



Situational Information Behaviour: Exploring the Complexity of Refugee Integration

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the knowledge gained from information studies creates the possibility of dealing with the challenges of refugee integration. We demonstrate that a situation-focused approach creates a systemic understanding of information needs that is useful not only for the individual but also for the design of institutional responses to forced migration. We analysed findings from our research into refugee integration using the sense-making situation-gap approach and found micro- and macro-situations affecting information behaviour and use. The combined analysis of individual and contextual factors highlighted the characteristics of situations for actors, actions, interactions and events of context. We show that overarching situations faced by refugees determine individual information gap moments, and we discuss situational information behaviour in light of these findings. The findings show how a situational approach expands understanding in information studies and emphasises the depth information behaviour adds to the social and behavioural sciences.

Keywords: information behaviour; information needs; refugee integration; sense-making; situational approach

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Introduction

The goal of situational approaches to research is to create knowledge that recognises the social processes and systems that create the context in which people operate. In information behaviour, *situation* is the dynamic environment in which interpretive processes unfold (Cool, 2001). Situation determines information needs and information sources (Sonnenwald, 1999) and is at the heart of many information theories and models (Fisher et al., 2005). Situation, as a focus of analysis, has the potential to bring together individual- and social-level analyses of human information behaviour (Cool, 2001). However, despite evidence of the power of situation in information studies, the specific characteristics of situations in information studies context are not explicit.

Dervin proposed a situational sense-making methodology for understanding contextual information needs, as well as the process of seeking and using information (Dervin, 1992). Sense-making conceptualises context as the container in which phenomena reside—a site of struggle where a new kind of understanding is reached (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003). Dervin posits that situations arise when an insufficiency is realised in context, and a gap exists (the difference between the current situation and the desired situation), with acquisition of information necessary to achieve a desired outcome. While sense-making studies have yielded findings



immediately useful to practitioners (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003), the investigation of situation in empirical information studies remains limited.

Although contextual understandings of information needs abound (Fisher & Julien, 2009; Fourie et al., 2018), these are often set in an individual informational context—information for the individual. This inadvertently excludes the origin of need, the processes and systems that may be active within the context which affects information needs. Similar observations have long been reported in information behaviour studies for example, Dervin (1992) pointed out how the information field recognises the power of process views of human behaviour, but process views are scarcely implemented in research. Reddy et al. (2010) highlighted the limitations of individual information behaviour in organisational settings and Cibangu (2013) noted the tendency of information studies to focus on information rather than on the phenomena studied.

This research looks at a situation within the framework of forced migration. Studies of forced migrants have also described individual information needs, as well as the process of seeking and using information. The information needs are present in most experiences of forced migrants but does not inform institutional processes. A situational approach combines individual and contextual factors to achieve an understanding of information behaviour that is relevant for the individual and the design of processes and systems (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2020). Using the context of forced migration within the United Kingdom (UK), this article demonstrates how focusing on situations encapsulates both individual and contextual information needs—the type of information that is useful for understanding processes and designing systems. First, we review the literature and broadly examine the concept of situation and its use in information behaviour. We apply sense-making situational approach to analyse the findings from our information behaviour study of refugee integration (Oduntan, 2018), then discuss the significance of situational approaches for complex investigations and the implications of this for the field.

Background

Increasingly, information studies highlight information needs as situation-dependent. Ruthven (2019) used situations to differentiate between conscious and formalised information needs. Willson (2019) and Gatson (2013) observed situations and changing information needs during transitions. This is also evident in literature relating to the general migration context (Caidi et al., 2019; Lingel, 2015; Allard & Caidi, 2018; Du et al., 2019). Such studies create understandings of personal and situational characteristics that facilitate or constrain the abilities of individuals to meet their information needs (Allen, 1996; Dunne, 2002; Gibson, 2016; Naveh & Bronstein, 2019; Agarwal, 2017). However, holistic understandings of situation in complex contexts has not been established.

