

# The Most Divisive Use of Space, a case study looking at the coming refugee centre and its impact on the local community of Midden-Delfland.

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## Abstract

This bachelor thesis investigates the division caused by the coming of a refugee centre in the local community of Midden-Delfland in the Netherlands. It tries to uncover this by looking at the reasons why the refugee centre exists as the main method of sheltering refugees. In addition to this the frames provided through media coverage are uncovered, and the local reaction to the place is analysed. To achieve this result a qualitative study was done including a policy analysis on local policy, national policy and EU policy, a media analysis on the frames present in local and national media, several semi-structured interviews with the inhabitants of Midden-Delfland and an interview with the councilmembers of a local political party. To analyse these results the theoretical framework of Bordering, Ordering and Othering was utilised. The result was that through policy the refugee centre, was separated from its environment, which made way for the media to provide this place distinct identity through framing to which eventually resulted in the refugee being othered by the local inhabitants of Midden-Delfland, with the imbalance caused by these processes of bordering, ordering and othering resulting in a division in the municipality.

## Summary

The peaceful municipality of Midden-Delfland has in the past been one which positioned itself as welcoming to the outside public. This however changed when the local government announced its plan to shelter 225 refugees inside the municipality by creating a refugee centre. An online petition was started, and banners were hung at the eventual site of the refugee centre, this research aimed to investigate the characteristics of a refugee centre created through policy, the characteristics given to it through framing in the media and the way the local people of Midden-Delfland responded to it. The following research question has been formulated: *“Why does the creation of a refugee centre in Midden-Delfland create such division?”*.

To answer these questions the following methods were used: a policy analysis looking at asylum policy on the local, national and European scale; a media analysis of both national and local news sources to uncover the prevalent frames surrounding the topic of refugee centres; and 6 interviews of which 5 with inhabitants of Midden-Delfland and 1 with the councillors of a local political party. Amongst the interviewed locals were people positive toward the refugee centre, negative toward the refugee centre and indifferent to the refugee centre. The interview with the councillors helped in uncovering the intentions behind some decisions of the local government and provided the viewpoints from one of the parties involved in the development of the refugee centre. To analyse the data acquired during the interviews, the program Atlas.TI was utilised. Through Atlas.TI codes can be created and assigned to answers to help organise the data.

The data acquired would in turn be analysed through the theoretical lens of bordering, ordering and othering. With the process of bordering being critically applied to the policy behind refugee centres, the process of othering being applied to the frames prevalent in the media coverage of the refugee centre in Midden-Delfland and refugee centres in general.

The analysis of European policy showed that the refugee centre is built up out of minimum requirements, with the only thing enforced by the European legislature being the adequate standards of living. There is a guidance provided which gives some examples of how such a place would look or function, but this is simply suggested. The practical aspects of the refugee centre have to be decided by member states. The Dutch asylum policy is carried out by the COA, an independent administrative body. The COA utilises three main types of refugee centre: the reception centre, the procedural shelter and the AZC. These three locations form the sifting process, which is part of the national asylum policy, through which the real refugee is distinguished

from the fake refugee. This distinction is further emphasised by the politicisation of the national asylum policy. With measures to make the asylum procedure stricter being explicitly requested by political parties. This political will for a stricter asylum policy has resulted two opposing goals of the refugee centre: a humanitarian place where refugees can be safe, and a political space which acts as a measure to discourage fake refugees from entering the country. The policy analysis on a local scale mainly showed the inexperience of the local government and community with refugees. The choice for the location of the refugee centre was made based on a list of criteria but resulted in the location not actually being chosen for being a nice living environment.

Through the way in which policy has caused the refugee centre to become a place built out of minimums which is focussed on keeping the so-called fake refugees out of the country and is created in a space which is not actually a nice living environment, the refugee centre has been bordered from its surroundings.

The media analysis showed the way in which the media is able to change and influence the discourse around the refugee centre. Through the analysis of current news articles from three national news sources, various frames created around the refugee centre were identified:

The bad management frame, which frames the refugee centre as a place which is ineffective and not very good at fulfilling its goal of sheltering refugees. The frame of the refugee centre being demanded by a larger entity frames the smaller entity that is against the refugee centre as the victim of the situation and creates the story of a power struggle. In turn leaving the refugee out of the story by focussing on these other two parties. The most prevalent frame is the frame of the refugee centre as an unsafe place. Because of the overexposure of stories about crime and illegalities inside or in the vicinity of a refugee centre, the frame creates a feeling that every refugee is a criminal or at least that a refugee centre is a less safe place than its surroundings. Along with this the frame of a place which causes disturbance also creates the expectation that a refugee centre is bound to cause a decrease in joy of living for its neighbours. Finally, the frame of a refugee centre also being a bad place to live for a refugee undermines the whole idea of a refugee centre and causes one to doubt its effectivity in fulfilling its main task.

During the process of the creation of the refugee centre in Midden-Delfland, there were also some instances of framing, especially when the local story was picked up in the national media was the story distorted. The opposition was exaggerated, once by providing the article about the situation in Midden-Delfland with footage from a much fiercer protest in another municipality. This was evoking the image of much fiercer opposition than was actually the case. The other time the opposition from people during an information evening was exaggerated as the opposition from the entire village. Along with this the refugee centre was consistently framed as large scale, even though the COA does not consider it large scale. Through these frames, an idea of 'the refugee centre' is created. The place is given some qualities some ways in which it differs from its surroundings, the refugee centre is ordered.

The local response was mainly critical of the way the local government had communicated throughout the entire process. They were seen as dishonest because of three main reasons: broken promises, a pretence of participation and a lack of transparency. Along with this the sentiment of one of the villages being the drain of the municipality was also widespread. This specific village which will house the refugee centre has been underappreciated by the local government for a while and the coming refugee centre was the straw that broke the camel's back.

There is a feeling among the locals that the opposition could have been prevented if the local government would have been more open and honest. But because of this opposition there is also a feeling of pity for the refugees that get thrown into the middle of this heated situation. The refugee is seen as an innocent bystander, because the community is not against sheltering refugees, the process has caused the opposition. The actual experience of the interviewees with refugees and refugee centres were limited, so most opinions and viewpoints were based on assumptions and stories they saw in the media. They did not perceive the refugee as a nice place, and some were assured that no one would live there given the choice.

The most mentioned aspects of the refugee centre were security and integration. With security having to protect the neighbours from the inhabitants of the centre and integration being the best way to combat disturbances. This integration would be much easier according to some locals if the local government would have gone with the suggestion of some locals and spread the refugees out evenly over the three villages. This was however deemed not possible as the local government would in that case have been unable to provide all necessary facilities for the refugee.

Because of the way the refugee centre has been bordered and ordered, the place has been differentiated from its surroundings and given a specific identity. However, because this place has been differentiated in that way, the refugees inhabiting it get othered. The fact that none of the interviewed locals had ever been in a refugee centre exemplifies the ways in which the nature of the place keeps people out. The various frames in the media have contributed to a view of the refugee as a place you do not want to be. Because of this a distance is created between the locals and the refugee and the refugee gets othered. Through the interplay of the processes of bordering, ordering and othering, an imbalance is created within the municipality resulting in a division.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction to research

Peace, quiet, blue skies, green grass, and nice people. Such a description would not be out of place for Midden-Delfland. This small municipality in the Province of South-Holland in the Netherlands is sandwiched in between the cities of Rotterdam, the Hague and Delft. To combat the franticness of the metropole it's located inside, Midden-Delfland has opted to take things slow. Fulfilling the role of the eye of a hurricane, the municipality has sought to stay green, quiet and a bit of a haven for all people dazed by the city. Consisting of the small villages of Den Hoorn, Maasland, and Schipluiden and meadows in between, the municipality has a welcoming appearance and mentality. However, this changed when in September of 2022 the temporary mayor was requested by the safety region to investigate the possibility of a refugee centre in Midden-Delfland. In November of that year the local government publicly announced that there was the intention for an investigation into the feasibility of housing 225 refugees inside the borders of the municipality, and the welcoming stance slowly changed. For a while the mood of the inhabitants of Midden-Delfland was to wait and see, but when the specific location of this centre became apparent the sentiment changed. The local pride that had welcomed outsiders to experience all the municipality has to offer, now changed in a conservatory preservationist pride. For the planned refugee centre there was no public support and the politicians had to listen to the locals, as some banners that were hung up at the designated site claimed. An online petition was started, and it was signed by more than 3000 people ("Plaats geen AZC in Midden-Delfland", n.d.). No refugee centre in Midden-Delfland, the message was clear, however the reason behind this response is not as clear as the petition itself does not give any concrete reasons as to why there should not come a refugee centre to Midden-Delfland.

The reason that comes to mind first is an overall aversion toward refugees, it would certainly not be the first time that a village had protested against a refugee centre because of this reason. However, this is not fully the case, as in 2024 housing for Ukrainian ex-refugees was built ("Realisatie verplaatsbare woningen 'Euterpe' in Maasland feestelijk gevierd", 2024). This development was not met with protest but with celebration. There has in the past been some commotion around the development of housing for ex-refugees in the municipality, however in that instance there was still a very conciliatory approach from the neighbours toward the local government and it created far less division in the local community ("Omwonenden Kreekzone tekenen massaal petitie", 2015). So there is a difference between regular housing for refugees and a refugee centre.

This research deals with the place identity of a refugee centre and the ways in which this place and the process surrounding it impact the local community. This encompasses the identity given by design and added to the framework of a refugee centre through the foundational policy behind it, but also the identity given to it from external sources. Framing which dictates the expectations surrounding it. These frames don't just linger on in the minds of individuals, but also in the national and even international consciousness. Through the language of media and politics, a specific picture of 'the refugee centre' is being built. To fully understand the impact of this place identity the response to this place is vital in understanding how this actually affects the situation and in what way the identity of a refugee centre has an impact on the local community and why it

causes such division. Because when one place which will not even exist until 2025 (“Asielzoekerscentrum voor 225 vluchtelingen begin 2025 klaar”, 2024) causes some councillors to receive threats in this once so peaceful community, this place clearly has a big social impact.

## 1.2 Relevance

### 1.2.1 Societal Relevance

The topic of asylum policy and the international migration which it is part of is a relevant one in current times. Not only is migration one of the most influential geographical processes, having an impact across borders. It has also risen to the top of the political agenda.

Especially in Dutch politics, the importance of the refugee in political discourse cannot and should not be understated. Asylum policy is currently one of the biggest concerns of the Dutch people, as can be extracted from the 2023 electoral victory of far-right populist party PVV. The Partij Voor de Vrijheid or Freedom Party as it is officially called, has been present in Dutch politics for quite a long time now. Carried by its distinctive leader Geert Wilders, the party has had an undeniable presence in Dutch politics ever since its inception in 2006. While the party has reached this victory partly by positioning itself as a party for the people and against the elite, its identity largely stems from a history of anti-Islam and anti-migration viewpoints. With Wilders and other PVV members of parliament in the past often appearing to support locals fighting against the coming of refugee centres (Redactie Medialogica, 2022a). A party so critical of refugee centres being voted on the most in the country indicates the impact and importance of these places for Dutch society.

Our national asylum policy has been scrutinised and criticised in various ways. There seems to be somewhat of a consensus among the Dutch public that the current policy regarding asylum is not sustainable. With the reception centre Ter Apel being filled to the brim, refugees even had to sleep outside, a fact which is thought to be unacceptable in a country like the Netherlands. The solution to this problem is not brought with consensus, as some people feel we should house less people because of the limited space in the Netherlands. Other people and the past government brought forward a different solution. Spread out the people across the country and take in refugees in small quantities throughout the country. This would be enforced through the Spreidingswet. A law which is very unpopular in various circles. A lot of nimbys (an acronym of Not in my Backyard) revealed themselves and made clear that they would not accept the taking in of refugees in their municipality. All this because of the spatial impact and societal image of the refugee centre.

For a long while the municipality of Midden-Delfland dodged the accommodation of asylum seekers. But recently the local government revealed plans for a refugee centre in which 225 asylum seekers could be housed. This fact eventually resulted in an outcry among locals. Through media like a local newspaper, television and local news websites, a story has been constructed of the people against local government.

This story is not limited to Midden-Delfland and despite the fact that the Spreidingswet has been revoked by the new government lead by the PVV, a lot more places in the Netherlands will have to deal with the same issue as the influx of refugees shows no sign of stopping and these people will in the future also have to be sheltered somewhere in the country. This research concerning local policy, framing and the public negative response to the establishment of a local refugee centre is

aimed at clarifying the mechanisms resulting in such a commotion. And in such it might help avoiding pitfalls.

### 1.2.2 Scientific Relevance

There have already been various studies on the response to refugee centres in a local environment. Like Bygnes (2019) who studied the reaction to a large group of refugees in local Norwegian communities through qualitative interviews after the refugee centre was realised and focussed on the change in mood once the refugees finally arrived. This current research also utilises qualitative interviews to gauge the local responses to the refugee centre, and the anticipation toward the establishment of a refugee centre is also something which this study will research. But because the refugee centre in Midden-Delfland does not yet exist our research has opted to incorporate more research into the influences on this response, through media framing and policy.

