Information Behavior of Refugees:
Viewing Refugee Integration Through an Information Science Lens

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Introduction: The Refugee Crisis and Refugee Integration

With over 65 million forcibly displaced persons reported by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) – an 8% rise from 2014, a 50% increase in 5 years, and an over 75% increase in the last two decades – the current refugee crisis represents the most important humanitarian crisis of all time. Over 80% of the displaced live below the poverty line in host countries, and integration of refugees is undoubtedly of global concern.

Of course, host societies prepare integration processes and systems to support refugees; however, to the traumatized refugee in an unfamiliar territory, these processes are complex and complicated. Refugees are therefore unable to navigate them sufficiently for sustenance in the new territory, resulting in their marginalization. It is also likely that the sheer size of the refugee population is a major marginalization factor.

Refugee integration is indeed a complicated phenomenon: it is an attempt to deal with the sociological and psychological consequences of forced displacement. It cuts across legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, and it is operationalized as an all-inclusive integration service with numerous processes and systems. How well do processes and systems match the actual needs of refugees, if at all? This was the question on my mind at the start of my investigation.

During the literature search, I looked through academic literature, practitioners' reports such as UNHCR, World Bank, Council of Europe, ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles) and those of national refugee councils. I also attended seminars on migration. In the course of this search I stumbled upon a Scottish refugee council research report that highlighted the need for a person-centered accommodation service as part of its over-arching recommendation. The idea of "person-centered" struck me as a connection: information science has an applied science element used in developing user-centered services, and refugee integration service processes are complex, so there is a need for a person-centered integration services.

My Ph.D. research is a situational level information behavior investigation aimed at identifying personalized information needs during refugee integration. The word 'person-centered' has resonated directly and indirectly through the various stages of the research. For instance, an interview, when asked what he wished he had known, a participant replied, "There are so many general information but there is nothing specifically to help you live your life as a person." Viewing refugee integration through an information science lens means deep insight into the complexity of refugee integration.

In this article, I discuss my research, highlighting the key concepts, connections and preliminary findings of my research and emphasizing information behavior at the situational level. I then describe how it was translated into my short video submitted for ASIS&T's Doctoral Student Research Video Contest.

Why Information Behavior?

Information behavior is a branch of information science that adds depth and insight to user studies through the discovery, synthetization, application and implementation of facts, theories, principles, techniques and technologies across disciplines toward solving information problems in any given context. In a social context, it focuses on the red thread of information in the social lives of people, its manifestation and use including the processes in the service of information transfer to solve problems. In this research, concepts of information behavior are being related and synthesized with discovered facts, theories and practices in refugee integration to understand the complexity of the refugee integration processes from an information science perspective. But first, what facts, theories and so forth are being synthesized?

Refugee integration: What Is It About?

Refugee integration spans the different end goals of professional practitioners and policy makers; therefore, it has no operational definition. It addresses the changing relationship between refugees and host societies. There are two sides to it, individual features and public features. Individual features pertain to the refugee and public ones to the society. The individual features include identity, belonging, recognition and self-respect, while the societal features include the juridical statutes, social values and economic and political environments. Integration lies in the experience of the societal by the individual; however, in practice, refugee integration is political and not straightforward. The issues that surround refugee integration include:

- *Integration type* – for example assimilation or multiculturalism
- *Who* - for example, persecuted wealthy businessmen or refugees
- *Into what* – for example, ethnic minority group or holistic society amidst separatist policies.

Refugee integration is in fact a social process through which the whole population acquires civil, social, political, human and cultural rights for greater equality. It is concerned with the social connection and participation within and between communities in the host societies. As a result, its policies are implemented through the practical and functional aspects of the society such that public services accessed by both refugees and citizens of the host society are used as the measurement tool to evaluate integration services and compare experiences. The services are called *indicators of integration*.

In the United Kingdom, the place of my study, the public services are set within a broader holistic framework of all aspects of integration. The indicators-of-integration framework is spread through four layers: foundation, facilitators, social connection and markers and means. The markers and means are the public services used to measure progress. They are employment, housing, education and health. Although the framework stipulates the conditions of integration-service provision, it appears to be a one size fits all situation. The individual circumstances with respect to the processes and systems are not clear: does the framework really model the refugees' actual integration experiences? These questions were in my mind as I unraveled integration.

At this stage it was clear that integration is about social interactions, connections and relationships and is therefore socio-oriented. In information behavior studies, context determines concepts, so there is a need to examine social science concepts appropriate to integration. The two I considered most carefully were *hierarchy of needs* and *social capital*. Hierarchy of needs would have been more applicable if the focus of my interest had been on the individual markers and means of the indicators-of-integration framework, but since my focus is on experiences during interactions, I chose to use social capital.