Information studies of forced migration have shed light on refugees' experiences, even though this is an emerging area (Caidi et al., 2008, 2010; Kennan et al., 2011). Insights that can enable the information needs of refugees to be met are apparent, such as refugee students (Shankar et al., 2016), Syrian refugees (Lloyd et al., 2017; Mansour, 2018; Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018) and asylum seekers (Le Louvier & Innocenti, 2019). Also, information studies have created awareness of refugees' use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to meet information needs including mobile phones (Fisher et al., 2016; Diaz & Doolin, 2018) and social media (Borkert et al., 2018; Dekker et al., 2018). Research findings indicate the information needs that refugees have but these are not embedded in institutional processes responsible for the lived experiences of forced migration—integration remains challenging.

Refugee integration is the dynamic relationship between host society and refugees to achieve inclusion. It involves host societies supporting forcibly displaced peoples to live successfully (UNHCR, 2014). However, administering this system is not straightforward (Sigona, 2005, Castles et al., 2002). The process of integrating refugees into host societies is complicated for both parties and is increasingly challenging with each occurrence of disaster. Simply providing information is insufficient for the level of complexity refugees encounter during integration. Information should be coordinated with service delivery at a systemic level within the host society. The constantly evolving nature of displacement complicates the context not only for the refugees but also for the institutional processes.

An information gap exists between the refugee's access to services and the host society's provision for refugees needs. The information gap prevents refugees from meeting their needs and the host society from making provisions successfully. These variables in refugee integration can be explored together in information behaviour studies. The information required is multi-faceted, refugees need information to navigate complex social processes and systems, while host societies require information to create institutional responses. Efforts to create understanding of information needs during refugee integration should therefore consider key elements of this multi-faceted relationship. The field of information behaviour has the capacity to contribute at this level and facilitate social responses. To achieve this, refugees and host societies can be examined situationally, a focus that encapsulates the relationships and interactions of refugee integration.

Along these lines, our information behaviour investigation into refugee integration found dependencies in refugee experiences (Oduntan, 2018). The study found an order to how information needs arose during integration and formulated an information needs matrix that mirrored the institutional responses that emerged. The investigation also highlighted that system complexities, such as arrival route and persecution reasons, were determinants of integration and pointed to sources of information required on the integration journey. These findings validated the UK indicators of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008) and are consistent with other fields that have highlighted how legal status (Da Lomba, 2010), country of origin (Craig, 2015) and changing policies (Mulvey, 2015) constrain refugee integration. A situational approach to information behaviour enables dynamic interactions in context to be captured such that individual and contextual characteristics can be combined to determine information needs.

Situation as Concept

Situation is a discipline-independent conceptual lens through which we can interpret social complexity. According to Reis (2008), situation emphasises how “external factors” determine human behaviour, as well as how interactions and relationships moderate social psychological processes. Methodologically, the situational approach enables the intricate details and complexities of social life to be captured (Clarke, 2005). Reis (2008) opined that situations should be characterised by their objective properties, and further, that the emphasis on situation should produce deep understanding of context at any level—individual, collective, organisational, geographical, and institutional. From a relativist philosophical point of view, Clarke asserts that situational analysis makes the situation the focus of interest by stating, “the situation per se becomes the ultimate unit of analysis” (Clarke et al., 2018). Clarke's situational analysis combines situational maps, social worlds and positional maps for capturing key elements, structures, and conditions that characterise complex situations of life to create inclusive

understanding. For this analysis, we discuss situation within the context of Dervin's sense-making theory.

In Dervin's sense-making theory, situation is one of the many attributes of context—multi-dimensional and describable by a variety of attributes (Dervin, 2005). According to Dervin, sense-making is both an internal and external behaviour which allows the individual to construct and design their move through time and space. The essence of sense-making is in the strength and profundity of its assumptions about the nature of reality, human beings, and observation. An individual may have multiple interpretations of the same situation at different times, particularly when a comparison is made between different people at the same time (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003). Sense-making combines human observations, and this makes it stronger than the interpretations of one person. Therefore, there is strength in varied human observation rather than weakness.