Another study done by Strømsø and Bygnes (2021) focusses not just on the differences in responses from locals to the establishment of a refugee centre in their local area, but also on the reactions of locals on each other's reactions and the disagreement in the appropriate response. That study focused on the response of people attending local information meetings, something which this study will also research. However, where that study is particularly concerned with researching the social processes and interactions as a result of the response to the centre, our study will focus more on the spatial aspect of the refugee centre and the ways in which that influences the social interactions. By looking at the spatial aspects and the policy behind a space like a refugee centre and in addition to that incorporating the viewpoints of one of the parties in charge of the project, we can consider the intentions behind a place like a refugee centre and investigate how resulting spatial aspects influence the response.

Whyte, Larsen and Olwig (2018) have also done research on the influence of asylum centres on local communities. They did an extensive qualitative study with interviews with locals and observations in three separate local communities in Denmark. While it focusses on the experiences and opinions of the local community, it does not consider the influence of media frames in establishing these opinions. So while we both investigate the impact a refugee centre has on a local community, this research chooses to include the way in which the media influences the local response. In doing this we get a clearer idea of the origins of the place identity of the refugee centre.

## 1.3 Research Objective

The topic of refugee centres is an important one because it deals with vulnerable people, people on the run from conflict and danger, trying to find a place where they can live their lives in safety. However, because refugee centres have become such a controversial topic the government has failed to provide accommodation to shelter these people, which has meant that in some extreme cases, people have had to sleep outside on the grass. This research hopes to find out why the refugee centre as a place is so controversial and what causes the firm opposition. In the meantime, it tries to provide information which will smoothen the process of creating a refugee centre in a local community.

The municipality of Midden-Delfland was chosen because of the very recent developments and the fact that the refugee centre does not yet exist, therefore the initial response has not been altered by the actual nature of the place, still relying on the understood identity of ‘the refugee centre’. Furthermore, Midden-Delfland has never dealt before with the sheltering of refugees on such a scale, therefore this process was new to both the local government and the local inhabitants. Since, on the whole, its residents do not have any personal experience with refugees the identity of the refugee centre plays an important part in the acceptance process.

## 1.4 Research Question

### 1.4.1 Main Research Question

Why does the creation of a refugee centre in Midden-Delfland create a division between the locals and the coming refugee?

### 1.4.2 Sub-Questions

Why are refugee centres utilised in policy as the main way of accommodating refugees?

What is the frame created around refugee centres in the media?

How does the previous experience of locals in Midden-Delfland with refugees and refugee centres inform their opinion on the coming refugee centre?

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

### 1.5.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The refugee centre as a place has been studied by many academics. First of all, as a spatial entity with an impact on its surroundings. One instance of this is the study on the ways in which a refugee camp plays a role in the life of a refugee (Feldman, 2015). Here the refugee camp has been subdivided into 3 distinct spaces: a humanitarian space, a political space and an emotional space. It being a humanitarian space is a result of its function as a part of asylum policy, of which the main goal in its purest form is to provide safety to refugees. While one could argue about the priority of this goal in the European Union’s asylum policy. A policy which in its nature of only providing asylum to people once they are inside its borders, conflicts with the idea of asylum policy existing solely in the context of human dignity (Düwell, 2023). Adding to this the utilisation of asylum policy as a deterrence method in European countries (Whyte, Campbell, et al., 2018), and it becomes clear that asylum policy and the refugee centres part of it do not only exist in a humanitarian context but also very much in a political context. The third aspect of the refugee centre being an emotional space does not only apply to the refugees inhabiting them but also applies to the local residents surrounding a refugee centre. In a study on refugee centres in Germany Zill et al. (2021) defined three ways in which the material aspects of an asylum centre can have a discomforting effect on not only the refugee but also local residents: Self mortification, depersonalisation and role-breakdown. These effects give us an indication of the flaws asylum

centres bring with them and makes us wonder why they are currently the main implementation of asylum policy in the Netherlands.

Banko, Katarzyna and Gatrell (2022) discuss 3 reasons for the usage of centralised refugee sheltering in the form of camps: “*a place of safety and protection (usually described by officialdom as ‘temporary’), management and surveillance and a site of administrative convenience*”. These three reasons provide the basic principles in which a refugee centre should succeed, because if they no longer applied, there would be no inherent reason for the existence of the refugee centre and other asylum policies could be more effective, therefore these three reasons will be used as criteria to assess the effectivity of a refugee centre as the method of providing asylum in the case of Midden-Delfland.

The European policy surrounding refugees and asylum can be defined as flawed, not in small part due to the way in which it serves a frame surrounding refugees and asylum and creates a border in the discourse surrounding refugees (Bürkner, 2018). While policy plays a part in the creation of frames it does not encompass the entirety of it. The creation of frames surrounding refugees and refugee centres exists in an interplay of policy and discourse. Through the use of framing, discourse can be altered by changing the meaning of words, as has been done to the terms ‘allochtoon’ and ‘autochtoon’ by right wing political parties in the Netherlands (Doomernik, 2017). Along with this media framing also has an influence on the perception of refugee centres in the Netherlands (Kox et al., 2022), shaping the way in which asylum policy and the reaction to refugees are perceived while in turn also being shaped by it. Because policy and media very much intertwine in the case of the framing of refugees with news stories about policy also carrying frames and creating barriers between refugees and residents (Estrada et al., 2016). Because of this interplay policy and media should not be seen as separate from each other but are needed to support each other. The frames created in discourse and policy on a national level are not solely possible for the reaction of locals and their interactions with a refugee centre. Along with this local sentiments and stories also play a big part in how people deal with a refugee centre (Segers, 2019).

To study such a place as a refugee centre and its impact on its surroundings and the image it creates inside the minds of people, one must understand its identity. A place identity was originally described by Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff (1983, p. 60) as: “*best thought of as a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types of settings*”. The refugee centre is a place with a definite identity, even though it is different in its acquisition of this identity than many other places. Where other places acquire their identity through historic buildings and the communities that are part of this place (Azmi et al., 2014). Places of temporary refugee asylum exist in a liminality, because of its insistence that refugees seek home elsewhere and only inhabit the place temporarily (Ramadan, 2012). It is a space embedded with the interplay between its inhabitants and governance (Stevenson & Sutton, 2011). Place identity has also been used overall to legitimise or criticise the presence of refugees inside a host society (Kirkwood et al., 2013). It is therefore necessary to take place identity into account when analysing the impact of a refugee centre, because it does not only exist as a material addition to its locality, but it also brings with it a specific identity.

To create an understanding of the data acquired during the research process a certain theoretical framework will be utilised. This framework provides the lens through which the data will be analysed and given meaning. This framework is created using the theory of Bordering, Ordering and Othering as established by Van Houtum and Van Naerssen in 2002. This theory creates a

connection between the processes of Bordering, Ordering and Othering and will be utilised as the main processes which influence the creation of the place identity for a refugee centre.

The first part of this theory is bordering, which presupposes that borders should not be understood as fixed spatial points but as strategy and ongoing social processes that enforce differentiation. Along with this, borders make way for the process of ordering in which the lines drawn using bordering are used not only to order but in turn also differentiate people. This division then allows the process of othering to take shape.

Othering utilises the order created as a result of bordering and ordering, to initiate a narrative of us versus them. Where ordering creates two distinct groups, othering embraces one group as the standard, while pushing the other group away. Othering is a process which is still very much part of current interactions with refugees: *“Today the key issue is how stereotypes turn out to be rooted geopolitical scripts that are mobilised in making dividing lines between us and the ‘Other’ and our/their territory, both in State’s activities and in everyday lives where such lines come into play”* (Paasi, 2020). Othering exists as a result of bordering and ordering and the dividing lines it creates but it also interacts with bordering and ordering to in turn legitimise the borders and the order created by these processes.

The theory of bordering and ordering gives us the framework in which the place identity of a refugee centre can differ from its surroundings. It is a theory which is vital to help in answering the question of why the creation of a refugee centre in Midden-Delfland creates a division between the locals and the coming refugee, because it provides a framework to analyse the origin of this division. The division created between the locals and the refugees is one which relies on the process of bordering and subsequently ordering and othering. By looking at the policy behind refugee centres through the lens of bordering, we can investigate the spatial aspects in which the centre differs from its surrounding and the intentions behind that difference. The borders created by design can be assessed and critically reflected upon by looking at it through the lens of bordering. Which will help identify the real reason for the utilisation of refugee centres as the main way of accommodating refugees. The lens of ordering will help identify the frames created around the refugee centre in the media, showing how the image of the centre is affected by the way it is reported on. Because to fully understand these frames and we need to look at the way these frames order the world around us, by creating a coherent narrative around refugee centres. Othering provides an explanation for the way in which the recipient of these frames looks at the refugee centre and reacts to this place. Providing an explanation for the extraordinary reaction and helping us understand why this place has such an impact on the local community. Othering exists as a result of bordering and ordering in the same way that local responses exist as a result of asylum policy and media frames. Therefore by using the theory of bordering, ordering and othering the answers to the three sub questions can be connected to each other, as is also true in the case study of Midden-Delfland, to eventually provide an answer to the main research question.

### 1.5.2 Key concepts

#### ***Refugee***

While refugees do not have an active participatory role in the case study of the refugee centre in Midden-Delfland because the centre does not exist yet, this group of people is central to the discourse surrounding the refugee centre. In addition to this, it is very important to define the term

refugee and denote to which group of people it refers because the term has been politicised and framed in various ways. This study uses the same definition for refugee as the European Union and its member states, which based it upon the United Nations Refugee Convention (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2010, p. 14) and states:

*“any person who (...) owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”*

### ***Safety and protection***

The safety aspect of the refugee camp is very important. It is the most important aspect of asylum and the biggest difference between the place fled from and the place fled to. It is exactly lack of safety that drives the refugee to move toward a new place. Therefore, making sure these people are ensured safety is a vital aspect of the motivation behind refugee centres. The safety in this aspect is completely focused on the refugee. We can apply this specific goal of a refugee centre to the identity of a refugee centre as a humanitarian space by Feldman (2015) as the humanitarian identity is exemplified through the effort to provide safety and protection to the refugees.

### ***Management and surveillance***

While we interpreted the first aspect of safety to mainly concern the protection of refugees from the dangers outside, some may also apply this point of safety to the protection of the outside from the refugees. But this applies to of the management and surveillance aspect. Management and surveillance essentially deal with the interaction between the refugee and their new surroundings. It's a question of control and power.

### ***Administration***

The administrative aspect of the refugee centre may seem far removed from the essential goal of an asylum for refugees. But it seems to be the main reason why refugees are placed in a central location in western countries like the Netherlands. Because the Netherlands is far removed from the places from which the asylum seekers flee, safety is not particularly more prevalent inside the refugee centre than outside. And so, there is not an inherent need to shelter the refugees from the area around the centre, but this central approach is mostly for administrative convenience. It enables to provide central facilities and only needing one space to house all refugees, instead of multiple.

## **1.6 Research Design and Methodology**

For this research a qualitative approach has been chosen as this gives the opportunity to get a grasp of the sentiments behind the response of locals, and the profound way individuals look at the refugee centre and what they see as part of its place identity.

The way through which the research was carried out, was as a Case study focused on the municipality of Midden-Delfland. The research was split into three distinct areas: an area focused on policy, an area focussed on media coverage, and an area focused on the response of locals. In these three different areas the place identity of the refugee centre was assessed and researched, to

eventually use all three areas to finally answer how the creation of a refugee centre had such an impact on the local community in Midden-Delfland.

To acquire data on the policy behind a refugee centre, a policy study was done to find out the system behind the refugee centres and how such a place is given an identity in its creation. By looking at the policy behind a refugee centre the goals of a centre can be uncovered. The policy analysis was subdivided into three scales: The European scale, the national scale, and the local scale. Because all three scales have institutions which provide policy that is important in the creation of the refugee centre, respectively the European Union, the Dutch government, and the local government. To understand the requirements and place identity of a refugee centre it is necessary to look at all three scales and the interplay between these governing bodies.

Along with this it is also vital to look at the media coverage of the refugee centre as frames are created during the spread of information. These frames have a significant impact on the way people look at a refugee centre and how they respond to them (Kox et al., 2022). To uncover these frames a media analysis was done, both on national and local scale. It was chosen not to look at media on European scale as the interviewed locals did not engage with such sources. To get the most comprehensive look of the frames surrounding refugee centres in national media, all news articles concerning refugee centres from 3 different news institutions, NOS, RTL Nieuws and NU.nl, from 2023 onward were analysed. The sources of local news that were analysed were based on the sources with which the interviewed locals informed themselves on the topic. This included the local newspaper, the regional newspaper, the local broadcaster, and the regional broadcaster.

To acquire data on the feelings, opinions, and viewpoints of the local people of Midden-Delfland 6 interviews have been held. Through these interviews the view these people have toward the refugee centre will be assessed. It's also important to find out where these people got these ideas from, and why some people have a positive view of refugees while others have a more negative view. To fully understand the way this view was created and how their personal idea of the refugee centre was created, the difference in kinds of news and media they consume is also important to assess, as through questions about this we can find out whose frame has influenced their view and how these ideas were formed. The selection of people that will be interviewed, has been made through personal connections as the researcher is familiar with the local people. To ensure a varied selection of responses active effort was put in the selection to encompass both people in favour, against and indifferent to the process. Eventually resulting in 3 interviews with people against the development, 1 in favour and 1 indifferent. An interview guide served as the basis of these semi-structured interviews, to make sure the answers of various subjects can be compared. There was a preference for in person interviews as this made it easier to get an idea of a person's body language during the interview, eventually scheduling conflicts caused two interviews to be held online.

