned (Ibid., 5). While no studies show the success of these ‘motivating asures’, other countries experienced that ‘persons who have been activated through employment or education during their stay are much more likely to return voluntarily when the situation in the country of origin so permits’ (Ibid., 5). Vinther noted a comparable tendency towards cooperation in case of a final rejection of their application, by asylum seekers who were accommodated in Centre Vollsmose (Vinther, 2013).
The Phases of the Asylum Process

This map is showing the different phases an asylum seeker is passing before he gets a refugee status or is being sent back to his home country. This process can take from minimum 3 months up to several years in extreme cases even more than 10 years. During this time the asylum seekers are accommodated in isolated asylum seekers.

The official integration program starts at PHASE 4 after already spending months or years in Denmark and even then the refugee must not live in Copenhagen and other big cities.
PHASE 1

1. (reception centre)
You arrive in Denmark and apply for asylum
You are registered with the police and accommodated in the Sandholm asylum centre. It is decided whether or not your case will be tried in Denmark or if another country is responsible for the trying of your case.

PHASE 2

2. (accommodation centre)
Your case will be tried in Denmark
You fill out an application form and are interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service. You have the option to apply for a humanitarian residence permit. The Danish Immigration Service determines whether your application will be considered under normal procedure or if your application will be considered under the manifestly unfounded procedure.

PHASE 3

3. (detention centre)
You will be returned to another country
According to the Dublin Regulation, any asylum seeker will have his or her case tried in the first EU country they have travelled through. You can also be returned to another safe “third country”.

4. (accommodation centre)
Your case follows normal procedure
The Immigration Service determines whether more information is needed before your case can be decided. If the information is considered sufficient, there are two possibilities: You are recognised as a refugee and are granted a residence permit or your application is rejected and your case proceeds to the Refugee Appeals Board.

PHASE 4

7. (allocation to municipality)
You are granted asylum
You are recognised as a refugee and are granted a resident permit. Then you will move to a municipality where you will go through a three year programme aimed at integrating you into the Danish society.

OFFICIAL BEGIN OF THE INTEGRATION

REJECTED
The Standards

The Danish Red Cross Asylum Department defines its main task to accommodate the asylum seekers and ‘to make sure that all asylum seekers have dignified and meaningful stay while they are waiting for their cases to be processed.’ (La Cour, A. in Terp, 2012)\(^6\). Therefore and to ensure equal living conditions in different centres, standards for the facilities were defined, including e.g. that every family has to have two rooms, the minimum of 5m\(^2\) dwelling space per person and a maximum of 10 persons per bathroom (European Commission, 2001: 21).

Many non-governmental organisations such as Refugees Welcome or the Trampoline House\(^7\) question the fulfilment of the asylum rights and the suitability of current forms of asylum centres. Clante Bendixen claims the biggest problem is the ‘uncertainty/anxiety about the future and untreated trauma combined with an institutionalized daily life without power over ones own situation and without meaningful occupation’ (Clante Bendixen, 2011: 10). She also states that the Red Cross itself has expressed doubts about the current system and ‘has warned that the camps are only appropriate for short time staying.’ (Ibid., 10).

The average stay of an asylum seeker in Denmark was 600 days in November 2011 (Ibid., 32). Through legal improvements introduced in 2012 the duration of the asylum procedure should be decreased, but no official numbers about a success is thitherto published. The duration spent in an in-between-state of being neither here nor there, neither a refugee nor part of the society, was often criticised in recent years.

The government reacted to the increasing critique and since July 2012 asylum seekers are allowed to move out of the centres after 6 months, if they meet

\(^6\) Anna La Cour is the Head of the Danish Red Cross Asylum Department and is interviewed in the documentary (Terp, 2012)

\(^7\) Trampoline House is a user-driven culture house for asylum seekers and Danes working for a just and humane refugee- and asylum policy in Denmark.
specific requirements and sign an agreement with the Danish Immigration Service to assist with the deportation process if their asylum application is being rejected. If applicable the asylum seeker can move into an independent residence affiliated with a centre. Surprisingly only a few people took advantage of this new regulation so far (Awad, 2013), as they fear on the one hand, that signing the agreement has negative consequences for their application, and that they will be forgotten by the Danish Red Cross and will be socially isolated in the Danish society (Ibid., 2013).

This shows that, what Cairns introduces as ‘the construction of individual dwellings distributed among host communities in the name of assimilation’ (2004: 2), is also not a successful solution to integrate asylum seekers.