Methodologically, sense-making uses a “*situation-gap*” procedure to investigate lived experiences with a focus on where people come from, what they struggle with, and where they are going, to arrive at comprehensive understandings of context (Dervin, 2005). The situation-gap is an iterative process of asking research participants pertinent questions about their state at any given point in time. A form of questioning which involves asking a respondent to detail systematically what happened in a situation in terms of what occurred first, second, and so on. For each step, the respondent is then asked what questions they had, and what things they needed to find out, learn, come to understand, clarify, or make sense of in the situation (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2013). The systematic process ties human experiences and constructions to specific times, places, perspectives, and human conditions in such a way that the outcome honours individual diversity while at the same time addressing human universals.

Given the complexities that surround forced migration, a situational perspective considers all actors (individuals and host societies), their actions, and their interactions (access to needs and provisions for needs), to create an inclusive understanding of key elements and relationships. The properties of situations can be sub-contextual characteristics of complex systems, where information gaps experienced by more than one person can be identified. This inside-out focus enables information needs to be elicited from the situation rather than as expressed by an individual. For instance, multiple people with different experiences of forced migration each indicating information gaps related to the same provision, highlight situational information needs. A focus on objective properties of situation in relation to human construct of experiences directly expands the scope of information need beyond the individual.

Methods

Primary data collection took place through semi-structured interviews designed using the sense-making situation-gap approach. Sense-making's focus on movement, change, and the forces facilitating or constraining this was a strength in the context of the study. Refugees navigating the processes and systems in unfamiliar countries were moving across time and space on a journey of integration and the evidence of this journey is found in their story. Prompted by the researcher, participants recounted their lived experiences of forced migration situationally, such that information gaps tied to specific times, places, and human conditions were elicited. For instance, the recounted experiences were framed around questions such as “tell me about how you got here” and “describe your current situation”. This enabled information gaps elicited to be time and conditions bound. The process was repeated for each distinct event on all

interviewees' journey to establish situations and information need. The detailed interview protocol is published in Oduntan & Ruthven (2019).

The situational approach allowed certain characteristics of context (previously unrecorded in information studies) acting on the individual information needs to be captured. For instance, reasons for persecution varied and included business, political, safety, religious, sexual, and war-related motivations. In addition, there was no one method of arrival into the forced-migration system. Routes of arrival included road, ports of entry, in-country routes, and humanitarian/family reunions. These contextual characteristics determine what information needs arise on the integration journey (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2019). As a result of the breadth of experiences, it was possible to examine individual experiences in relation to contextual conditions, which led to the discovery of related information needs. Adopting a situational approach resulted in an interview focus on the contextual conditions of time and place, in which the information needs occurred.

The interview population comprised 20 individuals of different origins and at different stages in the integration system. The population included 11 female and nine male participants, including two minors (below the age of 18), and individuals who were part of families. Participants' ages ranged from 15 to 48, with ten educated to primary school level and ten educated to university graduate level. Participants' geographical origins spanned 14 countries, including the top countries in the United Kingdom Home Office list of nationalities applying for asylum, such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Eritrea, Afghanistan, and Syria. There were other countries in the population such as Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, and Malaysia. Participants had lived for periods of between one month and 15 years in the country at the time of data collection.

The interview data showed information behaviour during refugee integration revolved around contextual factors including the refugee-seeker's status, provisions accessed, and length of stay in the host society. An individual journey through the integration system is either as an asylum seeker₁, refugee₂, or refused asylum seeker₃, collectively referred to as refugee-seekers. There were ten refused asylum seekers, five asylum seekers, and five refugees in the study. All participants had similar information needs irrespective of status but different access to provisions due to institutional processes in place in the host society (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2019).

The findings from interviews were substantiated with observation data recorded during an eight-month volunteer role with Scottish Refugee Council—a national service provider that delivers financial assistance, essential information, and advice to people seeking asylum in Scotland. Ten observation sessions were completed, with the focus of data collected on the refugee-seeker status, provisions accessed, and the length of stay in the host society. The observed included three refused asylum seekers, two asylum seekers, and five refugees, which made it possible for homogeneity of data to be assessed. The observation data was consistent with the interview data, it showed institutional processes determined access to provisions (Oduntan, 2018).

