

Co-creation workshops using proto-persona

Espoo, 2023 May – June



Goals

1. Empathise and identify (with) migrant challenges.
2. Meet our collaborators from the city of Espoo, experts working on the ground.
3. Using proto-persona as a boundary object.



Participants from the City of Espoo

#1

23.5
Espoon Keskus

- 1) **Sanna Lindholm** – works with immigrant mothers
- 2) **Said Aden** – works with immigrant communities, religious communities
- 3) **Ulla-Kaisa Pihlaja** – Hello Espoo info
- 4) **Teemu Haapalehto** – head of immigration services

#2

26.5
Otaniemi

- 1) **Kirsi Eskelinen** – previously worked with youth employment, now with partnerships and co-creation
- 2) **Liisa Manninen** – works with schools and cultural counsellors
- 3) **Tiia Väyrynen** – Call center
- 4) **Juho Orjatsalo** – Call center

#3

9.6
Otaniemi

- 1) **Katja Rantula** – works with immigrant employment
- 2) **Lionel Reya** – Hello Espoo info
- 3) **Elizabeth Atkins** – Espoo talent hub

Proto-personas

Usually, personas are based on extensive research, highlighting the pain points and goals of the users. Since we did not conduct new research for the purpose of these workshops, we adopted the name of “proto-personas” – lightweight stories, based on existing knowledge.

#1

23.5
Espoon Keskus

Fatima

Stay-at-home mother who had migrated with her spouse.

#2

26.5
Otaniemi

Mehmet

The challenges faced by immigrants when their child is growing up.

#3

9.6
Otaniemi

**Yiquin &
Dongmei**

The anxiety of finding employment when living abroad.

Fatima

Mother tongue: Arabic

Home country: Iraq

Education level: Equivalent to Finnish secondary school

Stay in Finland : 4 years

Language skills: Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases in Finnish

Fatima is a mother of three children. Her husband Ali came to Finland in 2016, and she joined him 3 years later in 2019.

Child care

Fatima has been thinking about her life in Finland. She has made a couple of acquaintances here, however, she still doesn't have real friends and she misses her extended family back home. She spends a lot of time talking to them on WhatsApp. Most of the days she feels lonely, isolated and gloomy. **Loneliness**

She would like to start learning Finnish language but doesn't know how to make that happen since her youngest is still at home with her. Ali knows Finnish much better due to being exposed to it more when he is out and about. The couple is eager to study Finnish together every night, but Ali's working hours and demanding child care make things hard. **Finnish language**



Her youngest child is turning 3 this year. Fatima has considered enrolling him to day care, but she is worried that the child's Arabic language skills will suffer and soon they will not have a common language. It is important for both parents that their children know about their cultural heritage and can speak the language. The family's older children did not attend day care. **Cultural and linguistic background**

Ali is currently proud to be the breadwinner of the family. However, as the period of child home care allowance is nearing its end, Fatima and Ali are starting to feel anxious about their financial prospects since they are also sending some money back home to Iraq. **Finances**

Mehmet

Nationality: Albanian

Mother tongue: Albanian

Education level: electrical engineer equivalent to BA in Finland

Stay in Finland: 9 years, came for work

Language skills: Conversational Finnish, since English is the main language at his workplace

Mehmet is a father of 3. His daughters are in primary school, whereas his eldest son Sazan is in lower secondary school. Sazan used to be a happy student and he had friends at football practice. Sazan starts his 9th grade next year after which he should go to upper secondary school if everything goes well. **Migrant-specific**

school problems

However, six months ago something changed. Sazan's grades went down, he started skipping school and quit his hobbies. Mehmet has a hunch that his son is being bullied at school. He received a call from school about this situation but he doesn't know how to prepare for a meeting with a teacher. **Mental health Marginalization**



At home, Sazan spends time with his family but Mehmet feels like Sazan has become more quiet and that he is not telling him everything. Mehmet turns to his Albanian community for help but at the moment, but it is still quite unclear what is going on with Sazan.

