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1. Abstract

Visualising the Invisible is a project whose final materialization reflects upon our connection with information and how it can immediately affect the way we view the world beyond and around us.

Throughout my research and the development of this project, several “meta-words” relevant to this project had to be considered: respect, dignity, integrity and information accuracy, thus redefining a challenge within a challenge and, more concretely, the need to contemplate upon a topic of our time that happens to influence politics and society alike, locally, but with a global effect and long term impact.

With this project, the role of the visual communicator is highlighted in a different way. His or her role becomes an agent in itself, a curator of information, a journalist, an invisible activist. The role of the designer and the purpose of design as it is commercially perceived is questioned, challenged and confronted.

2. Introduction and project background

The world is made of an incredible plurality of ways of being, built on different ways of thinking, ways of seeing and ways of doing. Each of these “ways of...” is motivated by such a complex amount of factors ranging from religion, class, skin colour, social, historical and political backgrounds, etc. that it would be unimaginable for us to fully understand their influence on a particular culture or society as a whole.

For instance, coming from a country which existed under a dictatorship for almost 50 years, I have seen how that has affected the Portuguese behavior and ways of being and seeing life – this is in many ways, something extremely difficult to explain. The aftermath of that dictatorship is as confusing as it is polar. The democratization of information has provided my generation with an understanding of the world completely different from the one my parents have. The generational gap has widened and the conversation about this matter simply doesn't exist. This practice of no-dialogue highlights how complex it can even for a single society to define itself within its own territory. The residual identity of a nation is then created by those who migrate abroad and carry with themselves the sense of being Portuguese and the Portuguese culture. Media portrayals and even tourism bring a conception of the “native” people that can be close to, but does not really coincide with their “authentic” image. Ironically, even this residual image is a privilege, as many countries that do not adhere to European/Western are considered to be “third-world” or Least Developed Countries, thus creating an image in our mind that distorts our knowledge of something we don't even fully understand by default.

What is then the image we have of others? Of the others who are mediatized negatively with little chance of defending themselves? From the beginning of my studies at Konstfack I have been deeply interested in the topic of migration and fascinated by the idea of “free movement” – a concept that in my view, is almost exclusively attached to a Western status and a Western point of view, for Western people. From this idea,
stems several concepts that interest me: uprooting, resettlement, integration, assimilation, refuge and survival. These topics interest me not only because I am a migrant myself, living, studying and working in a different country for almost 3 years now, but also because through this experience I am forced to come to terms with my own privilege that allows me to practice this “free movement” almost without considering what it would be like not being able to do so. A white, middle-class European male coming from a country belonging to the European Union is, especially in the world today, a matter of status.

I then believe that with this understanding comes a different responsibility towards others who can’t practice this movement in the way we’re used to. For me, it became important to understand that my position as an economic migrant is the polar opposition of a lot of people who need to practice migration as a matter of survival. For my project, I found it important to then reflect and investigate on how to represent migration as a matter of survival by developing sculptural and spatial infographics that together with a physical space create a unique bodily experience only definable by the viewer. With this experience — and the opportunity the viewer has to explore/enter the space — I am also highlighting how our own choice to participate or not, in that moment, is also a byproduct of our privilege, something many don’t have the luxury of.

3. Visualising the Invisible

The space was especially designed to force the viewer to create an unexpected relationship with it. Through a dark and tight corridor, a narrow passage emerges, a passage the visitor has to squeeze through in order to arrive to a barely illuminated space. The feeling of anxiety, fear and uncertainty is very quick to set in, thus unsettling the visitor. The water on the floor creates an unexpected tension and intrigue reflecting the objects (3 podiums of different heights) that stand still at the center of the room and the writings on the wall. In this dark room, the only visible things are the texts written on the walls and other informative elements that pertain to each podium in UV sensitive white ink. To illuminate the room, 2 UV lights stand at each corner.

In sum, Visualizing the Invisible is a work that confronts an ongoing reality: the migration to Europe caused by civil unrest, extreme poverty and violence. This is a human catastrophe with immediate social and political backlashes that need to be addressed for the sake of those seeking refuge and safety.

As such, to create both an emotional and intellectual understanding of the statistics, facts and false narratives surrounding this event, I developed new methods for dealing with infographics by materializing current events of migration and its social and political consequences into physical objects.