Data Analysis

The data analysis in the study involved an iterative process of thematic coding and circling out information gaps in the recounted experiences. The data collected reflected the complexity of refugee integration, as refugee conditions were significantly different. Our analysis revealed micro- and macro-level situations in refugee integration and situation became the unit of

analysis. The data collected using sense-making’s situation-gap perspective was micro-level; they are individual situation-gap moments on the integration journey. These situations resided within an overarching contextually conditioned situation which we refer to as a macro-level situation. The sense-making mandate that analysis be anchored in time, space, movement, gap, power, force, constraint, constancy and change, allows context to be covered in greater depth, making possible micro- and macro-level analysis of information gaps.

In our study, situation is input and output, in that, the micro-level situation (individual situation-gap from interviews) was the input and focus of a further analysis where commonalities and differences in lived experiences were circled out that resulted in macro-level situation (context conditioned situation). The interview data showed individual situations where information was required for basic needs such as housing or where travel was a problem that required information. The circling process revealed that these situations exist as a result of contextual conditions such as legal and social status incorporated in host society processes. This led us to two distinct cases as macro-level situations, what we refer to as ideal situation—the status of refugee and asylum seeker, and unideal situation—the status of the refused asylum seeker.

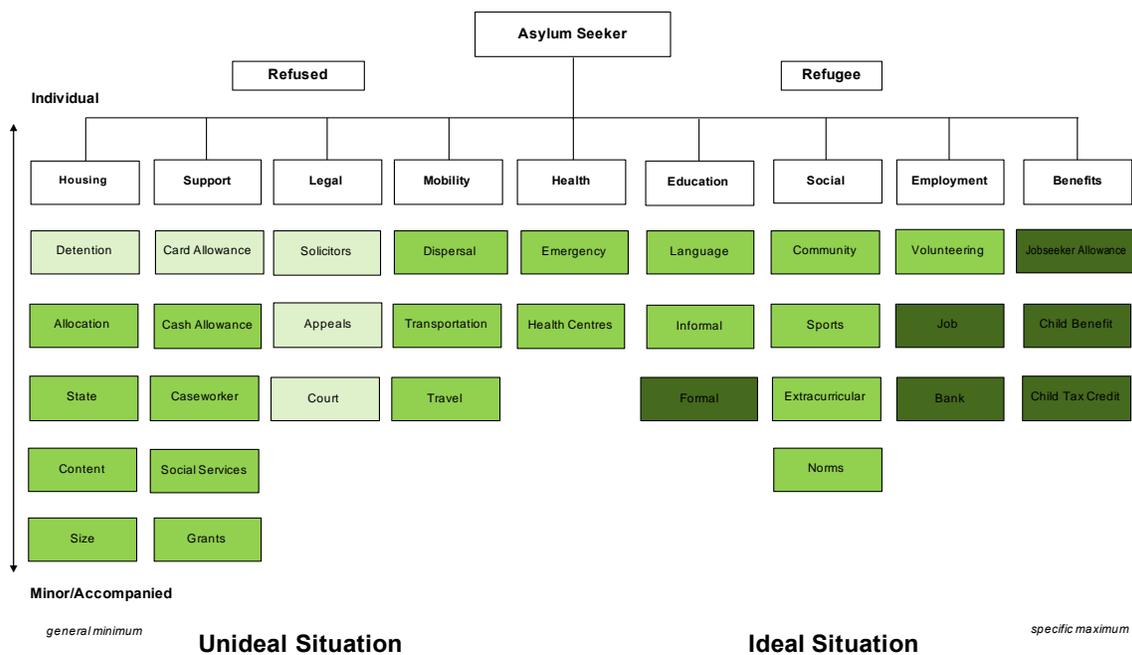


Figure 1. Situations in Refugee Integration.

Our information needs matrix (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2019) in Figure 1 above is used to illustrate the micro- and macro-level situations in refugee integration. The matrix sums up refugee integration as an information need journey through sociological provisions in the host society. In the UK, changing legal statuses determine provision levels, irrespective of needs. As refugees passed through the different states, the information need consistently revolved around basic needs. Each status’s information need was highlighted using a green color-coding scheme, a central-green shade for the asylum seeker, a deep-green shade for the refugee, and a light-

green shade for the refused asylum seeker. This made visible the individual and contextual transitions that occur during refugee integration.