Alongside these interviews with local inhabitants also one interview with the councillors of a local political party has been held. This was deemed necessary to get further insight into the process behind the creation of the refugee centre and the political opinions and ideas behind it. This interview will act as a counterpart to the local response by providing some of the intentions of the local government and how some of these intentions may be misconstrued. It will also provide the view of a government institution like that of a municipality on the identity and purpose of a refugee centre. The interview guide for the semi-structured interview with these councillors consisted of different questions than the interview guide for the locals because the answers of the councillors were indicative of the local government, which fulfils a different role in this research than the locals.

All interviews were transcribed either by hand or with the help of transcribing software. Afterward all transcriptions of the interviews with locals were coded in the web version of Atlas TI. The codes served the purpose of giving an overview of each interview and helped to point out similarities between interviews and narratives which were present in multiple interviews. The interview with the councillors was not coded as it was not deemed necessary because of its difference from the other interviews. The results from the interview with the councillors were individually assessed in their connection to the answers for the other interviews. Afterward the answers were analysed and looked at through the theoretical lens of bordering/ordering/othering. This data was then combined with the data acquired through the policy and media analysis, which were also viewed through the theoretical framework.

Interview number	Role	Hometown	Stance toward development
1	Local	Den Hoorn	Negative
2	Local	Den Hoorn	Negative
3	Local	Den Hoorn	Negative
4	Local	Schipluiden	Positive
5	Local	Den Hoorn	Indifferent
6	Councilmembers	-	Positive

Through the use of the theoretical framework of Bordering, Ordering and Othering the research questions will be answered. In particular by utilising the specific process of bordering, the research question of: Why are refugee centres utilised in policy as the main way of accommodating refugees? will be answered as the process of bordering helps us understand some of the results and flaws of refugee centres as the main asylum policy, which will eventually help in answering the main research question of: Why does the creation of a refugee centre in Midden-Delfland create a division between the locals and the coming refugee?

To explain the ways in which media framing also enables the division between locals and refugees, the theoretical process of ordering will be used. By identifying the creation of frames surrounding refugees and refugee centres as a process of ordering, we are not only able to critically analyse the process but also connect it to the process of bordering.

Finally, to answer the question of: “How does the previous experience of locals in Midden-Delfland with refugees and refugee centres inform their opinion on the coming refugee centre?” the process of othering will be used to analyse this response from the locals. Through the utilisation of the theoretical term of othering, the response is not only brought into relation with the processes of bordering and ordering, but also with the policy behind refugee centres and the media framing of refugee centres. This way the way these things influence the response becomes clear.

### 1.7 Potential Considerations and limitations

Because the refugee centre is currently a controversial issue, and people’s identification of a refugee centre is partly influenced the biases of people, extra attention was paid to the researcher’s image of objectivity during the interview. An interview with a local which tries to uncover the way in which people think about a refugee centre may be experienced as confronting or even subverting. While trying to uncover the nature of this thought process, especially with a topic laden with emotion, the interviewee may feel like the researcher is trying to tell a specific story and thus

attention was paid as to not give the interviewee any suppositions that the researcher is trying to make them the antagonist of the story. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, and it is not the task or the intention of the researcher to presuppose otherwise.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1 Policy

#### 2.1.1 Foundational policy in the creation of refugee centres

##### **European Policy**

To get a full picture of the deliberation behind the asylum procedure in Midden-Delfland, we not only need to look at the local and national policy at the core of the local developments but also at the policy created by the European Union. Because if we really want to get to the core of why the asylum centres are the way they are, we need to look at the policy and rules made by the European Union that have created the framework in which our national asylum policy exists.

The Common European Asylum System has been used as the main asylum policy as directed the European Union since 1999. It sets up rules and regulation for the process of granting asylum to refugees. Part of the Common European Asylum System is the Reception Conditions Directive which creates a common standard in the reception of refugees in Europe. It states the baseline of facilities that should be available to refugees in all member states of the European Union (Directive 2013/33/EU). It is the foundational document regarding the requirements for the living conditions of the refugees in refugee centres. It also applies to the refugee centre in Midden-Delfland (Art. 22.16 lid 2 plan gemeente Midden-Delfland, 2024).

There are a few ways in which this directive dictates what a refugee should have access to. First of all it establishes the ways in which refugees may be sheltered: *“premises used for the purpose of housing applicants during the examination of an application for international protection made at the border or in transit zones”* (Art. 18, 1(a)). This applies in the Dutch context to the reception location in Ter Apel. Regular refugee centres like the one that’s coming in Midden-Delfland are given as the second option for sheltering, as long as they “guarantee an adequate standard of living” (Art. 18, 1(b)). The third option is “private houses, flats, hotels or other premises adapted for housing applicants” (Art. 18, 1(c)). The need for adaptation of these premises for refugees exemplifies that refugees need special care and conditions in terms of their housing.

Some other requirements are also present in the directive like the condition that refugees need to be able to “move freely within the territory of the host Member State or within an area assigned to them by that Member State” (Art. 7, 1). So long as this assigned area does not deprive them from the other requirements laid down in the directive. Along with this, the location of residence may be decided by the Member state, for reasons of public interest, public order, swift processing, or effective monitoring (Art. 7, 2). This means that the placement of refugees can be chosen based on whether they are wanted somewhere, establishing the power of public opinion in asylum procedure, or the monitoring or processing of refugees, with these last two points overlapping with the core goals of a refugee centre given by Banko, Katarzyna and Gatrell (2022): Management and surveillance, and administration.

The directive sets up these minimum requirements for asylum centres, but is not very concrete in these requirements. For example, Article 17 paragraph 2, which states that: *“Member States shall ensure that material reception conditions provide an adequate standard of living for applicants, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health.”* What is meant with an adequate standard of living and what measures have to be taken to ensure it, is not explained in the directive. To provide answers to these questions, the European Asylum Support Office (2006) created the ‘Guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators.’ A document which provides guidance to the implementation of adequate measures to ensure good living standards for refugees.

The guidance is divided into eight sections: Housing, Food, Clothing and other non-food items, Daily expenses allowance, Health Care, Provision of information and counselling, Identification, assessment and response to special needs, and Staff training. To keep this analysis limited to the spatial aspect of the refugee centre, we’ll focus on the first section concerning housing. The first standard concerns the location of the centre, which should ensure access to relevant services either by having it available on location, being walking distance away from the location, available by public transport or organised transport (European Asylum Support Office, 2016). On infrastructure there are also various standards given which apply to refugee centres. With a minimum of 4m<sup>2</sup> of space per person and a maximum of 6 refugees per private lockable room, at least one bed and cupboard per person and functioning sanitary infrastructure. The building should also be built in accordance with local and national regulations. There are also standards that apply to the security of a refugee centre, which recommends making risk assessments on a regular basis and taking security measures in accordance with the outcomes of the risk assessments. Along with these standards there are also a few others which recommend giving people a place to eat and a place for leisure, having access to a telephone and access to the internet.

The guidance has a lot to say when it comes to the practical aspects of refugee centres, but it only has little power. As the name guidance suggests, the entire document is filled with standards that do not have to be followed but are simply recommendations. And so, it may seem like European legislature has a lot to say when it comes to the creation of refugee centres and it certainly does in some aspects, but it also leaves a lot of freedom to the member states as to how they should implement these rules.

## **National Policy**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1994 the law called Wet Centraal Opvang Asielzoekers goes into effect. Along with the introduction of this law a new organisation emerges: Centraal Orgaan Opvang Asielzoekers, or COA for short. This government organisation becomes responsible for the sheltering of refugees in the Netherlands. Before this point the sheltering and housing of asylum seekers was a task of the municipalities. This locally organised affair was in 1994 replaced by the COA to become a more centrally organised ordeal (Jonker, 2023). The COA is an independent administrative body, which means that it does have public authority, but is not subordinate to government ministers (art. 1a Wet Kzbo, 2006). In the COA law the responsibility of the COA when it comes to the sheltering of refugees is established (art. 3.1a Wet Coa, 1994).

There are various types of refugee centres which the COA utilises (Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers [COA], n.d. -a). First of all, the ‘Centrale ontvangstlocatie’, the reception location. This is the first location to which the refugees will go. Here they will be registered, and

temporarily housed for 3 to 10 days. There is only one of these COL's currently operating in the Netherlands and it's the most famous of all Dutch refugee centre's: Ter Apel. This small village in the northeast of the Netherlands has become a nationally recognised name, as it has become a symbol in the national discourse and the media for the Dutch asylum policy, and the ways it is lacking currently.

The second type of refugee centre is the Procesopvanglocatie, the procedural shelter. At this location the refugee goes through the general asylum procedure. The stay is intended as very temporary, and the location is very much a short stop on the way toward the third location.

The Asielzoekerscentrum or AZC, which is confusingly also the overall term used for a refugee centre in the common discourse, including by the COA itself, is also one specific type of refugee centres. In this location there is room for three types of refugees: The accepted refugee who has come through the procedure and stays at the AZC until they are housed in a municipality, the refugee who is still in a lengthened procedure, and the rejected refugee who has 28 days of right to stay in the AZC to plan their departure out of the country. This is the kind of location which will come to Midden-Delfland. However, when speaking with locals, interviewees 2 and 3 spoke of Ter Apel as a way in which the development could turn out bad.

These three locations form the sifting process through which the 'real' refugee, is distinguished from the 'fake' refugee. And this whole process is designed for the refugee to have one of two outcomes: either they are housed in the Netherlands, or they are kicked out of the country. For this second group of people that have not been granted the opportunity to stay, there is another location after their permitted stay in the AZC. If there is an apparent intention of leaving, these people can get a roof over their head in a so-called 'freedom-inhibiting location' until they are able to leave according to their plan. This location is said to only have austere amenities, and the house rules are stricter than in a regular refugee centre. All this to discourage refugees that have a low chance for a residence permit, from coming to the Netherlands (COA, n.d. -b).

This austere policy was partly expanded during a pilot program in 2021, during which refugees from countries that were deemed safe or refugees with a low chance of success, are not only kept apart in more austere locations while they applied for a residence permit, as was already the case. They were also kept in separate locations as they appealed for new judgement. The pilot was deemed a success, as it increased the austerity of the living conditions of the refugees, which was one of the goals, and was estimated to have a discouraging effect (COA, 2022). The only reason the pilot was not extended was that the municipalities that housed these extra strict locations did not want to keep these locations in their municipality (COA, n.d. -c).

This increase in strictness was not a development which was proposed internally by the COA, or by one of the social organisations that helps out in these locations. The origin of this development is political will, as so much of the migration policy is. In 2019 the austere policy was announced to the second chamber by then state-secretary Broekers-Knol of the right-wing liberal party VVD (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2019). This was a clear execution of one point in the election programme of her party the VVD in 2017, which stated "For migrants from safe countries there is no place here" (VVD, 2016). Choosing to put the focus on the so-called fake refugees. Close to the end of this austere pilot there was another even more restrictive suggested variation on the policy from Joost Eerdmans of right-wing party JA21. (Broekers-Knol, 2021) All this to exemplify the way of asylum policy on the national scale is closely linked to politics. Which has resulted in the topic becoming heavily politicised and being used for political gain.

In the summer of 2023 minister of Justice and Security Yesilgöz-Zegerius stated in the run-up to the national election for the second chamber in the *Volkskrant* her disdain for the way the Dutch asylum policy was abused with what she called “nareis-op-nareis” (Reijmer & Meijer, 2023) which translates to something like stacked follow ups. It has to do with the regulation through which separated refugee families are reunited, which permits close family of an accepted refugee to join them in the host country. The stacked variant is when the people that are let into the country through one of these follow ups in turn also make use of the reunification regulation to let other family also come to the Netherlands, this way stacking follow-ups on top of each other, which Yesilgöz-Zegerius argued was one of the main reasons behind her party’s intention to make asylum policy stricter. Even at the time various experts called stacked follow ups a non-issue and this was mentioned in the same article, but minister Yesilgöz-Zegerius who had also become party leader of liberal party VVD had held on to the problematic nature of the phenomenon and its big impact on the national asylum policy. It is not hard to see why: a few months earlier the VVD let the previous cabinet fall because of this topic (“Hoe Rutte vriend en vijand verraste: reconstructie van de val van Rutte IV”, 2023). The VVD wanted to limit the family reunification policy, which they knew was off the table for coalition partner ChristenUnie (“In het kort: het kabinet is gevallen, dit weten we nu”, 2023). Because of this the cabinet fell over the topic of migration and asylum policy, which was favourable for the VVD who had established themselves as a party concerned about migration. By letting the cabinet fall because of a problem with migration, people would think of migration as a topical issue and vote for political parties with a clear agenda concerning migration and asylum policy, like the VVD. The VVD was accused of using asylum policy as a strategy for political gain (De Koning, De Witt Wijnen, Aharouay, 2023). Eventually it came to light that stacked follow ups resulting in more people being accepted in the country did not occur thousands of times like Yesilgöz-Zegerius claimed to the *Volkskrant*, but only 350 times in four years, about 1 percent of all follow up requests (Hoorntje, 2024). Like the experts said, it was a non-issue, but the topic had already been politicised.

