

**Ever felt
like you
don't
belong?**



Ever felt like you don't belong?

Candidate

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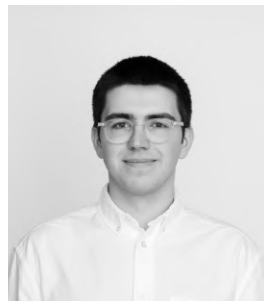
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Field

Service and systemic design

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Abstract

Almost 20% of the Norwegian population consists of immigrants or children of immigrants. In the coming years, this number is only going to grow bigger. Those already here, and those coming in the future will have to make use of public services at some point or another. As the Norwegian system is built on Norwegian norms, assumptions, and expectations, for people coming to Norway with a different background, navigating through the system can pose a challenge.

Maladapted services, as well as institutions not taking into account the challenges and needs of immigrants can lead to systemic exclusion in a way that might hamper the immigrants' integration into society. As the Norwegian welfare state is built on trust and participation, it's in the public sector's best interest to ensure that their services and interventions don't contribute to alienation, or even actively try to fight it.

"Ever felt like you don't belong?" is a project looking at how the public sector can transform and adapt to the growing complexity of a diverse population by taking critical approaches and being conscious of the consequences of public services. My proposal is a set of principles to guide the public sector towards being one built on the values of inclusivity, self-reflection, and compassion.

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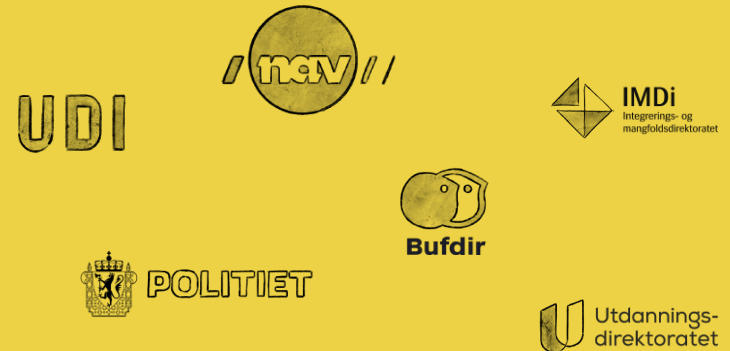
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Motivation

Having moved to Norway at the age of 9, from a different country, I've experienced immigration first-hand. I have experienced the system - the many positives of it, and some negatives as well. During the pre-diploma, I have decided to work with Special Norwegian Tuition, or "Norwegian 2" as I knew it as a child - a special measure for children that start education in Norway, but don't know the language. For me, the service turned out to be quite useful - it is after all what first taught me about the language and the culture. However, even as a child, I have noticed some things that I thought could be done better.

As I developed my proposal further, I noticed similar parallels in others' experiences. A service or measure that is there to help you - that quickly turns out to be more of a source of stress, rather than what it originally was supposed to be. I quickly realized that I wanted to look at the broader picture, and look at the systemic source of these experiences.

During one of the semesters at AHO, I took an elective course called Design in the public sector. After two or three lectures I knew it was going to be a difficult semester. Complex structures, complicated language, slow and frustrating processes, and seemingly endless amounts of rules and guidelines to comply with. In fact, I swore never to touch the subject of design in the public sector ever again, yet here I am, writing a report on exactly that topic. I'm not sure how it got to be, but as I researched and developed my project early on, I was drawn to the systemic nature of the problem I have just identified. Having finished the project now, I can say that I look at the whole topic, and especially the systemic approach, with a new set of perspectives and knowledge than I started with.



Background

Almost 20% of the Norwegian population in 2021 consisted of immigrants or children of the immigrants, and the number of immigrants coming to Norway is only going to get bigger in the coming years ("Fakta om innvandring", 2022).

Those already here, and those coming in the future will have to make use of the public institutions at some point or another. For people coming from a different background, navigating through the system can pose a challenge, as it is built on the assumptions and expectations of a nordic recipient.

The nordic model is somewhat unique, in that we put so much trust in the welfare state, and hand over things we care about to other people. For those coming from other places, perhaps not putting so much trust in the government, this can come as a shock and might manifest itself as a preconceived lack of trust towards the officials.

Public institutions, therefore, have to ensure that their services are experienced as welcoming, trustworthy, and non-excluding. Ensuring that leads to better integration of immigrants, and more trust between the organizations and immigrants.

Definition of immigrant

As this report uses the word immigrant extensively, it is important to specify who an immigrant is in the context of this report.

In this project, I define immigrants as people living in Norway with a non-native background, either being first-generation immigrants, or children of immigrants and I do not limit myself to people who live in Norway permanently.

Approach

This diploma project is situated between the disciplines of service and systemic design. The approach I have taken is theoretical, research-based, and critical. The overarching question throughout this diploma has been “How does the public sector ensure its services don’t do harm and don’t contribute to the systemic exclusion of immigrants?”.

To understand the issue of systemic exclusion of immigrants, I have taken an analytical and systemic approach. By researching, and talking to immigrants and people in the public sector, I aimed to understand the bigger picture and the mechanisms at play. Doing that, enabled me to think critically of the current structures and entrenched values, processes, and methodologies.

My personal experience of being an immigrant in Norway has no doubt affected the outcome, and I have taken advantage of this background in this project. It has helped me understand, relate and empathize with the people I have talked to, as well as reflect on the overall subject.

I approached this topic through the context of systemic structures in the public sector. There are many perspectives with which one could approach the topic of systemic exclusion, and the bigger picture is not limited to the public sector, but it is one key area where change could happen. By building on the knowledge gathered, and the opportunities presented, I, therefore, developed my project with the public sector in mind.

As the public sector and policymaking is situated very much at the conceptual level, the delivery and proposal of the project are positioned at this very level itself. The main delivery in this project is a proposal for principles to be incorporated to ensure a public sector that is inclusive and open to learning.

Considerations

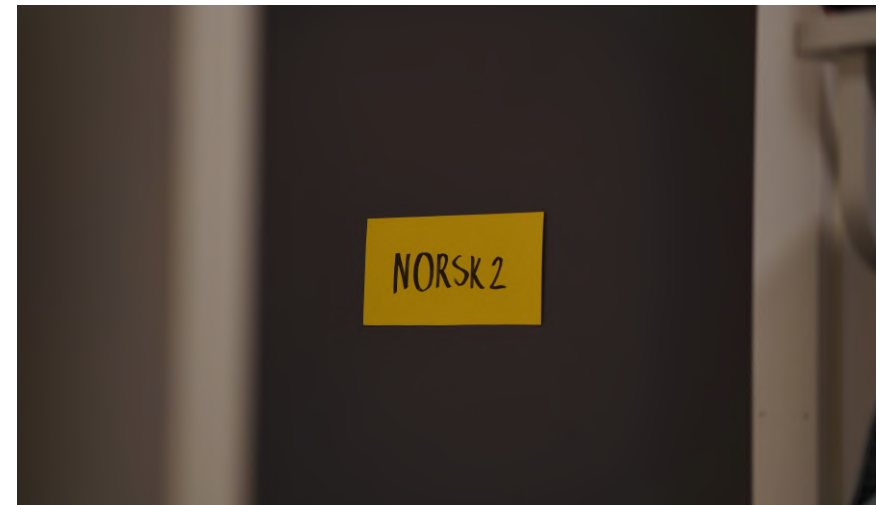
Dealing with the topic of marginalization and systemic exclusion, one has to be wary of its sensitive nature. The changes I am proposing might have far-reaching effects, and the implications and consequences have to be considered carefully.

I have to be conscious of my biases and assumptions. I have my own experiences and opinions, and they might, and probably will affect the direction and choices I make. To prevent biases and assumptions from taking over, I have talked to immigrants and experts and approached my assumptions critically.

As the topic is vast and complex, it is important to be aware that you alone will not be able to grasp the whole picture. As designers, we strive to get to the root of a problem, and the fact that one will never be able to do that with a topic like this is not comfortable. However, being conscious of these limitations is also what enables us to make decisions that are better suited to unpredictable circumstances.

Visual identity

The visual identity came about during the pre-diploma when I worked on the topic of Special Norwegian Tuition. It is inspired by a sticker hanging on a glass door to the “special tuition”-classroom with the text “Norsk 2” or “Norwegian 2”.



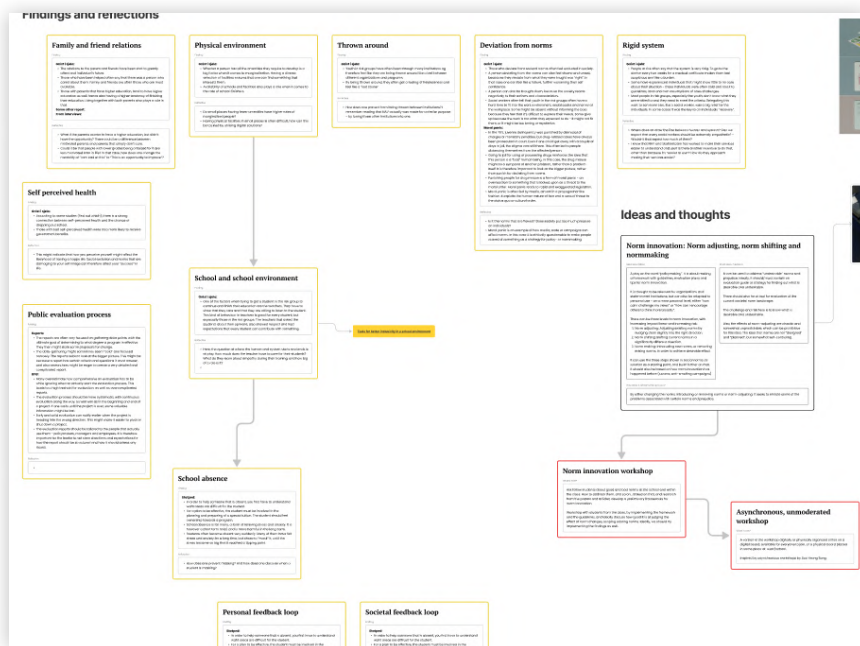
For some reason, this image stuck with me, and in many ways symbolizes my arrival in Norway and my first contact with the Norwegian public system. Back then, to see big classrooms with glass doors, workshops in the elementary school, and even kitchens where students learned how to cook food, was unlike everything I've seen before. I, therefore, pay homage to the sticker, by using its colors as an inspiration for the project's visual expression.

01

Methodology and tools

Desk research

As my approach was very theoretical and research-driven, I've utilized desk research extensively. Through studies and reports, reading articles, and looking at previous diploma projects, I worked to gain a picture of the current situation. This analysis work included extensive note-taking and framing of the findings in a relations-like system. I utilized "process cards" to keep track of my research and ideas, by summarizing insight, ideas, and questions into quick notes that point to relevant documents and sources.



This research and analysis continued throughout the whole duration of the project and shaped my initial direction and approach.

Interviews with immigrants

To get the immigrant's perspective on the matter, I have interviewed a diverse set of individuals either having immigrated here by themselves or being children of immigrants. Talking with immigrants, I was especially interested in their experiences with the public sector, and their views and opinions on it. During later interviews, I also asked about their visions of a public sector that would suit their needs and challenges.

Recruiting online

One, somewhat unique way to recruit people for the interviews, was to reach out to people on the internet. As many people like to share their opinions and experiences anonymously, getting a hold of people on forums like Reddit and Jodel was quite straightforward. By doing that, I managed to recruit people that were outside of my social group. This does however come with some caveats.