In this project the facts speak higher than the opinions and demonstrate how misconceptions and prejudices can shape the way we think and feel, thus cementing the concept that understanding and knowing the facts can prevent, especially in our current political environment, populist and right-wing movements from gaining momentum when using poisonous narratives that twist our perception of truth.
Refugees in the World: Residents of Developing Countries.
The majority of migrants traveling the Trans-Saharan route self-report however, that Algeria and Libya are their final destinations. In comparison, only 20% to 35% of migrants initially report that they intend to travel on to Europe.
The State is always involved in refugee crisis, either directly by violating Human rights or indirectly by not being able to protect its citizens.

FRONTEX, the coast guard agency, operates the most
The numbers of arrivals to Europe fell during 2016 due to the EU-Turkey deal set in March that year, meaning Turkey would stop migrants from reaching Europe while receiving financial assistance. However, reports from Amnesty International and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights have documented the death of 163 civilians, including 34 children and 15 women, killed during attempts to cross into the Turkish lands since 2016 until today.
4. Infographics

“It all starts with a journalistic idea – data and facts are filtered analytically and interpreted. We translate this interpretation into a visual language which tells the reader a story.”

Francesco Franchi in *Novum Graphics Magazine*, 2013

“Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication.”

Marshall McLuhan

Information Graphics was born out of the necessity of representing complex ideas visually in a simplified way.

Having had its boom not so long ago, we have grown increasingly accustomed to looking at infographics in newspapers, reports, online, motion graphics, on walls... in sum, in every medium available. We may not know the name of this practice but it has been helping us to understand some of the most important events that happen around us locally or worldwide, personally or collectively; visually. Their usefulness don’t come only from rethinking the story and presenting it in a more accessible way, they are useful also because they quickly present clear graphics of a certain/ specific situation(s), practically narrating stories on their own with virtually no need of text or any other kind of aid. In reality, even cave wall paintings from more than 30 000 years ago can be considered infographics – an iconographic visual narrative of an event, situation or just a way of storytelling.

Throughout my bachelor course in graphic design, we were never encouraged to think of design as a political tool — we’d have to somehow manage to find that language on our own and away from the commercial briefings we were given. I decided to then focus on infographics. Here I thought I’d find the tools to enhance and highlight how design can be political, capturing meaningful and current events, retelling the stories of our world. Thus in my project, I also wanted to question the role of infographics by subverting its inherently neutral stance of “just” telling a story by scrapping off its layer of apparent invisibility, or as something that only works as a medium between the story the author is trying to tell and the reader, and reshaping its surface to something tangible. This was then attained by the previously mentioned creation of a space where 3 podiums rest, each containing an object that narrates a story on its own and when combined together with the space and the writings on the wall, become part of a bigger narrative.

During this project there has always been a dominant question laying on the surface of its development: how can the reader trust the information he/ she reads? How can we believe these are facts and not personal interpretations of information? While the answers to this may be many and take different shapes I do think that there is an interesting thread that has more relevance than others. When we for instance
see numbers, there is this almost unconscious feeling that tells us they are more serious, more accurate, more real, perhaps because we know they belong to the realm of Science, an area that searches for the Reason within things. This can then be seen as the direct opposition of the Word, which is the product of someone who thinks, feels and acts and, although this “someone” can be led by reason, our instinct may tell us that since the word is human, it can also be flawed. All this boils down to, in my opinion, something as “simple” as Reason vs. Emotion, a long-age dichotomy that still manages to polarize opinions, arguments and politics today. How do we then create trust? Trust that the information is correct, that the story is real, that the topic as it is, does have the repercussions I explore? In a way, I do believe that aesthetics (however subjective and relative) has always played a major role in the creation of trust in the information.

During my first year at Konstfack and while researching the way infographics are created and designed, and throughout my work practice in a studio dedicated to the development of these back in 2012, I came to quickly realize that the audience creates a much stronger bond with something that is “beautifully” designed, rather than something which can be purely informative but have none or little “appealing to the eye” factor. In this sense, their appeal factor is something that has greatly help cement their reputation and credibility. The better they look, the more credible they seem to be and sometimes their overall design, way of being composed and aesthetics take more time in imagining than the actual design of the infographic. In a way, there is this kind of magical visual appeal about these creations, they can draw us in because of their complexity aspect but the problematic is painstakingly clear: is this content relevant and correct? Is this infographic designed in such a way as to allow the reader to read it accurately? And how often do we go beyond the beauty of the object to actually pay attention to what that message is? In my project, I took these considerations in mind by delegating aesthetics onto a second plan, while focusing on the information I wanted to communicate as best as I could, on the space I had been given and constructed.