Another part of this politicisation is the securitisation (Kraak, 2018) of asylum policy. Securitisation is the creation of security issues as a result of leaders wanting to shape the world. In this case the perception of a security threat is a social construct and not necessarily representative of the real situation. This way politicians can use politics of fear to become an issue owner. In many cases this is done by the as Kraak calls it: political radical right. Core characteristics of the political radical right are nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The VVD is not a part of the political radical right, as it does not fit these characteristics. The political radical right is growing, something that can be attributed to an increase in migrant population, a crisis of national identity because of globalisation and a transition into a multicultural society. This politicisation and securitisation have in recent years had an effect on public opinion as in 2015 during the height of the European asylum crisis the Dutch public believed an increase in refugees would mean a decrease in security. A big part of this politicisation of the topic of migration and therefore also asylum policy can be attributed to the issue owner of migration in the Netherlands: Geert Wilders’ PVV.

After the previous cabinet fell over the topic of migration, the VVD thought this would make sure they would win the election as party with a clear agenda concerning migration and asylum policy, but by no longer ruling out cooperation in a coalition with the PVV, they made way for the real issue owner to swoop in and win the election (“De PVV niet uitsluiten was een grote inschattingfout van de VVD”, 2023). The new coalition of PVV, VVD, NSC and BBB wrote a new accord which will be the guideline for their new policy (PVV, VVD, NSC & BBB, 2024). If we analyse this text, it states first of all that the asylum policy of the new coalition will be the

strictest ever. With strictness being implied as a good quality for asylum policy. This will be done to achieve grip on migration, which creates an image of migration and the influx of refugees being something currently out of our control, but not because we have been unable to control it but because we have been unwilling. Something which fits with the stance of the PVV. Throughout the accord, the image is created of a current crisis situation with a much higher influx of migrants which warrants stricter policy. It calls for a reform of current asylum policy, which failed because it was too lax. In this accord the goal of asylum policy is not to provide refugees with safety, the goal of asylum policy is to act as a deterrent for possible incoming refugees.

### **Local Policy**

What is telling in the specific case of Midden Delfland is the lack of experience in dealing with refugees. Not because the issue was unknown to the municipality or its inhabitants. There is a knowledge of the problem, which is exemplified by the introduction the local government gives to its plans for the refugee centre on their website. First the national situation is brought up, and the explanation that this is the reason why the local government steps in to help, even if it may not be in their own best interest (Gemeente Midden-Delfland, 2024). By first putting forth the problem to then offering your help as part of the solution, there may have been the intention of framing the action as a positive one, but in reality, it results in the action being established as a self-sacrifice in the interest of the country but in spite of the local interests and framing the refugee centre as an inherently negative addition to the municipality. This self-sacrificial frame was not recognised by the interviewed councillors. To them the intent was not to suggest a self-sacrifice in the nations interest, but to emphasise the significance of the action and treat it as a no-brainer. If this action could help out these people in need of help, it should be obvious that the municipality would need to act. This may be what people that are more inclined to be compassionate to the refugees get away from this messaging. But to someone who is already less welcoming to refugees, this messaging does not provide them with any reason why the development might also be beneficial to the municipality.

By taking up the role of the party that finally jumps in to help out with the situation, another thing also comes to light: the fact that the municipality was not previously involved in the situation, and that the new action is a departure from the previous stance of Midden-Delfland. The answer to the question of ‘why now?’ was also addressed by the temporary mayor (Schapers, 2022). It all had to do with a new law that was about to pass during the making of plans: the spread-law. This law would make sure that the sheltering of refugees would be more evenly spread out throughout the country, and that not just a few municipalities would take all responsibility upon them while other municipalities would not do anything (Rijksoverheid, 2024). This would also mean that municipalities that had never contributed and were firmly against the presence of refugees in their area would finally have to, even if it was against their will. One interviewed councillor stated that it was not fully a result of the spread-law as the main intention was to finally take responsibility and lend a hand not only to help the refugees but also the neighbouring municipalities that in the past had sheltered more refugees. There is a regional give and take between the local governments, and in the past Midden-Delfland had obediently followed national enforcement of asylum policy, but never offered to help out more than the required amount.

By offering to shelter refugees ahead of the implementation of the spread-law, the then-mayor expressed a hope of doing thing on the municipality’s own terms, and not forcibly something as decided at the national scale. Certain demands could be met, and the then-mayor set expectations that this would mean that mostly families would be sheltered and as little single minors as possible.

This because this last group would need much more attention and guidance which the municipality could not offer due to budget (Van Winden-Tetteroo, 2023). Later on, it became clear that demands such as these would not be met and that the national institution responsible for the sheltering, the COA, would not let a municipality choose the kind of refugees that would come to their asylum centre. (COA, n.d. -d) Along with this, the new national cabinet formed after the 2023 elections has promised to get rid of the spread law, and now the reason for this development happening at this moment, which was in the interest of the locals has vanished. This is especially problematic because the utilisation of this argument of a deal which would be beneficial for the locals as opposed to an argument built on a foundation of humanitarianism, has meant that the humanitarian aspect of this project has been completely forgotten. Add to this the self-sacrificial framing and the refugee seems to no longer be the subject of the discussion, because now the administrative process is. The focus has shifted from the refugee centre as a humanitarian space to the refugee centre as a political space.

Midden-Delfland in the past has been one of the free rider municipalities when it comes to sheltering refugees. It was not alone in this regard as neighbouring municipalities Delft and Westland also contributed very little to the sheltering of refugees from 2010 until 2022 (Kamphorst, 2022). Looking at previous and current policy documents, there is very little policy concerning refugees. There is only an exception to the minimum amount of space required per person for a healthy living environment which applies to people in asylum shelters (Art. 22.16 lid 2 Omgevingsplan gemeente Midden-Delfland, 2024), because the demands set for this type of living environment is established not on local scale but with European regulations. But other than that example there is simply no local current regulation specific to refugees. If we really dive back in older policy, there was one policy plan for integration, carried out in the period 2007-2010. This also gives us an idea of how isolated the municipality has been from the influx of refugees. It states that Midden-Delfland has a relatively small amount of immigrant compared to the surrounding areas, with at this time only 1,7% of inhabitants being born outside of the Netherlands, the total amount of immigrants being 226 (Beleidsplan inburgering 2007-2010, 2007).

In the municipal coalition accords of the last 6 years there are barely any words dedicated to refugees or the ways the municipality may be able to contribute to the asylum crisis. There is however a segment in the headline accord from 2022 which talks about the sheltering of Ukrainian refugees specifically (CDA Midden-Delfland, VVD Midden-Delfland & D66 Midden-Delfland, 2022). Because of this there have been 30 temporary apartments built in Maasland, one of the villages of Midden-Delfland, of which half is available for Ukrainian refugees and the other half is available for people starting out on the housing market (Gemeente Midden-Delfland, 2022). This development met very little resistance from the public and was even celebrated at its opening (“Realisatie verplaatsbare woningen ‘Euterpe’ in Maasland feestelijk gevierd”, 2024). The interviewed councillors also stated this development as an example of the way in which a development related to refugees or ex-refugees can go smoothly with little resistance.

Looking at the process behind the current plans for the refugee centre, there were some hard criteria set up by the local government in the allocation of a space for the refugee centre (Gemeente Midden-Delfland, 2023). Most of these were purely practical concerning the time it would be available, whether it would be acquirable at short notice, and the amount of space. Other criteria include: it should not impair green landscapes, it should not impair the development of regular housing, it has to be close to facilities for sport, education and healthcare, and the accessibility of the location should be adequate. Other considerations that were not hard criteria but still taken into account were: whether the development fits in with the atmosphere of the place and whether the

location will result in cooperation between the refugees and locals, entrepreneurs and civil society organisations. Because of all these criteria eventually the location of the Harnaspolder was chosen, an industrial area with a lot of distribution centres, big roads and dreary scenery. A placement which is very contested by the surrounding locals, and not just because they live nearby. Interviewee 1 and 3 also called the specific place second rate and somewhere they would not want to live. Isolated by “giant grey boxes” as they called the distribution centres, impaired in their movement by busy roads, close to the highway and underneath electrical cables. Because of all the criteria set in place by the local government, the location was not chosen as a nice and healthy living environment, but as the location that ticked all the boxes. A second-rate place which interviewee 5 felt created an uneasy contrast with the neighbourhood next to it, and therefore also made the rift felt between the locals toward the refugees even bigger.

### 2.1.2 Why do refugee centres exist as the main asylum policy?

People moving from place to place is not a new phenomenon. Throughout all of human history there has been movement and mobility by people who want a new environment. Whether it is because they think they’ll move somewhere that’s good, or somewhere that isn’t as bad as their current place. Following the Second World War, with the emergence of the United Nations and all the following organisations and international treaties, there came the first pieces of international recognition and coordination of refugee displacement problems. Most importantly with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which Article 14 (1) states: “*Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.*” (UN, 1948, p.74). This document was one of the first international acknowledgements of the right for asylum to those who seek asylum and still serves as the basic principle for asylum policy as stated by the European Union. The declaration is designed to be as concise as possible and therefore does not clarify what the form of this asylum should be. Along with this the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, was established. It’s main task at the time was to deal with the refugees that had been dispersed along the European continent as a result of the Second World War. Initially the organisation was given just three years to solve the refugee crisis and then disband (UNHCR, 2010). A typical underestimation of the scale of the problem, and a signifier of post-war optimism. The illusion of the finality of the international refugee crisis is further exemplified in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which was held by the UNHCR. In this text the definition of a refugee as someone outside the country of their nationality and unable to enjoy the protection of their country is given the remarkable additional criterium: “*As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951*” (UNHCR, 2010, p.14). This specific time frame very much shows the 1951 Refugee convention being conceptualised in a period still recovering from the Second World War, and all conflicts that directly resulted from it. This resolution to resettle the people that were displaced and whose lives were uprooted, is built upon the assumption that the actions to help the refugee find a place in the world mostly take place post-conflict. However, the realisation eventually came that displacement of people due to violence or oppression was not a temporary international phenomenon, but one of endemic nature. As a result, in 1967 an amendment was made to the 1951 convention, that removed the aforementioned time-specific criterium from the definition of refugees (UNHCR, 2010).

The status of the refugee and their rights were internationally acknowledged, but nothing in these documents mentions or guidelines the method in which these refugees should be accommodated. In the 1951 Refugee convention there is a paragraph which ensures the right of refugees for housing, it needs to be as favourable as possible, and not less favourable than that accorded to aliens. (UNHCR, 2010). The word aliens here referring to foreigners. According to this document

refugees deserve the same right in the context of housing as foreigners, but not inherently the same rights as natives. Still this right says nothing about the process of seeking refuge only of the goal. Because who could have thought in 1951 that in the future there would be a possibility that people would not be able to return to their home temporarily because the conflict, or whatever reason why they left their country, is not resolved and still present? The vision of temporary asylum is simply lacking in this covenant for the rights of refugees. If the person wants to return to their original country, then they need to be resettled there, if they don't want to, they shall be resettled elsewhere. But the notion of temporary displacement, is irrelevant in a world post-conflict.

The reality is that these people are not all housed or given their own place immediately. In our current globalised context with regulation and various types of borders, the refugees are not immediately given a place in their new location. First, they are stored in a liminal space which we know as the refugee centre or refugee camp. A place which is not really part of the local surroundings but fenced off, either physically or societally. A place that's not really housing, for people that may not really be refugees according to international law. Because it is not the statement of the asylum seeker that grants them the rights of a refugee. It has to be verified and during that verification process the refugee camp has to be their home. A place that creates a border between those inside and those outside.

### 2.1.3 How does refugee policy create borders?

When asked whether they thought that they would ever go to the refugee centre, most locals were slightly put off by the question. Multiple respondents asked what the context of their visit would be, and when given the freedom to figure that out for themselves, they would think for a while. The walls of the refugee centre don't even exist yet and already there is a barrier between the locals and the asylum centre. The creation of this border through the process of bordering, has happened by making a distinction between the people inside and outside a certain place, in this case the place is the refugee centre. The distinction being made can be defined by different things: the ones who belong versus the ones who do not, the free and the ones contained, those who wait and those who participate (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). Possibly the most significant difference between the people inside and outside the refugee centre is the recognition of their right to exist in the country. Even though the refugee has crossed the border and is physically inside the country through the policy behind refugee centres, there is still an active process of bordering. The existence of the refugee centre is exemplary of a process which is trying to keep certain people out. Through the sifting process of the three kinds of refugee centres of the COA, certain people are let in and others are kept out. But this also creates a spatial border between a refugee centre and its surroundings.

Interviewee 4 suggested that a community centre could provide a reason for them to come to the refugee centre. Housing a community centre within the refugee centre would give residents a legitimate reason to regularly visit the centre for leisure activities. But there is no guarantee that such a development would happen at the refugee centre at least not guided by policy. Because the refugee centre is built up in policy as a place created from minimums. It is a place which is directed by European policy to have minimum requirements, but because it is also an unpopular place, municipalities have little incentive to expand past these minimums in the creation of a refugee centre. There is no inherent ambition in the development and there is no sense of regarding it as an opportunity. This also creates another border between it and the surroundings, the place that was built to the minimum requirements and the place that was given a chance to reach its full potential.

The refugee centre in its current form is in its essence a place of governance. Often a temporary place not created because it was in the best interest of the people it concerns, but because it has an administrative function and accommodates procedures. This was also the case in the decision for the location of the refugee centre in Midden-Delfland. A refugee centre needs to be decided top down because they have the biggest function for the actor at the top, the government. It exists as a non-place of temporary nature, for non-people. As it exemplifies the placelessness of the refugee. Because the whole reason that the refugee is not housed yet, is that there is a disbelief as to whether they are really refugees. Everything seems to be done to prove that the qualification of the applicant as refugee is false. With the politicisation of the topic and the increased emphasis put on the difference between the fake and the real refugee, the humanitarian nature of a refugee centre is put aside and the focus is put entirely on its function as an extension of the Dutch border, and entryway into the country.