For one, as the interviews were conducted online, using text messaging, it is easy to lose a sense of connection with the interviewee. Also, follow-up interviews and getting feedback on the changes I implemented proved difficult and cumbersome, due to the semi-anonymous nature of the interviews. However, as much as this comes with some drawbacks, I feel it contributed well in addition to the regular, physical interviews I held with other immigrants.

Of those I have interviewed, 2 of the interviews were in person, while 4 were conducted online.

Interviews with experts

In parallel, I have interviewed two minority advisors from The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (Integrerings- of mangfoldsdirektoratet) or IMDi with backgrounds in social science and sociology, in addition to having previous experiences with immigrants and refugees.

Minority advisors are IMDi's frontline workers, displaced in schools all across Norway. Their roles are to aid students with minority backgrounds to better integrate, and help with issues they might face at school or at home. In addition to that, they have a vast knowledge of the current situation regarding immigrants in the context of the public sector.

I have also talked to two design researchers from NAV, both with backgrounds in social anthropology, and one project manager working for the Oslo Municipality.

In addition to gaining valuable knowledge, talking with experts served as a way for me to gather feedback and test my proposals.

Storytelling

Storytelling can serve as a powerful tool when trying to show experiences and makes them easier to convey and relate to. I have used storytelling for exactly that, by illustrating some of the challenging experiences I have been told about from immigrants. I have used this storytelling in the presentations along the way, as well as in this report to illustrate typical scenarios and situations.

Ideation workshops with other designers

Although I have been working alone during this diploma, I have made sure to include other designers in idea workshops and (at least) weekly feedback sessions, in order to get a new pair of eyes to look at my progress and my solutions. It has served me well in looking beyond my personal perspective and contributed to this project immensely.

Materialization

During the elective course Design in the public sector, we have used the technique of materialization extensively. Materialization is about breaking down complex, systemic structures, into simpler, infographic-like visualizations. It makes the structures less daunting and serves as a great tool for communicating abstract ideas and characteristics.

In this report, I have used this method to illustrate ideas, concepts, and processes that would otherwise be difficult to grasp and imagine.

Systems-oriented design

Systems-oriented design encompasses a large set of tools, methodologies, principles, and approaches. As my previous experience with systemic thinking was limited to a semester of SOD and an elective course, I have utilized the multitude of tools, frameworks, and articles available online, as well as physically, to develop my project further with the systemic direction in mind. Some of the methods I have used were giga-mapping, zip-analysis, and synthesis maps (Sevaldson, Systems Oriented Design).

The landscape

Through the lens of an immigrant

This project looks at the topic of systemic exclusion through the lens of an immigrant. It is a big and growing part of the Norwegian population ("Fakta om innvandring", 2022).

The government is clear on the need for public services to be experienced equally by all citizens, regardless of background or culture (Kultur- og likestillingsdepartementet, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to be critical and mindful of the ways a system might exclude certain groups of people.

As immigrants as a group are inherently in a disadvantaged position, due to the language barrier, cultural differences, and existing norms, it is important to look at the potential pitfalls and shortcomings of the institutions, and their services and solutions.

Norwegian expectations

Many services are developed with the Norwegian norms and expectations in mind. What institutions take for granted, might not be so obvious to all people. Services can therefore unknowingly introduce solutions that are harmful and damaging to immigrants. It is seldom that these services don't want to help other people, but as the public sector's biggest strength and resource are people, unconscious biases and assumptions will make their way into the system.

Some argue how much the public sector should adapt to the immigrants, arguing that too much adaptation can lessen the importance of knowing the language or culture.

There is no clear-cut answer. It is important, however, to keep in mind that a welcoming and accepting society that invites public participation, will likely face less marginalization and systemic exclusion (Aanesen, 2020).

Zooming in on this group of people serves a practical purpose as well. Narrowing down the topic to a single group, allowed me to look at more specific mechanisms at play. Therefore, I look at immigrants as a "proxy group" through which I could understand the bigger issue of systemic exclusion. At the end of this report, I reflect on how the findings I present can be extrapolated to a wider population.

To understand how systemic exclusion and other types of marginalization can affect immigrants, we can look at a typical scenario. This story is based on the experiences and situations I have been told about by immigrants.



Anish came to Norway at a young age. As he didn't speak Norwegian at the time, he was assigned to special Norwegian tuition classes. While it helped him learn the language, it also meant that he didn't get to be with his peers all that much. He often missed out on social events, and therefore the others didn't see him as part of their group, something he often thought about.

Back at home, his parents had very high expectations of him but offered little help and support. When he told them that he wanted to be a car mechanic, he was met with criticism and shame, as they imagined him pursuing a more prestigious career.



Being pressured to pursue another career, he decided to study to become a doctor, but deep down he knew it wasn't what he wanted to do. As he didn't have any friends to talk to, this period of his life was very tough. Three years in, it was too much for him. He started skipping lectures, and soon dropped out and became unemployed.

He tried to find a job, but the lack of prior experience prevented him from being hired. This only grew worse, as time went by, and it started affecting his health and self-esteem. At some point, he stopped looking for a job, as he didn't see himself ever getting one. His family blamed it on him dropping out, and having nobody around him to turn to, he believed it himself.

Risk of marginalization

Immigrants are a group inherently at risk of marginalization. The language barrier, cultural differences, and often worse socioeconomic status can all be factors preventing immigrants from fully participating in society (Aanesen, 2020).

Marginalized individuals can find it more difficult to integrate into society. As the system sees them as “deviants”, feeling like a burden can make some turn away from the system or lose trust in it (Rasmussen, Dyb, Heldal & Strøm, 2010).

The process of marginalization often repeats in a negative feedback loop, only getting worse with time. Ideally, we would want to prevent this process as early as possible (Hyggen & Ekhaugen, 2021). The institutions are often some of the first instances an immigrant meets when arriving in Norway, and it is, therefore, important to make sure the institutions don't contribute to this process themselves and work actively work to reduce it.

The Norwegian model

Norway is a welfare state. The Norwegian model is based on fundamental values like democracy, human rights, solidarity, and perhaps most importantly, trust. (“The Norwegian Model”, Oslo Kommune)

Trust is the most important prerequisite in a welfare state and is the foundation on which Norway and the Nordics are built. For years, it was a prevailing assumption that it was the welfare state that caused the high degree of trust in Norway. However, research shows the opposite. Norway's high degree of trust can be traced and rooted in the high degree of internal stability during the last couple of hundreds of years, and descendants of Scandinavians that emigrated before the welfare state was introduced, generally display a similar degree of trust as people in the Nordics. (Karkov, 2012)

Trust is important for the welfare state, as in the simplest terms, in a welfare system, you're daring to hand off something that is important to you to people you don't know, trusting that these people will take care of it.

When other people receive benefits and help, we trust that they really need them. In return, we get security and a promise that when our time comes, the state will take care of us as well.

So, the welfare state is not the cause of the trust we have in Norway, however, it helps to maintain it. One can look at it as a symbiosis, where one supports another in a state of balance. This balanced symbiotic relationship is deeply rooted in the Norwegian identity, and it is difficult to tear it apart, but not impossible.

Research shows that societies with big economical inequalities, lack of economic freedom, and bad integration often have less trust, compared to countries with a well-integrated population and a high degree of economic equality and economic freedom. (Clemet, 2013) Therefore, a government that fails to solve important public issues can damage the trust in the state and its institutions. It is therefore important to ensure that people in a society feel treated equally, and have access to institutions and services that treat them with respect and dignity.

Analysis

The analysis of those findings happened by capturing the essence of the interviews and research, and by finding common patterns between them. These were then grouped and summarized with a short description.

These findings are all from the perspective of immigrants, as at its core, the project aims to make their experiences better. Framing the findings from this angle also allows us to move closer to the underlying factors, before moving toward addressing those in the context of the public sector.

Of course, individual talks will always be more nuanced than the generalized learnings I am about to present. However, by finding some commonality among the sentiments and experiences shared by the immigrants, I hope to highlight some key areas I found worth investigating further.

Key learnings

The following section will present my key learnings. These were created to better summarize and communicate the knowledge I have gathered from the interviews and prior research.

"I waited weeks, received many cancellations, new agreements, and then suddenly you get a new caseworker who doesn't know your case."

– Immigrant

A feeling of no compassion from the institutes

Today's institutions feel "cold", and it can often feel like the employees lack compassion towards immigrants. Workers often adhere to strict guidelines, without considering individual cases and challenges.

Many immigrants share a feeling that the institutions don't respect one's time and efforts. As you're not necessarily assigned the same caseworker each time, there is no single person that knows your case thoroughly.

This can leave a feeling of a public sector that is hostile and difficult to work with and does little to build immigrants' trust.

"...I've been told that I'm a young boy that will manage just fine. When I told them about my rights, the social worker felt threatened and called the guards."

– Immigrant

A feeling of not being trusted

Immigrants can often feel like a burden. A common feeling among immigrants is that some social workers might see immigrants seeking help from institutions, like NAV, as someone who "doesn't want to change" or "doesn't want to work".

Proving your identity, the need to supply documents, and background checks can leave some immigrants feeling like the institutions are "out to get them". There are many stigmas about certain institutions, like the Norwegian Child Welfare Services (Barnevernet), and a bad reputation is often being built up within immigrants' communities about those institutions.

“I managed to escape to Norway all on my own when I was 12 without anybody’s help, but when I arrived and asked NAV for help, I experienced a huge shock... I didn’t experience racism, but I felt strongly that I wasn’t Norwegian.”

– Immigrant

“...compassion and seeing other people as human beings are gone. You only get offered courses and CV-making. It took me 3 years to get a specialized plan.”

– Immigrant

Differing cultural expectations

Individuals brought up in different cultures, or with a different set of values and norms, might have different expectations of what the governments’ roles are. For example, not all people come from places where the government is as widely trusted as in Norway. (Kleven, 2016) The notion of giving the government so much control of your and your children’s life can therefore be uncomfortable for some.

The institutions have certain expectations from their users and adhere to certain norms that some immigrants might not be so familiar or comfortable with. The expectation of prior knowledge is frustrating and can leave immigrants with a bitter taste towards institutions.

