



Refugee Transition Network:

City as Commons and Transition to Sustainable Refugees Futures

1. Background

Asylum seekers and refugees, hereinafter referred to as refugees, are forced to leave their country of origin to seek protection in either a transit or destination country. As of 2021, a total of 82.4 million people have been forcibly displaced, in which 30.5 million people are categorised as asylum seekers and refugees (UNHCR, 2021b). So called “developing” countries hold around 86% refugees and two-thirds of them are residing in urban settings (Kirbyshire et al., 2017). Refugees are subjected to foreign policies, regarded as victims of external conflicts, vulnerable, passive agents, when on the contrary, refugee populations are becoming at home within the host country. The interest is to assemble a design-led transdisciplinary network that applies Transition Design as a methodology to transform existing narratives of refugees focusing on what they bring rather than what they lack.

Transition Design (TD) as a theoretical framework of the project integrates an emerging set of ideas related to other ways of knowing, and the design of worlds in which many worlds fit, sustainable inclusive futures, and interdependent relations with land. This growing strand of research has denounced the complicity of design with colonialism (Angelon & van Amstel, 2021), anthropocentrism (Forlano, 2016), and other forms of oppression. Pluriversal design (Noel, 2020), feminist designs (Bardzell, 2010), design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2018), multispecies design (Westerlaken, 2020), designing for liberation (Jack & Tuli, 2021), and designs of the South (Gutiérrez Borrero, 2015) are some approaches that shift design research from denouncing to announcing new realities. This transition in design as a discipline, has been very little explored in the context of displaced populations in transit or aiming to find a new home country. The hypothesis of this proposal is that TD; its ideas, methods and announcements of new realities, have a lot to contribute to both methods of micro-integrations of urban refugees and new understandings of the city as commons.

2. Aims and Objectives

The project proposes to build a design-led international network of stakeholders and researchers, to explore the use of Transition Design as the basis of a future methodology to

advance work of urban refugees management. There are three specific objectives of this research project:

1. To create a Refugee Transition Network (RTN) with relevant academic and non-academic partners, such as researchers, stakeholders, practitioners, observers, and refugee-led organisations. Through the network, we intend to further reinforce relations, create memorandum of understanding, and assemble a steering group with relevant partners for future research projects.
2. To gather cases of good practice and successful methods in the use of Transition Design and the 'City as Commons' in the context of urban refugee management to create a bilingual (English and Bahasa) teaching resource.
3. To gather initial insights from creative workshops applying the Transition Design framework with practitioners and communities of refugees, in the UK and Indonesia.

3. Project Description

This research project will explore and develop the Transition Design Framework that proposes collaborative design-led international networks as a tool to address complex/wicked problems and transitions towards more sustainable futures. Transition Design is an emerging framework that proposes collaborative design-led practices as a vehicle to create new narratives and approaches needed to address complex (wicked) problems and transitions towards more sustainable futures. It has been developed and used with Traditional Ecological Knowledge Systems (TEK) found in indigenous and local communities to re-design visions of their own development and systemic change.

This concept focuses on the need of “cosmopolitan localism” which means place-based and regional yet globally awareness and exchange of information and technology at the same time. Throughout this concept, the designer explores ways how basic human needs are fulfilled locally by drawing the knowledge and wisdom from the past, present and future. These need an integrative agent within academic, practitioner, government, private sector, non-profit, community sector to work collaboratively for developing transition solutions. (Terry Irwin, et.al, 2017).

There is little evidence of its application in the context of displaced populations. However, our aim is to bring a future-oriented perspective by making a re-conception of the entire lifestyle to lead a more sustainable life. Therefore, we need a fundamental change to attain our desired changes. Refugee Transition Network (RTN) brings together stakeholders,

transdisciplinary researchers and practitioners from a refugee transit country (Indonesia) and a refugee destination country (UK). RTN will provide a forum for secondary /indirect beneficiaries (refugees, local/host communities, and the general public), to collaborate in the development of further scaled up research, directly benefiting refugees and host communities.