This politicisation and bordering has also materialised in asylum policy by giving the refugee centre two contradictory purposes, a place with a distinct humanitarian goal and a political goal. As a humanitarian space its purpose is to act as a safe haven which is dignified and positive for the refugee. However, as a political space, the refugee centre has, especially in recent years, functioned as a discouraging tactic in asylum policy. The austere nature of refugee centres is by design but conflicts with the function as safe haven. Especially because the framing of refugee centres as bad places has also had a discouraging effect on its neighbours. But that may not just be a result of policy, but also of the framing of refugee centres in the media.

## 2.2 Media

### 2.2.1 Framing of refugee centres

When asked the interviewed locals said that they kept themselves most informed on the topic of asylum policy through channels like the news in television and newspapers. Through these kinds of media, the actual information regarding the state of national asylum policy and the experiences of refugees are brought to the general public. There is however an internal struggle for journalists as to how they should report on such a polarising topic. For instance during the situation of August 2022 during which the reception centre in Ter Apel was unable to process all incoming refugees to such an extent that around 700 persons had to sleep outside around the centre on the grass (Muller, 2024). A situation as dire as this, because of which NGO Artsen Zonder Grenzen had to apply medical and psychological help in the Netherlands for the first time since its inception more than 50 years ago, turned into national news headlines with confronting photographs of the people sleeping outside. But exactly this situation is indicative of the distorted view created of refugee centres in the media.

One rule which is partly responsible for the reach of this specific news story, is actually the privacy policy of the COA. The privacy policy of the COA dictates that inside the locations of the COA, refugees aren't allowed to be recognisable in photos or on film (Borm, 2022). Along with this, journalists are only rarely allowed to enter the shelters. The COA states their discomfort with having journalists observe the refugees when they already have so little privacy. But because of this the media is less likely to write about the regular workings of an asylum shelter. When a situation like the people sleeping on the grass in Ter Apel, was not only easily accessible to journalists, but the refugees were also not actually inside the Ter Apel location and thus able to be filmed and give personal statements to the media.

During this crisis in Ter Apel there were two separate television programs that covered the topic: *Op1* and *Danny's wereld*. While both of these programs were taped in the same week and concerned the same topic, they got very different reactions from the public due to the way they reported on the topic. In the episode of *Danny's Wereld*, presenter Danny Ghosen, a former refugee himself, tries to get an understanding of the situation by talking to people ("Nacht in ter Apel", 2022). First, he speaks with the local protesters who are unhappy with the refugee centre in their area. When listening to these people, we figure out that in various instances the opposition to the refugees stems from a much larger dissatisfaction with current government policy. After this, Danny listens to the refugees that are sleeping outside. Here we hear their stories about their disappointment with the way they are treated in the current asylum policy, feeling the way they are forced to sleep outside is not dignified. By shedding light on both sides of the problem and listening to people, *Danny's Wereld* gives the viewer an understanding of the conflict and makes sure to put emphasis on the people that are behind the groups in this situation. This contrasts heavily with the episode of *Op1* ("Op1 – 30 augustus 2022", 2022), a talkshow in which problems are discussed by experts and public figures around a table. For this episode the location was moved to Ter Apel, with a fence and the centre visible behind the backs of the presenters. Eventually some actual refugees were visible in the background of the program, but they were not acknowledged or participatory in the program. Around the table, well dressed experts and the presenters were talking about the problem. But by not actually incorporating the actual people that were experiencing the situation discussed, and only having them be window-dressing in the background, the connection with the subject was lost. Online the program was critically compared with a zoo, the program seemed to simply be moved to the location for the sights of refugees behind a fence, for us to see and to discuss, but not actually to connect (Muller, 2024). Both these programs tried to show and critique the situation in Ter Apel by being at the location, but because of the different ways in which they engaged with the situation, a different image was created. Where *Danny's Wereld* brought the viewer closer to the problem by giving the groups part of it individual faces and letting the people concerned tell their experiences, *Op1* actually removed the viewer from the problem by standing at the sideline and while being so close to the problem, not letting the people involved participate. The way a refugee and refugee centre is reported in media, influences the way we look at it.

Around a polarising topic like asylum policy, there are many journalists that try to counteract this polarisation by shedding light on a topic from multiple sides. With many columns and opinion pieces calling for a welcoming stance toward refugees and utilising anecdotes, facts and figures to counteract the prejudices and misconceptions about the unsafety and trouble caused by a refugee centre (Benali, 2023). Along with these written pieces, there was also one documentary series that got permission from the COA to film in an asylum centre in Zutphen, and it shows a more optimistic and positive view of the refugee centre, humanising the people living inside it (Van Erven Dorens, Klinkers, & Heijne, 2023). But these kinds of journalistic pieces are markedly different from the actual news reports that so many people use to stay informed and they also have a different audience. When people get their information from different places, they may develop a different opinion. And while there are instances where journalists and the media try to cool down the heated topic, they are not blameless in the creation of the image surrounding refugees and asylum policy.

The village of Oranje in northern province Drenthe became national news in 2014 when a refugee centre was decided to come there (Francken, 2020). The situation escalated when in 2015 the state secretary demanded the number of refugees would have to be doubled. A fierce debate and struggle between those opposed and those in favour resulted in a chaotic situation which became known

throughout the country because of heavy media exposure. With one woman who blocked the car of the state secretary who was dragged out of the way, becoming not only a visible symbol for the powerlessness of the people against the state, but also a meme (“Vrouw symbool voor onmacht Oranje”, 2015). Eventually the number of refugees was not doubled, the peace returned to Oranje but its legacy remained. The refugee centre existed until 2017, without many problems, and when it eventually closed multiple locals stated their disappointment, with one man claiming that if the centre were to stay in the village for 10 or 15 years, the locals would not have a problem with it. (Francken, 2020). The peaceful day to day existence of the refugee centre was, as opposed to the commotion surrounding its possible expansion, not a national news sensation. And even though the whole situation was not about the people being against the sheltering of refugees, as there were already refugees being sheltered in the village, through framing in the media and the sensationalist nature of national news Oranje became a national icon for the resistance to refugee centres in the Netherlands.

Another instance of framing by national media is the situation in Steenbergen in 2015 (Redactie Medialogica, 2022a). At that moment there was an international refugee crisis and the government was desperately in need of more shelters to accommodate the high amount of refugees. The municipality of Steenbergen recognised this and wanted to gauge among its citizens whether there was public support for a refugee centre within its borders. This suggestion was misconstrued as a definitive plan and the locals started to believe that there was already a plan in motion for the realisation of a refugee shelter. When Geert Wilders tweeted that he would participate in a demonstration against the refugee centre, the national media picked the story up. After this the situation got out of hand, with derisive singing during a participation meeting becoming another national headline and widely seen clip. Steenbergen also became a symbol of the public fight between citizens against the development of refugee centres and the public institutions that were enforcing this development. However also in this case the story was twisted from a local story into a national symbol and in the process some very important aspects were lost. Most important in this case is that there was never a concrete plan for a refugee centre in Steenbergen. It was not requested by the COA or the government as it was merely a suggestion to gauge public opinion. On national media there were even pictures of the ‘planned location’, when there were not yet any plans made by the local government. But because this situation was made a symbol in the public discourse about refugee centres, all nuances got lost. There never was a refugee centre in Steenbergen because the public opinion was against, however this development received far less news coverage and thus Steenbergens legacy of resistance to refugee centres is what lives on in the national consciousness.

All this to say that the media has a big influence on how a situation is framed in people’s minds and what a person’s opinion is on a topic. Negative stories linger on longer in our minds than positive stories and shocking things influence our opinions more than mundane things (Redactie Medialogica, 2022b).

Because of this the media mostly play into these shocking tendencies, and this way the problem is amplified. With a polarising topic like asylum policy, the negative stories are far better remembered than the positive stories. When the interviewed locals of Midden-Delfland referred to ‘the things you see on television’, it was always about the negative stories surrounding refugees and refugee centres. This amplification of negative stories also explains the reason why some people who are against the refugee centre claim that most refugees are criminals (“Nacht in ter Apel”, 2022). Instances of theft and nuisance by refugees do exist and get reported on and shared on social media, to such an extent that interviewee 3 expected it to be an inevitable result of a

refugee centre, even though the majority of refugees in the Netherlands do nothing of the sort. When the mayor of Katwijk asked for the crime figures for the refugees in his city to get some insight in the reality of the framing of refugees as criminals, he found out that a regular citizen of Katwijk was 2,5 times more likely to come into contact with law enforcement than a refugee (Redactie Medialogica, 2022). And while facts like this may seem to burst a bubble of the frame of refugees as criminals, because the topic is so entwined with people's emotions, there is also a likely chance that people are more tempted to mistrust the facts than change their opinion. Even with interviewee 2, who was less inclined to expect rampant crime as a result of the refugee centre, the idea of some 'bad apples' among the group and the security issues as a result of that was very much on the forefront of their mind when discussing the refugee centre.

## 2.2.2 Media reports on refugee centres

### **National media**

When looking at actual news reports of refugee centres there are a few aspects of the place that get mentioned multiple times and are very prevalent in the discourse created around these places. A frame is created in news stories is the refugee centre as a badly managed place inside badly managed asylum policy. The content of these stories is often news of bureaucratic or procedural processes which may change the planned course of a refugee centre ("Voorlopig Geen Asielzoekers in Voormalig Hotel Den Bosch, Vergunning Geschorst", 2024; "Asielzoekerscentrum Budel gaat niet dicht, maar wordt Kleiner", 2024) or be public negotiations and statement from the different bureaucratic parties toward each other (Oving, 2024a). The headlines of these pieces describing the asylum policy bizarre, up to its limit or a failure (Oving, 2024b, Oving 2024c, Hankel, 2022). The result of these news stories about the procedural problems that take place behind the scenes is that a story comes forth about the inadequacy of the current asylum policy and the uncertainty that comes with a refugee centre not only on a social level but also very much on a procedural level. The shortcomings of the system behind refugee centres and the political and procedural mess it always seems to accompany, either on national or local scale, are often events deemed newsworthy. It paints the refugee centre as a place of uncertainty, and even more as a place rooted in procedure. These stories are less about the actual place which is a refugee centre but about political and administrative struggle which comes with the cooperative and compromise-filled negotiations that establish and run these places.

Another significant frame is the frame of the refugee centre being demanded by a local government or the COA despite opposition among the people, the story of the public not being listened to and being powerless in the decision ("Tubbergen in verzet tegen komst AZC: "Dictatoriaal besluit"", 2022). It emphasises the power dynamic between a citizen and the local government and creates an impression of the people in power deciding in spite of the people the decision concerns, creating two distinct camps that are opposed to each other: the local government that is in favour of the refugee centre versus the locals who are against the refugee centre. This framing excludes and discredits all people that do not fit into either of these groups and washes out the nuance involved in such a situation. The frame is supported by the news stories of various lawsuits in which these two groups are actually against each other ("“Asielhotel” Albergen Mag Doorgaan, Rechter Wijst Bezwaren Omwonenden Af", 2024; "Hotel in Den Bosch mag toch 250 asielzoekers opvangen", 2024). In these cases, it is often the local government that wins the lawsuit, which would further emphasise the powerlessness of the people. Sometimes this frame applied on a bigger scale in which it is the local government that is against a refugee centre and the COA that is in favour (Van Ooij, 2024). Still, this comes down to the bigger party forcing the smaller party to accept a refugee centre, and the smaller party being unable to resist, due to an imbalance of power.

The most prevalent frame present in news reports is the frame of the refugee centre as an unsafe place with a big presence of violence. With multiple reports of violence associated with refugee centres reaching the national news. Stories about stabbings, robbery, and mutilation in the area of a refugee centre are spread through national channels and make up a significant amount of the reports on refugee centres (“Politie Schiet Verdachte in Been in Winkel Ter Apel”, 2024; “Vijf bewoners azc Budel vast voor steekpartij station Maarheeze”, 2024; “Gewonde bij mogelijke steekpartij in azc Sneek”, 2023; “Asielzoeker krijgt 12 jaar cel voor verminking met kokendhete olie”, 2023). Because these stories so often reach the national news channels and make up a significant part of the reports on refugee centres and their inhabitants, a reader may be inclined to view a refugee centre as a place with a disproportionately high amount of violence and refugees as inherently more violent than natives. Other kinds of violence like intimidation of LGBT persons is also reported on (“Lhbt-asielzoekers onveilig door landgenoten in azc”, 2024) which not only serves as an example of violence inside refugee centres but also as an example of the moral incompatibility of refugees with the Dutch norms and values for some. These kinds of stories are the only times in the news when a refugee is reported on as an individual, and only because of the crime they committed. While all these stories are factually accurate, the newsworthiness of violence seems to increase when it concerns refugees or when it happens in the vicinity of a refugee centre, and local stories of violence are more likely to be picked up and reach the national news. This way the frame is created of the refugee centre as an inherently unsafe place, not just in the reporting of journalists, but also in the mind of the reader.