A feeling of no influence over their situation

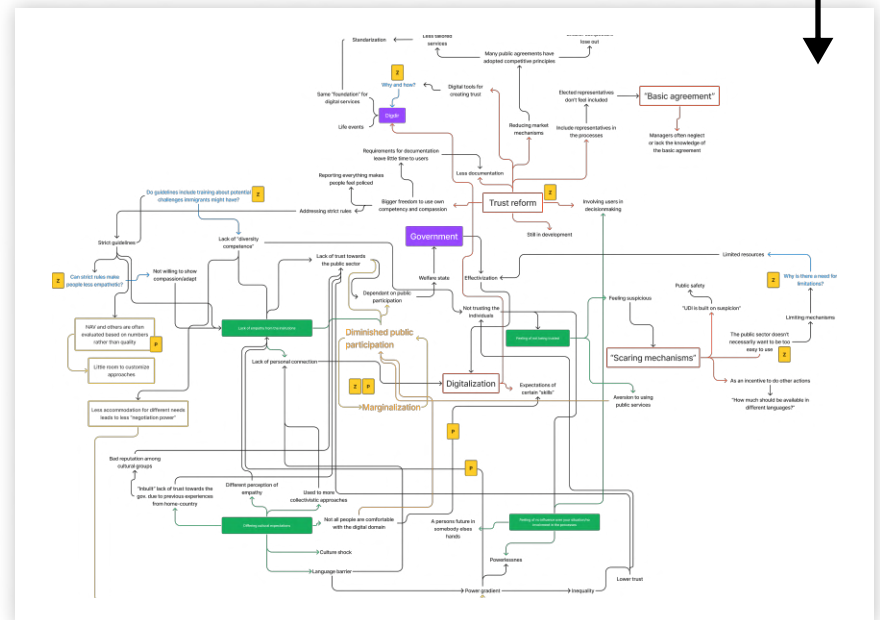
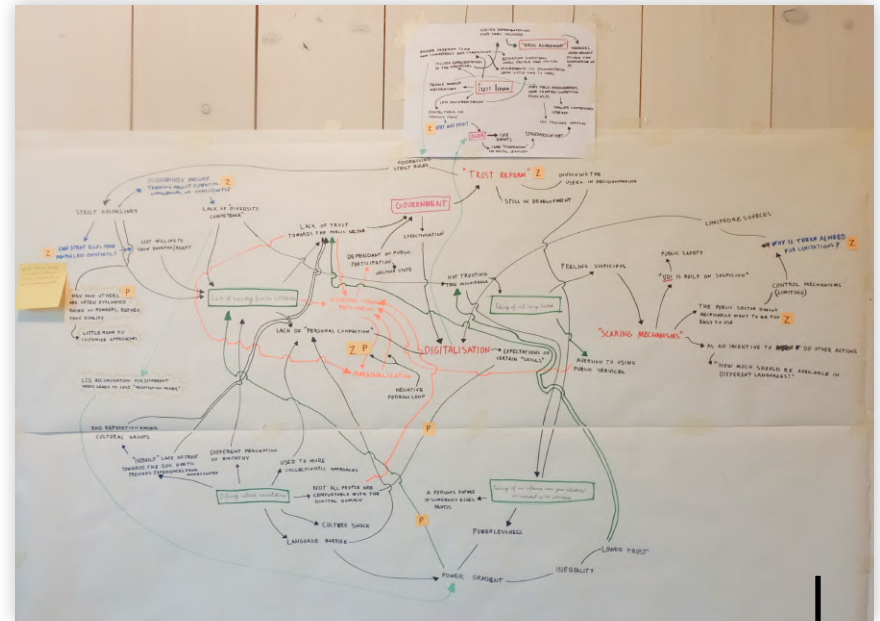
Immigrants say they often felt like having no influence over the decisions that were being made for them. Many receive courses or public measures that they either do not want or feel don’t help them in the first place. There is no feeling of involvement in the processes that surround you, and you are often being bounced around from institution to institution.

When being new to a country, and likely not knowing the language, meeting a native social worker will always create a power gradient. In that situation, you might feel powerless, and it will likely feel like your future is in somebody else’s hands.

Mapping the key learnings

In order to see how the key learnings fit into the broader, systemic picture, I have used the process of giga-mapping in order to map out the different relations, factors, stakeholders, and drivers that are at play. The result is a messy and unorganized map of the relations. It shows the intricate connections and shows a system that is complex, yet delicate to external and internal disturbances. This proves to be a challenge, but also an opportunity for future interventions.

This exercise served as a great way to move forward with further analysis and research, by zooming in and using systems-oriented methodologies.



03

Zooming in

Zooming in

In order to better understand the relations, stakeholders, and drivers from the previously mapped, rough overview, I have zoomed in by doing further research and interviews on the areas that needed more investigation. In this chapter, I will present the findings from this phase.

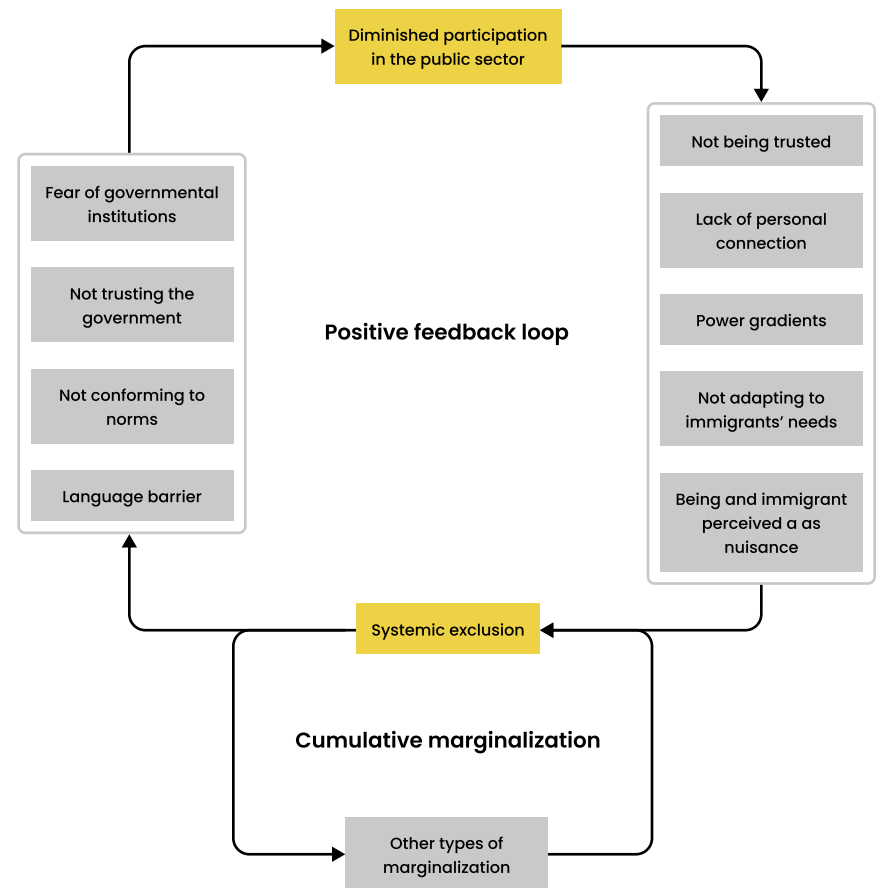
Positive feedback loop

At the very center of the giga-map is a positive feedback loop. A loop, as a reinforcing process of marginalization, has been identified very early on in my research. Many factors can drive the process of systemic exclusion, and these factors often affect one another, driving the loop.

If something affects one's view of the institutions negatively, it can lead to this person being less willing to participate in it.

This lack of willingness to participate can lead to the individual being perceived in a negative light, which in turn can make the institutions more "hostile" towards the individual. As this loop repeats, it reinforces itself, which makes it extremely difficult to overcome.

Other types of marginalization can also affect systemic exclusion and vice versa. In the immigrant's case, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and other disadvantages can lead to marginalization by the system. This interchanging relationship is called cumulative marginalization (Aanesen, 2020).



Digitalization

As Norway aims to make its public sector more efficient and meet the demands of the current and future populations, digitalization is often brought forward.

Digitalization is a process of transforming existing public services into digital alternatives. As the digital domain has its unique set of characteristics, it is not simply a matter of converting existing analog forms into digital versions.

The Norwegian Digitalisation Agency, stresses the importance of adapting and reevaluating services in the process of digitalization. This can often prove to be a challenge in a system so used to the methods and technologies of the past, but could also serve as a perfect opportunity for social innovation (“Hva er digital transformasjon”, 2022).

The public sector can often seem fragmented and disorganized. Therefore, new strategies for digital innovation are aimed at creating more seamless services that span across multiple organizations and departments. The goal is to look at the wider picture, rather than looking at the challenges from the perspective of individual institutions.

To achieve that, there is an increased need for a common architecture and common components within the public sector. Digdir argues that the use of those is more user-friendly, makes inter-sector collaboration easier, and lowers the costs of production (“Tjenester på dine premisser”, 2021). While these statements seem to hold up, does this happen at the expense of individual needs?

As much as increased user-friendliness and more effective services are great for the majority of the population, they might do the exact opposite for some. People coming to Norway for the first time will have different experiences of public governance. Some cultures can put more emphasis on verbal communication, while others might not utilize the digital domain as much as Norway does. Many of those coming to Norway can therefore be skeptical of the digital public sector. Others can simply lack the knowledge of how to use it.

“NAV requires a lot of documents to be uploaded or scanned. I have worked with a lot of youth who don’t necessarily know what scanning is. ‘How does one do that?’; they ask.”

— Laila Restan, IMDi

The personal factor is often overlooked and is a key factor in building immigrants’ trust in the system and creating a feeling of belonging. Seeing somebody face-to-face and communicating with real people is much more powerful than filling out a pre-made form or talking to a half-functioning chatbot.

“Everybody, even those without prior experiences of the institutions will have certain angst about it, so it is especially important to make sure that the institutions gain immigrants’ trust. I think it is very important to build empathy. Explaining in person is much better at achieving that.”

— Hege Tørdal, IMDi

A gap between immigrants and institutions

When I talked with one minority advisor, a topic of a gap between immigrants and the institutions came up. Immigrants can often feel left alone on their own, overwhelmed by some aspects of the public sector. The language barrier is often a problem, and receiving or having to deliver documents that might be deciding their future can be quite stressful and scary.

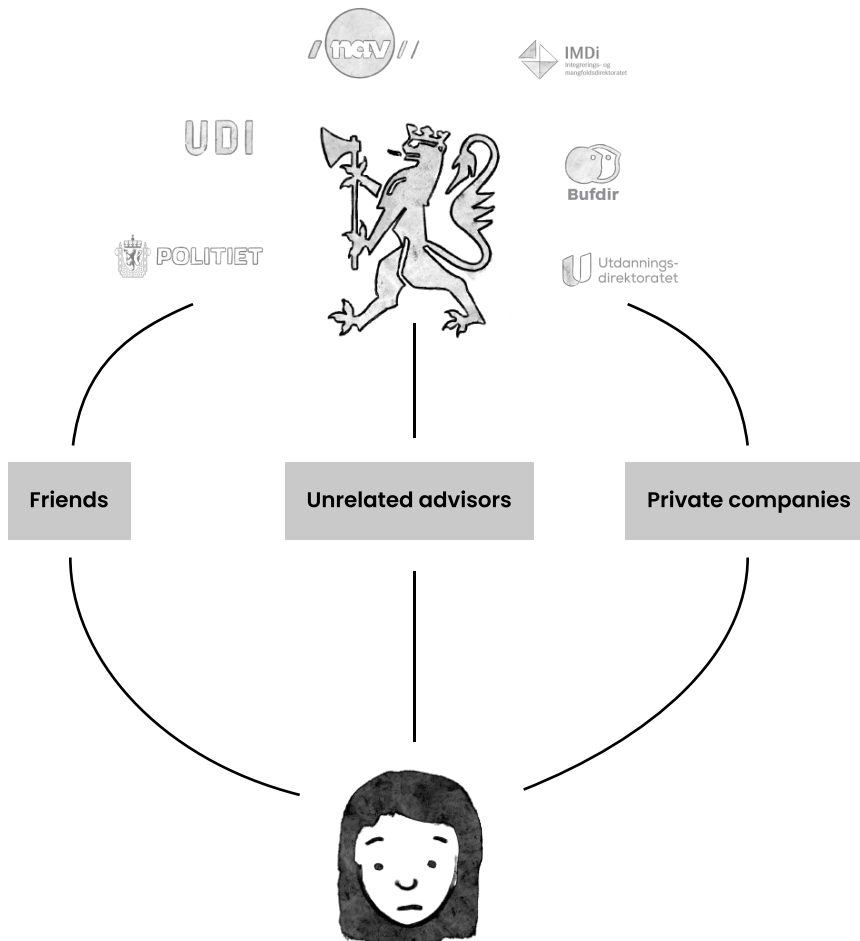
Therefore, immigrants often rely on friends, advisors, and officials that they know, or even, as one immigrant has told me, paid services to bridge this gap.