Findings and Discussion

The study found that the individual situations and gaps of refuge-seekers were embedded within an overarching macro-level situation. Our situation-gap analysis showed a transition on the information need journey based on the contextual conditions of access and provision, described as ideal and unideal situations (Figure 1). Although individual information needs are important, contextual conditions determine experiences, meaning that individual information gaps and contextual information gaps exist. The situational approach tied together micro- and macro-level information gap situations, resulting in situational information needs of systemic relevance useful for the individual and the design of contextual systems.

Ideal Situation

This is a macro-situation seen as ideal for refugees and asylum seekers because these categories of people have unrestricted access to provisions to meet integration needs, although there were differences in levels of provisions for each category. The matrix in Figure 2 shows the information needs journey in the ideal situation. Asylum seekers, while waiting for a decision on their asylum applications, are provided with basic needs such as housing, financial support, travel support, health and basic education, and also receive some social support. In addition, refugees are provided with benefits (statutory financial support as citizens) and allowed employment. Different shades are used to differentiate each status provisions, the lighter for the asylum seekers and the darker shade for the additional provisions for the refugees. The legal provision was not a requirement in this situation hence is not coloured in figured two. These provisions are explicit and highlight host countries’ commitment to the United Nations refugee convention and the global compact on refugees.

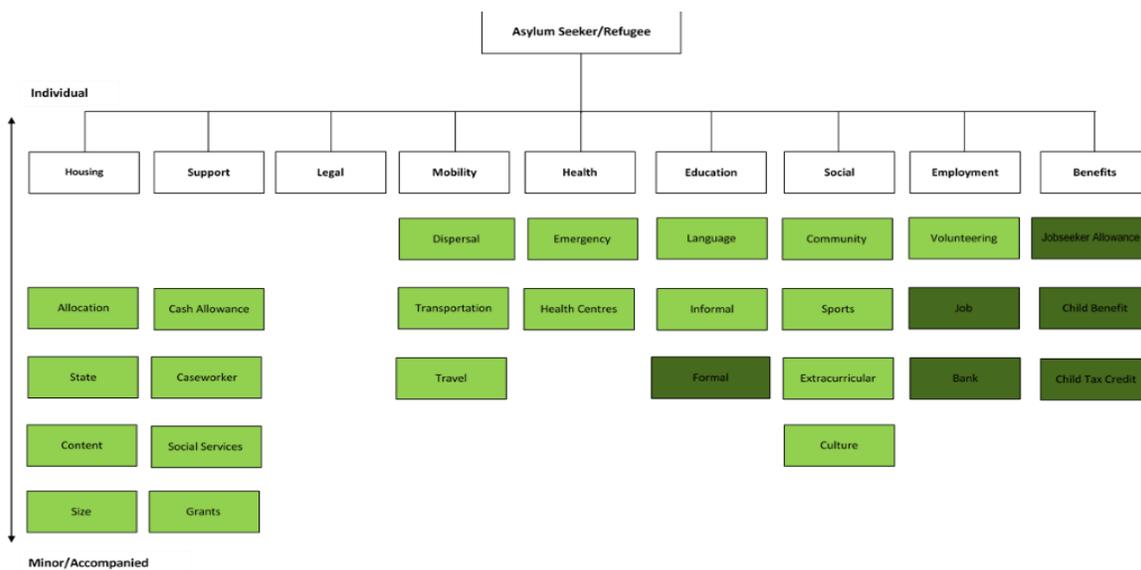


Figure 2. The Ideal Situation.



However, despite the ideal nature of this situation, our study found numerous individual and contextual information gaps that prevented successful access to and delivery of provisions for refugee integration. At the micro-level, the data showed all asylum seekers and refugees in the ideal situation had no information on their specific provisions and providers during their journey. As a result, there were misconceptions about which provisions they were entitled to, as highlighted in the matrix.

“I went to Red Cross to apply for English Language class, but no one accept me and I have to go because I have no English at all. The college all full so they put me on waiting list. I have gone directly but still full.” 2-month asylum seeker

On the other hand, the three refugees who arrived via the family reunion or humanitarian route appeared to be well received with information on arrival into their host countries. They are provided with much information and training on how to integrate into the community. This is in addition to the spousal or parent-in-country edge in the case of family reunion refugees. While preparation of information and training highlights the importance of information for the individual, the data showed that refugees encounter similar unknowns.