Just like a writer should know how to engage his or her reader, the creator of the infographic should also be sensitive to a few things: the message (data information), the medium, and the viewer. For both viewer and designer to critically analyze what is considered veracity of facts and/or the numbers presented in an infographic, both should maybe start by questioning the sources, their intentions and the actual data. Media has been playing a major role in disseminating infographics and has been using them to translate news segments quickly and effectively and while Information Graphics can empower a story, it can also take away that same power along with its credibility, particularly if wrong data is used or if the message is incomprehensible or incoherent.

Being critical and challenging what we see, read or hear is thus, a necessary practice within any visual communication area and infographics is, for many reasons, no exception and while I do believe this practice can have a tremendous effect on the reader, I also feel like there is a lot of potential that can be extracted from it and that could theoretically deliver a bigger and wider impact.
5. Research

Due to the complexity of this project, the actual development of the infographic objects and the breaking down of the statistics started only quite late. For me, it was important to be absolutely sure about the story I was about to tell and in which way and order I should tell it.

It was of the utmost importance to take a step back, reanalyze the material I had previously gathered and understand where I could go from that point, i.e.: if I needed more material and what would that be, what kind of information was important to communicate, why and with what objective, etc. It was also important to define from the beginning my role within this project. I hadn’t met a person who had gone through the experience of migrating in order to ensure his or her survival so I had to understand that my part in all this was, in a way, more connected to a journalistic practice of retelling a story through facts and numbers, thus providing the necessary weapons for the viewers to combat ignorance through knowledge and to understand a situation of which its context is poorly explained.

I then extracted my material from several sources: ONG reports, EU reports, newspapers and documentaries about migration explaining the reasons why people had to flee, the perils of the journeys, the crossings, the arrivals, the resettling, the asylum application process and so on. Particular writers also performed a great influence on the way I came to understand forced migration. Specific writings by Hannah Arendt and Shahram Khosravi, allowed me to transport myself out of my own world into the lived experiences of these authors, thus entrusting me with some kind of voyeuristic knowledge of their experiences. As these were auto-ethnographies, the rich and deep content, despite the time difference between the authors, couldn’t have felt more in tune with the current climate of deep political change catapulted by a collection of events that has increasingly taken advantage of the migration of “non-westerners” into the Western world, thus dismissing the inherent human factor that orbits these events — one doesn’t forcibly leave one’s homeland simply because one feels like it.

The irony of all this, is that humans have been migrating since time immemorial but as we have come to live in a time of identity crisis within the western world, these issues somehow gain a different relevance and impact, thus in fact highlighting our prejudices and ignorance about the world outside our own borders. As Shahram Khosravi clearly illustrates in his book ‘Illegal’ Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders:

“Our time is a time of the triumph of border, an epoch of border-fetishism. Borders determine how the world looks. The map represents the world as a mosaic of unities, of nations, with clear outlines and distinct in different colours. Borders are constructed to designate difference. (...) There is no intermission between borders. Borders appear unbreakable as if they have always been there. Natural barriers, such as rivers, mountains and deserts, are used to designate borders, and thereby to naturalize them. In this way, borders are presented as primordial, timeless, part of nature.”
For me, it is safe to say that this book in particular exerted an influence in this project beyond words. The text *We Refugees* by Hannah Arendt, also uncomfortably exposed the stigma attached to the word “refugee” and our predefined ideas around it, thus making me quickly realize how important the use of language is when defining, narrating, demonstrating, exemplifying and displaying situations or stories that relate to a Human catastrophe.

Reports by Amnesty International, UNHCR, IOM [International Organization for Migration], MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières] International, EUROPOL, Open Society Foundations, refugeecouncil.org, NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council], OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development], SOHR [The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights], migrationsinfo.se, PEW Research, EASO [European Asylum Support Office], FAFO Research Foundation and others offered much needed insight and knowledge of not just the numbers related to this crisis, but also the reasons, the motivations, the stories and the reality of the people that compose it. As these stories live in the background of the portrayals mass media makes about migration, it became important for me to bring these facts forward. Furthermore, the journalistic analysis of this subject offered by The Guardian, Al-Jazeera, The Intercept, Reuters and SVT have helped me set the tone of language of the project: informative, factual and necessary. It wasn’t just about the journey people had to take, but also why the journey had to happen in the first place. As most of the articles written linked to official sources, this network of information truly proved its worth by connecting different pieces of information directly to its source and allowing me to feel more secure that the information I was about to share was genuine.