“There were times when immigrants have been planning to come to me with a bunch of letters they needed help with. I looked at the letters and then I had to explain that it’s nothing serious to worry about.”

— Hege Tørdal, IMDi

In a way, this is not surprising to me. Relying on friends and people that have previous experience is commonplace, at least in my community, and from anecdotal experience, it seems like a rather universal occurrence.

A service that is reliant on help from others might leave a picture of a system where you need to ask your way to the solution. This has a negative effect on the trust in the officials and might lead to individuals being skeptical and anxious every time they have to use public services. In addition, not everybody has access to friends with previous experiences, advisors, or expensive services. One should therefore be critical of the fact that there is a gap in the first place.



Trust reform

For the Norwegian model to properly function, trust, from the system and towards the system, is essential. Trust and scientific, unbiased approaches are proven to give good results in a democracy like Norway. Trust-based societies have less inequality, are better adapted to crises, and manage their resources better. In the last couple of years, however, trust and collectivism in Norway have been on the decline. There are many potential factors to blame, but to name a few, are; increasing standardization, rising inequality, focusing on quantitative goals, rather than qualitative, and blunt and “flat” budget cuts (Tillitsreform i offentlig sektor, 2022).

The government and welfare organizations have been growing aware of this, and to prevent and reverse these effects, a new “trust reform” is in the works. The reform is targeting better trust from the public sector towards its workers and the citizens, but also the citizens toward the public sector (Kommunal- og distriktsdepartementet, 2022). It aims to strengthen collectivistic principles by ensuring that services and institutions have room to adapt to their needs and circumstances, focusing on knowledge-based decisions from the institutions and their workers, and delegating more resources to the public sector.

As the reform is still in the works, there are no official resolutions or plans yet. However, there is some general agreement on some key aspects:

- Include unions and workers’ elected representatives in the process of developing new policies, services, and methods in relevant fields.
- Reduce the use of market mechanisms in the public sector (Arbeiderpartiet, n.d.).
- Make requiring documentation more difficult.
- Use digital technologies as tools for building trust, and heightening the competence of the public workers within the digital domain.

- Give more freedom for public workers to use their competency and compassion, rather than relying on strict guidelines.

The need for such a reform is both showing the fact that there are existing systemic barriers preventing social workers from using their compassion and also serves as proof that trust is a key element of the Norwegian democracy. As the reform is not yet finalized, we cannot judge the consequences and effects of it quite yet, however, for my project, it serves as a good pointer toward a potential area of exploration.

Empathy and compassion in the public sector

When talking about compassion in the public sector, it is easy to assume that the workers “don’t care” about the people they are working with. The people from the public sector, however, present a different story.

That the public sector and big organizations are hierarchical and difficult to change, is hardly a secret. The public workers I have talked to all mention the difficulty of developing services around strict rules. Guidelines and standards leave little room for people to exercise their compassion, and in turn, this might leave a picture of an institution that is cold and unwelcoming.

Putting emphasis on quantitative goals in a bid for greater efficiency and turnout, shifts the focus away from tailored services, to producing as much as possible. Flat cuts in the budgets, have also weakened the collective knowledge of many institutions, discarding valuable insights and experiences (Tillitsreform i offentlig sektor, 2022).

A lack of knowledge of the people you’re working with is also detrimental to the compassion one is able to provide. As much as one can wish to help, it can be damaging if you’re now aware of or don’t know the intricacies of different cultures.

Cultural competence

The minority advisors I have talked to stated lack of cultural competence as an important factor why institutions might be lagging in adapting their services to the immigrants’ needs.

Cultural competence is an understanding of an individual’s cultural background, challenges, nuances, strengths, and the values their background can bring. In the public institutions’ context, it is often about understanding peoples’ challenges and tailoring services to their needs.

Current efforts seem to gravitate towards special professions working with immigrants. A “minority advisor” profession is an example of that. However, in recent years there has been an increasing desire to include cultural competence in existing curriculums for public roles (Assidiq, 2016). A recommendation from the “City and Living Conditions Committee” says the following:

“Different welfare educations should provide solid knowledge about inter-sector cooperation and emphasize knowledge about relationships and diversity. It will be able to promote the recognition and implementation of strategies for more diverse and inclusive organizations and institutions... Through the education, future employees in the welfare services must be able to meet and communicate well with a diverse population with varied challenges and to work holistically and preventively in unfamiliar and unfamiliar situations and contexts.”

— City and Living Conditions Committee, 2020

Today's approach

As of today, however, cultural competence is often offered as an additional course some individuals can take after the bulk of their education. In educations where cultural competence is a topic, it can sometimes be overshadowed by topics that might be perceived as "more important" by the educators.

A report on cultural competence in Norwegian police education concludes that how much one learns about cultural competence, is related to how actively teachers engage in promoting diversity for its benefits, and creating room for ethnic and cultural differences (Bjørkelo et al, 2020).



Example of available educations from Oslo Met, PolitiHøgskolen, UiA and NTNU

Diversity management

Targeted recruitment and quotas are not enough. – One has to include and make space for the values a diverse population has to offer:

"...just employing people from other countries, doesn't mean the problem is solved. A social worker should know the cultural needs and struggles. Also, people with an existing experience in public work should be educated in these aspects."

— Laila Restan, IMDi

One of IMDi's key goals is to promote diversity-oriented management. It is a set of principles where organizational thinking about diversity starts at the management level, and not only HR making sure that an organization recruits a certain quote of a certain group of people (Brenna, 2021).

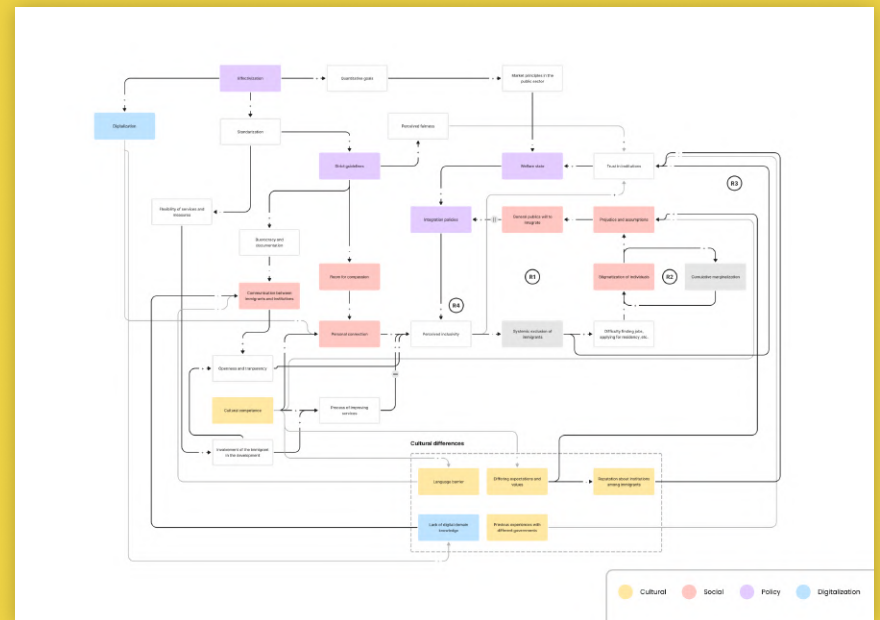
To promote diversity-oriented management, IMDi is offering grants for companies that want to increase their cultural competence and gives out a prize, the "Diversity prize" (Mangfoldsprisen), to companies that do especially well in utilizing diversity as a source of value, rather than a quota.

With this amount of desire to include cultural competence in the workforce, one can ask; where are the grants for public institutions, and why don't the institutions that utilize cultural competence especially well don't receive prizes for that?

Putting it all together

By zooming in, looking at the potentials, and trying to understand the micro- and macro-mechanisms at play, I discovered a set of challenges and opportunities that I identified as the roots and catalysts for my key learnings.

To summarize this process, and turn this into a systemic overview, I've utilized the method of causal loop mapping to understand the positive and negative drivers, as well as uncover reinforcing loops in the relations. Doing that gave me a better understanding of the underlying structures that I could tackle further down the road, and inspired me to pursue a more analytical direction going forwards, as well as utilize the same methods to convey my proposal later.



A bigger version of this map is attached in the appendix.

04

The public sector

Understanding public structures

To be prepared for thinking about changes in the public sector, we first have to get an overview of the mechanisms with which the public sector operates. In this chapter, I will describe some of the overarching mechanisms, and the consequences they might manifest as.

Public projects

The Norwegian public sector operates on a “downstream-like” model; where the initial inquiries for new measures tend to come up from the political leadership and move down the hierarchy of public instances. These inquiries tend to start with broad goals and get more specific as they go down.

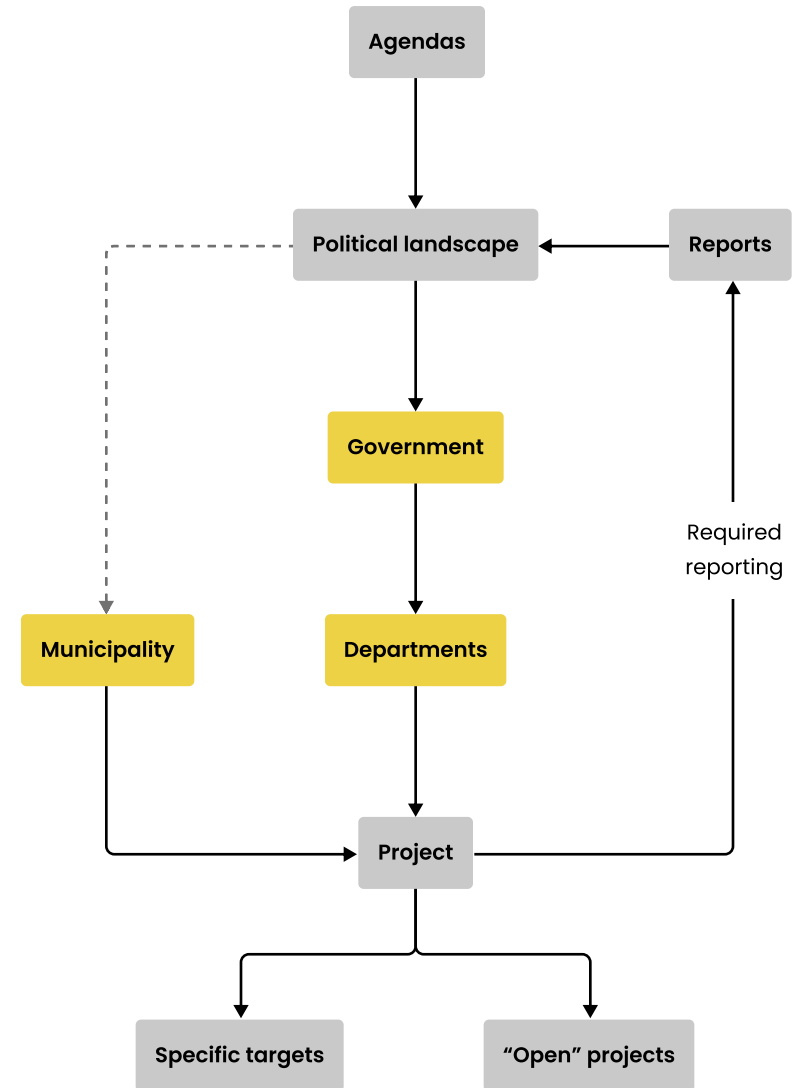
The initial goals are generally based on the “political landscape”, which is affected by the public expectations, and the ruling governments’ agendas. Political decisions can also be affected by findings and recommendations from surveys and reports from previous projects. From this “political landscape”, local forms of governance, like municipality councils or city councils can also establish their projects.