Parenting

The parents feel confused about their son's upbringing and education as they don't understand the school system and have limited Finnish skills. They feel like they don't know how to help their son with his school nor they know how to ask for help or what help is available. **Finnish language**

Yiqing, Dongmei & Huang

Nationality: Chinese

Mother tongue: Mandarin

Education level: **Yiqing** – fresh MSc graduate; **Dongmei** – graduated high school in China

Stay in Finland: **Yiqing** – 2 years; **Dongmei** – 3,5 years.

Finnish language skills: **Yiqing** – no Finnish skills; **Dongmei** – Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions

Yiqing came to Finland 2 years ago after being admitted to Master's program at Aalto business school. She intentionally picked a Nordic country for her move, as it suits her personality. So far, she's been really happy with her life in Finland and she wants to build her future here. Now that her studies are over, she's excited for her first proper job.

Committed to integration

She has already applied to many public job postings, but has either been rejected or not heard anything back. As the language of her studies was English, Yiqing didn't have an opportunity to learn Finnish, and is having a hard time meeting the Finnish language requirements of many job applications. To expand her professional networks, she started attending exhausting networking events and even wrote her first LinkedIn post. Unfortunately, her job search has been without much success for 6 months now, and she's slowly losing hope. **Job seeking struggles**

Yiqing met Dongmei at one of Helsinki's queer parties. They didn't waste time to become a family of 3 and moved in together quite soon, partly due to practical reasons of relieving some financial burden. They share the struggle of being an unemployed immigrant parents, although their job seeking experience is quite different. **Parenting**



Dongmei came to Finland to work at her relative's restaurant. The job was not exactly what she was expecting, but at least she got to learn some Finnish. Nearly 3 years ago Huang was born and since then Dongmei has been at home with him. Dongmei wants to return to worklife and maybe find another profession but she does not have a clear idea on her career path possibilities. Dongmei does not have financial resources or motivation to study at a university, seeing the struggles that Yiqing is facing. With the help of Yiqing she recently registered as a job seeker. **Changing career path**

Both Yiqing and Dongmei want to stay in Finland where they are more free to live openly as a rainbow family, compared to China. However, they have a lot of anxiety about their visas expiring, as well as limited financial resources. They have already invested so much time and energy on their integration process, so going back would feel like a devastating setback.

Workshop structure

30 min – Intro

30 min – **Starbursting (Small groups)**

15 min – Break

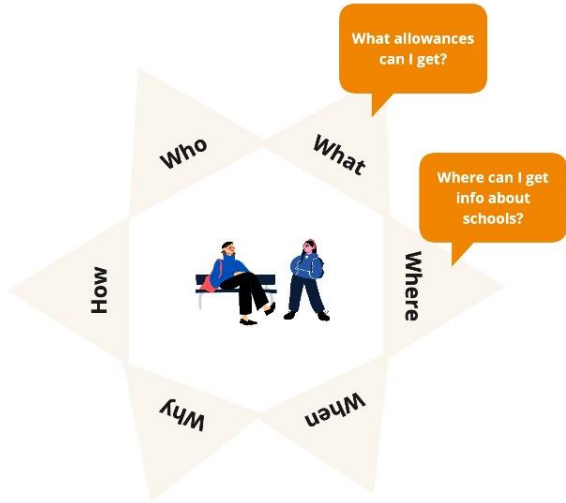
30 min – **Relationships (Small groups)**