Associated with this frame of unsafety is the exposure of the disturbance caused by the presence of a refugee centre. Both of these frames shed light on the possible negative results of refugee centres and the ways in which it will negatively affect the joy of living for the locals. Stories of public urination and defecation are shared by residents of a neighbouring municipality to Ter Apel (“Plan of noodkreet? Dorp wil camera’s bij ieder huis tegen overlast veiligelanders”, 2024). Along with this there are various news items about the disturbance for the residents of Ter Apel (“Hoe inwoners van Ter Apel (nog altijd) gebukt gaan onder overlast”, 2024). These stories make sure not to call the troublemakers refugees but identify them as people from safe countries that have very little chance to get a residence permit. However, the disturbance is still very much connected to the refugee centre and therefore has a part in the creation of the frame which says that refugee centres are bound to come with disturbances for the locals.

Along with the frames that emphasise the negative sides of the refugee centre from the perspective of its neighbours, there is also a frame which highlights its negative points for its residents, the frame of the pitiable refugee. The negative impact the current asylum policy can impact the children that must endure it (““Mensonwaardig”: weer een kritisch rapport over opvang asielkinderen”, 2023) The moral obligation to fleeing people that must be fulfilled is another point that is emphasised (“Spreidingswet of niet, Bergen gaat door met opvang: “Is onze morele plicht.””, 2023). It counters some of the previous frames in actually sharing the positive effects of a refugee centre in providing a place for refugees. Another piece tells the story of a young asylum seeker and uses it as a way to emphasise the impact of national asylum policy on individuals and creates an understanding between the reader and this young refugee (Diab, 2023). Grounding the national debate and giving a face to the group of individuals it concerns. Still the pictures included with the piece don’t show the face of the asylum seeker because of the rules of COA about not being able to recognisably depict the residents of asylum centres. Because of this only the persons back is shown, which lack some of the personality which is included in the story.

To fully show the impact of framing on the understanding of the topic of migration, we should look at two different articles published on the same day and depicting the same situation. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December both NU.nl and RTL nieuws, reported on the so called unsustainable situation in the reception centre of Ter Apel, but the titles of the pieces alone cause both pieces to differ very much in the way they frame the situation. The RTL piece exclaims in its title an increase in the amount of incidents in the reception centre, followed by a quote which calls the situation unsustainable (“Aantal incidenten azc Ter Apel groeit met de dag, meldt inspectie: “Situatie onhoudbaar.””, 2023). By laying the focus on the incidents first it implies the situation being unsustainable because of the increase in incidents. This way the article’s title fits more in line with the frame of the refugee centre as a dangerous place. The NU.nl piece also emphasises in its title the unsustainable situation in Ter Apel but emphasises the lacking amenities first (“Volle afvalbakken en smerige wc's: inspecteurs zien onhoudbare situatie Ter Apel”, 2023). This way implying the situation to be unsustainable because the amenities and standards of living for the refugees are not up to standards. It fits more in line with the frame of the pitiable refugee that has to live in bad conditions in the refugee centre. Just through the title alone, these two articles create two very different images of the refugee centre and the dynamic between the refugee and the refugee centre. In one the refugees themselves are framed to be the cause of the bad qualities of the refugee centre and in the other the refugee has to endure the refugee centre which is a bad place because of bad management and policy.

Interesting is the overrepresentation of Ter Apel in the news as a refugee centre, with it being just one of the many locations in the country but so often being the subject of news stories. In many of the pieces about Ter Apel it is given the label of AZC, which is not incorrect, but it does make Ter Apel a possible example for other refugee centres in the country even though Ter Apel is a unique instance because of its status as the only reception centre in the country. Because Ter Apel is so often in the news as an AZC, it is no surprise that the local people interviewed also used it as an example, especially to exemplify the ways in which the refugee centre could be negative.

### **Local media**

At the start of the process when it concerned just an exploratory phase as to whether it would be possible to shelter 225 asylum seekers in Midden-Delfland. The local paper included a small piece in which the plans are laid out and some promises are made to soothe the worries of readers (“Komt er een opvanglocatie voor vluchtelingen in Midden-Delfland?”, 2022). It is expressly stated that the intention is very much not to create a permanent AZC in Midden-Delfland, but a temporary emergency shelter, which will stay for a maximum of 5 years. But overall, the media pieces stick to the wording of the local government and are not focussed on questioning these statements (Van Der Meer, 2022). The pieces are ways for the local government to reach the public and ask for their involvement in the creations of the plans. After the green light was given to start an investigation in the feasibility of the plan, the local paper included a summary of the meeting that put it into effect. The concerns of people regarding safety and participation in the decision-making process were reported with answers to these questions and concerns by the mayor also clearly in the report (Schapers, 2022). A few months later the story got picked up by national media outlet Hart van Nederland (“Inwoners Midden-Delfland Protesteren Tegen Mogelijke Komst Azc”, 2024). With a header which states that the people in Midden-Delfland are protesting the refugee centre, the article is far more interested in the opposition to the shelter than the local articles up to this point. Within the articles is a video embedded which shows a public demonstration against a coming refugee centre, with people rallying with banners and chanting. This video is not from a demonstration in Midden-Delfland, but from a demonstration in Uden. The fact that the video does

not concern the topic of the article is stated in the piece, but it creates an image of similar rallies taking place in Midden-Delfland, when this has never happened. The protest of the people of Midden-Delfland was expressed through an online petition, the hanging of banners at the possible site and an urgent letter, with as principle that the sheltering of refugees is not something which the people are inherently against, but that they needed reassurance that the municipality would stay safe.

In the period before the local government came with clarity about the location of the centre there was a lot of speculation, also in the local newspaper (Van Winden-Tetteroo, 2023). Until in September 2023 when the location of the refugee centre was revealed, and the resistance from the local community became visible in the local media. These local articles utilised the banners hung at the site of the refugee centre as a visual sign of the resistance from the people. Banners that exclaimed this unhappiness with texts such as: No big refugee centre!!! Big refugee centre = no support, politicians listen to the citizens, and sign the petition (referring to the online petition against the refugee centre). Where earlier in the process most of the article stated the plan of the local government, with a small piece at the end dedicated to the concerns of locals, now the articles are dedicated more to the troubles that people have with the plans, and the local government has to substantiate why their plan differs from the wishes of the people (Van Der Meer, 2023; “Veelbesproken Locatie Voor Opvang 225 Vluchtelingen Bekendgemaakt”, 2023). After this the reactions of the unhappy neighbours were deemed newsworthy enough to warrant their own article (“Zorgen Om Mogelijke Komst Vluchtelingen in Den Hoorn”, 2023). One article reports on a private talk between the mayor and the representatives of the residents collective against the centre, but is mostly concerned with the feelings the collective got away with, reporting on the worries that they remained with after the conversation (“AZC: Uitleg Burgemeester Aan Bewonerscollectief”, 2023). It lets the people from the collective summarise the conversation, something which results in a story that is more understanding to their point of view.

The participation evening in Den Hoorn became a story which was not only reported on in local media, but also national media, once again by Hart van Nederland (“Inwoners Den Hoorn Bezorgd Om Mogelijke Komst Azc in Dorp”, 2024). The meeting was described as grim and loud. With frustrated shout from someone in the audience being part of the headline for local network WOS (“Rumoerige Bewonersavond in Den Hoorn: ‘Ga Naar Rotterdam, Mafkees,’” 2023). The importance of the meeting, and the unusual nature of the situation is something very much focused on in the piece in the local paper (Schapers, 2023). Where the local media sources claim that the 500 people in the room are against the plans and unanimously rose against the mayor and the local government, in the national coverage by Hart van Nederland, this was simplified to the inhabitants of Den Hoorn. In the conversion from local story to national story, the story was simplified to include only the residents of Den Hoorn that are against and have that group represent all residents of Den Hoorn. In the report by Hart van Nederland, the final statement is made by a man who says he expects the meeting to lead to the dissolution of the plans because otherwise the town would rebel (“Gemeente Midden-Delfland Legt 9 Miljoen Neer Voor Grond ‘omstreden’ Azc”, 2024). By giving him the closing statement he comes to signify the overall feelings of the town, even if his statement is the most extreme of all statements made in the report. In a different report made for local television the man is also featured but here is not the symbol of the local sentiment, in fact in this report he is exactly the opposite (“Rumoerige Bewonersavond in Den Hoorn: ‘Ga Naar Rotterdam, Mafkees,’” 2023). The man is seen to struggle with the guards that only allow locals to enter and in the piece the man is described as not invited, an outlier. One man is in the national piece on the participation evening the symbol of the local dissatisfaction, while in the local piece he is framed as an outsider who does not belong.

The most impactful aspect which sets the tone of these articles is whether the local government is allowed to explain their decision. Some articles are very much focussed on the answering of as many questions as possible by the local government (“Op meeste opvanglocaties amper incidenten die voor overlast zorgen”, 2023). These articles very much try to soothe the conversation by highlighting the positive facts and combatting the fears of people. While the other extreme is one piece in the local paper in which only the questions of the people at the participation evening are summed up, with not one single answer or statement from the local government (Van Winden-Tetteroo, 2023b). The article gives the impression that the local government simply has not thought about the questions by not including any answers. It leaves the reader with a feeling of uncertainty and uncontrollability. Whether you read the one article or the other influences your feelings on not only the refugee centre but also the competency of the local government in the creation of a feasible plan.

When the plan for the refugee centre was finally voted in, the tone somewhat shifted, most importantly with the resident’s collective against the centre promising to take responsibility now that the plans were definitive and no longer preventable to make sure the current plan would turn out a success for both the refugees and the town (“Meerderheid raad kiest voor opvang vluchtelingen aan Harnaschdreef”, 2023). A sign of a more harmonious continuation in terms of the relationship and cooperation between the local government and the people of Den Hoorn in this case. A development which is only shortly described, and only a small part in a piece about the voting in of the centre, not worthy its own article. While the 115 appeals sent to the local government against the plans for the refugee centre, was worthy its own article (“Meer dan honderd bezwaren tegen opvang vluchtelingen in Den Hoorn”, 2023).

Another way in which the refugee centre is framed in the local articles is by calling it a big-scale shelter (Van der Velden, 2024; Vos, 2023; Van der Velden, 2023). The plans for a shelter for 225 refugees may seem big scale when comparing it to the suggestions by some locals for the spreading of 30 refugees in each town, making only 90 in total. However, when comparing it to other refugee centres and the standards as set by the COA, the centre is actually one of the smaller shelters. One of the reasons why the local government chose to shelter more refugees than would be enforced by the spread law, was that the COA would only assist with certain amenities from a certain amount of refugees. The locations that shelter less than 300 don’t receive full support from COA and require the municipality to be more responsible and more active in the centre. So, we can state that in the grand scheme of things the centre in Den Hoorn would actually be a smaller-scale shelter. Because it is actually called a big-scale centre in these articles, the burden on the local community seems bigger and an imbalance between the so called big-scale shelter and the small-scale community is very evident. Just by using the words big-scale the development seems unfit for a compact local community which partially finds its identity in its limited size.

Along with this a frame of outside interference is sometimes evident in local articles. With the headline of one article stating that with the accession of a new councillor not a single person in the council of Midden-Delfland actually lived in the municipality (Schouten, 2024). Articles like this have fuelled the feeling of some local people that the local government does not make decisions in the best interests of the local community. By putting the council down as something foreign and apart from the local community, the frame of intruders is utilised to suggest that the plans for the refugee centre are not in the best interest of Midden-Delfland because it was not decided by Midden-Delfland but by these people from outside. It enlarges the barrier between the inhabitants and the administrative body, fuelling distrust in the municipality.

### 2.2.3 Frames limiting the possibilities of refugee accommodation

Framing determine the image people have of a refugee centre (Kox et al., 2022), especially if they have never been in a refugee centre themselves and rely solely on media stories to provide their information on these places. Because these frames limit the picture of refugee centres that is spread, the refugee centre as a place is very different from the refugee centre as a topic. All these frames paint a picture upon the refugee centre, the centre is ordered and given an identity through these frames (Zill et al., 2020). This ordering is made possible by the bordering of the refugee centre in policy. Because the centre is fenced off from the outside and distinctly different from its surroundings, therefore the possibility for a different identity is made possible.

The frame of bad management undermines the perceived benefit for refugees. Because the emphasis is so often laid on the ways in which the policy behind a refugee centre fails, the overall effectiveness and necessity of the centres are put into question. It makes clear that the refugee centre is a place of governance. The frame of a refugee centre being demanded by an external party, like a local or national government, creates the feeling of an unjust situation in which a powerful actor forces something upon the powerless actor. It creates sympathy for the smaller party which in this case is against the refugee centre and frames the refugee centre as a place resulting from injustice. It is completely focussed on the refugee centre as a political space of power, leaving the refugee out of the narrative and forgetting the humanitarian nature of the centre. The frame of the refugee centre as an unsafe place also undermines the centre as an effective or necessary place because one of its three main reasons for existence: safety and protection, would not be present. Besides this it changes the perceived identity of the place from a safe haven to a breeding place for conflict. It changes about safety into concerns about security. The frame of a refugee centre as a cause of disturbances also support the frame of bad management, as the disturbance is an indication that one of the key goals of a refugee centre, management and surveillance, is not being reached. Thus the value of the refugee centre is once again undermined. Add to this the frame of life in the centres also being a negative experience for the refugees themselves, and the reason for the existence of a refugee centre is put into question.