The projects can be separated into two types; those with specific targets in mind, and those that are more “open-ended”.

Specific projects often have a clear goal in mind and have a particular way of approaching the inquiry planned out beforehand. Those are more about actually executing the plans, rather than investigating the issues.

The “open” projects are often more open to interpretation. An instance might still present a goal, but how one arrives at a solution is more up to the team leading the project, and the project owner. Therefore, one can think of them as open for more exploration (I. Tollerud, personal communication, 2022, May 13).

Overview of the process of public project initiation



Public development

Most bigger public offices have teams responsible for project development, in addition to the frontline workers. These can apply for resources to develop a given project, according to the inquiries from other public instances.

The process of this public development starts with the initial inquiries being investigated by a preliminary project (forprosjekt). These are smaller projects, meant to “test the waters”, by determining whether the idea is viable, cost-effective, or meets other criteria (Rolstadås, 2018).

From the results of a preliminary project, the framing for the main project can be defined. At this point, many of the main targets and guidelines for the project are already decided.

When applying for a project, the teams have to describe how they are going to approach the project, how the resources are going to be distributed, and how they are going to report and evaluate the results.

Generally speaking, for the project to go further into the “real world”, or wider adoption, the results have to be positive, according to the reporting and evaluation. However, good results do not automatically lead to wider implementation. There are many factors that can be prohibitive from it, like poor prioritization, no capacity or resources for implementation, or poor cooperation between the sectors and instances.

If a project is to be continued further, the project leader and the project “owner” – the entity or person responsible for the project after its realization – plan the strategy for the continuation together, before the project leader moves on to another project (I. Tollerud, personal communication, 2022, May 13).

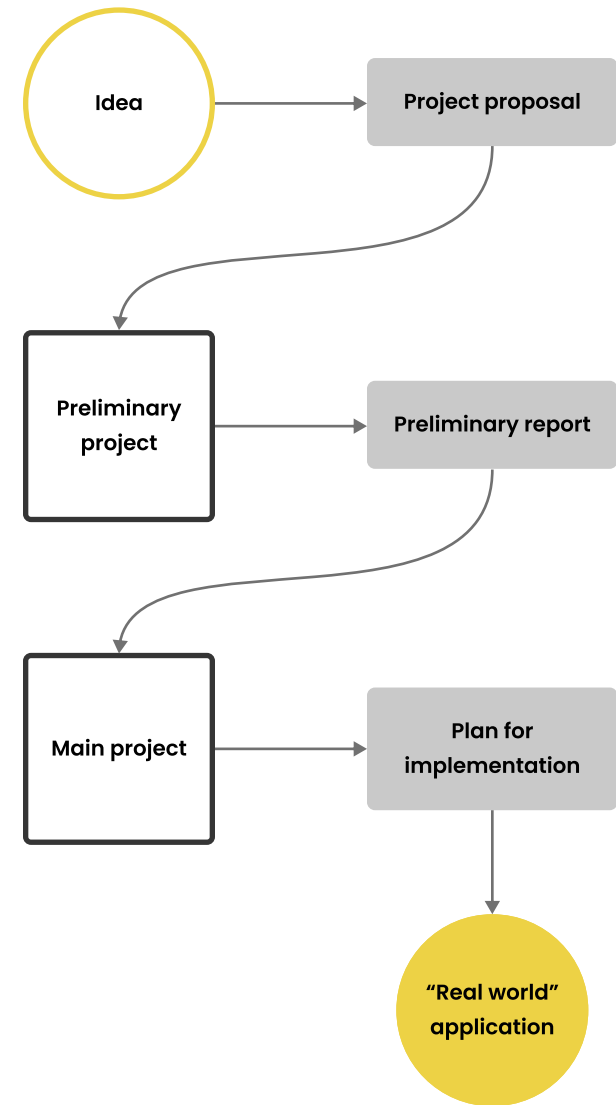


Diagram of project development, inspired by “Prosjektledelse”, kommunnett.no

Competency development

Competency building within the public sector today varies greatly from institution to institution. A great deal of learning is dependent on an individual worker's self-interest to learn. The institutions often accommodate conferences, yearly meetings, and events, but in the end, the workers are often reliant on engaging their colleagues in the projects they have been working on.

This itself is not an issue, and building on that self-interest is great, but the lack of a systematized approach to knowledge sharing is perhaps detrimental to creating better services. Currently, the most formal way to spread competency is through reporting, but the reports are often highly focused on specific areas of interest, which themselves are often created initial phases of a project when the outcomes might not be known yet. Surveys are perhaps more flexible, but still, they miss a lot of the nuances, by often revolving around quantitative ways to measure progress (I. Tollerud, personal communication, 2022, May 13).

A prevalent comment I've gotten used to hearing in the last couple of months was the ever-persistent lack of resources and time. This factor affects many parts of the public sector, including knowledge sharing;

"Everybody has been to a workshop, but you come back to your work and don't bring what you've learned forward because you don't have time."

— **Inga Tollerud, Project manager and special advisor in Oslo Municipality**

From personal observation and having talked to numerous people from the public sector during this diploma, in addition to experiencing some of them through the previously mentioned elective course Design in the public sector, it is easy to tell that a lot of them are passionate about what they are doing, and genuinely care a lot about making other peoples' lives better. The current system is not specially adapted to make space for that kind of compassion, which manifests itself in a very high turnover rate in the public sector.

Struggle for positive outcomes

As positive outcomes lead to projects possibly getting pushed forward into the wider implementation phase, there can be pressure to deliver projects that present positive outcomes. In reality, projects can fail, as much as they can be successful, but the pressure to deliver positive outcomes can bias people towards "wanting to believe" their projects have fewer flaws than they actually do.

This can manifest itself in only listening to positive feedback, and discarding the negative if it doesn't fit the narrative, or more innocently, not considering this feedback relevant as it was not considering "some factors" (I. Tollerud, personal communication, 2022, May 13).

Some might also not see the feedback as useful or necessary, often having the involvement of people in their processes just to "tick the checkboxes". Others might not involve the people due to the time constraints, or tight resources.

There is potentially as much value in learning from negative outcomes, as from positive ones, but ultimately, when there is pressure to deliver, one can be biased, knowingly or not, to produce results that are skewed in the positive direction. That being said, the importance of user involvement and learning has been greatly emphasized in recent years, according to Tollerud, and most people in the public sector genuinely want to create services that are better for the citizens and society.

Rigid project framing

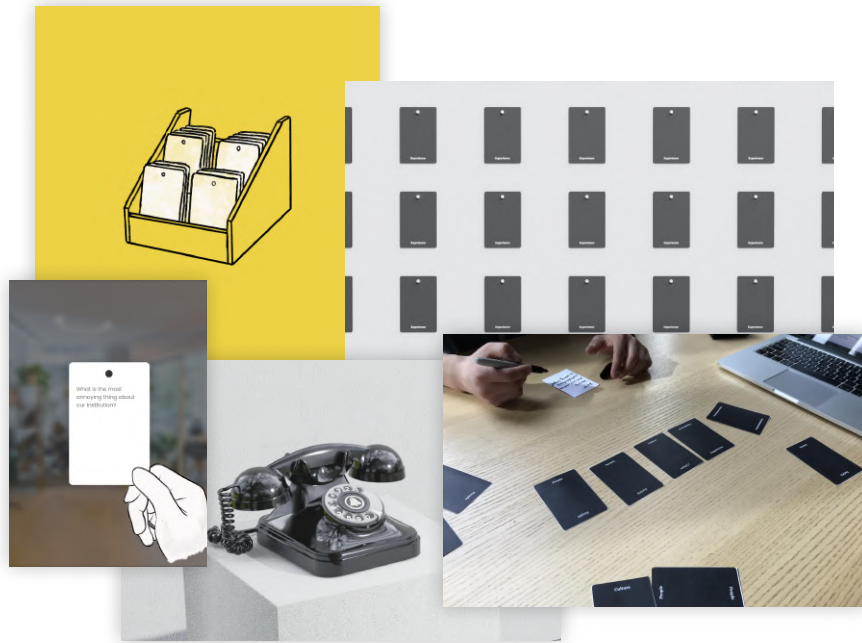
New and existing projects often have a rigid framing and an “assumed” end result. When jumping on a new project, the target has already been set at least partially, which can hamper the freedom to innovate. On the other hand, framing helps the public sector be more transparent and focused on specific goals. Succeeding despite the strict guidelines can feel more rewarding, and a source of pride for many.

Seemingly everybody you talk to in the public sector states that having to comply with guidelines and regulations is a limiting factor in how they work. As the preliminary projects can be based on acute, urgent issues, it is not unheard of for projects to jump straight to “how”, rather than “why”. The planning phase of projects could therefore be improved, and there is perhaps a need for more “open” projects (I. Tollerud, personal communication, 2022, May 13).

05

Looking beyond interventions

"How does the public sector ensure its services don't do harm and don't contribute to systemic exclusion?" is a question I have had in my mind throughout the duration of the diploma. My initial approach was to create a set of interventions aimed at informing and educating about immigrants' needs, to better take into account their challenges when developing new services. Having come up with a set of interventions, I've set out to analyze their consequences, both positive and negative.



Some of my previous proposals and approaches

Rescoping

What do my proposals do? How do these lead to less exclusion? What is the reach of these proposals? I've found a lot of answers, but I've also found a lot of counter-arguments. If I implement these interventions, what effect do they have on the wider system? Do they lead to more integration, at the cost of something else? How do I know that they don't harm in other ways?

Reflecting on these questions, I understood that the process I used to identify those consequences was perhaps more interesting than the interventions themselves. Therefore, I've decided to look at the question from a more systems-oriented perspective.

Defining a direction

The overarching goal of my proposal is to ask:

“How can we better analyze planned interventions, to make sure the interventions don’t cause harm in other ways?”

For the sake of the project, I specifically look at how public institutions can be wari-er of the systemic exclusion their otherwise well-intended services might contribute to. In this context, I define “systemic exclusion” as not catering to the immigrants’ needs, in a way that might hamper their integration into the Norwegian society.

As an example from my own experience, the Special Norwegian Tuition I had when I was younger was meant for me to learn the language and learn the culture, which both helped with my integration into the Norwegian society. However, as the goals solely looked at my proficiency in the language, the measure would not capture the problems that arise when a student is taken away from their peers. This could be a lack of social connection and relationship building, which paradoxically hinder integration, despite you knowing the culture and the language better.

To steer the project in a clearer direction, I have created a set of principles the proposal should follow. In the following section, I will present the principles and their purposes.

1. Embracing complexity

The public sector exists in a complex system, where laws, societal structures, cultural nuances, and people, interplay with one another. An initial approach might be to try to abstract the complexity, in a bid to make the system easier to understand. Doing that is unavoidable, to a certain degree, as it is practically impossible to have an absolute view of a whole system.

However, trying to tame these complex systems to fixed frames in which one can operate, can often hide the many nuances, and might hinder trying to uncover unforeseen consequences. Therefore, an open approach, where one is not trying to hide the ugly and complex nature of a problem, is a key principle going forward.