Documentaries by BBC and other independent filmmakers, managed to finally add the human face to the facts and figures that build this story. The impact and further realization of the importance of the theme I was about to develop became ever more evident. It was essential to feel like the respect and dignity these people deserve would not be compromised in any way as the project rests on a thin balance of being informative and honest while keeping these people’s integrity intact. I then felt the need to develop an experience that could somehow relate to all the feelings I had had while during my research for this master’s.

I had previously thought about my exhibition space as 3 objects that conveyed a specific narrative each: *The Number of Arrivals to Europe by Mediterranean Sea between 2015-2016; Dead and Missing at the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea between January 2015 and December 2016 + Migration Routes most commonly taken to reach Europe and Approximately 86% of all refugees in the world reside in developing countries* — a collection of facts that contradict popular believes about migration and its effect on society. By the end of my research, I had gathered a collection of information too precious to be synthetized. As such, I decided to then create a small booklet with all my findings. The content of the booklet reflected upon each object by presenting the stories that seldom make the news: from the actual number of people who wish to migrate to Europe to how European policies about providing a safe haven for refugees had (and have) largely failed and what are the implications of that in the long run. The curation mass media does regarding world events became clear as water when with a few simple Google searches most of the material we ought to know appeared on my screen. The booklet then became this sort of sacred book of information, too rich to be ignored or dismissed.
"We come from the traditions of the European Enlightenment, the Age of Reason," says, Michael Hák, the elder statesman of Austria's ruling party, the Social Democrats, who has served as mayor of Vienna since 1994. "So we find it extremely hard to face down the emotional force of right-wing populism using rational arguments." That is what gives the FPO its power, he says: "It lives off the emotion of fear, and it's a lot harder to take these fears away than to create them."

Poverty can hardly abate. Currently, it vastly limits our bourgeois politics. We are constantly hemmed in with right-wing and populist rhetoric, which prevents us from realizing what we need to realize for the community and for ourselves. It is a sign of our community-oriented society. Poverty, be it poverty of the body or of the spirit, is the foundation of our economy. We cannot just run away from it."

To understand the essence of the populist movement, one has to look at the Austrian society. But the crudest form of populist movements is the FPO. It is a political party that is completely contrary to the democratic principles of our society. It is a party that is supported by a small group of people who are afraid of the changes that are happening in our society.
6. Project development

At the beginning of my project, I wanted to graphically develop something that would be completely out of my comfort zone, even though I knew that could mean a total failure. I wished to turn away from what I, in my practice, am used to doing. Therefore, I had to completely polarize my work methods by shifting from digital to handcraft, from digital typesetting to handwritten and so on. I trusted this would give the work a different feeling and meaning as it goes in a different direction of what is usually made in terms of infographics. This, obviously, also meant different and bigger challenges, more trials and errors and site-specific (while building the exhibition space) tests that could possibly turn out not that successful.

There were a lot of possibilities for constructing the narrative. At first, I thought that it would be better to start with the reasons why people were forced to migrate, but this represented a task bigger than I could handle and was a project in and by itself as it would involve an extensive background and history research and the understanding of a chain of events too complex to explore in the time I had to develop my master’s. I also thought about only developing the project around the rise of right wing and populist movements but felt there was a missing link between a human crisis and its political consequences in the “west”.

I then focused on looking at what we know and are told everyday and on how that story could be retold differently through the exhibition space and objects. By starting with the arrivals by the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, the routes to reach Europe and the numbers of the dead and missing at sea and finally the political and social aftereffects of those events, I presumed it could relate more closely to the information we are daily in contact with and the familiarity of it would allow for a better understanding of the topic, while at the same time allowing me to shed some light on data that isn’t immediately accessible.

