# Housing Qualities and Effects on Identity and Well-Being: Theoretical Perspectives for Interdisciplinary Research on Asylum Seeker Receptions Centres



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## Preface

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), SINTEF Building and Infrastructure, and University College of Lillehammer (HiL) succeeded together in obtaining funding for the current research project on asylum seeker reception centres by Norwegian Research Council's research program FRIPRO for 2012-2015: "What Buildings Do - The Effect of the Physical Environment on Quality of Life of Asylum Seekers". The project is furthermore supported financially by The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) as well as internally funded by NTNU, HiL and SINTEF Building and Infrastructure.

Facing the many complexities and challenges of conducting the project, we have had invaluable input and support from our Advisory Board including academic experts in the field, representatives from actual NGOs, UDI, organisations that run asylum-seeker reception centres, and prior residents. Ultimately, the research team extends grateful appreciation to the many employees and residents of asylum-seeker reception centres for their willingness and generous collaboration that have allowed us to pursue the aims of this project. Any faults or mischievements rest on the research team alone.

The writing of this report was headed by Anne Sigfrid Grønseth (HiL) in co-authorship with Eli Støa (project leader, NTNU), Ragne Thorshaug (NTNU), Åshild Lappegard Hauge (SINTEF), while also drawing on valuable comments from team-researchers Einar Strumse (HiL) and Karine Denizou (SINTEF). Svein Åge Kjøs Johnsen (HiL) has undertaken a quality assessment.

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## Introduction

"*What Buildings Do - The Effect of the Physical Environment on Quality of Life of Asylum Seekers"* is a research project aiming to document and identify the effect of housing quality on well-being among the asylum seekers. This report is a partial delivery of the project, and highlights relevant literature, which includes perspectives from social anthropology, geography, environmental psychology and architecture. Among the main activities in the project is a web-survey submitted to all the leaders of the Norwegian asylum-seeker reception centres  (Strumse et al., 2016), case-studies including interviews with employees in selected receptions centres (Hauge et al. 2015), examination of alternative architectural solutions (for instance by including architect student's work) (Støa 2014), and fieldwork in three centres focusing on the residents' perspective (Thorshaug Work In Progress).

There is a wide literature on research of institutions such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, and others, that we might have focused on, however we do not find such studies on  'total institutions'  (Goffman 1959) as fully relevant for the project, as these are meant to respond to, and provide for a much broader scope of everyday lives needs and concerns (see also section on "Housing for asylum seekers…"). The project examines what the physical environment – buildings, outdoor environments and localization – may do for the well-being of asylum seekers and their relationship with the local community. Thus, the project applies studies of neighbourhood and housing quality and environment, as it relates to individual asylum-seekers' sense of well-being and social integration in the local community. Furthermore, the project aims to guide actual actors and policy makers by means of discussion and recommendations for an acceptable housing quality at asylum seeker reception centres. Much research focuses on the built environment in general, but very little attends to asylum-seeker reception centres. Thus, our study is an opportunity to develop housing-research in general by the means of focusing on the case of asylum-seeker reception centres, while at the same time, and equally important, by addressing a political pressing issue of forced migration, inclusion and equality.

Considering the study's concern with asylum seekers who seek refuge from war, persecution and/or discrimination, a recognition of these populations and individuals' specific life conditions is needed. Some central features of relevance for such refugee populations' situation often includes a) not choosing nor knowing their destination, b) migration marked by

trauma and persecution, c) vulnerable mental and physical health, d) separation from family members whose safety may be at risk, e) arrival without identity document or with false documents, f) arrival without evidence of qualifications, g) arrival under the stress of deportation or detention, h) temporary admittance under the fear of return (Kissoon 2010). In particular, the forced transitional and temporary condition and experience need special attention. The transitional and temporary condition is crucial for the perception and reception from the receiving society, authorities and community, the decisions for placing and shaping of reception centres, as well as for the arriving families and individuals who are in different ages and phases of their life-cycle.

This report introduces the theoretical approach that has inspired and shaped the *What Buildings Do*-project. The authors have contributed with theoretical perspectives from their disciplinary expertise, that is, social anthropology, architecture, social geography and psychology. Generally, the text attempts at weaving the approaches together, while the section on Architecture and Housing Quality (as the title suggests) relies predominantly on architectural perspectives. We have deliberately chosen 'house' and 'housing' as a key-concepts throughout the analytical process, so as to highlight physicality and materiality as an axis around which various strands of the project revolve. Generally, we understand both concepts to refer to the features of the buildings themselves, the residential surroundings, and how residents engage with and create meaning to the surroundings, more than housing politics or economic frames and premises.

In this way, we seek to identify basic theoretical frameworks, concepts and issues as they are employed in an interdisciplinary context, and make them central for the project. While some of the issues discussed are of general concern to housing and environment, we will focus on those issues of particular interest with regard to asylum- seeker reception centres. The possible approaches to this study are many, but  this report will focus on the key concepts of 'housing', 'house', and 'home' as these relate to issues of 'well-being'. When discussing the interrelations between these concepts we see aspects of meaning, identity, social organisation, and agency as fruitful perspectives for the study. The report targets foremost actual scholars and students, and secondly relevant professional actors in the practice field of asylum-seekers as well as policy makers.

This report is structured into seven sections. First, we present a brief history of houses and dwellings in a European context. Second, we introduce relevant aspects of housing from a perspective of health and well-being. Third, we discuss how 'the house' communicates meaning, identity and represents a central feature in social organisation. Fourth, we consider

the links between house and home as it is experienced by dwellers, home-making processes, the normative implication of a house being homely or unhomely, and finally how we see housing of asylum-seekers as places of home. In various ways, all the above four sections point to the fifth section in which we elaborate  how houses hold a degree of agency. We focus on how houses change, mediate, are unstable and sometimes unsettles the order of ongoing everyday social life, while also recognising the opposite, namely how  houses stabilise social life and structure patterns of equality and in-equality, and inclusion and exclusion. Sixth, we discuss the architecture of houses in perspective of housing quality, essentialism and quality assessment. Lastly, we present a brief outline of the organising of asylum seeker reception centres in Norway. By way of concluding, we call for a need to highlight perspectives on asylum seeker reception centres that acknowledge shared human needs in and for housing.

### Brief History of Houses in a European Context

This section aims to present a brief outline of historic development of houses in the intersections between changing social practices, meanings and structures, and architectural forms as they both stimulate and respond to such changes. To begin with, the concept of house is most likely rooted in European experiences of domestic society (Parkin 1997; Bouquet 1996). Contemporary alternatives for 'house' like dwelling, residence, and abode are related to the ancient notion of stopping or staying in a place or a habitual returning to a place (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999:6). Further, house comes from the Old English *hus* and related *huden* which means "to hide" connecting also 'hut', 'huddle' and 'hoard'. This conveys the fragile and exposed side of the dwellers. The Latin term *domus,* on the other hand, relates to "domesticate", "dominate", and "dominion" which carries a symbol of power, rule and ownership with rights and privileges that enable inhabitants to impose by their possession and transform by their habitation (Danto 1982:8; Rykwert 1991:52). Furthermore, in classical Latin the term *familia* referred to whatever and whoever was under the household head's authority (Herlihy 1985:2) as it includes persons as well as economic resources and their dwellings. In Europe, house and family sometimes overlap and are not separable. When it is referred to the "House of Windsor", it is not the architectural form, but the family line across generations, which is addressed. In this sense, 'house' implies permanence which transcends the human life-span, and has, as Lévy-Strauss points out, the ability to reunify and transcend contradictory forces in the larger society.[1]

Thus, the construction and use of houses and dwellings are not just manifestations of cultural forms, but affect the domestic environment in which the actors' daily activities are both enabled and constrained by the physical character of the building and its contents. Houses are encoded with practical meanings that convey proper spaces for preparing food and eating, sleeping, storing possessions and such, though there is often a tension between meaning and practice. Much of what the families and household members experience as the physical structure of the dwelling is actually a collective result of the agency of others, often in the past and remote past. Acknowledging the exclusive role that the house plays as a fixed and limited resource fundamental for biological and social reproduction, it appears also as an agent for differentiation and hierarchization within societies (see also Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999).

Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga (1999) refers to a study by archaeologist Matthew Johnson (1993) who documents changing house forms in rural England in the

fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, and argues that these were forerunners to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century changes in housing that expressed privacy and class differentiation. It is referred to how the fourteenth-century medieval open hall had a multifunctional central fireplace as representing a home with a storage and parlour on each side, which was used by the landowning family and their dependents and servants (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999:10). Their interactions were based on a shared understanding of what were proper relations of status and esteem. In the sixteenth century, the open hall was replaced with a closed house form where the entrance hall divided the house and the hearth. The hall's functions spatially parted the two classes and stimulated development of class consciousness that began to separate the landowning class from all others (Johnson 1993:107).

Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga point out how Johnson links the architectural expression of such an advancing class structure to larger economic and cultural changes, including physical division and boundaries as means of control, the rising emphasis on privacy and rational thinking which valued the designation of space according to use (1999:10). The architectural forms were not only expression of change they also promoted changes themselves by physically reorganising social groups and channelling their activities and interactions. In the seventeenth century the international and formal architecture of 'polite architecture' symbolised and reinforced the separation and domination of the landed class (Johnson 1993:140). The growing bourgeois classes in the nineteenth century popularised a technologically advanced version of the landed estate and urban mansion, as it influenced the physical structure of the house concepts of family and individual privacy and compartments for specific activities and individual space. Today, as Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga observe, there are multiple forms of housing as people appropriate or modify elements of the modern and older house (1999:11). However, a hegemonic influence from industrial production, mass marketing and advertising have begun to commodify housing, thus shifting the meaning of houses again.

### Effects of Housing on Well-Being[2]

Research on housing is fragmented as it is subject to different disciplines involved in housing studies. Bridging concepts and perspectives from different disciplines have been difficult, as well as connecting traditional academic research with the professional field of architecture (Symes et al 1985). Though more important, each discipline tends to hold specific assumptions about the relations between people and environment. Architects have been criticised for taking a deterministic approach in which physical design can directly influence behaviour (e.g. Franck 1984; Steventon 1996; Doucet 2010), while social sciences deal with probabilities, not certainties. Also, there may be a conflict in defining the goals for the different kinds of knowledge that is to be generated. Researchers may define the problem so narrowly and context-specific that it is not generalizable for practical application. Although, the scientific search for general principles can be at the expense of specific applicability. Thus, what derives from a user or resident's perspective is not always easily integrated into professional practice (García-Mira et al. 2005).