Thus I will highlight in the following investigation of my case studies, the importance of the site context, the programme, the social context and the architecture for a successful integration of asylum seekers.

---

The case studies:

The spatial articulation of isolation from the society / Building a sense of belonging
Site context: location/infrastructure; facilities/program;

The spatial manifestation of hierarchy and heteronomy / Building identity through self-determination
Social Context: the neighbourhood; provisions for asylum seekers;

The spatial articulation of limited privacy / Building a sense of being home
Design/Materiality: typology/standards/configuration; interiors/exterior;
Photo showing the idyllic but isolated location of the asylum centre (1). The centre has its own energy supply (2) and also the activities offered (3) make it a small functioning community. Still an absurdity is the location of the asylum seekers kindergarten directly next to the public kindergarten for Danish children, located in the northwest of the complex. The former rooms for the patients are now housing up to 4 people in the main brick building (4) while the ‘temporary’ accommodations in form of containers have rooms for 2 people (5).

[credits: (1) http://www.circusballoon.dk accessed 05.11.2013; (5): http://www.scfhansbklader.dk/ accessed 05.11.2013]
'Impressions of Centre Auderød'
Auderødvej 90, 3300 Frederiksværk

The centre is located 5.2km away from the nearest town. As there is no public transport servicing this area, I took my bike in the train as cycled to the centre (1). The fence of the former military base is still up (2). Alongside this fence and next to the road I saw several pieces of clothes left-behind (3). The community facilities were in very different conditions, but the school/kindergarten was the only place that felt really homely (4-6). Near the lake are some raised beds for growing vegetables and a henhouse (9). The comment of the centre leader: ‘Most of the people who sow the vegetables will probably not be there anymore to harvest them.’
The photos are giving an impression of the everyday life in Vollsmose. Top right and left middle are showing the accommodation of the asylum seekers.

[credits: http://www.information.dk/sites/information.dk/files/styles/article_full__mobile/public/media/2012/07/31/20120731-191521-252915_0.jpg?itok=087oSnCZ (accessed 22 March 2014)]
The spatial articulation of isolation from the society /
Building a sense of belonging

Site context: location/infrastructure; facilities/program;

In this section I will highlight the spatial influences on the integration in an urban scale. The spatial articulations and their socio-spatial effects, related to the site context, categorized in location and infrastructure, and public facilities, will be analysed and argued by using maps, photos and quotes from the conducted interviews as well as Terp’s documentary as evidence. I will argue the spatial impact on segregation/integration by employing the theoretical concepts of Amin, Borden and Wirth.
Location and Infrastructure

In the previous chapter I pointed out the remote locations of most of the Danish asylum centres and the tendency towards concentrated, institutionalised accommodations. Consequently the asylum seekers are isolated not just spatially but also socially and cannot decide where or how to live. In Terp’s documentary one of the in asylum seekers states:

‘It really sends a message to all asylum seekers that the society do not want anything to do with you. You have to live out in the woods where nobody can see you’ (Jean Claude, as cited in Terp, 2012 11:15).

The aerial photos of Centre Auderød and Centre Avnstrup approve his apprehension. On the contrary the aerial of Centre Vollsmose shows the inclusion of this centre in the urban fabric. Centre Vollsmose is located in the eponymous suburb Vollsmose, which belongs to Denmark’s third largest city Odense. Previously there have been accommodation centres situated in villages, but this is the first time asylum seekers are living in equal flats and in the same building as the residents.

According to Wirth ‘the physical distance that separates these immigrant areas from that of the natives is at the same time a measure of the social distance between them and a means by which this social distance can be maintained’ (Wirth 1928: 284). This would implicate social distance is reduced in Centre Vollsmose even more since the asylum seekers are not just living in the same neighbourhood as their hosts, but door to door with residents, in one apartment block.
Another important condition for integration is the infrastructure. In consequence of the remote location the centres are hardly or not accessible by public transport. *Centre Avnstrup* is located 8.6 km away from the nearest local supply in Hvalsø and the buses are running once an hour until 7 pm during weekdays, whereas there is no public transport at all from *Centre Auderød* to the nearest village Frederiksværk. Borden determines this time-restricted access to places as *time as boundary* (Borden, 2004), as it is segregating the asylum seekers by limited possibilities to leave the institution. In *Centre Vollsmose* the spatial mobility encourages and facilitates social mobility as the asylum can easily reach local support by foot and other parts of Odense by various bicycle links and public transport facilities.
‘Center Avnstrup’
Avnstrupvej, 4330 Hvalsø
Visit: Tuesday, 29th of October 2013
[Scale 1:5000]
‘Center Auderød’
Auderødvej 90, 3300 Frederiksberg
Visit: Thursday, 31st of October 2013
[Scale 1:5000]
‘Center Vollsmose’
Vollsmose Alle 10, Odense