2. Uncovering unforeseen consequences

Being driven by requirements and specifications, it is easy to focus on wanting to achieve specific outcomes. This, however, fails to look at the bigger picture and the consequences of the choices made in the process. In the end, you might achieve the desired outcomes, and the project might be labeled as a success, but the people using your service will know better.

Therefore, a principle I want to bring forward is the principle of thinking critically about the ripple effects the interventions might cause on the broader system. By doing that, hopefully, you can spot friction points, and address them as early as possible.

3. Shifting goals

A key aspect of thinking critically about an intervention is shifting goals from being quantitative and specific to taking more holistic approaches. Reducing indicators of success to simple statistics and numbers is not providing a full picture, and while on paper, the service might be very helpful, it might lead to more systemic exclusion in other ways.

As a principle, I, therefore, want to encourage more holistic evaluation, rather than specific, one-sided goals.

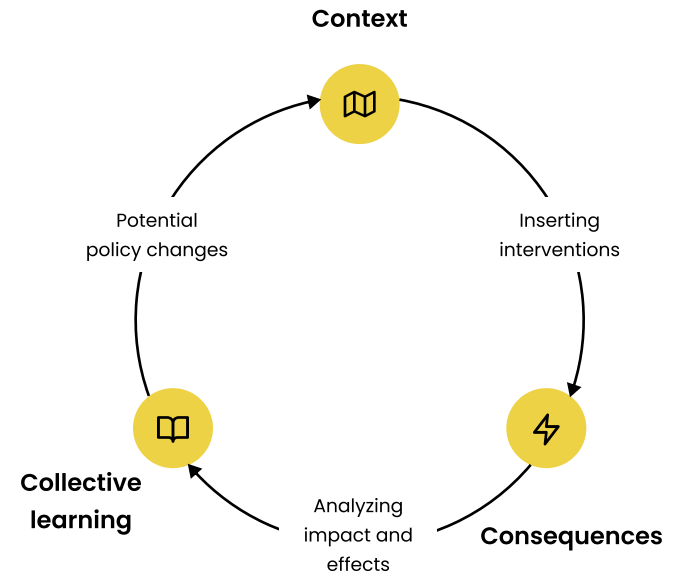
06

The vision

The vision

My proposal is a vision for a public sector that values inclusivity, self-reflection, and criticality. It is a public sector where the quality of the services is valued over the perceived effectiveness, and it is a sector that creates room for workers to show their care for individuals and make them feel safe. Ensuring that will lead to a public sector that is more mindful of the way it can harm and exclude individuals that are in vulnerable positions.

To achieve this, I present a framework, or, a set of principles, to guide this vision.



To achieve a systemic and reinforcing approach, the principles are presented in the form of a framework. The framework is structured as a loop revolving around three principles; the context, the consequences, and the learning. Each step in this loop is supposed to build and reinforce the next one.

Context

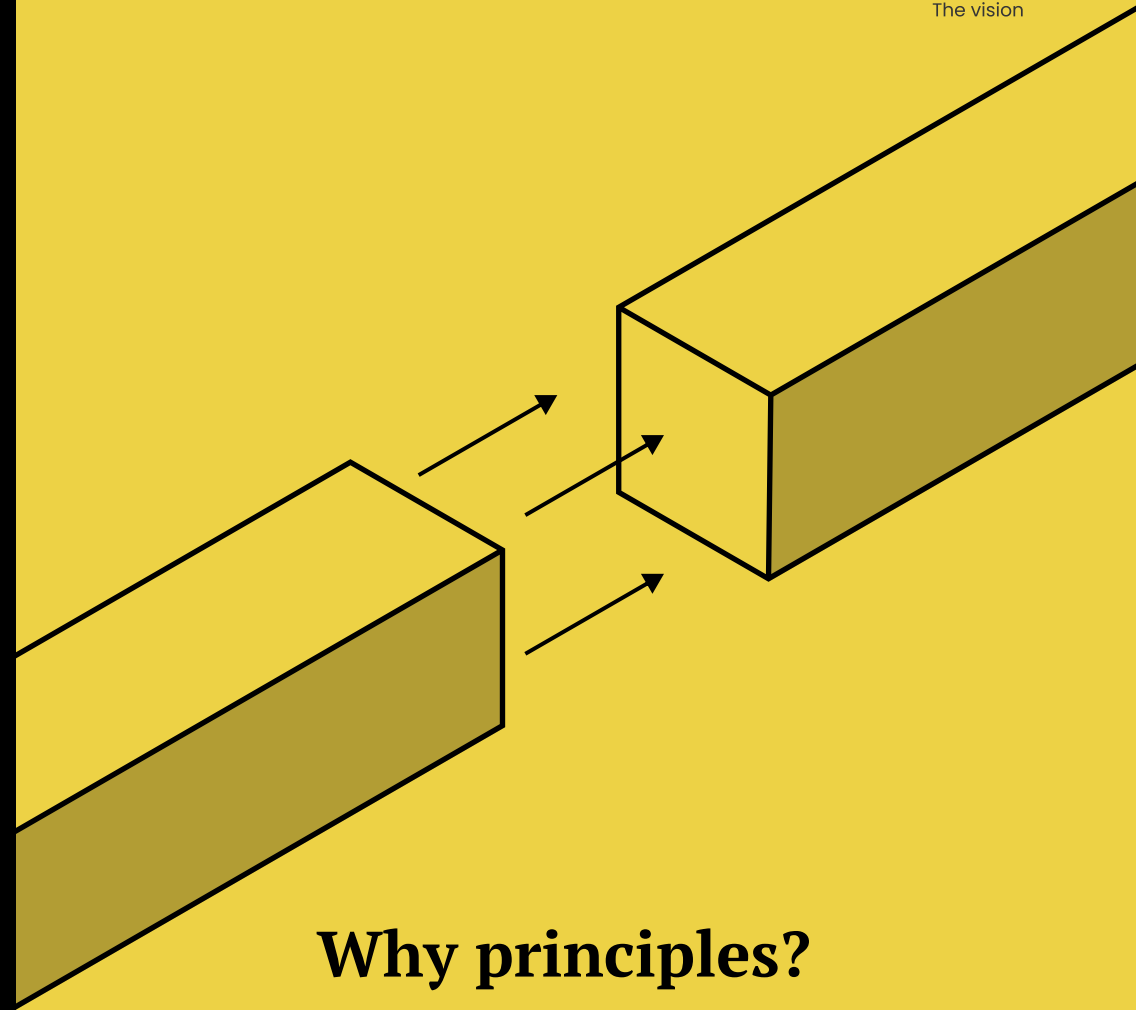
Understanding the underlying systemic structures and facilitating critical approaches towards future interventions.

Consequences

Identifying possible outcomes and consequences of future interventions, through knowledge of the system and people.

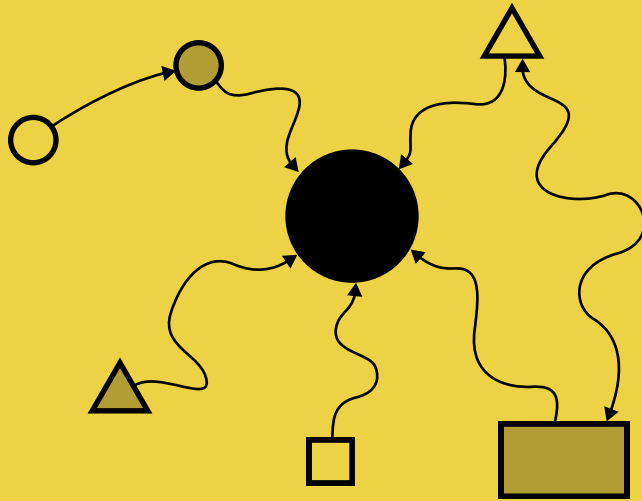
Collective learning

Challenging the way the public sector learns across the sectors, through the spread of experience-based knowledge and information.



Why principles?

Creating meaningful change must happen at a fundamental, mindset-oriented level. Achieving that without a clear context, however, can prove difficult. Principles, therefore, serve as a bridge between the abstract and the practical. They help align people in the same direction so that they build each other up with a common goal in mind. Creating strong principles can therefore help shape the foundation of a new public sector that values quality and inclusiveness, over quantity and indifference.



Context

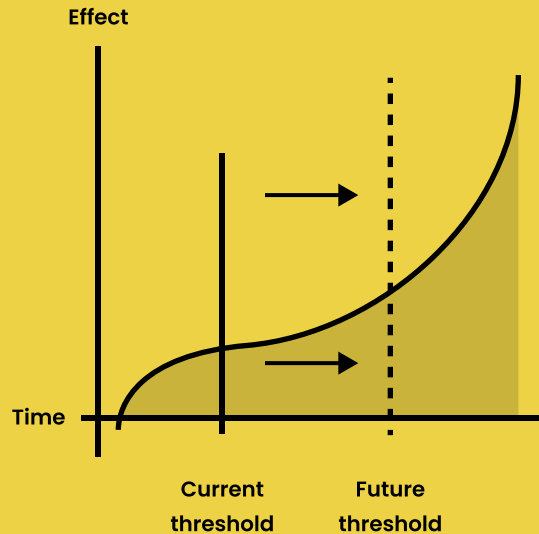
The first principle in the framework is getting to know the context. It is about identifying the underlying structures that might affect your intervention and trying to understand the relations between the different drivers, stakeholders, actions, and people that make up the bigger system. The goal is not to understand the system fully, as that is impossible, but rather to be aware that the interventions that are being made are a part of something bigger.

By acknowledging that, you're better able to see the causes of certain actions, and the mechanisms at play. Doing that will make catering to different scenarios easier, and it will facilitate the next step in the framework.

Considerations:

Current planning

Hastily planned projects that are an answer to an urgent issue lead to less considerate interventions. Urgent projects often cut corners on the planning phase, and jump straight into the design of the solution. This can be due to the lack of perceived benefits of good planning, not having an adequate amount of time for planning or a lack of tools necessary to do the thorough groundwork. Not seeing the value of good preparation might be a hindering factor, and there will be a need for a cultural change in how we are looking at project planning.



Effectivization

Current effectivization efforts can be detrimental to this principle. As there is a strong push towards quick and more effective services, the process of taking a step back and analyzing the context can for some seem slow and unnecessary. The public sector will therefore have to be more accepting of the fact that the initial gains will be smaller, and the process will seem slower than what it is used to. This is perhaps the biggest hurdle to overcome, but adopting a mindset of long-term projects can come a long way.

The hope is that as these processes are more widely adopted, this approach becomes standard practice.

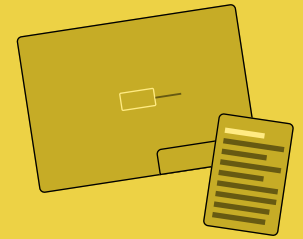
Building on the desire to improve

As the public and social structures become more complex and intertwined, the need for more reflexive and analytical approaches will be increasingly important. Fortunately, the Norwegian public sector does generally see the value of these approaches. As one public worker has told me; in the last 10 years the public sector has come a long way in trying to build competence, and the value of service designers, design researchers, and social anthropologists have been acknowledged. Therefore, I see this as a driving force that we can take advantage of.

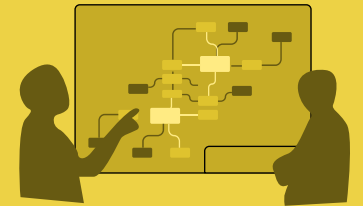
How do we achieve it?