Housing research has, for many years, focused on how housing quality and well-functioning neighbourhoods may influence and possibly improve an individual's health and everyday life (see Lawrence 1987, 2002; Halpern 1995). Within environmental psychology, a large body of research has accumulated on various aspects of residential meaning and satisfaction as well as on the requirements for a residence to become a home. Residential satisfaction is broadly speaking a function of 1) the resident's relation to the residence and 2) the resident's comparison between present and past residence, present and ideal residence and between perceived and preferred qualities (Canter 1983). Although distress is a normal response to inadequate housing, it may have serious consequences when residents are not able to improve their residence. Inadequate housing, for example overcrowding at home, may be related to psychological distress and psychiatric illness, long-term negative effects on children's development, and disruption of parent-child relations *(cf.,* Taylor et al. 1997; Evans et al. 1998**;** Evans et al. 2003). Also, features of the physical environment affecting privacy regulation (Altman 1975; Archea 1977; Margulis 2003), the experience of overcrowding in shared physical space within the household (Evans & Saegert 2000), and person-environment compatibility (see for example Kaplan 1995) both indoors and outdoors, have all been found to be important  in affecting the well-being of residents.

While well-being is an increasingly utilised concept, it has no clear-cut definition. According to WHO (World Health Organisation) well-being is closely related to mental health: "Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his

or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (WHO 2014). There have been many attempts to operationalise well-being. Considering research on housing qualities Ryff's (1989) operationalization seems fruitful as she relates it to theories of positive psychological functioning along 6 dimensions: 1) self acceptance, 2) positive relation to other people, 3) autonomy, 4) managing of the environment, 5) life-meaning, 6) personal growth. Of these dimensions the four first appear as the most relevant ones in assessing housing quality, as these have direct relation to the well-being of persons such as asylum seekers (see Hauge et al. 2015). While Ryff's operationalization represents a theoretical approach to well-being, we stress that an experience-near approach may include a variety of concerns and values related to the specific actual social and cultural context in which people live their everyday lives.

Houses and homes cannot be assessed simply in their own terms. They are always linked and related to the surroundings. The context in which houses are situated are important not only for how they are seen architecturally, but also the location and setting can have effect on the experience of life quality (Potter et al. 2005). Urban planning and housing design can be carried out with a perspective on how to include groups of people that are excluded from society. Experience of security and well-being can be effected by spatially and social characteristics of the area. Migration movements and settlement of asylum seekers can significantly affect the perception of residential areas. Also, the perception of place can be differently perceived by newcomers and long-time residents. This may be especially relevant for small communities where resources are often scarce, and the absorption of new populations can often be problematic.Especially the negative effects of living in overcrowded housing, has been a topic for research. The effects of overcrowded housing is hard to separate from poverty, but many of the studied aspects have moderate negative effects of its own. Living in overcrowded residences, particularly without social support, is psychologically risky (Evans et al. 1989).

Considering the to-days increasing number of children growing up in asylum-seeker reception centers we draw special attention to research on links between housing, crowdedness and child development. Cognitive development is slower for children living in residences densely populated and noisy (Heft, 1985). Children from overcrowded homes may be forced outdoor more often, leading more of them into trouble on the street and in school. Furguson et al (2013) points out that infants in crowded households tend to be more lethargic

and drowsy and are associated with delayed psychomotoric development suggested to result from disruption of children's exploration, play and engagement with both objects and people in the immediate environments (see also Widmayer et al. 1990; Heft 1979; Liddell and Kruger 1987, 1989). Equally important, residential crowding disrupt parent-child interactions (Evans 2006; Wachs and Corapci 2003) as parents tend to talk less with their infants and toddlers, and use less complex vocabulary and sentence structures with their baby children (Furguson et al. 2103).

Some of the adverse effects of household crowding are furthermore mediated by increased level of family conflicts (Evans et al. 1998) and inadequate space to do homework (Hassan 1977). Several studies show that crowded children tend to be more socially withdrawn and that parents in crowded homes are commonly less responsive to their children (Evans 2006; Furguson et al. 2103). A study by Evans et al. (1998) show that residential density, mediated by family conflicts, related to learned helplessness among girls, while resting blood pressure elevated among boys. These finding matches a number of studies that indicated elevated physiological stress among children living in more crowded homes (Evans 2006), and also children living in substandard and poor quality housing (Evans 2006; Evans et al. 2003). It is worth noting that delays in cognitive development associated with residential density weaken if children have access to a room where they can spend time alone (Wachs and Gruen 1982). A study on orphanages found that space and furnishings (e.g. room arrangement, displays for children) predicted children's cognitive outcomes (Furgeson 2008), while also the infants' access to learning materials predicted infant's language and socioemotional development. There is further some evidence that children's self-esteem is negatively impacted by residence in informal settlements (Kruger 2002).

Low income and poor health indicate that a person cannot afford the best housing facilities, and it is difficult to decide the causal relations between low income and poor health. Poor indoor climate, density and pollution have direct consequences on health, but the same factors may affect the attractiveness and prize of the housing, and decide who can afford to live there. It is difficult to know the causal relationships when people living in the houses had poor health also before they moved in (Grønningsæter and Nielsen 2011). Studies show that poor neighborhood conditions predict health outcomes better than poor dwelling conditions (Macintyre et al. 2000) and further that rehousing tenants from an unpopular estate to a better estate, led to increased sense of well-being and reduction in demand for medical services (Woodin et al. 1996).

Housing can be seen to mainly influence people's well-being in two different ways: 1) Through how physical environments facilitate different types of behaviour, daily functioning, and social interaction. The connections between behaviour and environment are dependent on situation and contextual variables. 2) Through the associations that physical environments and neighbourhoods give. These associations are created through social interaction and influenced by context, process and situation (Hauge, 2009). Housing quality differs over time as expectations change. These expectations may be culturally specific, or may vary by class, gender and lifestyle. Some aspects of housing quality are possible to quantify, others are not. Housing quality has aesthetic and symbolic implications that are impossible to quantify, but never the less are of great importance for security, control, and a feeling of being at home. Hauge and Støa's (2009) study of how a group of former criminals and drug abusers were influenced by housing quality is an example of research on housing as a strategy to improve life and future hopes for a vulnerable group of residents. The study shows how former homeless people interpret different architectural details as symbols of how normal people live, their self-worth and possibilities to get their lives on track.

Housing influences our view of ourselves and our well-being through associations to exteriors, interiors, and neighborhoods, and through how the environment facilitates behavior and social interaction (Hauge and Støa 2009). None of these mechanisms are deterministic; they all depend on context and situation. As mentioned, the view that the physical environment - dimensions, colors, and shapes - have a direct effects on behavior (Franck 1984) is no longer valid. Today, most academics as well as practitioner regard the people-environment relationship as dynamic and interactive (Gifford 2002). A dynamic and interactive perspective on the environment includes the social, cultural and psychological meanings of a place.

Most studies of the effect of housing on mental health and well-being are conducted within a context of post-industrial and modern societies, which commonly involve a set of similar characteristics of housing. Acknowledging that such features are not always dominant and often less familiar in the areas many of the asylum seekers come from, linkages between housing and well-being become even more complex. Even so, the Norwegian asylum reception centres are in themselves of varying standards and have originally been built and set up for various other reasons than reception centres. It is only in a very few cases that the initial purpose has been of housing asylum seekers.

## Housing: Meaning, Identity and Social Organisation

As it appears in the above section focusing on housing's effect on well-being, central features of its effects relate to aspects of housing such as its attributed and perceived meaning, its significance for identity and its place in the larger social organization. Like the discussion below demonstrates, these aspects overlap and appear often more as analytical distinctions than they are actually experienced by the residents and environing populations.

### Meaning

Buildings are physical structures laden with meaning. The building, both in itself and through location, liberates associations and memories. "The house derives meaning from its setting as well as its own characteristics. Feelings about the house will be influenced by the perceived physical and social environment outside the front door" (Clapham 2005: 155). A neighbourhood may increasingly differentiate among people, and may be important to the lifestyle and identity of those who live in them. Gram-Hanssen and Beck-Danielsen (2004) have shown how people associate specific residential neighbourhoods with different symbolic values. Individuals belonging to different social worlds are found to live in different homes in terms of the neighbourhood's physical and social characteristics, dwelling-type, decorations and landscaping styles (Duncan 1985). Research has shown that people draw obvious conclusions about the wealth and social class of residents according to where they live (Lindstrom 1997; Gifford 2002; SAMT: http://www.citylab.com/work/2015/07/the-poor-are-less-happy-in-places-with-more-income-inequality/400001/). Not only location, but also building exterior, release specific associations. Building materials give people associations about the personality of the residents; residents were described as warm, cold, creative or non-artistic related to different building materials and styles (Sadalla and Sheets 1993).

Photos of houses in different architectural styles are associated with different levels of friendliness among the residents. Certain housing styles were associated with friendlier people than others. Farm- and Tudor-style houses were assumed as having the friendliest residents, while Tudor- and colonial-style houses were seen as having the highest status residents (Nasar 1988). In addition, identical buildings assigned different labels will elicit different opinions; an apartment said to be public housing provokes less favourable reactions than the same apartment said to be a private condominium (Nasar and Julian 1985). Interior styles are also associated with different social attributes, and the respondents' judgements are surprisingly similar (Wilson and Mackenzie 2000).

The examples above also illustrate that research on the communicative aspect of the built environment and housing is analysed according to very different concepts. The physical environment is seen as having communicative meaning related to social attributes, personality or social status. Robinson (2006) writes about architecture as a "cultural medium" and the way buildings may activate different mental schemas people use to understand the world. The associations the built environment release may be seen according to what social psychology calls "schema" or "schemata", mental structures representing different aspects of the world, such as situations, people, or groups of people (Lee 2003; Myers 2002). These schemas have to be learnt within a cultural context. People use schemas to organize knowledge about different aspects of life, and their schemas provide frameworks for future understanding. This approach represents both a necessary human simplification of information processing, and a potential risk for misunderstandings and prejudices.