(Scale 1:5000)
Facilities/Programme

In general the asylum centres run by the Red Cross are well equipped and they are offering many activities to the asylum seekers, trying to meet the needs of different age groups or gender. Centre Avnstrup runs a women’s café and a home work café, offers bicycle repair facilities, a second-handshop, hairdresser services, a fitness room, music room, a library and many other. Centre Auderød even has swimming facilities and a cinema, which were part of the training and amusement for the marine soldiers previously residing in Auderød. Regrettably these are not in use due financial difficulties. On the one hand the wide range of offered activities are great opportunities, but at the other hand it also means that the asylum seekers stay within their social group. This means selection and control of membership to the respective group and the social segregation is even intensified.

Other observations can be made in Centre Vollsmose. The Danish Red Cross was only renting the accommodations in the Østerhøj and one shop in Vollmose Torv, the shopping mall, which was used as the administration. All other facilities were shared with the local residents. Next to shopping facilities Vollmose Torv also houses a library, a culture house, a job centre, health facilities, a pharmacy, post office, prayer rooms and other. Additionally fitness activities and a swimming pool are linked to the mall. Schools and kindergartens are in direct vicinity.

These places are what Amin conceptualises as micro-publics (as cited in Sandercock, 2003: 94) – facilitating diverse groups and creating places for intercommunication between these. This is the first time that asylum seekers are sharing everyday facilities with local residents. The success of these micro-publics can be noticed through the following examples for interaction and intercommunication fostered through the spatial design.

The administration was located in a former shop. Vinther described, that the office facilities were designed open plan. Instead of small box offices and interview rooms, everyone could enter and engage. The sliding glass doors were removed
every morning, creating a fluid space with the rest of the shopping mall. As a consequence many people passed by and asked if they for example needed any clothes donations or other help to support the asylum seekers. The librarian of the learning centre asked for a list with the nationalities of the asylum seekers to organise and provide them with literature in their language.

One day an asylum seeker had his interview with the staff. For the translation, he brought the security guard of the shopping centre with whom he became friends with. These examples highlight the idea of Wirth, that ‘the transition from one culture to another, and from one personality to another, is a process that requires not only time but demand the co-operation of both groups’ (Wirth 1928: 263).

The sense of belonging can only be established if the asylum seeker gets feeling of having equal opportunities to access facilities and the city in addition with the engagement of all members of the community.
The spatial manifestation of hierarchy and heteronomy / Building identity through self-determination

Social Context: the neighbourhood; provisions for asylum seekers;

In regards to Wirth this social isolation derives not just from the spatial segregation, but is ‘produced by absence of intercommunication through difference in language, customs, sentiments, traditions, and social forms’ (Wirth, 1928: 287). Thus the asylum seekers are not just segregated physically but also psychologically.

In the following chapter I will investigate the psychological segregation/integration of asylum seekers through social interaction in my case studies Centre Avnstrup, Centre Auderød and Centre Vollsmose. I shall discuss the importance of the social context – the neighbourhood – and the hierarchy relations in organisational matters – provisions for asylum seekers – to avoid the heteronomy of asylum seekers and enhance identity building and self-determination. I will argue the spatial impact on the segregation/integration by employing the theoretical concepts of Borden, Sandercock and Wirth.
The Neighbourhood

As the previous analysis of the location already revealed, single-family homes and farms surround both centres in Avnstrup and Auderød. According to Awad (2013) some residents do not even know that the former sanatorium in Avnstrup now functions as an asylum centre. The asylum seekers are viewed as strangers, which will leave Denmark in the majority of the cases after a few months or years anyway. As discussed earlier asylum seekers are often negatively stereotyped. However a few people take action to dispel prejudices and engage with the asylum seekers. Both, Awad and Vinther, highlighted the importance of voluntary services by the community e.g. teaching language classes or organising ‘bingo-nights’. These activities help asylum seekers to connect with people beyond their own group, but the ways in which people could mix with residents are limited.