As a practical approach to this principle, we can imagine the public sector utilizing even more systemic and analytical principles, approaches, and tools in the planning phase of the interventions. However, there won't always be a designer available to help, but by ensuring that the public developers have the right tools and that these tools show the benefits of using them, we can make this systemic mindset a part of their processes.

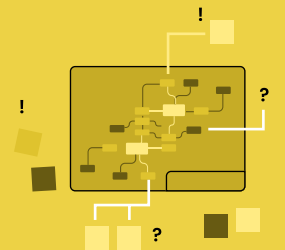
As an example, we could imagine a set of tools, guides, and templates for mapping the systemic structures surrounding the proposed interventions. The tools would explain the mapping process, and the concept of relations, drivers, and stakeholders.

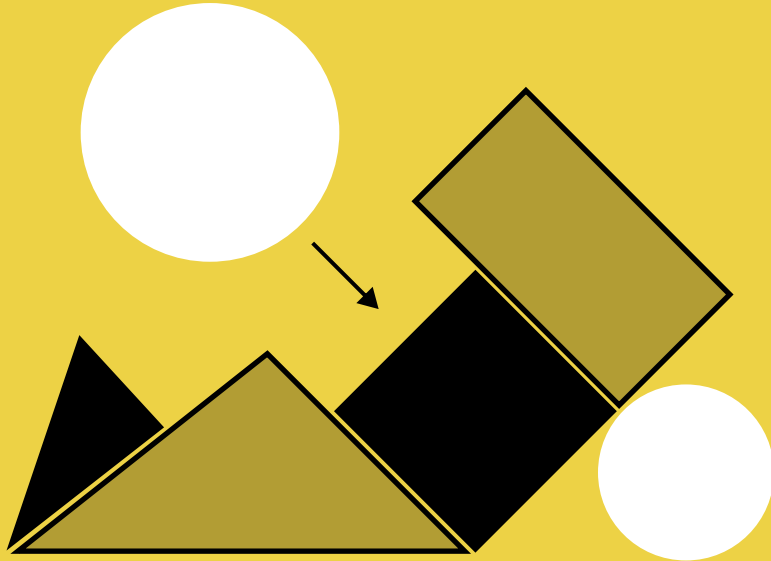


The mapping would happen collaboratively with the rest of the team, and the goal would be to build on the collective experiences and knowledge. As the mapping progresses, the team would gain an understanding of the underlying structures, pointing towards what areas to look at, and which people to speak to.



Taking this approach would facilitate for better understanding of the consequences and possible outcomes of your interventions in the next step of the framework.





Consequences

Identifying the consequences and possible outcomes of proposed interventions is the second step in the framework. It happens by thinking critically about the proposed interventions and applying a speculative approach to your intervention, as well as ensuring that immigrants are involved in the process of planning and evaluating the intervention.

Well thought out services that are mindful of their outcomes beyond the simple and obvious evaluation criteria, ensure that they limit how they contribute to systemic exclusion and have systems in place to correct their actions when needed. The goal is not to create bulletproof services, but rather to be aware of the ways they can harm.

Considerations:

Measuring the unmeasurable

As evaluation is a key part of the public project development, public services and measures are often built around what is easily measurable, rather than what is possible to achieve. As such, the right solutions can be lost in the process or brushed aside. Evaluating given narrow criteria that are often set before the project began can also give a false sense of success, and in reality, the service might harm in ways not monitored by the reports or the service. Therefore, as you discover possible outcomes, desirable or undesirable, you're better equipped to know where and how to measure.

Involving people

Finding hidden outcomes and possible consequences is dependent on involving immigrants and people with experiences relevant to the area you're working with. There are, however, some people that don't necessarily see involving potential users as necessary or useful, or involve people in the process just to "tick a checkbox". Therefore, to succeed with this principle, building an understanding of the importance of real user involvement will be necessary.

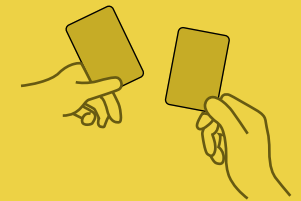
Taking advantage of compassion

A major driver of this principle is the public worker's genuine will to help other people, and improve their services. People in the public sector are eager to learn, and building on that, while giving more room for compassion is, therefore, the key to the success of this principle.

How do we achieve it?

To better understand the potential outcomes and consequences, I propose a speculative and critical approach. With a set of playing cards containing questions and scenarios, one can ask themselves whether they have thought about certain situations where the service they are developing might contribute to systemic exclusion.

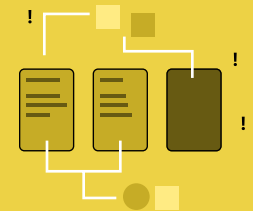
The deck is to be used in collaboration with immigrants and other people with relevant knowledge or experiences. Including people that are going to use your services can help you gather knowledge about the hidden aspects and shortfalls of current and planned services.

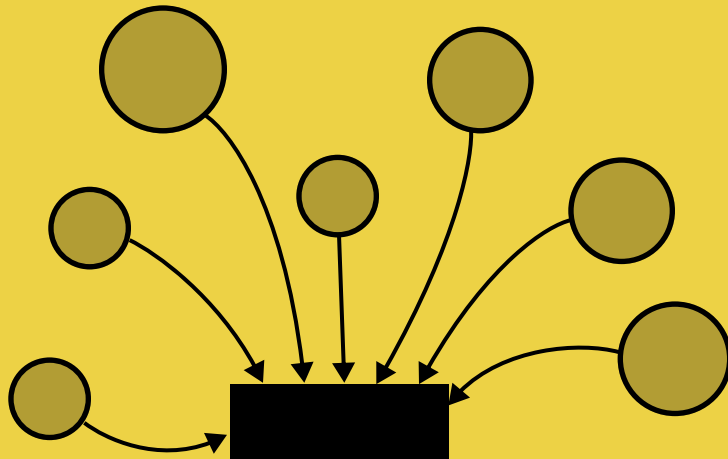


The deck contains scenarios, people, and challenges that can be applied to the planned intervention. By applying the scenarios, you can better test if your service can withstand the challenges it is presented with.



Testing and discussing the scenarios with the people that are a part of the service can help you find undesirable and desirable consequences, allowing you to address the negative outcomes, and build on the positive ones.





Collective learning

Knowledge and experience gained during the public processes should be captured and spread throughout the public sector. Competency should be spread between the sectors and organizations, and different groups should work together to build a better understanding of the mechanisms and processes that surround them.

People should collaborate, rather than compete, and undesirable outcomes should not be a source of shame, but rather learned from and shared with the rest of the public sector.

Collective learning should be a priority in the public sector; a new project or a service might fail, but the experiences and knowledge should still be there. This learning should be freely available to everyone, both for transparency and ease of access.

Considerations:

Rigid evaluation

Today's evaluation happens linearly and within fixed criteria. Reporting is the most common way of spreading learning, but its fixed framing might be prohibitive from applying the knowledge to "real world" applications. A rigid evaluation is an attempt at ensuring that the projects are followed through as objectively as possible, however, its lack of flexibility might pose a hurdle for the adoption of a more collective and experience-based system of learning.

Built on the same knowledge

As the public sector and the government pushes for services to be experienced as coherent and consistent with each other, as well as them being built on a shared foundation and architecture, it only makes sense to develop public services on the common knowledge as well. Utilizing this will to build on the same foundations is therefore a positive driver toward the idea of collective learning.

Aligned goals

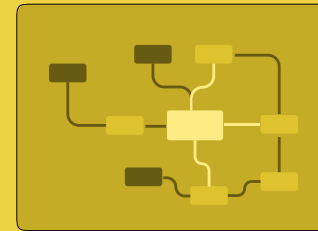
Competition between sectors and organizations can be both positive and detrimental to the spread of knowledge. It is therefore important that the public sector as a whole is aligned towards the direction of collective learning. It must see the benefits of cooperation, and must actively seek ways in which it can improve.

Negative outcomes

A culture where only the positive outcomes are shown and highlighted might lead to direct or indirect pressure on service developers to create successful services. This in turn can lead to a bias towards only considering positive feedback (confirmation bias). Negative outcomes should therefore be praised if the developers were able to learn from them.

Risk of over-dependence

A risk with a collective set of information and knowledge is people's over-dependence on it. This can lead to people blindly applying knowledge from cases that might not suit their circumstances and can disincentive them from trying to understand their context and issues. It might lead to services that are less adapted to the people's needs, and steps along the way being skipped. It is therefore important that this collective approach is not framed as a fit-all solution, but rather as a guide or a starting point in the process. Utilizing it as that will facilitate a quicker and more insightful context analysis process.



Analysis, experiences, tools, and learnings gathered during the project development are compressed into a case study.



The case study is uploaded on the platform, where it is available to the public sector workers and the general public.



People might relate to the experiences and find them useful, while others might disagree. The entry on the platform invites the discussion and exchange of experiences. As more experiences are shared, a fuller and richer picture is created.

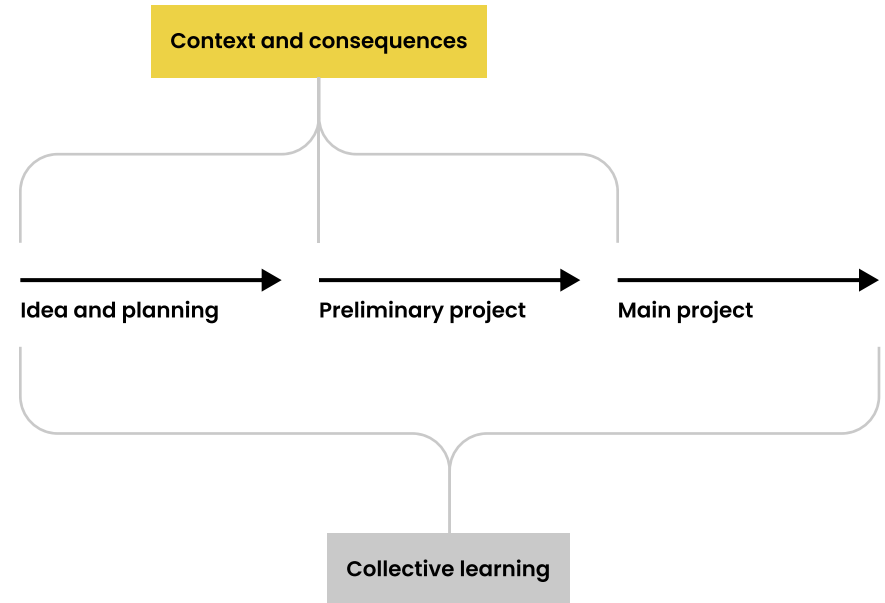
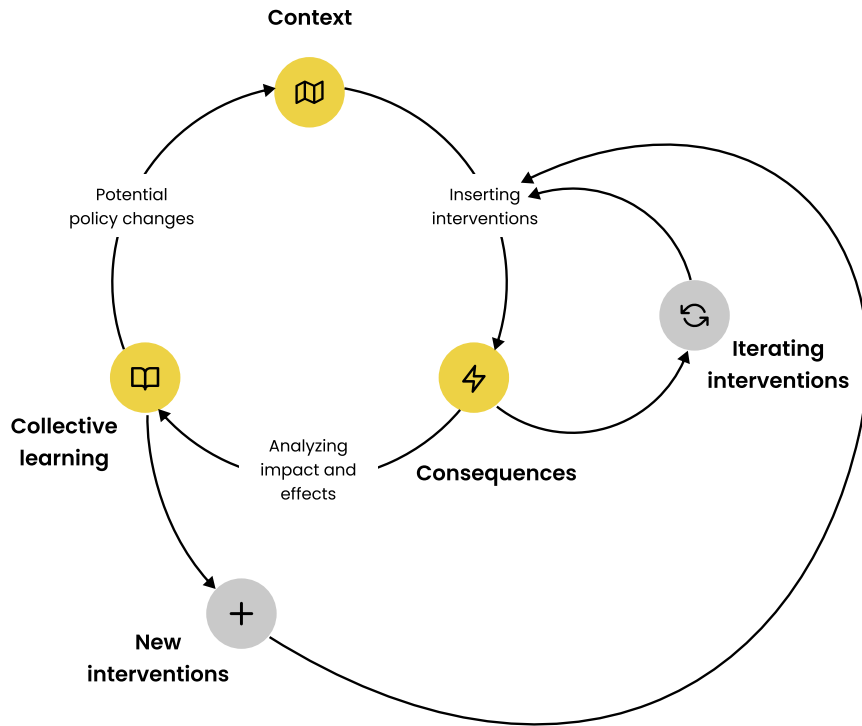


The knowledge shared affects how people approach their processes, and over time the collective knowledge has a bigger change on the system.