During the last decades especially, a broader understanding of the meaning of housing and home has arisen, with increased emphasis on qualitative research and the close interwoven meaning of physical environments and social processes (Clapham 2005). Lee (2003: 33) states that, "…the built environment is more or less isomorphic with the social system that is developed within it. Also because no human environment of any consequence can be perceived as a physical object in isolation from its social implications and behavioural activity patterns." The way housing creates associations may be referred to as "symbol aesthetics" or "aesthetics" (Cold 20011988). Nasar (1988) divides aesthetics into "formal aesthetics" and "symbol aesthetics", where the first category refers to aspects of shape, proportions, colours, and scale. "Symbol aesthetics" refers to the meaning individuals associate with the physical environment. "Aesthetics" is also a concept used in different ways in different disciplines, and would require a thorough examination. To distinguish between aesthetics and symbols may also be challenging.

One of the core symbolic messages of houses is the distinction between public and private space. As Wilson notes; domestic walls entail "possibilities for concealment" as well as "opportunities for display (1988:5). This relates to how all physically surrounded domestic spaces are private as they allow household members to control access to themselves, as they conceal or hide behaviour from others or manage knowledge others have about them. Public places, on the other hand, are those that are located beyond the boundaries of home and where residents have little or no control (see Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999:4).

The understanding that concepts and symbols are embedded within houses and that these reflect back to the human bodies by their engagement with the buildings remain

significant and powerful. This line of thought has inspired for instance 'vernacular architecture', which attends to the power of built forms to carry meaning and evoke sentiments (Rapoport 1982; see also Asquith and Vellinga 2006). Through houses' ability to indicate suitable behaviours and to accommodate them, one can see how house forms and their inhabitants constitute each other. To fully capture the meaning of houses it is furthermore needed an approach that acknowledges the total historical, cultural and social context of which they are part.

*Identity*

We communicate identity in many ways, by how we behave and speak, and through interests and activities, as well as through the physical environment. Residents are often judged based on visible clues that are interpreted as signs of identity by outsiders (Gullestad 2002). The associations buildings create do not only tell us who other people are, but also who we are. "The spatial world in which we live tells us who we are. We find our self within it, we respond to it and it reacts to us. By manipulating it we affirm our identity" (Robinson 2006: 23).

We communicate identity both on a conscious and subconscious level. The conscious and active way identity is communicated can be referred to as "self-presentation". We want to present a desired image both to an external audience (others) and an internal audience (ourselves) (Myers 2002). We may then express ourselves and behave in ways designed to create a favorable impression that corresponds to one's ideals. Some of us are more conscious about self-presentation than others, and there are situations where we are more self-conscious than other situations. Self-presentation can be seen from a dramaturgical perspective, where the environment is a collection of stage sets and props for social performance. We select and manipulate symbols in their environment in an attempt to influence an external audience. The communicative perspective on housing can be seen according to symbolic interactionism. Our belongings and environments carry meanings that are interpreted during social interaction (Blumer 1962; Goffman 1959; Hauge and Kolstad 2007).

The surroundings and possessions we have may say something about us, even within restricted choices of objects or surroundings. This means that identity communication is a process we are able to control to different degrees; it is impossible to stop others from interpreting information through physical clues. Within Norwegian and European cultural contexts a detached dwelling commonly contains more visible signs of lifestyle and identity than an apartment in a block where the residents have no influence on the exterior of the

building. Still, we tend to interpret residents' life stages, family situations and social status from the fact that they live in apartments and not in detached dwellings, and through the choice, or limited choice, of neighbourhood (Blunt and Dowling 2006).

*Social Organisation*

The association between houses and models of social organisation is strongly highlighted in Claude Lévi-Strauss' classification of 'house-based-societies' ('sociétiés à maison') in which rights and honours where transmitted via men and women, while also protecting domains of their own wealth and privileges. Here, 'house' referred less to physical construction and more to a concept of the noble 'house' of medieval Europe. Such metaphoric employment of the house is further extended with Pierre Bourdieu's study of the Kabyle in Algeria. Bourdieu found that the local architecture reflected not only the social order, but also the entire Kabyle cosmos including oppositions between male/female, day/night, fire/water etc. (1979 [1970]). Seeing the houses as constructed in accordance to such oppositions, these constructions were seen to mirror back on to the bodies of the inhabitants, and thus shape practice. Consequently, men and women perceived the houses differently and carried out different activities within them, while both genders engaged with the houses differently during day and night, summer and winter etc. In his later work of *Distinction* (1984) he elaborated on the links between the homely arena and embodied practices of 'habitus', class and taste (see Daniels 2010:201, n. 6). Bourdieu's thoughts also inspired studies of how people create and re-create their home interiors as a way of self-expression as a mean by which to construct themselves and their ideologies (Miller 2001, see also Pink 2004).

Considering that different kinds of houses or constructions of dwelling have been common to all human groups, at least since the domestication of fire, about 400.000 years ago (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999), it is not, as Vokes (2013) observes, so surprising that the house has been *one* of the central organising metaphors in modern anthropology. Already Louis Henry Morgan's (1981 [1881]) study of the American Aborigines was one of the first anthropological works that addressed the role of the house in local social organization. He identified particular house-like qualities, which gave them, and in an evolutionary sense all human societies, a basic unit of social organisation, which included some form of communalism and union. Also later in Marcel Mauss and Henry Beuchat's study of the Innuits (1979 [1906]) social organisation was seen to be characterised by a certain collectivistic ethos with reference to images of domestic architecture.

From another vein, Arnold Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) introduced in his study of *rites de passage* metaphors of the house as he wrote " a society is similar to a house divided into rooms and corridors. The more the society resembles ours in its form of civilisation, the more open are its doors of communication. In a semi-civilised society, on the other hand, sections are carefully isolated, and passage from one to another must be made through formalities and ceremonies (1960 [1909]:26). Bronislaw Malinowski (1963 [1913]) defined family as a specified group of kin that occupy "a definite physical space, a hearth and home" (see Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako 1987, cited in Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999:2). Paying less attention to the physical house and more to relations of intimacy in the 'home' (see next section for more on 'home'), Bronislaw Malinowski suggested that the Australian aboriginals' family had to be understood with reference to 'social aspects of kinship' as it included the "treatment, behaviours, feeding and so forth, which characterise the intimate, or home aspect of the kinship relation" (1963 [1913]:203).[3]

How we organise space, and place people in distinct places, expresses certain forms of power (Foucault 2000). Foucault (1974) argues how something that is institutionalised and constructed for one purpose, can be turned and altered into another meaning and effect. While spaces can create distinctions and define "others" from us, the process of 'otherising' can also deal with a fear of sameness rather than otherness (Hage 2002). Thus, to legitimise how asylum seekers, drug abusers etc can be offered severely restricted and poor living- and housing conditions "we need to convince ourselves that people who we are doing nasty things too, are not human" (Hage 2002:4). Such processes of otherising are not only mental processes, but as much spatial processes. Taking a perspective in which an actual neighbourhood, institution or asylum centre is recognised as offering a type of "zone in between" – not fully inside nor outside – they can be seen as 'non-places' (Augè 1995) or 'empty spaces' (Agamben 1998).

These approaches to studies of the house have in common that they tend to look for features that unify the social and thus invoke the house as a kind of aggregator of human organisation, practice and experience. Further, they see the house as a sign or symbol of human practice, thus leaving the house as a setting in which the activities take place and are projected on to. Together the above approaches place agency mostly with the humans alone, while houses are signs, or products of human social life. In a later section, we will discuss how also the houses themselves can be seen to carry agency (see House and Agency).

## House and Home

The concept 'house' is often set up together or interchanged with 'home'. The two terms refer to different cultural constructions (Rykwert 1991:52). 'House' implies a physical structure or shelter, while 'home' refers to a place of origin and retreat, such as one's natal birthplace, one's country or other native place. Home is a concept of place rather than space, which implies emotional attachment and meaning beyond the physical or any particular house. 'Home' rather takes on the meaning of a territory, a physical reference point, a symbol of self, or of family identity (Hayward 1975). The idea of attachment and roots is pointed out when Hobsbawm says home is "not the destiny of our journeys but the place from which we set out and to which we return, at least in spirit" (1991:65).

Not until the sixteenth century did "home" refer to one's own domestic dwelling (Gifford 2002). "Home" is a powerful word connected to symbolic meanings that may touch people deeply (Paadam 2003). Home is where people are settled psychologically, socially, culturally and physically (Benjamin, Stea and Saile 1995). The relationship between home and housing, therefore, cannot be taken for granted. A lack of a sense of home may be related to temporariness in accommodation, dissatisfaction with the physical design, or psychological tension among family members. A wide variety of social and economic relations are important in achieving a sense of home (Paadam 2003).

There are many ways of structuring the different meanings of home. Després (1991) summarizes the research on the "meaning of home", and describes the following ten needs, which have been described by informants in many research studies: Home as security and control, home as reflection of one's ideas and values, home as acting upon and modifying one's dwelling, home as permanence and continuity, home as relationships with family and friends, home as a centre for activities, home as refuge from the outside world, home as indicator of personal status, home as material structure, and home as a place to own (see also Sommerville 1997; Mallet 2004).

Rapoport (1985) argues that a home reflects identity due to the fact that house and interior are chosen. If they had not been chosen, they are not "home". An imposed setting is unlikely to be "home". Many people are too poor to buy or choose their physical environment; however, they may still experience having a home. Homeownership may offer better opportunities for self-presentation through housing, but Paadam (2003) argues that strong home identities are not restricted to owners. If you own your dwelling, you have the greatest freedom to choose your closest surroundings, and this may be one of the explanations as to why people in general prefer to own their dwelling (Agnew, 1981). In most western

cultures, a freestanding single house serves the function of reflecting identity best, and may therefore be related to the strong preference people in many western countries have for this type of house (Cooper, 1974, see Saeggert, 1985). This is, however, dependent on social, geographical and historical context; in continental Europe, "home" is predominantly associated with apartments (Blunt & Dowling, 2006**).**

Blunt & Dowling (2006: 2) explain "home" as a multi-layered geographical concept, and define it as "a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relationship between the two". Home is a place and an imaginary space – that has varying ideas and feelings connected to it, both positive and negative. In other words, a house may be experienced as home to different degrees. A "home" does not simply exist, but is made. "Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006: 23). Home also varies in importance according to socio-demographic characteristics as well as lifestyles related to socio-economic status and activities on other arenas (Ås, 1996, see Paadam, 2003).