Social Capital: Why?

Social capital particularly draws attention to relationships and connectedness with respect to the individual and social structure in a society. Its description includes "a resource that can generate a steam of benefits for society over time [1, p. 39]" 'the glue that holds the society, facilitates co-operation, exchange and innovation' [2, p. 11]; also 'a private and a public good' [3, p. 20]. To determine my approach, I examined three common conceptualizations of social capital: Bourdieu's, Coleman's and Putnam's.

Bourdieu's social capital focused on the positions of the individual within the society in gaining access to resources based on his social theory of habitus. He defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." [4, p. 284].

Coleman focused on social capital as a resource for action controlled by the actors (person or group) to achieve certain ends which in its absence would not be possible, stating that information inheres in social relations and it is important in providing a basis of action. In his words, "social capital is defined by its function; it is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common – social aspect of social structures and how they facilitate certain actions of actors (whether persons or corporate actors) within the structure." [5, p. S98]

Putnam's social capital focuses on political democracy and a civil society. He relates social capital to "civic virtues," highlighting the importance of a strong network of reciprocal social relations of social capital for a powerful civic virtue. He describes social capital as consisting of "features of social life - networks, norms, and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives." [6, p.664]

It was consistent among the three approaches that social capital concerns interactions and relationships with benefits. And, like integration; there are two sides to it: an individual aspect and a collective aspect. Three forms of relationships are further identified in the literature:

- *Bonding social capital* refers to relationships with family.
- *Bridging social capital* refers to relationships with friends.
- *Linking social capital* refers to relationships with friends of friends.

Simply put, they are used for getting by, for getting ahead and for getting across, respectively.

The point of departure for my study became Coleman's views that information inheres in social relations that link the effects of social capital to informational benefits, which suggests that information can be both a resource and a benefit of social capital.

Where Is the Connection?

The initializing concept in information behavior studies is a perceived need for information in a given context, and this need can be related to the "information provides a basis of action within a society" of social capital. Information behavior during refugee integration is therefore in the different levels and aspects of actions and interactions and their corresponding information. In other words, it is in the processes and experiences of achieving relationships and connectedness in the society.

Implicitly, to be integrated is to achieve full potential, access public services and achieve economic self-sufficiency through interactions in a new society. In social capital, since information provides a basis of action, information is required for the refugee to be self-sufficient in a new society, and the inability of the refugee to be self-sufficient becomes an information problem. Lest we forget, the quality of information and one's efficiency in acquiring and processing it are critical for adjustments to a stimuli deriving from the internal and external environment. Fortunately, information behavior studies are designed towards the solution of such information problems in any given context.

Explicitly, the individual and public features of refugee integration are consistent with social capital's individual and collective aspects: social capital is implied as the platform of exchange for the interaction during integration. In this case, the individual and public features of integration are situated on social capital's private and public aspects such that the interaction between refugee and host society is a sub-interaction of the larger societal interactions. Refugee integration and social capital become a function of each other and information becomes central for integration (See diagram in the video www.asist.org/doctoral-student-research-videos).

In our current world, the problem is not a lack of information, but rather of the inadequacy/inappropriateness of information, which means that if information needs are not met, it is not only a result of access/availability but also of what is provided. Addressing in a unified way the issues of information availability and access together with the understanding of information for the design of services is a potential delimiter of marginalization. The insight for these enhancements can be found in the depth information behavior research can provide. Specifically, understanding information for availability/access and service provision can be achieved through a situational level information behavior investigation. Put into context, the actual situations in which refugees find themselves as they transition into the new society are the observable experiences that define the situational need and, ultimately, the information needs.

A situational level information behavior investigation is a bottom-up approach that is embedded in the situation to enable the identification of person-centered information needs. It begins with the situation then continues through to the person to achieve the same information behavior studies goals as individual case studies, but at a larger capacity. The use of a robust methodology that will situate people, time and place with respect to information is a prerequisite, with the ensuing result being the identification of collective/individual

information needs, including situational information needs across a range of individual characteristics. Situational level understanding enhances individual level provisions and eliminates the limitation of individual needs findings.

Sense-Making: How So?

Information behavior research puts a person in context for the observation of their experiences. In such studies, the situation in which needs arise defines the experiences and information needs. The information science socio-cognitive approach (social environment and individual thinking) seemed appropriate for my research. This approach translates to the integration of individual features as the individual thinking and public features as the social environment. The observable experiences are in the interactions during transition to the society. But how will the contextual information needs be revealed in these complex interactions, and what is the most suitable information behavior concept for my study? Answering these questions was the goal of the next stage of my research.