Building on this knowledge might prepare for a deeper analysis of the context in the first step.

How do we achieve it?

A practical approach for this step would be to establish a platform for gathering the knowledge and experiences gained during project development. The knowledge would be shared publicly, and under the already existing Norwegian License for Open Government Data. It could be incorporated into existing solutions or exist as a separate one, but the premise, either way, is to include knowledge in the form of case studies and experiences in a common platform for the whole public sector.



Iterations and new interventions

Knowing the desirable and undesirable consequences can facilitate a better process of iteration, making it possible to address the unwanted outcomes, and build on the desired ones. Similarly, new knowledge can also lead to new ideas for interventions, and make people realize new ways of thinking about the problem. The framework's repeating nature facilitates it along the way, and iteration is encouraged at each step.

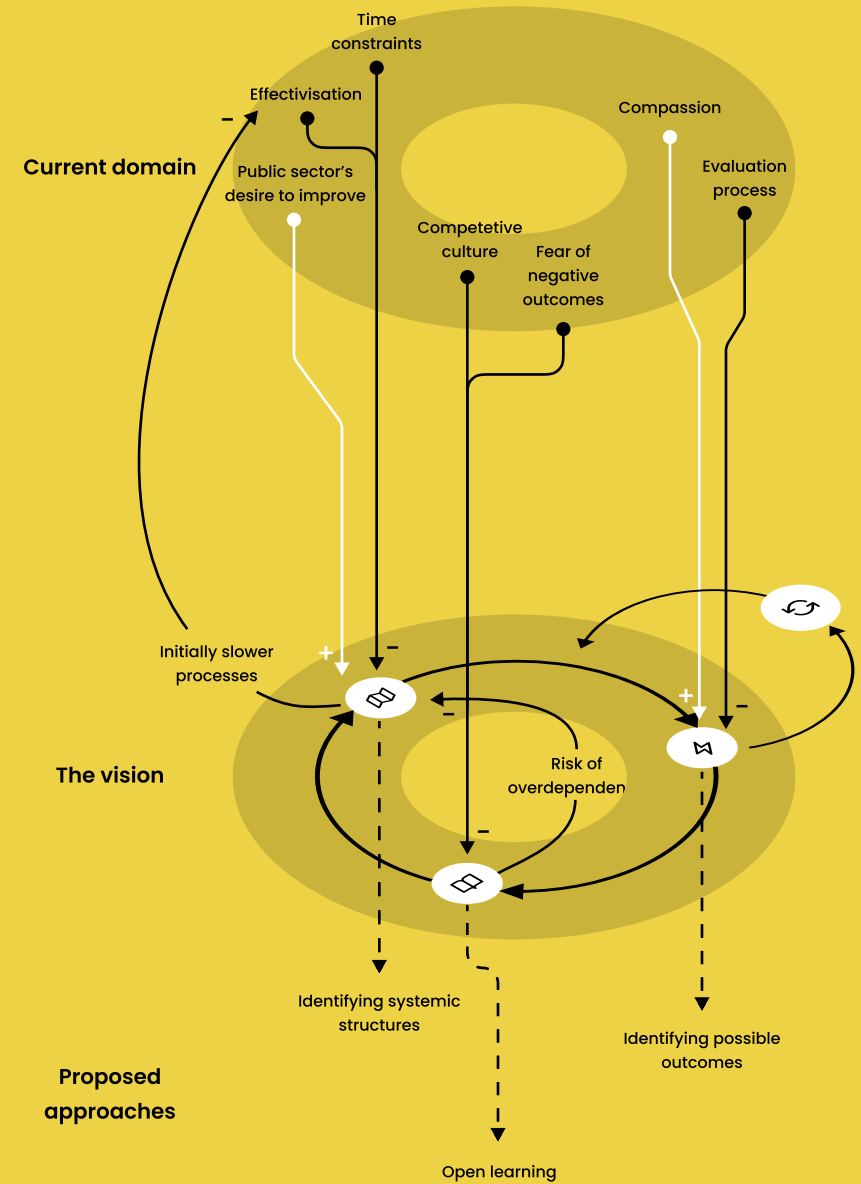
The initial two steps of the framework are to be used in the early stages of planning for both the preliminary and main projects, as well as under the evaluation process of the project.

The collective learning, though made specifically for the framework, is meant to be used throughout the whole duration of the project, and beyond.

The transition

The three steps in the framework support each other along the way. Strengthening one principle will reinforce the next one. The vision is supposed to exist in the form of a transformation from the current status and processes, to a public sector based on the new values and principles. To accommodate that, the public sector will have to overcome the obstacles and build on the positives I have mentioned along with each principle.

I have summarized this vision, along with the factors and considerations in a simple overview of the relations.



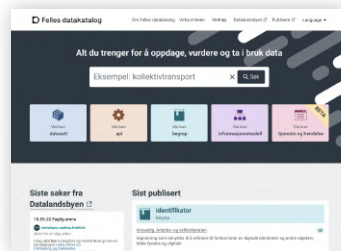
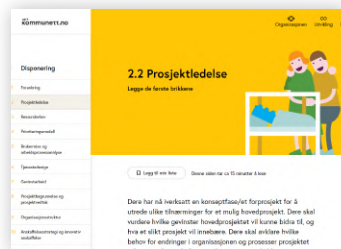
The process

The proposal is based on the research I have done for this project, and even more so on the talks, I have had with people working in the public sector, and their ideas of what could be done better.

The framework is also based on current goals and drivers in the public sector; building competency and common foundations for services are just some of them. Some of the specific examples of how these principles can be implemented are inspired by existing solutions.

For the learning, it is Kommunett's guidelines for the digital transformation, or the already existing public data databases (Digitaliseringsdirektoratet, 2022) and the Norwegian License for Open Government Data. Some of the tools are inspired or based on existing systems-oriented methods, like causal loop mapping and AT-ONE cards (Clatworthy, 2010).

To validate the proposal, I have presented it to people in the public sector. The general feedback was that the problems I presented were relatable. The importance of a shift in the mindset is necessary, and this approach was well received and appreciated, although, in the last 10 years, there has been a big shift in the mindsets for the better. I argue that this concept can build on this fact, and invite further discussion.



kommunett.no and "Felles datakatalog" – Some of the inspiration for the practical examples of the principles

Conclusion

I have proposed a set of principles formed as a framework for ensuring the public sector is mindful and aware of the consequences its services might bring. By using principles, I hope to bridge the gap between the mindset-oriented shift that is needed to happen, and the practical and tangible approach the public sector is used to.

Although what I present is a proposal for how the public sector could work in the future, it is only one way of achieving a public sector that is aware of systemic exclusion. This interpretation is based on my research, findings, and to a degree on my assumptions. That being said, when shown to people that are familiar with the public sector, it seemed possible that this could be one approach.

Reflections

Value for the immigrants

For the immigrants, the biggest value of my proposal is the feeling of belonging in a system that is theirs, as much as others. By ensuring critical approaches, that question our assumptions, unintended biases, and engrained practices, we create a system that is more inclusive and open for everybody, not only the immigrants.

Value for the public sector

For the public sector, the value of my proposal is multidimensional; For the public workers, it hopefully creates more room for compassion and room for using their knowledge and experience. For the general public, it ensures safer and more thought-out services and measures, while collective learning can lead to more effective processes.

Implications for the broader system

Although this project focuses on immigrants, their needs, and their challenges, the learnings taken from the projects can hopefully be applied to the bigger system. As the core of the project is making institutions create more room for compassion and understanding, the principles can be adapted to the wider population. Starting with immigrants can be catalysts for a bigger change that can spread throughout the system.

Why a critical approach?

I have chosen to take a critical and somewhat strategic approach to the proposal. Thinking critically and challenging the status quo serves as a starter for a discussion. During the interviews with all people, be it the immigrants, or the public workers, a discussion always arose about the topics I've mentioned in this diploma. People are eager to talk about issues they care about, be it based on political reasons, or simply to help others. By inviting to a discussion, I want to capture that energy and hopefully direct it in the right place.

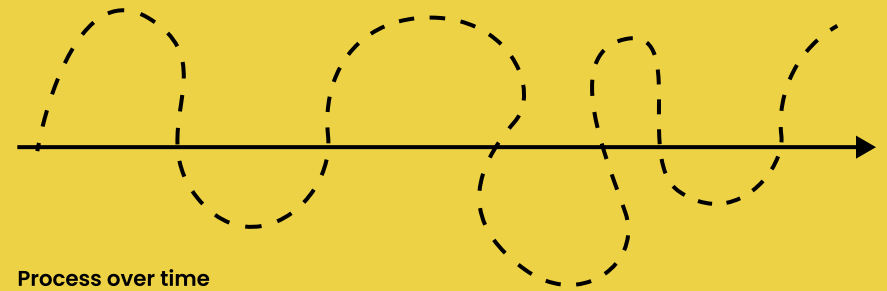
There is no such thing as “truth”

To tell that my research is absolute and a perfect representation of the system would be wrong. In a complex system like the public sector, no models are ever correct, and neither can they be correct. Being aware of this invites critical thinking, but also motivates you to never stop asking and investigating. Gard Høibjerg, a design researcher and social anthropologist at NAV has told me about a popular saying in the social anthropologist circle:

“There is no such thing as truth in researching, but the research you do is the closest representation of the truth.”

Personal reflections

My diploma process and experiences have been chaotic and turbulent. In a way, it's fitting, as the systems and structures I've tackled in this project could in many ways be described in the same way. Trying to tame complex concepts is difficult, and so is figuring out if you should tame them in the first place.



Process over time

I've gained an appreciation for the systemic approach and learned a lot about the systemic approaches, critical thinking, and the theoretical approach. Learning about public structures and how the public sector works, has given me a new understanding of the mechanisms and procedures that are involved.

Looking at the topic of marginalization and immigrants has given me a bigger understanding of the underlying issues and challenges related to immigration, but has also shown me the vast opportunities lying ahead. I wholeheartedly think it is a topic worth investigating further, as well as it being a topic that should be more prevalent in the public discourses. Everybody deserves to be heard, and everybody deserves to feel like they belong.

Thank you

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To the people working in the public sector that have helped me understand the public sector and its processes and inner workings.

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