Home is clearly a crucial aspect of housing and space and can be seen to represent the essence of the housing experience. Home can express the personality, culture and lifestyle of the homeowners. The importance of home cannot be overestimated as it is one of the fundamental sources of retreat, relaxation and social interaction in our leisure time (Ozsoy and Pulat 2005, Ozaki 2005). Furthermore, houses and homes can be seen to regulate people's social openness/closedness, and their management of the boundary between the self and the other. In this perspective home makes a territorial space that comprise different functional units such as public, family and private space (Märtsin and Niit 2005).

Young (2005) maintains that there is an enormous critical political potential in the concept of home. While indeed having a home signals a privilege in today's world, she suggests that an analysis of values for home and a commitment to the democratic distribution of such values for all represent a critical political potential. She states that there are at least four normative values for home that should be thought of as minimally accessible to all people. These stand as regulative ideals by which societies should be scrutinized. These values are safety, individuation, privacy and preservation. Safety is important because everyone needs a place where they can be safe, and ideally, home is meant to be such a place. Individuation concerns the performance of basic activities. To have some space where you can organize your life and perform activities with basic routine and security. Privacy concerns the autonomy a person has to control access to personal information and belongings. Last,

preservation entails the right to protect and safeguard the meaningful things, which one sees as the stories of oneself embodied.

Home has the power to constitute identities, as people live and produce their senses of themselves through homes. At the same time, these identities are structured and shaped by different powers. Blunt and Dowling (2006) suggest that Doreen Massey's concept "power geometries" sheds light on the ways that people are differently positioned to home places, and how they also experience them differently. The power geometries of homes work in such a way that a dominant ideology values certain social relations and marginalizes others. This way it defines some places as homes, while others are not. Some dominant meanings of home may include family, patriarchal gender relations, sense of security and stability, and owned dwellings.

*Making Home[4]*

Jansen and Löfving (2009) start with elucidating the concept of emplacement when exploring home-making. This is a term usually deployed in opposition to displacement, but can be defined in different ways. Emplacement can be the way people invest places with significance, or how people re-embed social relations that have been "disembedded". In describing emplacement, Jansen and Löfving (2009) put emphasis to the subjects' capacities to put themselves and others into place, and how this is articulated with the power relations that structure these capacities. Giving attention to the power to emplace is therefore important. This is a focus that can act as a countermeasure to the postmodern conceptions of "placelessness", as well as the notion that any place is good, as long as it is one's own, and that people are always "happily emplaced" unless there are obvious signs of the contrary. Nevertheless, homes are made and remade in everyday life by strategies of cultural continuity. In this way people seek to overcome alienation as well as social disintegration (Jansen and Löfving 2009). Ahmed et al. (2003) suggest that "homing" depends on the reclaiming of the names, stories and objects that are uprooted by migration or displacement. In the context of migration, "homing" can therefore be understood as a way of reattaching to new surroundings, to new homes. This may be a way of making sense of the new conditions under which they live. The concept of "regroundings" is useful in this sense, used to describe the strategies people use to attach themselves to new places (Ahmed et al. 2003).

Home may also be a physical site for identification. People may define and develop their identities in relation to the physical structures of their dwelling, as much as the dwelling can also affect people's identities. Hence, the practices of home may also be practices of

identity formation. A home displays the things people surround themselves with, that support their life activities and can reflect in matter the events and values of a person's life. As such, homes may be understood as personal in a visible, spatial sense (Young 2005). Home may then be seen as an important site of identification and therefore also a materialisation of identity.

The materialisation of identity in a home concerns not just the things themselves but also their spatial organisation. Things are arranged in space in a way that supports body habits and routines of those who dwell there. Coming to feel settled at home in a place takes place in the process of interaction between the body's movement in enacting aims and purposes and the material structure these activities occur within (Young 2005). Physical structures of homes and the things within them are imprinted by people's lived lives, and in this manner the home becomes a mirror of everyday activities.

Another important aspect to the materiality of home is the modification of physical structures, which can be understood as yet a way of imbuing things with meaning. As people come to inhabit dwellings, they adjust their living spaces through various alterations and decorations. As Miller (1998) states, self-built housing is a minority possibility and most households are likely to receive their ready-built environments. If people are to develop a self-conception in relation to their dwelling then, it must happen through some form of consumption as appropriation. Following Miller (1998) a theory on housing therefore needs to involve a theory of consumption. In relation to the appropriation of the physical structures of dwellings consumption must be understood as a process of transformation. Consumption can be seen as an ideal in the sense that it is a process by which social groups are engaged in activities that attempt to render alienating structures of ready-built environments into inalienable culture. It may therefore be interesting to study how people have adapted and modified their living spaces in reception centres.

Through making adjustments and modifications people imbue their dwellings with meaning that turn them into personal spaces. In accordance with this idea, Young (2005) suggests that home may be seen as a material sense of agency. Through the active creation of home people have the possibility to construct personal spaces of belonging and identity. However, there may well be another side to the coin as is pointed out by Miller (2001). As the residents in a dwelling may not be the ones who created the material structures in the first place, there may also be cases where the residents have very few possibilities to alter or modify their dwellings in any way. With reference to a study of a Council Estate in London in 1988, Miller (2001) describes how some people came to feel "haunted" by their homes due to

the lack of ability to make modifications in their own dwellings. Material structures thus also have a constraining effect on the residents in a way where they appear to have their own agency. This paves the way for a debate on the relation between structure and agency and which factors that can enable and constrain processes of home-making and dwelling.

The construction of homes through consumption and modification is never straightforward but involves contradictions. People build their homes in a recurring negotiation between what they have and what they want or wish for. As stated by Mallet (2004: 80) "Home is lived in the tension between the given and the chosen, then and now, here and there."

*Homely or Unhomely*

Normative notions of home, or power geometries as mentioned above, create certain homes as "homely" and others as "unhomely" (Blunt and Dowling 2006). For instance, people living in suburban homes are in many ways expected to be heterosexual and part of nuclear families. This is an experience of home commonly valued as "homely." On the contrary, living in refugee camps or in a reception centre for asylum seekers is depicted as "unhomely". Blunt and Dowling (2006) underline that it is important to keep in mind that seemingly "homely" places may be "unhomely", and vice versa that places appearing at first glance as "unhomely" may be turned into "homely" places. Ahmed et al. (2003) suggest further that the concept of "homing" is valuable for understanding the process by which home is created. "Homing" entails processes of home-building, whether this happens "at home" or in migration. This consists of the making of affective qualities of home, in close relation to the concrete materiality of objects and other physical components.

Rapport and Dawson (1998) see the normative aspects of home as a paradox of a concept that for most of the time remains very open and fluid. They suggest that individual homes, using the German term "heim", are influenced by a normative "heimat", an effort to impose home as a social fact and a cultural norm. It becomes a norm to which certain people in certain forms of dwelling can belong, while others must be excluded. Refugees and the homeless are people who therefore must be excluded from those who "deserve" to combine house and home. Normative aspects of home become visible as an expression of social division. As a continuation of this, Rapport and Dawson (1998) point to another paradox of the concept, that homes are understood in terms of a negation. The apparent absence of home moves us, and home becomes important in terms of what it is not. In this sense we can say

that the concepts of "homely" and "unhomely" homes inform each other. But who has the power to render some homes homely and others unhomely?

As already mentioned home may be understood as a basis for creating and sustaining individual and shared identities. However, as Olwig (1998) states, homes are far from merely harmonic places. Home is rather a contested domain, that is, an arena where differing interests are struggling to define their own spaces where identities can be located and nurtured. Identities have to be struggled for, as do homes. Also, there can be many homes within the same physical location, and different persons may interpret the same homes in different ways. It is for this reason that we should not expect people's homes necessarily to be their ideal sites of identification (Olwig 1998). Neither should we expect homes to be "happy places". People may identify themselves both with and against their homes.

*Housing for Asylum Seekers: Places of Home?*

Berg (2012) discusses how the housing facilities described as asylum-seeker reception centres can be understood. It appears that the centres cannot be fully understood as a 'dormitory' (*hybelhus*) understood as a kind of temporary accommodation in which the residents deal with their everyday life on own terms, in need only of a place to live. On the other hand, the accommodation cannot be seen as a 'total institution' in which all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority, and each residents' daily activities are carried out together with the other residents who are all treated alike (Goffman 1961:17). The asylum-seeker reception centre differs from both dormitory and total institution, in that the employees in the total institution are concerned with the residents' total life situation including social life and health issues, while at the dormitory the employees are basically concerned with the accommodation only. Generally, the reception centres can be seen to belong somewhere in between the two poles of a dormitory and a total institution, in varying degrees to be closer to the one or the other (Berg 2012).

More so, the reception centres may resonate little with what we conceive as homes, since reception centres are not meant to become the permanent homes of its residents. However we suggest that the concept is useful as it involves discussions of very basic processes of dwelling and making a place for one self to live, however temporary this place may be. Even in temporary dwellings people engage with homemaking practices where they seek to bind together the material, emotional, social and the imaginative. For example, in Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2004, people provided with temporary shelter started making adjustments and modifications to the shelters within months, adding structures to provide

kitchens and generally making the shelters more bearable to live in (Brun 2012). Even in temporary dwellings people engage with various symbolic acts such as receiving guests, which is important for demarcating the boundaries between the private and the public and as such an important act for defining one's home (Brun 2012). However, temporary dwellings are often of a low standard and people can be heavily constrained in their efforts to engage with homemaking practices within these structures. The symbolic and material are bound together through home-making practices even in temporary dwellings.

Increased mobility – virtually as well as in physical terms – may influence conceptions and practices related to home and place, and lead to the adoption of new strategies; making it possible for an individual to feel at home in a changeable world. Winter (2009), for example, has investigated how people living 'on the move' practise their mobility. She finds that her informants develop what she calls 'homing tactics' which include establishing various routines, using technological devices such as Skype and cell phones, or simply placing 'stuff' in temporary home arenas in order to territorialise changing locations.