5 min – Break

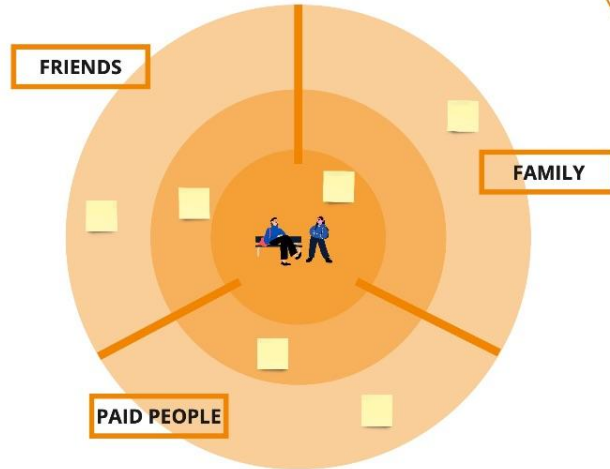
30 min – **Systems (Small groups)**

40 min – Presentations, wrap up (+buffer time)

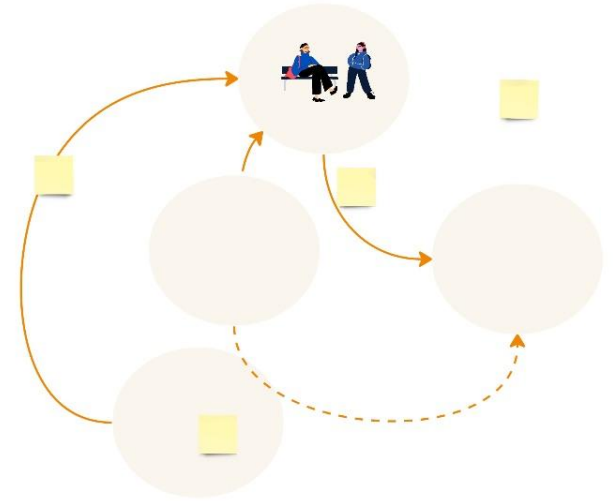
1. Starbursting



2. Relationship map



3. Systems map



Findings: workshop #1



Cultural conflicts

1. Some immigrant parents face the dilemma of wanting their children to integrate while keeping them close to their culture
2. Parents themselves face the challenge of trying to stay in touch with their original culture while adopting some of the cultural norms of Finland.
3. It's not always clear how decisions are made in the immigrant families and who influences the decisions.
4. We have to consider the immigrant women's relationship to Finland vs home country
5. Traditional cultural expectations can play a big role in people's decision making (e.g. father must be the sole breadwinner)



Wellbeing, finances

1. Most of the integration paths depend on a few major questions – how long are we staying here? Why are we here? What can I do here?
2. Financial pressure forces immigrants to do jobs they might not like
3. Immigrants are faced with many pathways to financially support themselves, but the risks and uncertainty can be anxiety inducing. (E.g. when will my children find a job and start supporting me, or do I need to look for a job?)



Information/support networks (1)

1. Stay at home Immigrant mothers usually don't have many individual relationships, mainly organizations and communities that give support
2. Immigrant communities in Finland (beyond immigrant/religious communities) depend on one's labour market status
3. The religious communities can also act as mediators to connect mothers to service providers
4. Sometimes places relevant to immigrants culture, community, needs can be too far away and not time and cost effective to go there.



Information/support networks (2)

6. Informal channels, e.g. local cultural shops or NGO's, have an important role in providing immigrant women/mothers with information or second opinions.
7. Immigrants choose between the different information received from formal and informal channels based on e.g. preference or suitability
8. Stay-at-home moms are not always at home – their physical space extends to local parks, shops, malls – These are all opportunities for interaction
9. A lot of information still comes from digital channels. However, lack of digital literacy can limit one's ability to see all the available opportunities

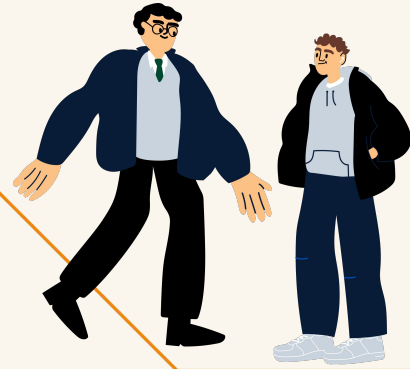


Accessing Finland through kids

1. Giving birth and raising children provide immigrant mothers with different opportunities at different times to become familiar with and connect to service points. (on the other hand bad experience can decrease trust and feeling of connection)
2. Children often act as mediators between parents and Finland, depending on their networks and language skills
3. Neuvola is probably the strongest link between immigrant mothers, giving birth in Finland and other services
4. School can be a safe place for immigrant mothers to talk about their needs