A problem of the community activities offered by the neighbourhood is their unilateral nature, which means that the frequency of community interactions depends on the willingness of the neighbours to cooperate. But what the asylum seekers would need instead, is a chance to show their skills and resources to contribute to the community. As Clante Bendixen notes they need to be asked: ‘What can you do? What are your resources? Is there something you want help with? Or, can you do something for us?’ (Clante Bendixen, in Terp, 2012).

A different tendency towards great interaction can be noticed in the Vollsmose project. An important factor for this is the multicultural social context of Vollsmose. According to statistics\(^9\) 71% of the residents are first or second generation immigrants and 48% of the residents are 24 years old or younger. The diverse community is not just sharing the experience of emigrating from ones homeland, but are also sharing similar interest related to ethnicity, gender, age and religion. The ‘mutual tolerance’ in such diverse communities ‘permits immigrants to be

themselves’ (Wirth, 1928: 284). What Wirth describes as isolation through ‘the absence of intercommunication’ (1928: 287) is reversed through commonalities in terms of language, traditions and social behaviour. In Vollsmose the asylum seekers get the chance to maintain their cultural identity and actively participate in the community life. Michael Vinther concluded: ‘The facilities have helped to connect people with networks within their own national grouping and beyond’ (Vinther, 2013).

An example for the spatial manifestations to maintain their cultural identity but also create community links, are the public prayer rooms provided in the Vollmose Torv. Additionally both, the shopping mall and the library facilities were reconceptualised in the past to meet the needs of the immigrants. In 2008 the library was redesigned as a learning centre with various facilities for adult education and is now providing the residents with services such as language classes and job training. Vollsmose Torv was also renovated in 2011 in reference to the medinas in Arabic cities.

Instead of limited occasions of neighbourhood engagement within the asylum centres, the neighbourhood of Vollsmose provides various public facilities for intercommunication and maintenance of one’s own cultural identity.

Provisions for asylum seekers

The hierarchy relation between asylum seekers and administrative staff is constituted in various spatial constellations. The spatially most significant manifestation of the segregation from the society in form of the governmental heteronomy of asylum seekers is the fence running around Centre Auderød. Obviously it is still a relict of the times when Auderød was operating as a military
base, but still this sends an unambiguous message to the asylum seekers and the society. Clante Bendixen imagines the feelings of the asylum seeker: ‘You are almost like a prisoner. [...] You are free to leave – but it is a system with guards and you have to ask and beg and stand in a line.’ (Clante Bendixen in Terp, 2012, 10:32).

On the contrary the concept that Borden is calling a ‘boundary as interrogation’ (2000: 232) can be applied. The fence was once erected to physically exclude people from entering the military base, whereas now it is ‘challenging the self-perception’ of the neighbours and the passer-by provoking the question ‘Should I be here, and now? Do I have the right of passage?’ (Ibid., 233). Thus in case of Centre Auderød this physical segregation is undermining direct contacts between asylum seekers and the passer-by.

Similar physical boundaries are used in different facilities to ‘control’ the group of asylum seekers. One example is the provision of health care. Many asylum seekers are suffering from mental health problems and therefore have to take medicine everyday. But due a lack of trust, the asylum seekers have to queue every morning to receive their medication for the day. The hallway in front of the reception can only accommodate a fraction of the asylum seekers so that long queues are formed in front of the building.

A comparable procedure is performed for the fortnightly payment of the pocket money. About 300 people are queuing, in summer and winter, in front of the military gymnasium, waiting for the police to arrive and the procedure to start. From the fear of a robbery, several policemen are attending the payment of the pocket money, inspecting the asylum seekers. Again one gets the feeling of being a prisoner and a threat for the staff and the society.

In Vollsmose the organisational structures and spatial configuration of the administrative facilities were reconceptualised.
The administration, located in a former shop, was now accessible not only for the asylum seekers, but also for residents. Therefore it became part of the everyday landscape and the asylum seekers got faces and voices that, were rarely seen and seldom heard, when living in isolated asylum centres.

Fortnightly the staff visited the asylum seekers in their apartments to distribute pocket money. Vinther reports that they sat down at the kitchen table, had a conversation with the asylum seekers about their general condition and then handed them prepared envelopes including their pocket money. Through this ritual the social tie between staff and asylum seeker got stronger and they were able to interact as equals. The feelings of disadvantage within the asylum group, based on misunderstandings, could be avoided.