This framing with ordering as a result is also happening in the specific case of Midden-Delfland. Especially the framing of the refugee centre being big scale is one which was repeated by multiple locals during the interviews. This framing and ordering was not confined to the refugee centre itself. The discussion surrounding it was also part of the ordering principle. This is illustrated by the way in which the local story changed when it was picked up by national media, the locals were ordered as unanimously against the process, and by providing videos of other protests by local communities in the article about Midden-Delfland, the situation was framed as any other protest against refugee centres. It orders the public as being against, when there is much more diversity in opinion and nuance to the story. A fact which becomes clear when looking at individual responses.

## 2.3 Response

### 2.3.1 Local response

When speaking to the local people of Midden-Delfland, one of the biggest points of contention brought up by the people against is the way the process was handled by the local government. There is an overall dissatisfaction with the local government and there are some key aspects in which the local government betrayed the trust of these people. The most important aspect which

caused the dissatisfaction is the perceived dishonesty of the local government. During the process of the coming refugee centre the local government has been less than honest in three key ways: there have been promises made and broken, the public have been given a pretence of participation when in fact all decisions had already been made in advance, and the local government has been less than transparent toward the public during the process.

The point about the broken promises has to do most concretely with the promises made by the temporary mayor on the influence the municipality would have on which kind of people would inhabit the centre. With promises made that it would mostly be families and that there would be coming no single minors, and that the municipality would be able to achieve this because it had leverage by taking initiative and starting the process of their own volition. These promises were made to provide an explanation to the people as to why this process was happening now, and they were very much stated as some of the most significant benefits this development would provide the locals, so when these promises turned out not able to be fulfilled because the COA would not allow the cherry picking of certain types of refugees, the locals were left with a feeling that the promises made by the local government were apparently not worth anything. Along with this some assumptions were shared that some arrangements could be made with surrounding municipalities to that some required housing for status holders could be passed on to them. The neighbouring municipalities responded to this statement that there had not been any contact with Midden-Delfland and that they were unaware of these assumptions. While this may not have been a full promise, the locals still felt betrayed and lied to, and it resulted in a decrease in believability of the local government.

Another promise made by the local government was that they would take the opinion of the inhabitants into consideration and that the people would have a say in the development. But this ties into the next contentious point: the pretence of participation. There is a feeling that the local government is claiming that the locals have input on the project, which the locals themselves don't feel like is true. There have been participation evenings in which the inhabitants could voice their concerns and get a reply from the local government, and the local government has invited people from the resident's collective to start a real conversation and have both parties listen to each other. But these measures have not created a feeling of participation among a part of the public. Especially for interviewee 3, the promise of input has turned out not to be true simply because the plans were not cancelled after the opposition.

The dissatisfaction with the local government is not just a result of the locals feeling that they do not have a say in the matter, but even more so from the illusion given by the local government that the inhabitants would actually have influence over the project. The core of this conflict lies in the different understandings of input between the local government and the inhabitants. When the inhabitants were promised input in the project, the local government meant with practical points. The point of the investigation at the end of 2022 was to uncover the possibility of the housing of 225 refugees in the municipality. During this investigation the people were given a participatory role to lay down concerns and suggest points that would need to be focussed on. They had a say in the practical implementation of the sheltering of 225 refugees. At this point they did not have a say in the political choice as to whether these refugees should come to Midden-Delfland, because the investigation was focussed on the possibility of this plan and whether it would be feasible. The investigation eventually confirmed the possibility of the centre, because practically it could be done. The reluctance of the people did not change that fact. It turned out that there was despite this reluctance the political will to shelter refugees within the municipality.

The third point of lack of transparency intertwines with the previous two points. Interviewees 2 and 3 feel like the local government is not giving them all the information and keeping things from the public. Especially with the decision about the location, the inhabitants of Den Hoorn in particular have felt like the local government has not been honest with them in terms of the progress of the process. The local government told the public that there was not yet a location decided, and that they were still looking at a myriad of options. Eventually Den Hoorn came out as the best location, which many inhabitants of Den Hoorn already feared and expected, without initially a transparent overview of the reasons why. Because of this lack of transparency and the result confirming the initial expectations, the people that were not happy with the result believed that the location had been certain from the get-go because of a political will and had not been chosen because of practical reasons. Eventually the document which summarised the merits and the subtracting elements of the considered locations, was made public (Gemeente Midden-Delfland, 2023), but at that point it was not able to diminish the sentiment of decisions being made in advance.

But this feeling that the location was always going to be in Den Hoorn also has to do with the feeling of Den Hoorn as the underprivileged village inside the municipality. This feeling is so prevalent that almost every interview utilised the metaphor of Den Hoorn as the drain of the municipality. The idea of Den Hoorn as “afvoerputje” is a result of the development in the recent years and the relations between the different villages in Midden-Delfland. Especially the difference in the development of Den Hoorn and neighbour village Schipluiden. Den Hoorn has developed rapidly in the recent years with a lot of new neighbourhoods being built and the village expanding out and growing ever closer to the neighbouring city of Delft. The old greenhouses had to make way for new homes and an industrial area. Because of this the traditional identity of Den Hoorn as a village of horticulturist and farmers into an identity of a suburban extension of Delft, something which interviewee 1 especially bemoaned. Along with this changing of village identity, the village has also been recipient of some political processes. New housing developments, the status holders being placed in Den Hoorn and a decade long dispute regarding the development of the centre which has caused the village centre to exist in a spatial limbo and not grow along with the village. All these points were brought up by interviewees 2 and 3 as explanations for their dissatisfaction with the local government as a whole. This all is contrasted with Schipluiden which lies between meadows and still very much holds on to its identity of a small-scale village. Schipluiden has been subject to much more conservative spatial policy. There is barely any housing development, and it has not been subject to many interventionist procedures by the local government. Because of this, the more interviewees 2 and 3 envy the way Schipluiden has been ‘left alone’ by the local government and feel like Schipluiden is Midden-Delflands golden boy and Den Hoorn the municipality’s drain. All this results in the fact that interviewees 1, 2 and 3 no longer have the feeling that the local government decides in the local best-interest but for their own political gain or in the best-interest of Schipluiden.

All this has to do with the relationship and communication between the local government of Midden-Delfland and the inhabitants of Den Hoorn in particular. There is a desire for an open honest discourse in which there is a much higher amount of participation by the local community. Even interviewees 4 and 5 who were not necessarily against the development agreed that a lack of communication and connection between the local government and the public can be blamed as one of the reasons for the opposition from the public. Interviewee 5 said that while this may be the case, one should also take into consideration that some people would not be able to be swayed through communication and would always be against due to their own conviction, but that clear communication could be the key to reassure people that are actually fearful. The information evenings may have been intended to take the fears away from people by having an open discourse

between the inhabitants and the local government, but they did not succeed in this department because the fear overshadowed the solutions brought by the local government. This failure was also testified by the then-mayor and mentioned as one of the ways in which the local government lacked in an effective communication strategy to involve the public (“Meerderheid raad kiest voor opvang vluchtelingen aan Harnaschdreef”, 2023). The interviewed councillors stated that they were initially quite happy with the communication from the local government and explained that there was a clear intent of first figuring things out, both the practical aspects but also the political stance within the council toward a possible refugee centre. The initial notice of the exploratory investigation on the feasibility of the shelter was in the councillor’s opinion handled quite well, taking into account the weight of the topic. However, during the process, they found that the local government could not meet the inhabitants expectation of transparency and notification, due to the nature of it still being part of the process and some decisions not being set in stone yet and therefore not yet ready to be shared with the public. Eventually struggling to compete with the local media, which tended to report on these topics, when the local government itself was not ready to announce these things just yet.

One of the lessons learned by one of the interviewed councillors was the importance of facts and figures in a topic as contentious as this. The local government has done more research in this case than usual just to make sure they would come to the right decision. Letting their political opinion be based as much on facts as possible. This was also very important to combat misinformation and preconceptions among the public and help the communication from the local government be as factual as possible. This does not mean that this form of communication always succeeds in winning people over. One instance of the importance of understanding definition which one councillor gave concerned the definition of an incident at a refugee centre. With a relatively high number of incidents at a refugee centre each year, a fearful public may get the interpretation of most of these incidents involving grave crimes, like knife fights, when in reality an incident does not only encompass these kinds of situations but also simple violations of house rules like smoking inside. One interviewed local also brought up this specific example given by the local government and felt like this indicated that they were not taking his safety concerns seriously. He criticised them for using such a silly example. So sometimes even staying fully factual can fall on deaf ears in such an emotional debate.

This emotional debate also has an influence on the people who are not vehemently against or in favour. Interviewee 5 found themselves less likely to read into the situation surrounding the refugee centre because it had become such a loaded and polarised discussion. Because the topic had been made into such a big issue, they were more inclined to not participate in the debate. Which lead to their voice and opinion which was indifferent not being heard in the discussion, a fact which causes the people with the strong opinions to be more visible in the debate.

Because of the worsening relationship between the local government and those opposing the refugee centre due to the way the process was handled, there is also a feeling of sadness for the refugee. With interviewee 1 feeling some pity for the refugees that are thrown into the middle of this controversial process. With the feeling that an aversion to these people already has been developed, because of how the process has gone and not because of something they did themselves. This disadvantage would materialise through a lack of volunteering by the local community and an instant negative relationship. Something which interviewee 3 confirmed, saying that he had been very active in volunteer work in the past, but that he would volunteer at the refugee centre for even a minute. Interviewees 1 and 2 regretted unnecessary disadvantage because

if the process would have gone more to the public's liking, there would not have been such opposition, and the refugee would have arrived in a more welcoming local community.

This would be possible because the community is not against the sheltering of refugees, as they state. The local community is in favour of helping people that need help. There is however also the feeling that a lot of the people that try to seek help through our asylum policy actually are not people that flee from conflict or personal threats but are identified as fortune seekers, with interviewee 3 stating that if the checks for the allocation for the status of refugee would be more thorough, at least half or more would not pass as a refugee. Because of this feeling, the refugee centre is losing its believability and integrity, as there is also a chance that the people that inhabit it do not actually need this treatment and should not be welcome in this country. Interviewee 3 also explained that the refugee centre was a manifestation of the extraction of government support by people who do not deserve it, away from the people who do. With the asylum policy being assessed as an overall waste of money. This point clearly indicates that the politicisation of asylum policy and the emphasis put on the distinction between fake and real refugees created in the political discourse also has an effect on the locals of Midden-Delfland.

These feelings toward refugees should be nuanced by the fact that when asked, most people admitted to have had zero experiences with refugees before. These feelings are not based on individual experiences but from stories in the media and the political discourse surrounding refugees. Interviewee 4 has had extensive contact with refugees in their work environment and actually welcomes the refugee centre as an opportunity for the broadening of the views of the local community. They stated that one of the key lessons one learns after dealing with refugees is that refugees are just people. People with their own stories and their own image of the future. Interviewee 1 was self-reflective of their own prejudice and attributed part of the aversion to ignorance. Because this situation and these people were unknown, the public was less welcoming and more guarded. The humanisation of refugees is something attributed to actual contact with them, not by an information supply through the media. The interviewed councillors also tried to put a lot of effort in the humanisation of refugees in their communication with the locals, as they recognised the tendency in the public debate to reduce these people to simple numbers.

As previously established the media has a big influence on the image surrounding refugee centres, but this in turn also skews the viewpoint the locals of Midden-Delfland have toward refugee centres. To exemplify the security issues a refugee centre can bring with them, interviewee 3 brought up the situation in Ter Apel and the stories of robberies of local supermarkets there. The situation in Ter Apel which was featured so often in the media, gets utilised as the reference material for the coming refugee centre, even though the situation of Ter Apel having the only reception centre in the Netherlands results in an exceptional situation, which is different than ordinary centres. Besides this, multiple interviewees identified the number of refugees that are coming to the centre as large, with interviewee 3 also identified the coming refugee centre as a large scale one. An identification which is also heavily prevalent in the local news articles.

The biggest problem attributed to the central approach of sheltering refugees, is its hindrance to the integration of the refugees in the local community. Integration was besides security the most stated goal of the refugee centre. Interviewees 1, 2 and 3 stated that the integration of the refugee in the local community would be much more feasible in case of the spread-out approach, because the smaller group of people in each village would result in more interaction with each individual refugee. By spreading the group of refugees, an individual refugee would become visible to the local community instead of being just part of the larger group. Interviewee 5 understood this

reasoning but also pointed out that the small group of status holders that lived in a designated area at the edge of their neighbourhood were also not part of a big group, but still their designated space was not really integrated into the local space and community. Interviewee 4 also stated their concern that even with this division into smaller groups, it would still be hard to integrate into a community like Midden-Delfland. The interviewed councillors also called integration in the local environment the most important requirement for the centre to be considered a success. One councillor also provided an addendum to this reasoning: *“In a refugee centre the refugees integrate in the Dutch society, not in the local community.”* The integration into the local community would only occur once the refugee has become a status holder and gotten a (semi)permanent residence. The temporary nature of the stay at refugee centres makes it hard for the refugees to become a part of the local community. Alongside this is the fact that most refugees would eventually be housed somewhere else and not in Midden-Delfland. This means that full integration in the local community could be negated eventually by the fact that these people will eventually not become a part of this local community, but a community somewhere else inside the country. Therefore, the refugee would benefit more from integration on a larger scale in the national society and community, and that’s what should be focussed on in refugee centres.