The concepts in information behavior that I considered included Wilson's information behavior model, Savolainen's everyday life information seeking, Fisher's information grounds, Marcella and Baxter's information inter-change, Chatman's information poverty and Dervin's sense-making [8]. Wilson's model is good as a conceptual framework, but everyday life, power and structure in information inter-change and information sharing locations are not independent occurrences in refugee/society interactions during refugee integration; they are simultaneous occurrences. Information poverty might have been applicable if refugees were being studied as a closed group, but it was evident that refugee integration must be investigated as a big picture.

Dervin's sense-making on the other hand encapsulated everything. Its simple description as "the behavior both internal (cognitive) and external (procedural) which allows the individual to construct and design his/her move through time space" [9, p 3] literally models the context: the refugee is transitioning in the society, acted upon by internal and external forces (the individual and public features of integration). Information behavior then, lies in what is observed from people's constructions/experiences highlighted, through Dervin's situation, gaps, bridges and outcomes metaphor.

But what if the concepts could complement each other in a synergy to explore the phenomenon, I wondered? With some further digging, I could link the concepts of everyday life, power and structure and information sharing to elements of sense-making, thereby creating a deep construct of information behavior for refugee integration (see diagram in the video www.asist.org/doctoral-student-research-videos). Moreover, Savolainen's everyday life information appears to augment the cognitive aspects of sense-making while Fisher's information grounds theory extends the cultures and communities in sense-making and Marcella and Baxter's information exchange expands the power and structures aspects of it. My thought was that this synergy would be particularly useful for the research findings.

The exploitable strength of sense-making for this study lies not only in its concept but also its methodology. It focuses on movement, change and the forces facilitating or constraining them. It acknowledges that individuals may have multiple interpretations of the same situation at different times. In other words, situations remain the same but experiences change. Therefore, for the refugees' movement across time and space in the host society, it

potentially enables the possibility of patterns and characteristics emerging, highlighting phenomena from different refugee experiences at different times in situations.

What Can Be Seen Through the Information Science Lens?

I am currently in the early stage of analysis but one of the research goals was to find the situations of information lack during integration. Ongoing analysis highlights the existence of three categories of situations in refugee integration:

- The minor: specific to people less than 18 years
- The individual: general to anyone in the system
- The accompanied: specific to people who's got company such as children or is pregnant.

The individual situations is common to all within the protection system while the minor and company situations are in addition to the individual situations. An individual situation includes when a participant was locked out of the provided accommodation and did not know what to do. Likewise, a participant who had spent three years on an English course, then realized it was not required. The specific situations includes when a participant did not know they were not allowed to leave the children at home until reported to the police. Similarly when a young minor was in need of a prom dress and did not know how to get one.

Refugee integration, as with all social issues, will always be complicated, whether or not there is an increase in forced displacement. Exploiting the depth provided by situational information behavior understandings will continue to reveal the emergent information needs in and from any situations at any given point in time. This insight will provide a fuller capacity for service design, while at the same time providing for access and availability of information to the user in any given context.

The Five-Minute Video: How Would This Be Possible?

I was in the first half of my Ph.D. second year when the doctoral research contest was announced. As the study progressed, the concepts surrounding refugee integration and its relationship to information behavior had appeared convoluted. Doing the video for ASIS&T's Doctoral Student Research Video competition was a good distraction and an opportunity to make the intricate relationship simple, clear and straightforward for all, including myself.

In this light, the video was made using videos, pictures and diagrams with very few words; as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." I should add that I love movies, so when I saw the video contest, I guess the Hollywood force in me awakened. The listed software in the call for submissions seemed most appropriate for formal presentations, but I was thinking of a movie, so I set out to make one. Some basic knowledge of movie making was by no means guaranteed; I needed software, a plot, a script and music. Film and sound editing skills came naturally.

From my research into movie-making software, I had heard of iMovie by Apple. It is popularly used for putting together personal pictures in a video for friends and family on social media, but I thought I could use it to put my research together for the contest. It is free

software, and I use a Mac. My plot and script went hand-in-hand: it was around the refugee crisis and the role of information behavior as I highlighted above. I researched heavily for videos and pictures from refugee organization websites, information science websites, and Google, among others. I was looking for intense illustrations to introduce my identified concepts. However, the pictures about concepts and their connections in the video were my illustrations. They are outputs from the literature review, especially the connections briefly described in the sections above. They are also the most recurring pictures in the video.

The first version seemed good, but it had a poor voice recording and lacked music; therefore, there was a need for music and a good voice recorder. Following some more research, I found free music by Ben Sound and the Blue Snowball Ice microphone. Snowball Ice microphones are not the cheapest on the market, but for the sound quality, I couldn't complain. Two months later (yes, producing a motion picture is some hard work), the video was ready for submission. I was so delighted when it was announced that my video won the contest for its originality and creativity. It's such an honor, and I'm thankful for the opportunity.

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