“The job is a problem, it is so difficult, and you need to have experience but when you are not employed how you get experience.” 7-year refugee

At the macro-level, a lack of co-ordination and communication between service providers caused an imbalance in provision, resulting in under-served and over-served occurrences. For instance, one asylum seeker had never received travel support in the form of, for example, bus passes or tickets, whilst others received multiple bus passes from different service providers. The refugee-seeker with information about service providers, has more opportunity to meet needs than the refugee-seeker without information, especially when information is not publicly available.

“They (Red Cross and Refugee Council) are so helpful but it is not enough for a person that has decided to stay permanently in this country. Now we have to try by ourselves and with the help of friends and not depend on the Red Cross and Refugee Council.” 20-month refugee

Also, within service providers, information on the delivery of provisions was undefined. The information on what should be provided and what has been accessed by a refugee-seeker is not explicit. As a result, there was inconsistency in provision. Refugee-seekers in ideal situations received help when they went to certain service providers in times of destitution but others with the same status and similar situations were turned away for the same problems by the same organisations or signposted to other service providers.

“The refugee council said they don’t have anything for me and that I should go to the Home Office.” 2-month asylum seeker

The lack of communication between service providers caused a “*survival of the well-informed*” syndrome which had a ripple effect. Service providers with defined services struggled with consistency while individual access to provisions arguably depended on the number of service providers known. For instance, an asylum seeker might access transportation provisions from a service provider in a particular week and receive the same provision from another service provider the following week. Meanwhile, someone else in a similar situation might not receive

any, if support was exhausted at that time. The inconsistencies in the ideal situation highlight the individual and contextual information gaps in refugee integration and points to the need for information to be coordinated with service delivery at the systemic level within the host society.

Unideal Situation

This is a macro-situation seen as unideal and applies only to the refused asylum seeker—the category with restricted access to provisions to meet integration needs. The matrix in Figure 3 shows the information needs journey in the unideal situation. This status had provisions and basics needs such as housing, financial support, legal support, mobility, education, and social support. However, the provisions are heavily impacted by restrictions and limits, as is extensively discussed by Oduntan and Ruthven (2017). Our analysis in this paper points to a lack of clarity at micro-level and a lack of accountability at macro-level. The information gaps in this situation concerned not only access to provisions but also clarity on the status of refused asylum seeker. At micro-level, participants did not have sufficient information to deal with the asylum refusal process. For example, all the refused asylum seekers in this study associated this time with uncertainty, confusion, depression, and ill health.