Findings: workshop #2



Cultural challenges

1. Problems stemming from cultural differences can be perceived by immigrants as incompetency in parenting. (Parents might feel they are bad at parenting in a new country)
2. Immigrant parents' lack the toolkit for raising a child in the host country
3. Pressure of being an immigrant kid also relates to traditional family roles, e.g. oldest and only sons are expected to do well



Wellbeing challenges

1. Young migrants problems can be intersected between being a migrant problem, teen problem, mental health problem or even identity crisis
2. There can be two approaches when dealing with such problems from the parent's side: seeking for help or venting about the situation to the service advisors
3. Stigma of mental health issues exists in general, but it's also culturally charged. This results in reluctance to involve service providers due to the fear of shame and saving face.
4. There is a lack of awareness regarding services and entitlements – immigrants are not sure what mental health/learning support services are available.



Information/support networks

1. We need to understand who do young migrants trust at school and beyond
2. Cultural counsellors could help both immigrant youth and parents to navigate support systems
3. Immigrants from tight-knit communities have more trust in others from their own culture or people they know personally
4. Importance of "bridges" or "mediators" when finding and trusting services: friends, immigrant communities, NGOs, places of worship, local cultural shops and hobbies (such as sports) can act as bridges or mediators when finding and trusting services. However the knowledge they have might be general – however the knowledge they have might be general.



Role of school (1)

1. School plays a central role in mediating immigrant family relationships, internal conflicts, as well as trust in the Finnish system.
2. The Finnish school system is complex with many actors involved which can be confusing for immigrants. It's not clear if these actors communicate with each other.
3. Technology plays an important part in coordinating the process at schools (Wilma messages). This can cause challenges related to digital literacy and language proficiency.



Role of school (2)

4. There is disproportionate bullying targeted at immigrant youth at schools raising the risk of marginalization.
5. Utilizing cultural counselors is crucial; however, the current methods employed by schools to promote their services are unknown.
6. Public spaces and services are crucial for students, especially immigrants, who skip school.



Findings: workshop #3



Language

1. For some people, Finnish might be difficult to learn. In some cases integration in Swedish language and Swedish speaking communities could be easier?
2. Doing a university degree in English might make it difficult for students to learn the Finnish language. Matching the language requirements of many jobs after graduation might become difficult.
3. Learning Finnish is important but not easy or cheap, unless accessed through integration training. Some language courses are criticized for being too theoretical and focus too little on interaction.



Community – support and knowledge

1. The unofficial info channels remain important source of information and support. We uncovered channels like queer community, other parents in the neighborhood, student friends or old colleagues.
2. In some cases, friends in Finland might be more important than family back home. Are they receiving from/sending financial support home?
3. The biggest support (emotional, practical) is coming from the spouse, as well as (queer) communities. Sometimes one might receive support from partner's professional/social network
4. It is unclear how informal channels are formed and discovered and how they can be used to help with integration.



Employment and career

1. Employers' needs and interests regarding immigrants' skills and background are uncertain. It's also unclear what job opportunities exist for those without advanced Finnish language skills.
2. It is important to treat employment questions broader than just finding a job. For example, resources for career goals, changing career, apprenticeship, certificates, workforce training or support in cases of not finding a job should be considered
3. Filling job applications can be extremely difficult with limited Finnish writing and reading skills. How could technology be used in making it easier?