When researching and developing ideas for the creation of the objects that would reflect the aforementioned narratives, I explored ways in which I could re-appropriate the formal language of infographics (like bar charts for instance) into a physical object. I wanted all of these to work together and to be able to evoke and reveal hidden information in such a way as to create awareness of the facts and numbers that compose this humanitarian crisis. For the Arrivals by Mediterranean and Aegean Sea object, I wished to highlight the number of people who had been forced to leave their homes and risk their lives at sea in order to reach Europe. As such, I decided at first to simply create a physical bar chart showcasing the “Number of Arrivals to Europe by the Mediterranean Sea between 2015-2016” by month, in a row. This however, did not feel like it could provide the reading I was expecting and had the risk of actually being misinterpreted. What people could read instead, was a reinforcement of the politicized idea that Europe was taking “too many people” or “being attacked”, which was not the intention. After some feedback from Johanna Lewengard and Hanna Heilborn and more sketches around this idea, I came to a better and perhaps, more evocative solution based on the fact that Europe has been gradually, through policies, “building walls” around its own borders as to demotivate people in search of safety from reaching its shores. As such, I then decided to create a tall square-shaped podium, with the height of 1.50 meters and where these wooden bars would rise from the inside, representing both the number of arrivals to scale between 2015-2016 per month and the concept of a towering wall in a clearer way.
Each side of the podium represents 3 months showing 6 bars on each side for both 2015-2016 (2 years) and the months in groupings (January, February, March on one side, April, May, June on the following and so on). Thus, viewers can walk around the object and directly see the numbers relating to each month and year. The tallest beam, representing the highest number of arrivals, would reach 3 meters in height.

For me, it was important to explore this idea of height as to literally convey the concept of a wall, something you cannot trespass or go through but have to find a way around it – a wall that supposedly “protects” from external threats and where the inhabitants inside the wall seem unable to properly understand what goes beyond it. To differentiate from the bars representing different years I decided to paint one of the “years” in black (2015) and leave the other in its raw material (2016), wood. The choice of material came more out of the necessity of building something sturdy and durable that could convey solidness and roughness, not something indestructible but “hard to break”. Numbers relating to the number of arrivals were then handwritten in fluorescent white paint on each wood beam, only visible when exposed to a UV light. A short text containing background and other pertinent information about the matter the object represented would then be added to the podium to compliment it and provide viewers with a wider understanding of what that object meant in reality.

From this narrative, I would then depart to the second object representing “Dead and Missing at the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea between January 2015 and December 2016 + Migration Routes most commonly taken to reach Europe”. This was a quite complex object that required a lot of information to be easily read and understood. Looking back at my research about infographics, I decided to stick with the original plan of re-appropriating a commonly used medium in infographics in order to better reach the goal of being clear with the message. In such an exhibition space, it’s easy to feel like there is too much going on and the least of my intentions was to force the viewer into making an extra big effort to decode the message.

It seemed to me that using a globe or an atlas would work best. I also knew I wanted to place this object in water in order to, to some extent, allow people to interact with it and suggest a closer relationship to the actual topic it symbolized. Since this was the case, it felt natural to choose the globe. I pondered about its appearance possibilities: should it look like quite realistic? Should I just focus on the countries that relate to the topic of my project? Should I have it in color? How much text can I add onto it? Will a lot of information on the globe make it look “messy” and unreadable? And most importantly, what exactly do I want to show with the globe, knowing that I will also have a complimentary text, placed on the podium, and that will assist with its analysis? With such complexities, my instinct told me to keep it simple. What I then did was to purchase an actual globe and work directly on it. I took the printed map that had been glued on it out, sandpapered its surface and reflected on what colors to use. It had to be something simple that would work harmoniously with the rest of the objects and space. Since my color palette was quite neutral – purposefully as to criticize the supposed neutrality of infographics – I decided to make it black and white and to only use the countries that related to my research.
Following this, I traced Europe, Africa and parts of Asia along with its countries in black ink while beforehand having painted its surface white, then adding in fluorescent white ink the routes from different countries and as divided according to what specific route they indicated (Western Mediterranean Route, Central Mediterranean Route and Eastern Mediterranean Route), also adding “death spots”, or, highlights at sea and some places inland where the highest number of deaths had been documented by Amnesty International, UNHCR and other groups. When doing the initial tests for this object, I used only black ink to mark the “death spots” at sea, all the rest of the information (routes, countries), would then be hidden within this white globe. However, after the first feedback session, most colleagues suggested I did it the other way around, thus showing the map, traced in black, and leaving the actual information invisible (more exactly, in fluorescent white ink). This suggestion ended up by being the way I would actually develop this object as it indeed felt like it would convey a stronger and more effective message and meaning.

