Introduction to research

The M1.2 semester officially started in September 2018, but my introduction to researching **Transformative Practices** already started in summer. Together with Renee Noortman I dived into the Transformative Practices Framework of Caroline Hummels et al, by analysing several case studies of Cindy van den Bremen, Philémonne Jaasma and Sietske Klooster. I really enjoyed working on this research, since I experienced the feeling of 'flying'. By gathering stories, mapping them out, seeking for patterns and abstracting insights, I felt able to really take a **bird-eye perspective** and try out where we could **spark** interesting discussions. What I found most inspiring was the **combination of perspectives**: the interviewed designers from practice, Caroline from theory and ours from **curiosity**. This is a role I felt extremely comfortable with and excited for.
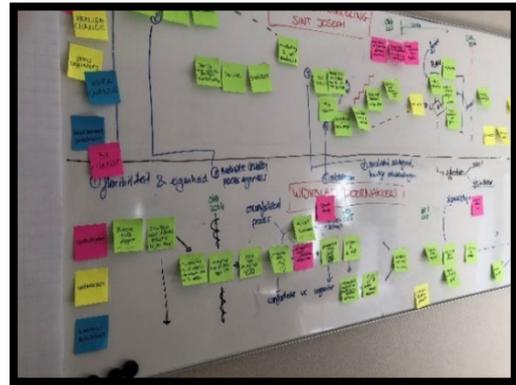

Figure 1 Analysis of Cindy van den Bremen's case for the Transformative Practices Framework.

Figure 2 A living statue of the Nuqat team. As can be seen, I am placed in this statue as The External Researcher: part of the team, but no part of the team.

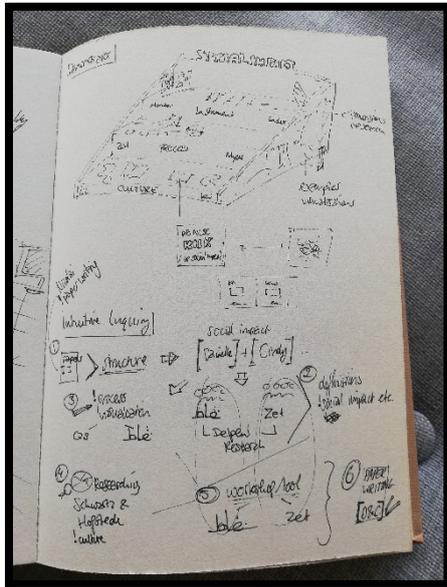**Finding my way as a researcher in a new context**

Hardly finished with this research, I departed to Kuwait to work on the Social Impact Index of Nuqat. Soon it became clear that everything would be different than **expected** and **prepared** for. Project wise, the two most important changes were the **different understanding of Social Impact** and the misconception that there was a team working on this project: I had to do everything by myself. Instead of a researching team member, I was an **external researcher**. To be honest, this role made me cry every now and then. I adored the company I was working for, but was **uncomfortable** with my position. I missed the ability to have **in-depth discussions** about my research, since I couldn't share my experience with anyone. Kuwaiti didn't have the same confusions I had and the Dutch people I was Skyping with couldn't experience the context themselves.

This meant I had to bring my **communication** and **reflection** skills to a next level. I realized I had to understand the local context better, to be able to understand our differences in definition of – well, nearly everything. Even the word 'camping' had a different meaning: I was preparing for a trip whereas my colleagues were preparing for a picknick.. which didn't even happen, because we'd do it *inshallah*. **Not judging** but trying to **understand** this culture helped me to put all these differences in **perspective**.

By **shifting** my research approach from theory to practice, I started to gain feeling for the context. I used my own familiar Dutch context as a **mirror** to open up the discussion. In every conversation, I first **aligned** our definitions of the topics we were discussing, so that we could both take each other's perspective into account. It took a while, but in my final days in Kuwait, I was finally able to have the in-depth discussions I had been longing for.

With this, also came the feeling of **being appreciated**. Researching a local context mainly adds value for locals if you can bring in something new – stating *their* obvious is not that impressive. I am fairly sensitive for appreciation, so this research was a massive **confrontation** with myself. So badly wanting to be of value, I always get **impatient** when I don't see this reflected quick enough.

I think this research period has been of value to me, since it showed that my efforts were a long-term **investment** that returned itself in the end. Also, being treated as an external researcher enabled me to purely consider my **own stake**. Although this is not something I prefer to do (working with multiple stakeholders excites me), it was interesting to completely guide my process to my **own interests**.

I followed my **sense** in selecting research methods, resources and directions, feeling supported by my coaches in doing so. As a designer my **confidence** has grown that I can trust my intuition, as it was always in line with my ratio. When reflecting on my holistic approach I noticed that I undeliberately incorporated the perspectives of all different Expertise Areas of Industrial Design in my approach towards understanding the **complex social system** I was researching. 'User & Society' and 'Business & Entrepreneurship' were of course most obviously integrated, but the other perspectives helped me as well: the **mindset** on technology and data taught me a lot about the (im)possibilities and dynamics of the Kuwaiti society; approaching the Social Impact Index from an **aesthetical** perspective, lifted my project towards researching the underlying dimensions of a Social Impact Assessment tool, instead of solely researching the different definitions of Social Impact.

Figure 3 Guiding my research process by visualizing my mind

Perspective on Social Impact and future projects
By making use of Intuitive Inquiry as a research method, I was also researching the transformation of my personal understanding of Social Impact. I realized my definition was very Dutch, and although I think it still holds in our context, is surely doesn't hold in every other. Aligning definitions turned out to be key in my research and I think *thát* holds within our context too. Fuzzy words like Impact, Resilience, Empowerment, etc, are easy to be misinterpreted (in nuance) when not discussed, even amongst colleagues. I think it is important for me to stay sharp on this, at every stage but especially at the beginning of a project, so that both definitions and expectations are aligned.

My graduation project will be in the domain of Transformative Practices again, which I am very excited about, since I experienced to be extremely triggered to play with this complexity. However, I am looking forward to now gain experience in the role of a leading / entrepreneurial designer in this field (I'm in the DLE track) and to create a collaborative environment that hopefully sparks so many interesting discussions that we can create some fireworks! *Yalla yalla!*