Likewise the procedure for distributing medicine changed. Instead of queuing every morning with the other asylum seekers in front of the administration, the asylum seekers were now, if needed, supplied with medicine by the local pharmacy located in Vollsmose Torv.

The examination of the two categories showed what Sandercock named ‘right to difference’ and ‘the right to the city’ (2003, 103). A basis for expressing one’s own cultural identity is provided in Vollsmose through the multicultural community of the district and the right to the city in the sense of equal participation in the community life is fulfilled through the access to diverse public spheres and facilities provided through the Vollsmose Torv and the surrounding neighbourhood.
The spatial articulation of limited privacy /
Building a sense of being home

Design/Materiality: typology/standards/configuration; interiors/exteriors;

In this part I will highlight the spatial influences on the integration in the building scale. While previous investigations were directed towards the spatial configuration of public or community spaces, the following explorations will focus on the most private spaces – the accommodation.

The spatial configurations influenced by the typology, standards, and configurations as well as the interiors and exteriors of the accommodations will be described. Subsequently these spatial articulations and their socio-spatial effects on feeling uncomfortable or comfortable in a space will be analysed and argued using architectural drawings and photos as evidence.
Most of the current asylum centres are re-used buildings that the government is renting or owning. While the former military base Centre Auderød is in use as an detention centre since 2009, Centre Avnstrup was opened 1938 as a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients and operates as an asylum centre for both, phase two and phase three asylum seekers, since 1992.

In Centre Auderød the asylum seekers are accommodated in 11 two-storey military barracks aligned in a u-shape. As about 700 asylum seekers are living in the centre each of these must accommodate about 60 people. A partition wall divides the former dormitories into two small rooms that now accommodate 2-4 asylum seekers. Toilets and bathrooms are located in the hallways as well as the kitchens, which are shared by 12-14 people. Additionally each floor has one community room.

Centre Avnstrup offers various accommodation types. While families are accommodated in the single-family houses previously occupied by the doctors working in the sanatorium, single asylum seekers are accommodated in the former patient’s rooms. In addition two-storey container accommodations are installed on the site. Although the standards of these are much lower than in the main building, many asylum seekers prefer to live in the containers as they have more privacy, as here they are sharing a room with just one other person in comparison to sharing a patient’s room with 3 other people in the main building. In total there are as well about 700 asylum seekers accommodated in Centre Avnstrup.

The greatest driver for creating a feeling of home at Centre Vollsmose is the typology. While Centre Auderød and Centre Avnstrup are institutional buildings, the asylum seekers of Vollsmose are accommodated in an apartment block. The Østerhoj is an 11-storey social housing block is part of a 1970s social housing
development. By 2012 only 20% of the flat in Østerhoj were occupied so that 200 asylum seekers could be accommodated in about 60 flats. In contrary to living in crowded camp-like structures, the asylum seekers were accommodated in two-bedroom flats with up to 4 people (families), living door to door with local residents.

*Interiors and Exteriors*

Comparing the floor plans of a container accommodation and a flat in the Østerhoj shows that the dwelling sizes do not vary that much to have such an impact on the well-being, but the materiality and design get importance. Jacobs notes that ‘architecturally speaking the walls of a house offer protection, managing the interference between the inside and the outside, […], the private and the public’ (Jacobs, 2004: 173). The walls of the military barracks and the containers provide at the most shelter, but they neither convey the impression of comfort, nor homeliness.

An additional relevance gets what Jacobs calls a *surface effect* (ibid., 175). Most interior spaces in Centre Auderød in Centre Avnstrup look improvised and impersonal. This applies especially to the community spaces in the accommodation facilities. The long corridors in the old sanatorium are completely empty, echoing the steps. In Centre Auderød the WiFi routers hanging at the ceilings of the corridors are secured with locks. Some walls are tagged with scribblings and after acts of vandalism in one barrack all furniture was removed from the community room. The rooms themselves look dismally and confined. It is hardly conceivable that asylum seekers spend their whole day, including eating and sleeping in one room with up to four strangers. Often the asylum seekers cannot even communicate with each other, as they don’t speak the same language. There is no privacy at all.
The rooms in Centre Vollsmose were just equipped with the basic furniture, but often the small things make the difference. The asylum seekers were welcomed with a small flower bouquet on their new kitchen table and a little card was saying ‘Welcome’ in Danish and in their own language.

The pilot project showed that the asylum seekers not only got more self-confident and autonomous, but also the mood of the asylum seekers and the atmosphere changed positively.