As for the third object, I knew it had to relate to the social and political backlash of this ongoing humanitarian crisis. I felt like there was, and still is, a need to fight the misinformation that goes around and that can be extremely destructive and damaging for many obvious reasons. Thus I wanted this object to be part of the exhibition space and embody this Fact vs Opinion “exercise” by making use of common misconceptions disseminated in media and revealing the truth about them, the actual facts that destroy these fallacies. With right wing and populist movements on the rise, there is an obvious need to be well informed, as to take proper action against their rhetoric.

When developing this part of the project, the first experiments consisted of using big blocks of chipboard and writing in big letters comments or opinions other people had had about the topic of migration and that could be found in the comment section of online newspapers, blogs or even political speeches, for instance. These were however, very regularly quite aggressive. My initial idea was that you’d first see these comments and then would “search” for the actual truth about it, the facts that were hidden in fluorescent white paint. After a lot of dialogue with tutors and colleagues, we came to the conclusion that not only were these comments far too aggressive, as some people in an exhibition context could take them as facts at first look, rather than opinions, but also that the visitor would have to be extremely well informed and understand that there was an expectation for them to actively be looking for the hidden information.

After pondering extensively about what the alternative to this could be, I realized that in reality what I needed to do, was to give people the “weapon” to fight the poisonous narratives that the previously mentioned political movements are trying to disseminate. This became a much more manageable task. As I had written extensively about each of these 3 narratives, I decided to use parts of those texts (a sentence or a short paragraph) to bring the focus back to the facts. I would then discard the negative narratives pertaining to this topic and instead use only the facts, written big, on the wall, and in the fluorescent white paint. As some misconceptions circulate so easily between people, media and politicians (thus incurring the risk of a misconception becoming a “truth”), I believed this could then be a much more effective counter attack. In my opinion, one of the most important pieces of information presented in the project, and written
on the exhibition wall, was that approximately 86% of all refugees in the world live in developing countries. This staggering piece of information somehow reveals more truths about this topic than we could actually explain. It also showcases so clearly how such a short and simple sentence can change so much our perception of what we know. To represent this, I decided to use a wooden beam, as tall as the room, and all painted in white fluorescent paint. This would be positioned in the room, inside a small podium, as to be the first thing the visitor sees in front of him/ her. I then added the previous caption on the back wall, behind the beam and to the left of it, thus almost creating the illusion of it being the title of the beam itself. Unfortunately and due to lack of time however, I couldn’t properly experiment and perfect this object and caption combination and it became, in my opinion, less effective as initially planned.

Another big part of the project were the texts I had developed. These would be part of the booklet positioned at the entrance of the exhibition space. These texts were connected to the specific narrative I had designed for each object and presented a more generous amount of written material about it, thus allowing the viewer to gain a wider knowledge of the background, statistics and other information that built the topic. In the first texts I wrote during the first semester of the second year, I was advised that they may become too emotional and personal and could make the reader feel like I was telling them what emotions they should extract from the texts, while confusing them at the same time since it could be hard to distinguish fact from personal opinion. The final texts however, are essentially a documentation of facts and
perform the intended objective much better in combination with the final exhibition work.

To deepen my exploration of the theme *Visualising the Invisible*, I decided early in the process that I would present my work in a dark space as to create a sense of being lost and adrift – words that quite logically came to mind during my research. This choice influenced many aspects of the final project. The podiums would be painted in black to themselves with the room and water would be used inside the podiums and floor as to create a stronger intellectual and physical connection with the topic. The ceiling would be covered in black fabric as to not allow any light to shine through. The dimensions of the room had the intention of projecting some kind of wariness and uncomfortable feeling, especially with its height, 3.5m.

The space was then constructed in an almost labyrinth way: the viewer would enter this short and tight corridor, then forced to go around a very narrow passage, up a small ramp and into the room.
The feeling the space conveys is almost immediate, a claustrophobic feeling of not knowing where you are or what to expect. The water on the floor reflects the pieces and confers a different dimension on the room: how deep is it? Can I come in? Should I go in? All these key concepts truly bring forth the feeling I got when doing my research for this project and while reading people’s testimonies about their journeys to not only flee to Europe but just somewhere safer than the place they’re escaping from: where do we go to? How do we get there? How safe is the journey? We are so used to knowing what to expect, of taking things for granted and in a certain way, practicing an “invisible” and unspoken privilege, so I wanted to explore what it feels like to be in a situation without those things and having to question them or have to question them. More than this, I also wanted people to go in and participate in an experience that can enrich their way of seeing and provide information that can change their perception of things and make them question the authenticity and accuracy of the information they are in contact with everyday.