A study on a Dutch reception centre argues how home is a relevant concept as the residents evaluated their current living situation in relation to ideas of home (Horst 2004). The asylum-seeker informants identified what they lacked and missed in terms of meanings of home. Two of the factors considered most important were the lack of autonomy and the possibility to uphold certain cultural traditions. The lack of autonomy emerged as a main "unhomely" feature of the reception centre. Guests had to leave at certain times in the evening, there were house rules prohibiting loud music in the evenings, and the cleaning duties were controlled by the staff. Generally, what was conceived as" child-like treatment" and the control exercised by the employees of the institution was seen as "unhomely". The difficulties with upholding certain cultural traditions appeared as another "unhomely" factor. This concerned both the lack of separate rooms for men and women and difficulties in maintaining traditions such as receiving guests, and secure appropriate relations between family members. Ideas about the relations between family and home were disturbed due to the lack of space in the reception centre. Being in control of both what and when to eat was central for the asylum-seekers' sense of well-being. Together, the study highlights how asylum-seekers struggle with negotiations of what is homely and unhomely, as well as possibilities for engaging in homemaking practices.

From the above we suggest that the concept of home offers a perspective that makes explicit how both material, emotional, social and imaginative dimensions are important in housing. More so, we suggest that it is fruitful to explore processes of making home also in

temporary situations. This view relates to a recognition of the importance of social and emotional process included in housing when making choices regarding the provision of temporary housing. Recognizing how houses, place and space express forms of power (Foucault 2000) and can define 'others' from 'us', we propose that studies of accommodation for vulnerable groups, such as asylum-seeker reception centres, make an interesting case to examine when considering the aim of securing social integration, well-being, mental health and justice for any nation-state or community's inhabitants.

## Houses as Agentive Mediators

From the above perspectives, it appears how houses and their inhabitants constitute each other, thus raising a question of agency. While houses, homes, families, and households are constructed by individuals, their personal agency is often compromised, though not fully cancelled. It has been argued that such units are a "knot of individual interests" (Laslett and Wall 1972), though an exclusive focus on individuals' agency reduces the ability to address the power of houses to organise and restrain the lives of the individual agents.

The physical dimensions of family and individuals' life appear in the work of several scholars. The notion of 'structuration' (Giddens 1984) and 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1976) both appreciate material and spatial dimensions of social action and how it links to actors conceptual frameworks. The materiality of domestic life is crucial in forming the family and individual biologically, socially, economically and morally (see Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999:8). Taking it a step further, Alfred Gell states: "Agency is attributable to those persons (and things….) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events (1998:16). This definition extends agency to works of art and other artefacts, including houses (1998:252). Gell see houses to have special characteristic with a capacity to disassemble and reassemble, to remodel and redecorate, and to objectify the historical process (1998:252). The acts involved in building and remodelling houses, in forming its inhabitants, in daily living in the house, and selectively using the house to include or exclude family members and inhabitants, manifest agency. By such acts, individuals take part in routines or make conscious plans, while also making use of strategies that are consistent with collective interests of the group of which they are members. Even though agency requires intention, the actors do not need to be aware of the strategies of reproduction they implement.

Bourdieu describes the house as 'the principle locus for the objectification of generative schemes' (1977:89). Generally, one can say that moving around in an ordered space, the body 'reads' the house which serves as a prompt and reminder for the embodied person. It is through inhabiting and habituated dwelling that each person shapes a practical mastery of the fundamental patterns of the actual culture they have arrived in. While people construct houses and make them in their own image, they also use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and groups (see also Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Furthermore, the space that surrounds the house is also an extension of the personal space of its occupants. However, in the article *"What buildings do,"* Thomas Gieryn criticizes

Bourdieu for not taking human agency sufficiently into account, both in terms of designing and defining buildings (Gieryn 2002:39). Thus, Gieryn supports an understanding of a building as "the object of human agency and as an agent of its own actors" and also "simultaneously shaped and shaping." (ibid: 41)

Appreciating how houses can be seen to be an extension of the person and self, we draw attention to how houses and their surroundings affect well-being as these are deeply interwoven with experiences of identity, personhood and self. By this perspective, houses are seen not only as places or "cases" of symbolism, but more as subjects in their own right (see also Humphry 1988). This refers to how materiality, such as buildings and houses, can be seen to take on a certain agency in reinforcing and shaping social relations, senses of self and well-being.

Quite recently, in the 2000s, anthropologists have argued that houses do not always unify and aggregate, but also unsettle and disturb (Gavey 2001; Marcoux 2001; Petridou 2001). When recognising the unstable relation in which houses could become something "to live up to" and "give time to" (Clarke 2001), it also appears how houses are perceived as holding a degree of agency (Miller 2001, Latour 1988). The theoretical basis for understanding the dynamic and mutual relationship between humans and material objects has developed during recent decades within fields such as science and technology studies and in actor network theory (Yavena and Guy, 2008).

Agency reflects an approach to architecture as not only autonomous products and objects, but also continuously changing entities entangled in and dependent on social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (Till, 2009; Latour and Yavena, 2009). Within this understanding, architecture has the ability to make changes and even "lead to other possible futures." (Doucet and Cupers 2009: 1). According to Schneider and Till, agency implies conscious action: "having the possibility to act with intent and purpose." (Schneider and Till 2009)[5]. When dealing with architecture and built environments, it is self-evident that architects have the power to act upon the design of a building (even though they rarely do this without the participation of other actors, such as owners, developers, and consultants). In this respect, what is even more interesting is how buildings in a network with human actors have a "capacity for agency" towards environmental, social, and other goals (ARQ, 2009). That material artifacts and the designers of them may play specific roles in social transformation processes is acknowledged not only within the professions of architecture and design, but also within the field of science and technology studies, as we have seen (e.g., from the quotation

from Gieryn above). It is even more clearly articulated by British and Canadian social scientists Shove et al. in their book *The Design of Everyday Life* (Shove et al. 2007: 134):

> [D]esigners have an indirect but potentially decisive hand in the constitution of what people do. If material artefacts configure (rather than simply meet) what consumers and users experience as needs and desires, those who give them shape and form are perhaps uniquely implicated in the transformation and persistence of social practice.

When discussing agency related to design of urban neighborhoods more particularly, 'residential practices' has turned out to be a useful concept. Reckwitz defines a practice as: "a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood." (Reckwitz 2002: 250) Based on this definition, residential practice is understood as a dynamic sociotechnical network in which material structures (technology, buildings, and physical environment), socioeconomic conditions and practices, and ideas, meanings, and values interrelate and mutually affect each other. Within this framework, architectural design can be seen as both a result of social, economic, cultural, and political contexts and as a tool for changing these contexts. Agency in architecture, understood within this framework, thus constitutes a basis for analyzing and discussing specific architectural and urban design proposals as well as the role of architects and designers in the shaping of future societies.

## Architecture and Housing Qualities

Housing quality can be understood as the characteristics related to housing which are given value (Guttu 2003). Such values will vary according to the residents' life-phase and preferences. Furthermore, housing quality is related to aspects of the buildings, but also the local surroundings. More specifically, housing qualities can be assessed according to the residents' needs in terms of physiological (temperature, air and light), practical (adjustment to daily activities), social (being with family and friends, as well as opportunity for privacy), and psychological (security, esthetics, identity and autonomy) needs (Støa et al. 2006).

### Housing Quality – Normative Approaches

Housing research within the architectural profession has tended to be rather normative, in the sense that is has aimed at providing practical guidelines for designers but also 'educating' home buyers, to make them aware of what to ask and look for. This normative approach is deeply grounded among architects, planners and designers, since their basic role is to shape the physical environment and to create solutions that meet functional, social and emotional needs. The aim is to add value into society. An important task for architects is thus to continuously take part in a public debate of what housing quality 'in our time' is or could be.

In the following, we briefly present some of the norms and guidelines that have been important in Norwegian professional debate. Basically we may say that they all originate (more or less) from Vitruvius' (ca 15BC) famous triad of architectural qualities or virtues: *firmitas, utilitas, venustas* – implying that a building should be solid, useful and beautiful. Even though this tripartition has been criticized (e.g. since it does not recognize issues such as meaning, identity etc, and because it could be questioned if it is right to separate functional aspects from aesthetical aspects) it is still often used as basis for professional quality assessment (e.g. Christiansen 1996; HB, 2000). Depending on how it is used, it supports an idea that tends to be central within the architectural professional debate: that quality is about the totality, rather than single issues:

> Good architecture is always a summary of the responses to many demands and needs. The quality can never be read in single dimension only, it is the synthesis that is the point. The ability to meet several requirements simultaneously. A beautiful house which is totally useless for its purpose can never be good architecture, just as little as a perfectly functional, but ugly, sad or plain house can. (E. Eriksson 1990:37, authors translation).

Looking more detailed into some examples of norms, guidelines and quality assessment criteria for housing, we find that most of these combine functional and aesthetic aspects, but exclude the more instrumental issues (since these probably are considered to be taken care of through legal requirements).

Several norms and guidelines are formulated by public authorities, or various public bodies in different countries and architects have played a major part in the development of these guidelines. As an example, the British CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) was the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space in the period from 1999 to 2011. It merged with Design Council in 2011, and provides a huge amount of publications, guidelines and case-studies meant to support 'great design' in the building sector: "For us, that means design that improves lives and makes things better" (Design Council 2015).

In Norway, The State Housing Bank was established in 1946 and has played an important role in both financing housing for 'ordinary people' as well as securing a kind of minimum quality standard (and in early years also maximum standard). The minimum standard was however abolished in 1983 with the conservative government in line with a general liberalization of the housing marked (Guttu and Schmidt 2012), and although it was reintroduced later on in the early 1990's it was finally phased out in 2005 (ibid). For the time being (2015) it is not regarded as a task for the State Housing Bank to 'secure' the quality of ordinary housing. When it comes to technical and functional requirements this should be dealt with through building codes. Other less measurable qualities are believed to be taken care of by the marked.

Even though the minimum standard as such was abolished, the Norwegian State Housing Bank for several years kept a role as a competence centre for housing qualities and put a lot of effort into collecting and disseminating knowledge and understanding for qualitative aspects towards the housing sector. After having focused mainly on the layout of the single housing units during the first decades after the second WW (HB 1985) they later on moved to a greater emphasis on the housing area, including outdoor areas and neighborhood qualities (HB 2000). The booklets published by The Housing Bank are still used by professional as checklists for housing qualities.