Navigating the system

1. It is difficult to understand which benefits you are entitled to as a foreigner – as a parent, as a newly graduated? What happens if those benefits are not enough (financial anxiety)?
2. Navigating all the job and career services is tricky – there are different services at Espoo for people with higher and lower level of education levels.
3. When you move somewhere and you don't need a job – you are ignoring these services (like Hello Espoo) – they might be unknown also in the new situation when you would need them for the first time.



Legal considerations

1. The new TE law brings significant changes to the employment process by transferring the responsibility to municipalities. The main change for job seekers is that currently, after registering with TE keskus, they are referred to työllisyys Espoo services. However, under the reform, the registered place (currently työllisyys Espoo) will be the primary service provider for the customer.
2. The goals of the new government forecast difficulties for foreigners to stay and work in Finland, which has to be considered
3. Work laws can be unfamiliar for foreigners. (exploitation of people in vulnerable situations is not uncommon)



Reflections



Reflections (1): Working with the experts

- It's difficult to schedule workshops with so many participants
- Invited experts can disagree and have conflicting inputs.
- People might be sceptical about the methods; good to consider giving an opportunity to validate.
- Chemistry between the experts is important for the atmosphere of the workshop.



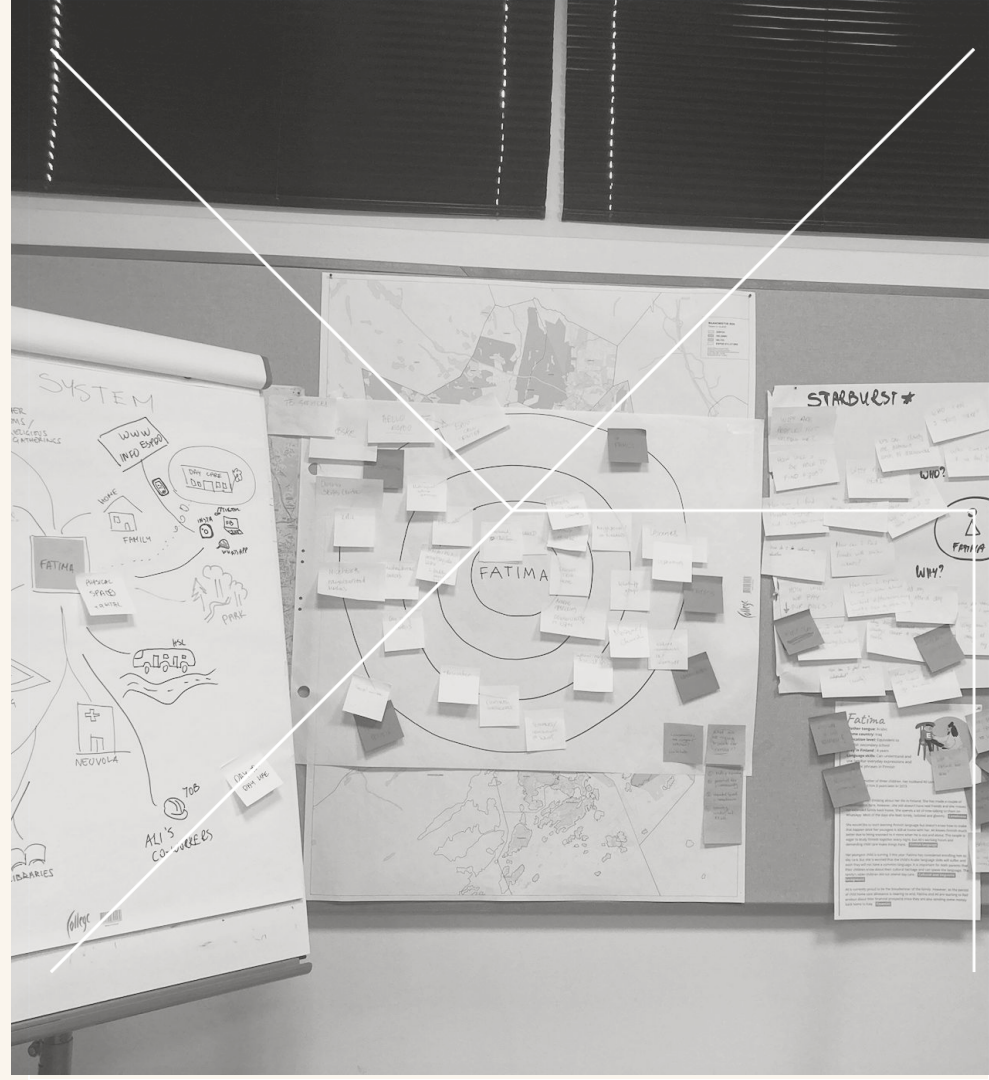
Reflections (2): Creating a story (persona)