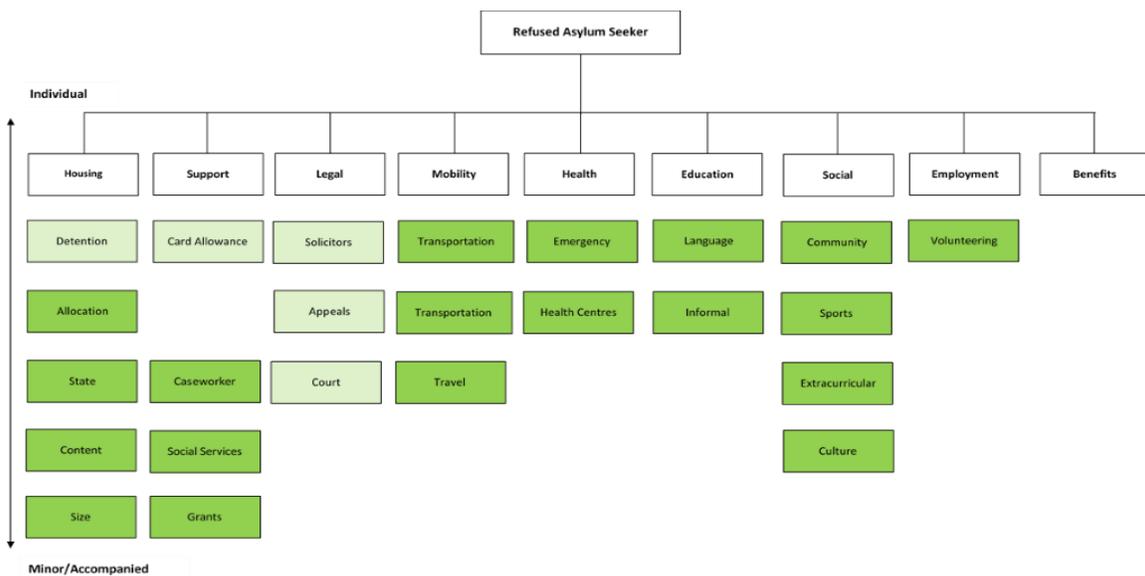


Figure 3. The Unideal Situation.

The data showed similar difficult experiences among refused asylum seekers, particularly for newly arrived asylum seekers. Even in-country applicants who might be thought of as having the advantage of being in the country do not understand the process. As soon as a negative asylum decision is reached, financial support might stop, and the failed asylum seeker could be sent out of their accommodation. In cases where refused asylum seekers are sent to detention, they have to start all over again when they are released. The participants highlighted their inability to resettle back into society when released.

“After the interview one month later, they refused; they say I am lying, I am not from Eritrea. When they refused, they say I am not a Christian when I am even a singer in

church. I got confused. I ask myself all the time who am I? So I have a court appointment, I took all my photos etc. Then the court said I am a Christian but not Eritrean. I am confused more.” 11-month refused asylum seeker

At the macro-level, provisions for this category appear even more difficult for service providers to administer. While there are provisions for this category, knowledge and conditions of provisions are neither explicit nor consistent. Individual situations are hard as refused asylum seekers do not understand their situations and have no information to meet their integration needs. The macro-level situation is even more chaotic because information is not shared, and administration takes place out of moral decency rather than for obligatory reasons. An integration bottleneck arguably exists. The refused asylum seeker’s access to provisions is regarded as a privilege, which contradicts the primary purpose of provisions for basic needs.

Theoretical Implications: Situational Information Behaviour

Our findings show that, in information behaviour, the information gaps are conditioned by micro- and macro-level situations. At the micro-level, individual descriptions of experiences lead to individual information needs while at the macro-level, further analysis based on contextual conditions leads to operational information needs. This implies information need is individual and collective, arising from multiple people with different experiences and backgrounds, each indicating related information gaps on host society’s integration provisions. Thus, although information need is individual, the macro-level situation is common to all individual’s experiences demonstrating a collective journey and situational information need. These individual-collective information needs journeys, via situations, deconstruct the context and emphasise sense-making outcomes that honour diversity as well as human universals.

Situational information behaviour can be posited, investigating situationally enables multiple variables in a context to be combined in determining information needs. The basis of situational information behaviour follows directly from Cool’s (2001) statement that situations have the potential to bring together individual cognitive-level and social-level analyses of human information behaviour. Fundamentally, “information behaviour follows the properties of information in a given context” (Bates, 1999) and “situation is one of the attributes of context” (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003). If information behaviour follows the properties of information in any given context, and situation is one of the attributes of context, situations contain sub-contextual characteristics of context where information gaps lie.

We demonstrate that situational information behaviour investigates the properties of information at micro- and macro-level in any given context. Situational information behaviour can also be viewed as the cumulative of individual experiences and contextual conditions, arriving at situational information needs. For instance, our study resulted in an information needs matrix that represented individual information needs during the refugee integration process and, at the same time, addressed contextual design of institutional processes and systems.

Furthermore, situational information behaviour is a higher-level interpretation of information needs. According to Dervin, researchers are not required to suppress their own interpretations or understandings, but rather to act as vehicles of dialogic practice (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003). The individual may be unable to make sense of their information needs beyond their personal situation as a consequence of the conditions of context, including observational constraints of time, place, change, and physiological limitations. Given the ambiguity of

information needs, the need and use of information is a creative process (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003). It is therefore possible for information needs to be situational, though data collected is based on the individual's situations and gaps.

Situational information needs are overarching and also individual. Ruthven et al. (2018) observed that information needs are often expressed as situations in the hope that someone else can turn situations into questions that can be answered. Our findings emphasise the distinct situations that can emerge: individual micro-level, upon which the field predominantly reports, and overarching macro-level, which enhances information needs but is rarely reported. This suggests that familiarisation with context is crucial for a situational information behaviour investigation to prevent isolation of the individual from context.