In "Good Housing" (HB 1985) the following issues are mentioned as important qualities: Adaptability, possibilities for zoning, securing both privacy and social activities and finally accessibility for physically handicapped or disabled persons. The booklet further gives quite specific advices on the layout of the various rooms and presents examples of good and

bad solutions. It focus on practical issues, but takes also into account the impact of daylight from different directions, possibilities for privacy and changing needs and use over time.

The guidelines for "Good Housing areas" (HB 2000) points out the role of housing in meeting social and environmental challenges. It presents nine issues or principles for decent housing areas: Landscape and outdoor qualities, local climate and air quality, traffic security, outdoor areas for practical functions, common spaces, accessibility for disabled persons and integration of various residential groups, plan layout of dwelling units and private outdoor spaces, aesthetic design, management, maintenance and social organization. Most of these issues are also of a practical character dealing with health and security aspects, practical functions, accessibility and organizational issues for the operation phase. The guidelines are rather specific when it comes to e.g. maximum distances from the dwelling to large green areas (not more than 500 m), between the dwelling and a playground for children under 6 years of age (max 50 m within a car-free area) etc. It further specifies that minimum half of the common outdoor spaces should have sun at 15:00 at vernal equinox (*vårjevndøgn*).  For the layout of dwelling units, it is recommended that they should not have a one-sided orientation towards north / north-east, they should as a minimum have light towards two directions, one should avoid bedrooms towards access galleries and every dwelling should have a private outdoor area, also in urban settings.

When it comes to aesthetic design, the guidelines emphasize that aesthetics should not be regarded as a superficial and random decoration of the facade, but should be embedded in the totality of a building or a built area. The authors refer to Vitruvius' triad and argue that aesthetics together with functional and technical aspects defines the architectural quality (HB, 2000:44). They further state that the design of the spaces between buildings are as important as the buildings themselves, and refer to concepts used in music to describe the aesthetic qualities of a housing area such as variations, themes, harmony, rhythm and use of contrasts (ibid:45).

The advices given by the State Housing Bank when it comes to aesthetic qualities seems to be much in line with what is expressed within the professional architectural debate on quality assessment. Cold (1996) analyzed the jury statements from "Treprisen" (Norwegian award for excellent wooden architecture) awarded 12 times during the period from 1961-1986.  She found that the statements could be grouped according to the following four concepts (quite similar to many of the concepts used in the HB brochure): (1) harmony with balance and totality, (2) originality and novelty (innovative) value, (3) belonging to place and landscape and (4) unpretentious and cultivated simplicity.

Although essential within the professional debate among architects, planners, designers and the building industry in general, such norms on housing qualities may have limited impact if they are not sufficiently anchored in the social and cultural context. For studies of the effect of the physical environment on quality of life of e.g. asylum seekers, it is therefore not certain that the same norms are applicable for the specific situation of this residential group. As we will see in the next section, the definitions of architectural or housing quality could never be given "once and for all". On the other hand, there is also a danger in a relativist approach. Who are in the position to judge that some qualities do not apply for certain residential groups, and on what basis may we justify that asylum seekers are offered a housing quality that no other groups in Norway would accept?

*Questioning Essentialism*

Theoretically the so called 'essentialist' interpretation, that objects or buildings embody specific qualities (Shove et al. 2007),  is fairly questionable although it is highly common within all design professions, including architecture. The previously mentioned aim to *add value* into society is therefore not very straightforward and has been problematized also within the profession: "Architects may intend to add value, to bring something good to the world, transform it or make things better, yet despite such good intentions they have also been blamed for making things worse" (Doucet 2010: 27). The Belgian architect and researcher, Isabelle Doucet, uses the modernist architecture as example. The last century's planning history has provided an abundant number of examples of failed good intentions. It does not always work out the way architects and planners want. Instead of improving people's everyday life and supporting social equity, modern urban planning has in many cases contributed to the opposite: Creating static, monotone and hostile living environments that have  increased social differences instead of decreasing them.

Doucet further questions if adding value through building is principally in the hands of the architect, and argues that value is just as much created by use – that is by the users of the building and the society it is a part of. Furthermore, she concludes that "the added value of architecture is not something one can pin down once and for all. (..) not something we can define in theory and then apply as an analytical tool to practice" (ibid: 29)

According to the Norwegian philosopher Trond Berg Eriksen (1989) there has been a major change in the understandings of the concept of quality from the pre-modern view that the quality of an object increased in line with the time and effort invested in it, to the contemporary understanding of quality as

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..something which is woven into a pattern of consumption goods and images, into the whole encompassing social circulation of signs. Therefore, quality is something which cannot be assessed without knowledge about society or created without insight in the users' secret dreams (Eriksen 1989: 16, authors' translation):

We could therefore agree that the definition of quality and value in architecture is relative to context (historically as well as culturally) and perspective (e.g. as an owner, tenant, designer, neighbour, technical expert etc). The Norwegian architect and researcher Jon Guttu demonstrated  how the perspectives on housing quality have changed within the architectural profession in the period between 1945 and 1990 (Guttu 2002; 2003), making it clear that there are very few universal truths when it comes to what is regarded as 'a good house' or 'a good residential neighborhood'.  Perspectives on housing quality do not only change over time, but also varies according to role of those who are undertaking the assessment. Cold (1996) thus distinguishes between "subjective taste", "professional quality assessment" and "instrumental quality assessment". The first is about the fact that we like what seems familiar to us. According to Cold, we tend to prefer symmetry, we like housing which signalize our values or the lifestyle we dream about and finally we tend to prefer living close to nature and within reach of a social community. The professional quality assessment (*good* vs *bad* architectural quality) is within the architectural profession a result of continuous debate on prevailing norms, guidelines and model (canonic) examples – which as shown by Guttu has changed over time. The criteria for the quality assessment are partly based on the tacit knowledge acquired during education and practice, and partly on theories and ideas. Finally, the instrumental quality assessment (right vs wrong quality) is about whether the dwelling and housing area satisfies legal requirements as well as technical and functional criteria. Efficiency and comfort are important elements. Concepts used within this kind of quality assessment are: spaciousness, accessibility, adaptability, security, health and maintenance / cleaning.

Although norms and guidelines are important, and a basic part of architectural education and professional understanding, it becomes clear that the idea that quality is an essential feature embodied in the object or building itself is highly problematic and that "architecture's adding of value is anything but straightforward" (Doucet 2010: 28). Quality is thus something that occurs in the interaction between people and things (Hansen et al. 2010). Related to the research on housing qualities in asylum centres it becomes clear that there is a

need to contextualize perceptions of quality, and to obtain more knowledge and awareness of the specific situation of this residential group. As mentioned earlier, established norms for housing quality do not necessarily apply here, but this does not necessarily mean that we should settle for worn-down and unpleasant buildings.

*Quality Assessment*
In spite of the difficulties in defining universal qualities, the discussion of what appropriate accommodation for asylum seekers should be, implies a need to distinguish between different kinds and elements of housing quality in this context. In order to do so, we need a more systematic approach to the assessment of housing quality. Acknowledging the problematic in a normative approach to housing quality, architectural researchers have thus developed and suggested different versions of more or less systematic approaches – aiming towards both practice and theoretical development of the field –, which may be useful in our research.

*Housing Values*
Jan Ericsson uses the term values rather than qualities in his book "Bostadens värden" (1993) and  states that the overall objective with housing is to "bring about healthy and happy people" (ibid:59, author's translation). In order to do so, they have to fulfill aesthetic, symbolic and practical values. Ericsson thus distinguishes between aesthetic values which is about whether the resident perceives the dwelling or housing area as beautiful or not, and symbolic values which is about how the aesthetic design communicates meaning or information. The symbolic values can be informative (how the design informs about use, orientation etc.), demonstrative (what it tells about meaning, social status, identity etc.) and affective (which feelings and associations it arises). The practical values of housing cover according to Ericsson four elements:

- Physiological/recreative: How does the architecture support the residents' basic physiological and psychological needs (for shelter, food, rest etc.)
- Psycho-social: How are the needs for privacy and social activities taken care of?
- Practical-rational: How is the dwelling and the housing area organized in order for the residents to perform their daily activities in a simplest and most pleasant way?
- Resource- economic: How do the dwelling and housing area contribute to an efficient use of resources (costs, energy, materials etc.).

*Phenomenological Approaches*

Other writers, such as the Swedish architect and researcher Ola Nylander emphasizes the need to be aware of the non-measurable qualities of the home (2002). He takes a phenomenological stand towards architecture and refers to theorists such as Christian Norberg- Schulz and Elias Cornell when he states that the "non-measurable architectural attributes of the home are an important part of the meaning and contents of the lives of the residents" (Nylander, 2002: 10).

> There are magic rooms with amusement and delight in the air… There is an atmosphere that goes straight to the heart, a sense of mystery amidst the everyday, a kind of charge about the simplest things that animates them and gives reality a new dimension (Ellen Key, cited in Nylander, 2002:10)

In his research, Nylander uses Cornell's definition of architecture as the "aesthetic organization of practical reality" (cited in Nylander 2002:10) and asks what deeper significance non-measurable architectural attributes have for residents (ibid: 11).  He then identifies the main elements "of the architectural profession's tacit understanding of residential architecture" (ibid: 12).

As part of the critique against rational modern planning, there has been a growing search for an architecture that could provide meaning and belonging for people in a modern world. Norberg-Schulz emphasized that dwelling is about being or becoming rooted in life and that the architecture should express and even strengthen the place identity (Norberg-Schulz 1980). In line with this, the Finnish architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa speaks up for an architecture of reconciliation: 'an architecture that can mediate man's "homecoming"' (Pallasmaa 2005/1994:125). Even though architecture only could be what he calls 'a container' or 'a shell' for a home: "home is an individualized dwelling, and the means of this subtle personalization seem to be outside of our concept of architecture" (ibid:113-114), he still regards it as the task of architects to tolerate and encourage personalization. This implies creating architecture  that "is based on images that are deeply rooted in our common memory, that is, in the phenomenologically authentic ground of architecture". (ibid: 124). Without lapsing into simplification and populism, he identifies some of the ingredients in a home, which are also part of the architectural solutions. Some of these are often neglected in modern housing: Secret rooms and hiding places, the unifying hearth or fireplace, the large shared table which structures and symbolizes social relations and the difference between  working days and Sundays, the bed recess (*sovealkove*) where the bed as the most intimate core of the

home becomes a private space within the room, a house within the house, and finally the window which according to Pallasmaa (ibid: 122-123) is much more than a glass area between inside and outside:

> The window and, in particular, the act of looking out of the window of the home to the yard or to the garden is a poetic and essential experience of home. The home is particularly strongly felt when you look out from its enclosed privacy. (..) The tendency of contemporary architecture to use glass walls eliminates the window as a framing and focusing device and weakens the essential tension between the home and the world-the ontological essence of the door has been lost in the same way.

