

12. Reflection

This chapter presents a detailed reflection on the process of the research.

Research topic

The subject of the research originates from personal experience in a refugee camp. During this internship already a lot of discussion about the transition of the refugee camp took place. The starting point of this thesis was not a theoretical framework to prove, or improve, but a practical experience that needed clarification. Therefore, the research was a search for a suitable theory that was able to clarify and to possibly improve what was currently happening in the camp.

Internship

Being involved like an intern in the camp and afterwards as a graduate intern at VNG International opened doors that are normally not opened. As an intern, the researcher was involved from the very first ideas to set up a think tank, which provided the researcher with a lot of insights. Also having access to many contacts of the existing network and expertise of VNG International helped to bring the research to a next level. However, this can also have a downside, in being biased and or having a tacit understanding without having a source.

Evolution of research question

Also the gap of knowledge was a challenge to master. This subsequently explains why the research question evolved over time. By reading literature and interviewing experts closing the knowledge-gap, the focus of the research changed. First, there was a major focus on the role of a specific project manager and in time changed towards a more general application of network management. Also defining the development of a refugee camp as '*transition*'; the change between humanitarian and development aid can be seen as a real breakthrough in the theoretical part of the research.

Sensitivity

One major aspect that influenced the research throughout the process was the political sensitivity of the topic. Permission to record full interviews was not always granted and asking for permission to use quotes was sometimes rejected. Also making the research too 'serious' caused obstacles in the process. When inviting a Jordan official, immediately the project number was asked and without that number the researcher was not able to arrange a meeting. Also contextually the research was challenging in the sense that the Syria crisis continued to evolve and tension in the country rose. A visit to the camp was not initiated due to conflicts at the border. Otherwise, more data concerning the refugees themselves and employees in the field could have been gathered.

The relationship between graduation topic and master track

The graduation lab of this thesis is '*designing project management*'. As explained before, through gradually gaining more knowledge the research question of this thesis shifted more towards network management which is a part of the course urban area development. This thesis contributes to the applicability of network analysis of wicked problems in complex settings. The transition of a refugee camp, which is in turn also a cross-cutting topic between management in the Built Environment and humanitarian practice forms a valuable addition to the current master track in which a refugee camp is a new topic. The courses for qualitative research methods, operational research and case-study research also contributed to the technical aspects of writing this thesis.

Single Case Study

For this thesis a single case-study approach was chosen to investigate the transition of refugee camps. It would be interesting to also conduct the network analysis on other refugee camps to enhance the generalizability of the results. However, for a master thesis like this, the complexity of one case already exceeds the time limits which in turn, to some extent, limit the scientific relevance as well.

Respondents

The number of people interviewed are limited. As a researcher, I would have preferred to at least talk to two officials of each involved organisation in the transition of refugee camp Za'atari. It was difficult to arrange interviews with officials from the Jordan Government as well as UN agencies and INGOs, outside of the existing network of the researcher and the internship organisation. In addition, the interviews were often conducted on personal note to avoid official permission from headquarters. The distance from Netherlands to Jordan did not help with this. In just 18 days (2 times eleven days and 4 travels days) the researcher had interviewed about 20 people. If the stay in Jordan would be longer more interviews could have been held.

Feedback of mentors

During the research, some constructive discussions about steps forward took place. Both my mentors from the university and VNG International helped to look at possible next steps based on the gained knowledge or data. However, a sidestep was sometimes taken. For example after the first mission to Jordan in April I was directed towards '*story telling*' and '*reframing*' which in the end became a smaller part than suggested at that moment. The focus on general network management was more valuable than specifically reframing techniques.

Practical implementation

To transfer the knowledge about network management a step-by-step guide will be developed after P4 presentation. This way, the project manager working at VNG International can be trained or can use the guide during their work and future refugee related programmes. Also the recommendation to apply process rules of the game more consciously, can possibly implemented in a similar kind of 'think tank' project of VNG International.