The findings show that contextual and individual characteristics of situations can be explicitly found in the time and place of constructed experiences. The contextual characteristics arose from system-imposed conditions, acting on individuals that could not be ignored. These include the different refugee-seeker statuses. Furthermore, from our situational focus on place and time, we discovered that arrival route and persecution reasons affected the information needs and sources of the individual. This suggests that intricate details of context can be easily omitted and the applicability of situations in information behaviour depends on contextual complexity.

The characteristics of complex context can be defined from conditions and actions, while individual characteristics are personal and specific. Analysis of changing individual and contextual factors revealed overarching situations in refugee integration. The situational characteristics is in-line with Sonnenwald's (1999) argument that situations may be characterised by actions or behaviours that occur over time and are connected by participants. The situational approach's attention to constraints of time, place, and human conditions cannot be over-emphasised. Viewing each person's information needs from their individual situations in relation to contextual conditions reduces individual bias and creates an inside-out perspective. Exploring information behaviour using a situational approach opens up interesting opportunities for information studies to contribute to the detangling of complex social systems, including forced migration.

Practical Implications

Forced migration is increasingly challenging and refugee integration processes and systems are deteriorating. If the goal of a society is to successfully integrate refugee-seekers, knowledge from information studies creates the possibility of dealing strategically with failing integration systems. Taking a view from a situational perspective is a means to re-define and align integration provisions, thereby strengthening host societies' capacity to respond to the sociological and psychological consequences of forced displacement in any given population.

Our systematic analysis, using information behaviour sense-making, sheds light on a system inherently divided and encapsulates refugee integration processes. The findings point to coordination of information with service delivery at the systemic level as best practice, information will no longer create privilege but will create equal opportunity for access to integration provisions. A situational information need is the bridge between individual and contextual information gaps causing the inability of refugee-seekers to meet needs and the lack of coordination and communication between service providers.

The understanding of needs alongside status and stage, eliminates ambiguity in provisions for refugee-seekers and service providers, enabling a strategic integration system. The individual and situational transitions highlighted can be translated to checkpoints for the system, service providers, and refugee-seekers. The findings can also form the basis of response in design to refugees use of technology and social media in host societies. Although the use of digital media is beneficial to refugees and service providers, it raises the challenges of accuracy of information (Fisher, 2018). The situated needs create an avenue for information across digital media platforms to be targeted and consistent. A revolving geopolitical issue such as forced migration will always be complicated, but consolidated understanding from interdisciplinary investigations reveals robust insights.

Conclusion

This paper makes explicit assertions on the nature of situations in a complex context. Through our research into refugee integration, we demonstrate situational information behaviour and point out situations conditioned at micro- and macro-levels. Using sense-making, we describe the characteristics of context and highlight time and place as fundamental for situational investigation, particularly in a complex context, such as forced migration. The situational approach elaborates on the multi-faceted properties and subtleties of context to enable richer and more inclusive understanding of information needs. The outcome is of systemic relevance that is useful individually for refugees to meet needs and contextually for the design of institutional responses.

We conclude that human information behaviour as a study of the properties of information in context can be investigated in two ways—unilateral and bilateral, each type creates its own kind of understanding depending on the goal of the study. For instance, previous studies that identified individual information needs are unilateral investigations that followed the properties of information individually. Meanwhile, our study can be deemed a bilateral investigation as it followed the properties of information situationally to achieve individual-collective information needs. Information behaviour studies are no longer only informational but also operational, increasing the significance of the field of information theoretically and practically. We put forward the situational approach and characteristics as directions to be pursued. In a complex context, situations are as much a collective as it is individual, combining individual and contextual factors will extend research outcomes and increase the significance of information studies.

Endnotes

- 1 Asylum seeker - A person who has applied for protection (asylum) in a host society and is awaiting a decision.
- 2 Refugee - A person who has been granted asylum either after an application or by selection from a refugee camp.
- 3 Refused asylum seeker - A person whose asylum application has been refused but has been given the chance to appeal.

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