4. Methodology

This research project uses a Transition Design framework aims to understand the refugee-hosting city as the ‘commons’ using Transition Design, and to engage and consult with refugees, practitioners working in refugee management organisations, and local government, to map real needs and test assumptions, to identify actionable information and to define the strategy of a future research and development project. The work of Transition Design will require a variety of tools and methodologies, used in different ways-no single one. Two key components have emerged: A framework that provides logic for bringing together knowledge and practices outside the design disciplines.

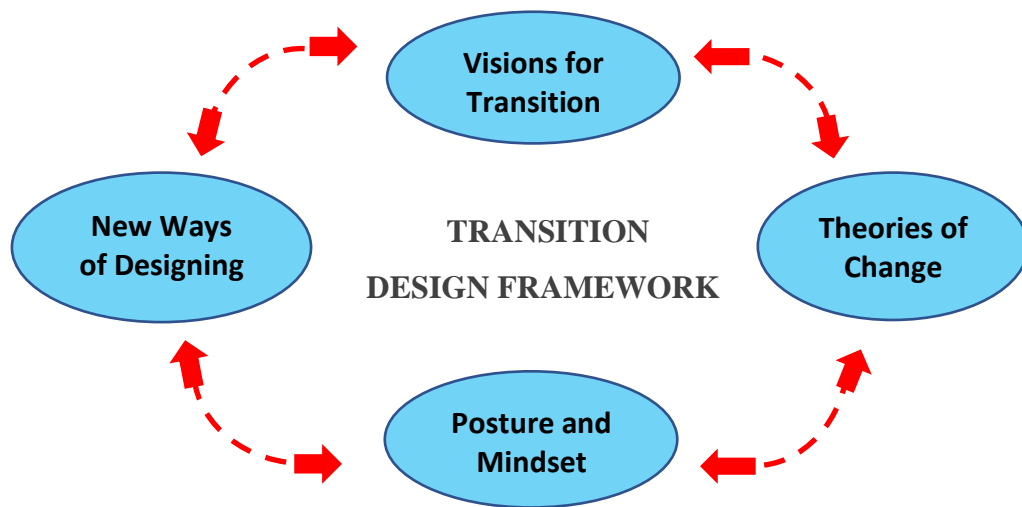


Fig 1. Transition Design Framework¹

5. Research Activities

In order to develop and explore means and methods with the aim of generating new concepts, knowledge, and understanding, the research actions are determined.

- a. International round table: pluriversal borderlands

¹ Terry Irwin, “Transition Design: A Proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study, and Research,” *The Journal of the Design Studies Forum*, Volume 7, 28 September 2015, 229-264, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17547075.2015.1051829>

The round table is centred around the intersections between Transition Design, City as Commons and Urban Refugee Management. Refugee Transition Network wants to nurture a space for knowledge exchange among our academics and practitioners working in these areas. Fostering up to date conversations, and gather emerging methods, tools, and good practice cases within a cohesive context and framework.

b. Good practice cases – educational resource

Refugee Transition Network wants to create a good practice cases compilation, bilingual (English and Bahasa) methodological resource directed to students. This resource enables the inclusion of the Transition Design framework into the curricula of the academics involved within the network. It will also contribute to capacity building among practitioners and support the advancement of Educational Design Research (EDR) practices.

c. Piloting methods – workshops with refugees and practitioners

The workshops bring together refugees and practitioners from refugee-led organisations to co-design, incorporating the contexts of their values, lifestyles and mindsets into the ideation process. These workshops are important for testing methods and ideas that will shape the future of the network.

d. Collaborative student challenge (in the UK only)

In January 2024 UAL's London College of Communication Design School will be holding a collaborative challenge in the framework of the collaborative unit that partners students across institutions to explore transition design. Informing collaborative tools to engage with refugees and vulnerable communities, imagining relation design that is feminist, postcapitalist and pluriversal.

6. Research Target, Timing and Outputs

Transition Design Framework is an emerging field of design-led transdisciplinary studies, there are still gaps particularly in methods and good practice cases. By developing this method on issues on urban refugee management, it will create an international, transdisciplinary, and cross-sector, working-research network. The research target will be refugees, local/host communities, academics, practitioners, government as well as other diverse organizations working in design and urban refugee management.

The RTN project is planned for one year (July 2023-June 2024). This project will produce a transdisciplinary research network, case studies and methods teaching resources on transition design in forced displacement context in bilingual publication.