7. Exhibition

Throughout the exhibition period, I tried to stay close to my exhibition space as much as I could in order to study people’s reactions and get feedback on the project.

Through my observations I had essentially divided the visitors into 3 types: the ones that look into the first corridor and leave, the ones that reach the narrow passage and give up, and finally the ones that go in and do take some time to explore and “read” the room. A lot of people felt daunted at first sight, not knowing exactly what was ahead of them and to whom giving up was the “easy way out”. As the project description was placed on the wall, right at the entrance to the room, I noticed that those who read it tended to go in more often than those who didn’t. A word often used by visitors leaving my exhibition space was: läskig. Since there were so many people giving up on entering the space, I decided to add an arrow to the wall immediately in front of the entrance, as to guide the visitor – this provided better results for the rest of the exhibition period. Another common comment I heard quite often from people was that if they hadn’t been wearing nice shoes they would have dared to step inside the room, which in many ways did highlight the privilege of choice we have that I mention in the beginning of this report. Visitors who had taken time to explore the room and with whom I spoke did come out feeling like the topic was well represented in that space and that the physical and psychological effect of the topic felt very real when inside it.

8. Response-session

At the response-session, I had Johan Jerpe as an opponent and Sophie Hedin as a guest critic. Their reflections on my project were extremely interesting. Johan commented that as soon as he got inside my exhibition space, he felt like he was underground and the water and smells the paint and wood had released brought to his mind the feeling of being in a sewer. This metaphor could symbolize I was representing an issue that is buried underneath the fabric of the city and therefore, hidden from most eyes but still present and reachable if we want to. He commented that as soon as he realized there was water on the
floor, he hesitated to go in as he was wearing “nice shoes”. The impact of that thought soon made him realize however, that that was the least he could do. His mentions on how information and statistics are built and curated also brought to memory my primordial concerns when developing this project, I was indeed curating a specific set of data with a specific goal in mind, thus highlighting the question: what is the intention or purpose of showing this or any data?

Sophie commented on how the space evoked in her a sense of fear and unknown which were so strong that both her and Helen (the other guest critic not present during this session), didn’t dare to go in but rather “explore” the project from a distance, in a “safe zone”. Both also felt uneasy with the water on the floor as they could not understand how deep it was and if it was, in fact, water.

Overall the public reacted very positively to this session, bringing forth concerns of how information is curated and how the construction of the space really captured a set of feelings and emotions, able to provoke so many strong reactions. A last question by a guest “simply” highlighted the issue most visual communicators ask themselves: what responsibility do you feel towards your work, being a visual communicator?

9. Conclusion

The development of this project felt crucial throughout my time at Konstfack as I do believe Visual Communication can have a bigger role than is usually perceived. In such a world of extremes, it’s easy to lose focus and forget what small things can be done to change the perception of what happens around us. Infographics can then become a tool that manages to say a lot with very little.

As this project unfolded, it required from me a huge psychological and emotional investment, which is not that typical within Graphic Design. As you grow more attached to the project you start wondering where you can go from there and how you can continue working within this area while feeling like you are contributing to something bigger. I’m still fascinated by the topic of migration and still relentlessly trying to understand why there is so much mythology about topics that should essentially be summed up as “just” a human helping another fellow human. It is also ironic to me when I feel like we live in the Era of Information, where knowledge is almost literally at your fingertips, and yet there is so much resistance to it at the same time.

In this project, I always sought to uphold the truth and the facts about a theme that has shaped the world of politics and history today and to return the truth to those who have been sloppily portrayed by media and turned into villains of their own misfortune. With this project, I felt like I could finally step out of my comfort zone and explore the materiality of infographics and the power it holds within a political topic. Still at the very end I feel like I still have two big questions to explore for the upcoming future: where do we go from here? And how can Visual Communication support that?
That's right. If you look at the very bottom of the infographic, you'll find that fully of the "refugees" from the Syrian civil war are 72% males. Many are beginning to wonder if this is really a refugee problem or if it's an orchestrated invasion of Europe by young males of fighting age.
Construction of the exhibition space