- Some topics are very complicated and hard to compress in one story (employment).
- You need to make compromises whether to go in-depth (2nd persona) or broad (3rd persona).
- Keeping the balance between asking for feedback and trusting your gut.
- Keep it simple and focused on one character, and add side characters if needed.
- The struggles of creating a story will affect the use of/confidence in that story (3rd persona).



Reflections (3): Facilitation and methods

- It's good to introduce the context of the project (Trust M) several times.
- People might have different interpretations of the methods (what a system is exactly?).
- Invited experts can feel critical towards the methods (personas might seem inaccurate).
- More examples might be needed when working with non-designers.
- It's easy to lose confidence, a facilitator needs to believe in the story and methods.
- Mixing up activities could have helped?



What's next?

The discussions from these workshops are already impacting our (research) work – they were referenced at co-creation workshops, informed some ideation sessions, etc.

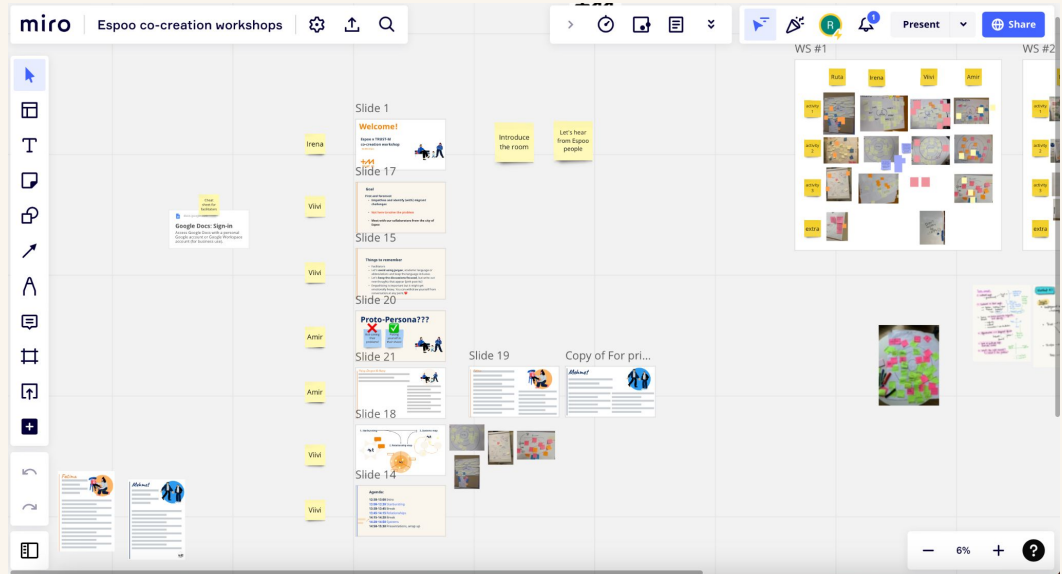
Going forwards, we can think of:

- How can this support our decision making?
- Academic outputs?
- Looking into informal networks & Trust – collab with Deaconess?
- How to validate our findings with the migrant groups (end users)?
- Similar collaboration with Espoo NGOs?
- ...

Miro board

https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMGFs8DU=/?share_link_id=790572118295

Welcome slides,
photos of the artifacts,
some extra notes.



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