Vinther stated that instead of contacting the asylum administration if for example something was broken, they now helped each other within the community. According to Vinther they did not have to call the police because of trouble once in the 6 months, whereas in Centre Auderød the police is called up to three times a day.

When an asylum seeker had to move out, whether he was granted asylum or has been rejected and therefore had to return to his home country, they left the accommodations in a perfect condition. Proudly Vinther told me: ‘Some of them even ironed their bed linen, bought some flowers and out a card saying ‘Thank you!’
'Accommodation for four asylum seekers in a container accommodation'

Floor plan, scale 1:100
‘Accommodation for four asylum seekers in Vollsmose’

Floorplan, scale 1:100
“Shared Accommodation in Centre Avnstrup (Main Building)”

[credits: http://trampolinhouse.dk accessed 25.01.2014]
Conclusion

The investigation of the case studies has shown that not only the location of asylum centres is segregating them socio-spatially from the society, but that this segregation takes place on multiple scales. As architecture is understood as a space of flows rather than an object, the case studies highlight the impact of the social and spatial context of the neighbourhood on an urban scale, the programme on a local scale, and the influence of the design and materiality on a building scale, on the segregation/integration of asylum seekers.
To resolve the spatial defects of segregation, resulting in isolation/heteronomy/limitation of privacy, while simultaneously developing a sense of belonging/identity and home, a thoughtful and considerate production of space and architecture is required.

The investigation of the case studies has shown that the most important task is to initiate a dialogue and foster communication to break down prejudices and overcome the perception that the asylum seekers are a threat for the social cohesion. Thus, to undermine the negatively stereotyping and discriminatory generalisation of asylum seekers as a mass of uniform individuals, the asylum seekers need to become visible and their voices have to be heard. They need to be recognized as equal members of the society. Architecture can create and facilitate the required community links by establishing places of interaction and intercommunication.

Inevitable for the success of these places is the social and spatial context of these architectures. These public places have to be highly visible, easily accessible and architectural elements creating boundary effects, like fences and other separating or secluding elements, need to be avoided or reduced to a minimum. Every restriction of the public sphere means selection and the control of membership to the respective groups. Psychological boundaries can be overcome by the programmatic concepts of these places - activities can force engagement and interaction, create relationships and interdependence. Still successful integration must not only be revealed through the feeling of belonging to the community, but asylum seekers need also rebuild their own personal identity as an individual. Thus, besides these community spaces, it also requires a thorough mix of different social areas and the availability of differing degrees of public sphere to guarantee the maximum freedom of choice between communication and insulation. The asylum seekers have to have the right to participate in public space and occupy public places as an equal. Also, besides socio-spatial negotiation of places,
asylum seekers should be able to articulate their diverse cultural identities and foster their own traditions. For asylum seekers, who often lost everything and might in consequence be never able again to return to their home country, the maintenance of their cultural traditions is the only way to keep up their cultural identity. This induces spatial manifestations and expressions of all members of the community.

In my opinion the research has shown the importance of an architectural discourse on accommodating asylum seekers. Architecture cannot only provide spaces for integration in form of fostering intercommunication and interaction and thus create social ties, but also contribute to the resolution of feeling socio-spatially segregated.

The reception and care for asylum seekers should be understood as chance - a cultural enrichment, enlivening the city. Our duty is to provide an environment where asylum seekers can develop their potentials to contribute to the social, economical and cultural life in the city and improve their prospects, even though asylum seekers might return to their home country in case that their application for asylum is being rejected. The challenge will be to find the right balance between assistance and surveillance, support and heteronomy.

Assessing the success of Centre Vollsmose, investigated in the case study, the context of the culturally diverse neighbourhood has to be acknowledged. Unanswered remains the question if or how a pilot project like Centre Vollsmose will work in a typical Danish neighbourhood. How will people engage, without having a similar background and comparable experiences of the challenge to integrate into a new society? How can the diverse cultural identities be articulated spatially without looking superimposed?
Bibliography and Illustrations

Book:


Edited book:


Chapter in an edited book:


**Interview:**


**Documentary:**

Terp, Morten (2012) Today Productions and the Quest for Integration, Copenhagen, Trampolin House.

**Journal:**


**Internet:**


Illustrations:

Unless otherwise stated, all images, maps, tables, diagrams and drawings by Simona Schroeder.

Credits for images from the internet are stated directly under the image.

All aerial photos are taken from Google Maps.