*How to Evaluate Quality?*

Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) is a joint designation of tools, which aim to "systematically compare actual building performance, i.e., performance measures, with explicitly stated performance criteria" (Preiser 1995:19). Having its origins in the US, POE seeks to evaluate the performance of the building as it is perceived from the perspective of the user: "It assesses how well buildings match users' needs, and identifies ways to improve building design, performance and fitness for purpose" (POE 2014). Performing a POE thus implies the need to identify specific performance critieria, which may be difficult in residential settings, and in particular in asylum centres since there are no established requirements for the quality of such centres. There is also a danger that these kinds of tools neglect aspects of housing qualities that are not measurable (Nylander 2002) but that are all the same essential for residential well-being. When evaluating housing qualities, several considerations will have to be made. We have already mentioned the need to emphasize the user perspective and also to include both measurable and non-measurable elements.

Some writers further point out the need to not only look at the dwelling itself, but to extend the evaluation to include the larger neighborhood. Guttu et al (2004) suggested six elements at this level which they argued were essential for residential well-being: (1) Health and security, (2) Social issues, (3) Access to service and facilities, (4) Central location, (5) Space for leisure activities and (6) Cultural heritage and aesthetic aspects supporting identity and place attachment. Other researchers have distinguished between individually based housing qualities and those which are more related to societal challenges (Narvestad 2008; Støa et al, 2006). While the first is about how the dwelling meets individual needs and preferences, based on life situation, economy, taste etc., the second category focuses on how

housing meets societal challenges such as climate changes, social segregation, demographic changes, health issues, economic policies and also cultural issues related to aesthetic qualities of our built environment, cultural heritage etc.  In their study of housing qualities in small apartments in Trondheim (Støa et al 2006), the researchers identified the following criteria (p. 9):

From an individual user perspective:
- Physiological: Heat, light, air
- Practical: Usability in order to perform daily activities, storage etc
- Social: Space for being together with friends, family and other members of the household, but also possibilities to be alone
- Psychological : Safety, independence, aesthetics, identity, sense of feeling at home etc

From a societal perspective there is generally a demand for sustainable and durable housing and housing areas:
- Aesthetic  qualities: Interplay with surroundings
- Community: Thriving, diverse and stable local communities
- Accessibility: Universal Design
- Adaptability
- Low carbon footprint

Although these criteria were suggested for the quality assessment of permanent housing, one may argue that most of these issues also are relevant for asylum seekers as a residential group, including the societal implications of the localization, design and technical standard of the asylum centres. At least the list can be used as a starting point for discussing quality in Norwegian asylum centres.

## The Asylum Seeker Reception Centres in Norway

In this section we present a short overview on official views and guidelines that govern the establishing of asylum seeker reception centres. This is meant to provide a general picture of the actual social and political conditions in which the reception centres are formed and run. However, it should be noted that while this description is written both the reception system, the kinds of reception centers and other related parts, are currently in change as a response to the dramatic increased number of asylum-seeker arrivals during fall 2015.

The Immigration Law (*Utlendingsloven*) paragraph 95, first section, first article, states the right for foreigners that seek asylum in Norway to be offered an accommodation. The law does not state what kind of accommodation these persons are entitled to, nor does it explicitly state which governmental institution that is responsible for accommodation. In second article it is noted that a foreigner with negative result on asylum application may be offered lodging, while waiting for return. In second section it is opportunity to make regulations concerning lodging, which include the possibility to offer and withdraw lodging facilities. Today's[6] (before the dramatic increase of arrivals which have led to changes in the refugee reception system) laws and regulations of reception centres in Norway are not substantially different from most EU-countries.

In Norway, asylum-seeker reception centres are defined as part of migration politics and not as part of housing politics. In zoning plans, sentralised centres are defined as 'buildings with public- or private services' while desentralised units are defined as 'housing' (Kommunal- og Moderniseringsdepartementet, 2015). In order to establish new centres in existing buildings local building authorities will in most cases require an approval for change of use[7]. This implies that the regulations in the Planning and Building act (PBL) will apply. PBL has specific requirements on technical issues (e.g. ventilation and daylight) and fire safety, but is far more general when it comes to plan layout and housing qualities. The building authorities thus have few instruments to use in order to secure a minimum quality on issues such as private space per person, of how many residents who can share toilets and showers etc.

The system of asylum-seeker reception of today has existed since the late 1980s of which the first was established in Trondheim in 1987 in localities that was earlier utilized as a motel and dormitory (Valenta and Berg 2012). Before 1987 the reception of asylum-seekers was rather random and improvised. Today's reception system is a consequence of the increasing numbers of asylum-seekers during the 1980s. The debates concerning the housing-conditions of asylum-seekers was then, as today, determined at not being too generous,

though not too simple. In policy documents the asylum centres are described to offer a 'simple, but reasonable standard' *('nøktern standard').*

The centres are commonly established within already existing (and often run-down) buildings (NOU 2011:10; Hauge et al. 2015; Strumse et al. 2016 forthcoming). The generally low housing standard is also a response to fluctuations in the number of asylum-seekers. The state sets as minimum that the reception-centre's housing capacity shall be 90%, which implies frequent openings and closings of reception centres. The limited economic resources and variations in number of asylum-seekers who arrive in Norway create challenges in planning for asylum-centres. In Norway contracts to run reception centres are bid out for open competitions in the private market, while The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) keeps agreements with municipalities, NGOs, and private operators (Larsen 2014). The employment of short-term contracts and the risk of losing the contract on three months' notice, may contribute to low housing standards and simple solutions (while politically a low standard aims to lessen attraction for asylum seekers, practically serving as a deterrence).

The UDI's specifications for asylum reception centres describes the reception centres as "simple, but reasonable[8] accommodation that secure the residents' needs and security" (*"nøktern men forsvarlig innkvartering som sikrer beboernes behov og trygghet).*The specific aims and considerations related to services targeted at asylum-seekers are (NOU 2011:10) *(author's translation)*:

1. Facilitate quick settlement, integration and inclusion if the application is successful.
2. Motivate and facilitate return and re-integration in home-country if application is not successful.
3. Cost-efficiency.
4. Secure individual dignity and functional ability.

These aims are contradictive when considering the aim of facilitating integration while also motivating and facilitating return to home-country. Also the aim for cost-efficient while securing each individual's dignity and functional ability may often be contradictive, although not necessarily. There are no definition of how to understand 'simple but reasonable' in terms of specific quality standards, but UDI has issued requirements for accommodation (UDI 2008) stating that everyone must have a bed to sleep in, access to lockable bathrooms, and common space for social interaction fit for residents of different sex and age. The document also states that the sanitary conditions are to be satisfactory and that the residents should have access to washing machines and space to dry clothes. Further residents should have access to

cooking facilities in the ordinary reception centres, and to be offered "nutritious, varied and sufficient feeding" in transit centres. And finally, residents with special needs are to be offered specialized accommodation as far as possible and single women should be offered accommodation that is separate from men.

The reception centre system in Norway contains two main kinds: transit centres (transittmottak) and ordinary centres (ordinære mottak). The ordinary centres include sections for single minors between 15 and 18 years of age, and reinforced sections for residents with special needs. After a health screening and delivery of asylum application most asylum-seekers are delegated a place in one of the ordinary centres. Many asylum seekers wait for weeks and months before the asylum interviews are conducted, often after being placed in a reception centre.

Approximately 130 reception centres[9] are today spread all over the country, organized as either centralised, partly decentralised or decentralised centres. The fully centralised centres have a staff-office and all accommodation on campus. The partly decentralised centres have a main office on a campus with one or several buildings with accommodation, and also rent houses and apartments in the local community for extra accommodation. A decentralised reception centre offers a main office with staff, where the asylum-seekers come to seek assistance and information, while they all live in ordinary houses spread out in the community. Three out of four reception centres in Norway today are completely or partly decentralized (Strumse et al., 2016[10]). An extended use of decentralized housing units came as a response partially to the increase in numbers of asylum seekers to Norway during 2008 and 2009, but also based on the idea of providing a more normalized housing situation that could have positive effects on issues like integration and empowerment of the residents (NOU 2011).

In July 2015 EU's revised "Reception Conditions Directive" was made applicable for all member states[11] (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013). It establishes common standards of conditions of living of asylum applicants and is meant to prevent a situation with diverging practices among Member States, which could lead to inadequate conditions for asylum seekers in some countries. Still, the formulations are rather general with no specific criteria given when it comes to e.g how to understand 'dignified' or 'adequate' standard'. As examples, it is stated here that:

> Standards for the reception of applicants that will suffice to ensure them a dignified standard of living and comparable living conditions in all Member States should be laid down. (Paragraph 11, p. L 180/97).

Member States shall ensure that material reception conditions provide an adequate standard of living for applicants, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health. Member States shall ensure that standard of living is met in the specific situation of vulnerable persons […], as well as in relation to the situation of persons who are in detention (Article 17, p. L 180/104-105).

Even though Norway is not bound to the EU's legislation on asylum seekers and immigration, except for the so called Dublin Regulation[12], there is an overall goal to harmonize Norwegian immigration policies to other European countries' policies within the field (Justis- og politidepartementet 2009; Regjeringen.no 2014). UDI and operators of reception centres are members of international networks aiming to exchange information and good practices on the reception and support of asylum seekers. Important networks are the European Migration Network (EMN)[13], European Network of Asylum Reception Organisations (ENARO)[14] and European Platform of Reception Agencies (EPRA)[15]. EPRA is coordinated by the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (FEDASIL) in Belgium and has as one of its tasks to develop a common European platform for quality standards for reception centres. At the moment of writing, this common platform is not publicly available. According to a report from EMN (2014) the available living area per person varies in member states varies between 4 m2 and 15 m2 (ibid: 18).

Some countries have handbooks that indicate quality standards, others have circulars, and some regulate the facilities in the contracts made with the operating management. The Swedish Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*) developed in 2011, together with the Swedish Standards Institute (SSI) guidelines for the quality of accommodation facilities (SSI 2011). It states some fundamental principles for adequate living conditions such as independent living (*självhushåll*), maximum two persons in each room and localization close to shops, public transport and services. The accommodation should have acceptable technical standard, in particular sufficient daylight and a well-functioning ventilation system are mentioned (ibid: 13). Facilities offered should be based on individual considerations and needs (ibid: 12). It also gives rather detailed prescriptions on what kind of equipment and furnishing each housing unit should have (ibid: 28-31).

Also in Belgium, FEDASIL is working on developing quality standards and a system of auditing reception centres in order to secure a basic quality. The quality standards here are at the time of writing not finally approved, but they will i.a. include requirements on

minimum square meter private space per person, maximum single persons sharing a room, maximum persons sharing toilets, showers etc.

In Norway, the so called 'Berge-committee' (NOU 2011: 10) suggested a law to regulate the reception system which include the security of a dignified living (*verdig tilværelse*), and a responsible and equal offer of accommodation. The normative plea for a dignified life implies a request of a satisfactory living standard. The NOU-report concluded however that there should be no general minimum standards for asylum-seeker reception centres. Still it suggested some concrete criteria, such as single rooms for single adult asylum seekers after one year (NOU 2011:21). What is also relevant when it comes to the standard of reception centres, is that the NOU-report suggested to establish so called 'base-centres' with more long term operation contracts which would make it possible to build up the quality of staff competence, services and activities for the residents  and also to provide more long term material qualities of the centres (ibid: 135 ff).

Research shows that the quality of buildings utilized as reception centres vary, though the buildings are generally worn-down and not suitable as reception-centres (Berg 2012; Hauge et al. 2015; Strumse et al. 2016 forthcoming). The housing quality is based on short term residence, while in fact many asylum-seekers stay for several years. The time waiting for a final assessment of asylum application in Norway, has steadily increased until 2014 (Larsen, 2014), though it is a small decrease in 2014. In 2012, 50% of the asylum-seekers lived more than 1.5 years and 41% more than 3 years at a reception centre. In December 2014 36% of the asylum-seekers had stayed more than 1.5 years, and 25% more than 3 years at a reception centre (UDI 2014a). The most numerous groups come from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Syria and Afghanistan. About 1/3 of the residents have resident permit and are waiting for settlement in a municipality. 1/3 are waiting for answer to their application, and 1/3 have received a negative assessment and are waiting to be deported out of Norway (UDI 2014b).

**Concluding Remarks: A Humanistic Perspective on Housing and Home for Asylum Seekers**

Considering the various perspectives deliberated above we acknowledge the intertwined complexities that arise when exploring the relationships between housing, social life and individual well-being. To study the effect of the built environment, such as the asylum reception centre and their surroundings on well-being, we need to see the separate components, while also seeing the interwoven patterns that make the various houses at different times and places, and in different cultural contexts.

When choosing relevant literature, we have looked for sources that we consider respond fruitfully to our field of inquiry; asylum seeker reception centres and how these influence the residents' well-being. A complicating factor is of course the temporality of reception centres both in respect to their function and for the residents' time of living there. The intended time of residency in the reception centres is meant to be a short-time stay, while a substantial number stay in the reception centres for many years.

In light of the temporality embedded in the asylum-seeker reception centres one may wonder why we have included an emphasis on the concept and experience of 'home'. As earlier discussed, we see 'home' as a fruitful concept as it engages with our concern for identity and well-being. Responding to how we see the asylum seeker reception centres not to fit with 'total institutions' (Goffman 1961), we have not engaged with the vast literature related institutions (hospitals, prisons, asylums, care for elderly and such). This is also motivated from our perspective in which we recognise the asylum seekers as part of the normal population, in terms of not being clients, patients or other persons with 'special needs' by somatic sickness, functional disabilities, retardations, mental distress or disorders, geriatric conditions and such. We rather aim to highlight asylum-seekers as fellow citizens who are entitled to seek asylum and protection within our society with generally ordinary needs, while in a special situation. We haste to underline, as earlier mentioned, that this view is not meant to ignore asylum seeker populations and individuals' specific life conditions related to distress, trauma and refuge from war, persecution and/or discrimination. However, we propose our study to benefit from perspectives that we see to be applicable for all human populations as we understand humanity to share an equal need of housing in terms of its effects on well-being, meaning, identity, social organisation, home and home-making, agency, and the architecture of housing qualities.

Looking into research literature on housing with a special concern for residents' well-being we recognise how built environment is symbolic and become agentive structures and communicators. We can safely conclude that buildings, places and environment of asylum-

seeker reception centres affect the way the majority population perceive its residents, as well as the way the asylum-seekers perceive themselves. This appears in terms of social class, position and status, as well as processes of identity, stigmatisation and othering. In turn, the accommodation offered effect asylum-seekers' identity, well-being and the processes of inclusion in the main-stream society. Thus, investigating asylum-seeker reception centres as physical structures proves to be a potent approach when aiming to explore and ensure asylum-seekers well-being and integration.

Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that 'house' is commonly set up together with or interchanged with 'home', in which house refer more to the physical space and home to the territorial place. Home takes on psychological emotional meanings and its relationship to house may not be taken for granted. However, the literature demonstrates that people engage in home-making practices that endow places with meaning and importance by for instance embedding and re-embedding social relations. Such practices take place in both permanent, long-term and temporary dwellings, as well among people "on the move" who constantly change location. Overall, the literature suggests that the quality of housing is vital for its residents' perception of and ability to create identity, well-being and social integration. More so, the literature suggests that an important factor for well-being and integration is to reside in architecture that manifest an equal quality, in terms of its physical structure, placement and environment, as the majority population enjoys.

By way of concluding we attract attention to in particular eight points we see as important when we are to consider the effect of housing on asylum-seekers' well-being:

(1) The physical environment has communicative meaning related to social attributes, personality and social status. This represents a potential risk for misunderstandings and prejudices.

(2) Experiences of security and well-being can be effected by spatially and social characteristics of the area. Migration movements and settlement of asylum seekers can significantly affect the perception of residential areas.

(3) Organisation of space and placement of people in distinct places expresses certain forms of power (Foucault 2000).

(4) Spaces can create distinctions and define "others" from us, while the process of 'otherising' can also deal with a fear of sameness rather than otherness (Hage, 2002). Such processes of otherising are not only mental processes, but as much spatial processes.

(5) Home is a relevant concept as the asylum-seeker residents evaluate their current living situation in relation to ideas of home (Horst 2004). Horst (2004) found four important

factors: a) lack of autonomy, b) lack of the possibility to uphold certain cultural traditions, c) ideas about the relations between family and home are disturbed due to the lack of space in the reception centre, and d) being in control of what and when to eat was central for the asylum-seekers' sense of well-being.

(6) Housing quality is something that occurs in the interaction between people and things (Hansen et al. 2010), thus research on housing qualities in asylum centres makes it clear that there is a need to contextualize perceptions of quality, and to obtain more knowledge and awareness of the specific and temporal situation of asylum seekers.

(7) It is not certain that the same housing norms are applicable for all residential groups, and the definitions of architectural or housing quality can never be given once and for all. However, there is good reason to question on what basis we justify that asylum seekers are offered a housing quality that no other groups in Norway are offered.

 (8) The debates concerning the housing-conditions of asylum-seekers are focused at not being too generous, though not too simple. In policy documents the asylum centres are described so as to offer a 'simple, but reasonable standard' *('nøktern standard').* The question is, what is reasonable housing and on what terms?

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*Endnotes*

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[1] Levi-Strauss proposes house societies as a transition between kin-based and class-based societies (1987:151). While the forces at play in this assertion is less explained, it has brought attention to a useful perspective of how houses can be used as a strategy to extend the idiom of the family  or connect family identity beyond its classificatory limits (see Headley 1987:210).

[2] Parts of the text in this section are previously published inn Hauge's PhD thesis (Hauge 2009).

[3] By this, Malinowski can be seen to open for what has later often been understood as the basic unit of social and economic life; 'the household' (Goody 1958).

[4] Parts of the text in this section are previously published inn Thorshaug's master thesis (Thorshaug 2011).

[5] The authors are referring to Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1984).

[6] Today is of 2015, just before the dramatic increase of arrivals which have led to partial changes in the refugee reception system.

[7] Excepted from this is in desentralised reception centres where ordinary housing is used for smaller groups of asylum seekers

[8] We have chosen to translate the Norwegian term "nøkternt men forsvarlig" with "simple but reasonable". *Reasonable* is however not a fully adequate translation for *forsvarlig* since this means not only *reasonable*, understood as *proper*, *sound* and *safe* but has also connotations to *dignity* and *decency*.

[9] According to www.udi.no the number of centres in October 2015 was 134

[10] This report is based on a survey from 2013, so the numbers may likely be somewhat different today.

[11] See: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/reception-conditions/index_en.htm

[12] The Dublin Regulation implies that an application for asylum should be processed by the first Dublin country the asylum seeker comes to. See: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants/index_en.htm

[13] EMN is coordinated by the European commission abs provides comparable information on migration and asylum topics to EU-states as well as Norway. See: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/index_en.htm

[14] ENARO is an inter-institutional network between 22 European organisations, set up to arrange the reception of asylum seekers. The Norwegian reception centre operator HERO is a member. See: http://www.enaro.eu/

[15] EPRA is a European exchange network. It is a forum for national administrations responsible for reception with the focus on strategic aspects, and the Norwegian UDI is a member of this network. EPRA is coordinated by the Belgian FEDASIL, hosting the EPRA coordination team. The goal of the platform is to stimulate strategic information sharing on a senior management level, compilation of information, identification and monitoring of best practices with a view to efficient and informed management of asylum reception in the EU. One of the topic is "Reception standards".See: http://fedasil.be/files/explorer/EPRA_briefing_note_May_2015.pdf

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