This national integration was also stated by interviewees 1, 2 and 3 in terms of learning the so-called western norms and values. This was suggested to be something which could be taught through courses during their stay in the asylum centre. Each time when the necessity of teaching these norms and values was stated, an explanation was given that if the roles were reversed and a Dutch person would have to stay in the Middle East, he would also have to become accustomed to the law and local customs. Interviewee 3 called the norms and values from refugees on another level, and that they could be brought up to speed with ours through mentality improvement courses.

Tied to this is the importance of safety and security. In this case the safety of the locals and the security of the refugee centre. There is a fear that things might get out of hand and that the safety of Den Hoorn will be affected especially because of the amount of single men that are coming to the refugee centre. The unsafe nature of the refugee centre in particular for women and young girls was also mentioned by interviewee 2 and 3 as a fear or expectation. However, not the safety of the refugee women and children, but the safety of local women and children. This frame of the refugee centre being an unsafe place filled with dangerous men which is prevalent in the media (Borm, 2022), has also nestled in the minds of some locals in Midden-Delfland. The most important features of the refugee centre according to interviewee 3 would need to be good surveillance and good fences. All this to provide good security for the neighbours. The interviewed councillors also stated the necessity for fencing around the centre, but not to provide security for the locals, but to provide safety for the refugees and make sure that the ones that have never learned how to swim do not walk into a ditch. This framing of measures to either be in place to accomplish safety or security, is something which is also central in the way a refugee centre is perceived. With measures like good surveillance which are meant to ensure the safety of the refugees inside the centre from outsiders that want to exploit these vulnerable people being perceived as measures to ensure the security of the neighbours. This interplay of safety and security is further helped by the fact that these terms both translate to the same word in Dutch: *veiligheid*. Thus, when the local government states *veiligheid* as one of their focus areas of the centre, this can be misconstrued as an issue of security and people can suspect that security is a big issue surrounding refugee centres. In the case of the fencing around refugee centres, this response which frames or orders the refugee centre as an unsafe place goes hand in hand with the creation of a literal border around the refugee centre.

Through the fence and its subsequent bordering effect, an order is created through frames. This order eventually has the effect that the refugee is othered by local inhabitants.

### 2.3.2 Effect of the refugee centre on the possible contact between locals and refugees

Originally the local government also announced that alongside the refugee centre some homes would be built for starters, young people, or status holders. These people would according to the original plan live right next to the centre, but eventually these homes were given a new location, separate from the refugee centre. An understandable change of plans according to interviewees 2 and 3, because you would not want to live inside a refugee centre. Because any person given the choice, would not choose to live next to a refugee centre. Interviewee 4 stated that even though they were in favour of the development, they themselves would not want to live in the refugee centre. This had nothing to do with the refugees as even in the hypothetical scenario that the centre would be inhabited by only native Dutch people, the nature of the centre would still not make it a nice place to live.

Every interviewed local confessed when asked that they had never been in a refugee centre, and so their assessment of the place is based on assumptions and exposure through secondary sources. Even though none had ever been inside the place, each one answered negatively to the question whether they through a refugee centre would be a nice place. Interviewee 2 stated that the centre may not be a very celebrated place, but that it was better than the alternative of war. But besides this positive aspect of the asylum, it is mostly the uncertainty and constrained nature of the asylum procedure and the asylum itself, that are argued as the main detractors from the place in terms of niceness. Also, the fact that all these people from different backgrounds are thrown together and have to coexist in a very small and restricted space, would inhibit the centre from becoming a nice place. Interviewee 5 did state their hope that the centre would be a nice place, even if their presumption would be that it is not. The interviewed councillors actually did visit multiple refugee centres and experienced the possibility of such a place not having the negative atmosphere which you would presume from the media coverage. They experienced places that can be positive, an experience which did not align with the expectations of the locals.

Another aspect which contributed to the negative nature of the refugee centre according to the locals, would be the surroundings of the location in which it would be settled. Between distribution centres, behind a busy road, next to a highway and underneath electrical cables, the refugee centre would simply not be a nice place because of its bad spatial surroundings. Interviewee 3 stated that they would not live in that location even if it would be in a villa, simply because of these inhibiting spatial factors. The location is also a point of contention for interviewee 1 and a reason to feel pity for the refugees, simply because it is a bad place to live and a second-rate living environment. One interviewed councillor stated that the reveal of the location also had a big impact in the process surrounding the refugee centre as it caused a change in the reaction of neighbours. They explained that up until the location was public information, the situation surrounding the refugee centre was very calm and there was little resistance from the inhabitants, but when people eventually knew where the centre would be coming, it hit too close to home for the neighbours which resulted in the resistance. Speculating that there would have also been angry reactions from neighbours if the location turned out to be in Schipluiden.

The essentials of a centre as imagined by the locals would be healthcare, which includes special care for the traumatised people, education for the children, and some entertainment or something to do during the day. Because many refugees are not yet allowed to enter the job market, they do not

have a day to day commitment or goal. In the eyes of interviewee 1, having a daily goal and purpose will increase integration, decrease disturbance, and also be beneficial for the refugee themselves by making them feel more at home in their new environment. But because of this lack of a purpose due to a restriction on getting a job, these people have to make do with the activities inside the refugee centre, or else stroll through the neighbourhoods in the vicinity, something which is not desired by the neighbours, with interviewee 3 stating that the refugee centre will result in them being on their guard when walking around in the neighbourhood. To make sure that the refugees will not get bored there has to be something done according to interviewee 3, preferring to have activities inside the centre which will result in the refugees staying inside and not start strolling through the neighbouring residential areas. There is however no idea what kind of activity would achieve this.

The central approach of sheltering all refugees in one place in Midden-Delfland was the most contentious topic of the plans for the locals, and interviewee 1 held on that the solution to improve the situation was to spread out the sheltering into multiple locations. The result of this would be more integration not only of the refugees, but also of the asylum itself. With one central location at the outskirts of one of the villages, the place itself will stay separated from the village it lies next to. Because of this location it can be easily avoided, either intentional or unintentional, and block the incorporation of the refugee centre into the local place identity. Through this central approach, there is a feeling that the refugee centre will stay a place of its own, also creating a barrier for the neighbours in how involved they feel they can be. The isolation in physical terms through fencing also acts as a deterrent for spatial integration. Because the centre does not integrate spatially with its surroundings, the space itself is not being seen as an addition to the village. With interviewee 3 bluntly stating that the refugee added 0 value to the village and providing not a single benefit.

The main reason why despite the opposition, the choice was still made for a central approach, is that this spread-out alternative would mean that the local government would not be able to ensure the best execution of the three main tasks of a refugee centre: Safety, management and surveillance. The local government does not have the financial capabilities to spread this over three locations. And this would mean that these locations would fail in the main goal of a shelter for refugees.

### 2.3.3 The refugee centre being part of the local community

Van Houtum and Van Naerssen (2002, p.126) state that: “(B)ordering rejects as well as erects othering.” It is through processes of bordering and ordering that othering is established, and that is also the case for Midden-Delfland. From the responses of the interviewed locals, we can identify that there are multiple others in their narratives.

Through the process of spatial bordering a divide is created between the world outside and inside the refugee centre. Through the process of ordering an identity is given to the refugee centre. The process of othering is made possible through this divide and constructed place identity and has as its recipient the inhabitant of this place, the refugee. Through the process of establishing a refugee centre and the surrounding media, the dehumanisation of the refugee is a frequent occurrence by reducing them to clean numbers to explain the flaws in the current policy. And while there is an active effort from some people to keep humanising the refugee during the process, often the refugees are utilised as a part in the narrative: “*The number of refugees is often seen as the social solidarity that is tested*” (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002, p.129).

At the same time, the refugee centre as a place and the bordering and ordering that result from its process, cause the refugee to be othered in specific ways. There is a very close-knit local identity present in Midden-Delfland. Crucial in the creation of this local connection are local associations. Sports and cultural associations were stated by interviewee 1, 3 and 4 as being one of the strongest connecting aspects in their relation to the local community. With both interviewees 1 and 4 stating that an association was their connection to the village even in a phase of their lives when they lived somewhere outside of the village. It was also one of the reasons they eventually moved back. Interviewee 3 volunteered at various associations like the football association and used that fact as an indication of their connection to the local community. However, they made it clear that they would not consider volunteering at the refugee centre in a million years. Because of the space of a refugee centre, the refugees are treated as different, not part of the local community and not worthy the effort of volunteer work.

Some other aspects also initiate the process of othering. By putting the refugee centre at the edge of the village, behind a busy road there is a spatial divide between them and us and the other gets established. Because of the fencing off from the outside world, people will not go to the place, illustrated by the fact that no respondent had ever been in a refugee centre. The refugee centre stays elusive and separate from the local environment, like the interviewees mentioned, it will not feel like a part of the local environment, and this border will result in it staying a place of itself and the people inhabiting it being othered. Besides this the initial promise made by the local government that they would be able to cherry pick some groups of refugees creates the inherent distinction between the wanted and the unwanted refugee. Through this order, one group is even further othered as unwanted against the other group of wanted refugees.

The frames of security issues and disturbances which are not only present in the media reports but also in the responses from locals, have ordered the place of a refugee centre as one inherently violent and negative. And while individual refugees may not be judged as such, a frame of the refugee centre inhabitant has been established and ordered, making way for individuals to utilise this order to other this group, by stating their difference in norms and values. The explanatory role reversal of a Dutch person in the Middle East which follows further emphasises the way in which the order is held up and rigid structure is being kept. The person being out of place, not belonging, being othered. Interviewee 3 also explained that if he were put in Nigeria, he would not know what to do. He does not know the language and does not know the people, he would not belong. However, even while imagining themselves in the shoes of the other, they were unable to come up with a motivation.

The emphasis put on the integration of refugees also others the refugee into a group that is lacking and needs to be taught something. Because integration is exactly the topic which emphasises the differences between us and them. Integration is the barrier which divides the outsider from our world. Integration would be necessary to make the refugee more like us, emphasising the other being not like us. The arrival of the refugee causes the local to see the difference between us and them, creating an imbalance inside the municipality.

Regarding the overall heated debate and mistrust which has entered Midden-Delfland in response to this process, the interviewed councillors are hopeful that the situation will improve once the refugee centre is actually present in the municipality. They expect this to happen, based on the talks they have had with the COA about similar developments in other parts of the country. With the fading of the local's unfamiliarity with the new situation, fears of a possible doom scenario will be invalidated. Previous similar situations in the country teach that once the centre functions well, the

topic will become a non-issue for most people, and the peace will be able to return to Midden-Delfland.

### 3. Discussion

The goal of this research was to get an answer to the question: Why does the creation of a refugee centre in Midden-Delfland create a division between the locals and the coming refugee? To answer this question, we looked at the characteristics of the refugee centre, the discourse surrounding it in the form of media articles and the response from representatives of the local community. By utilising all three aspects, the cause of this division could be found in the actual spatial nature of the refugee centre, the sharing of this information and the interpretation of this information.

When initially starting the research, the expectation was that the opposition of the locals would mostly be grounded in prejudice and conservatism. When actually speaking to these people it became clear that it was mostly concerns and fears on which this opposition rested. The reason this refugee centre was so divisive was not because of angry neighbours but it involved people that simply wanted the best implementation of this plan. Another thing that was found out through these interviews, was that the people that were against the refugee centre, all had their own reasons why they were upset. Whether that be, not finding the location worthy to shelter refugees and believing they deserve something better, an overall dissatisfaction in the way the process was handled by the local government, or an expectation that the refugee centre will only bring trouble. The answer to the research question, was much more multifaceted than initially expected. The division was initiated by the refugee centre as a place and the policy behind it which created the border between the centre and its surroundings. Through media framing the situation was ordered, constructing the frames which questioned the effectivity of a refugee centre in achieving its 3 purposes: safety and protection, management and surveillance and administration, having a significant impact on the response to refugee centres. And eventually that process not only resulting in division between the locals in favour and against or the locals and the local government but most significantly creating an other out of the refugee that inhabits the refugee centre.

The utilisation of the theory of bordering, ordering and othering provided the researcher with a way in which to connect the spatial aspects of the refugee centre to the division it caused. First of all, the term bordering showed the ways in which the utilisation of refugee centres in asylum policy created inherent borders around the refugee centre because of its centralised approach. In the case of Midden-Delfland specifically, this border was created through the choice of location, a location separate from other neighbourhoods and at the edge of the village Den Hoorn, separated from it by a busy road. The term ordering showed the way in which the framing of refugee centres in the media utilises the divide created between the refugee centre and its surroundings in policy, to carve out a specific identity for the refugee centre which also has different characteristics than its surroundings. In the specific case of Midden-Delfland, the framing of the coming refugee centre as a big-scale centre has resulted in a belief among locals that the coming refugee centre is in fact large scale, ordered into something which because of that quality does not fit inside the small scale communities. Finally the term othering did not only make clear the division between the locals and the coming refugee, but also the ways in which this result was dependent on the processes of bordering and ordering. Most clearly illustrated in the specific case of Midden-Delfland, through the interpretation of the fencing around a refugee centre. This fence creates a border between the refugee centre and its surroundings, creating order to ensure safety, an order which in turn facilitates the othering of the refugee into something dangerous. The process of othering the

refugee is inherently linked to the processes of bordering and ordering. With all three processes ensuring the eventual division that is created between local inhabitants and the coming refugee. The results showed a way in which the spatial entity of a refugee centre is able to provide meaning and an identity to the refugees inside it. The results of this research imply the responsibility of policy makers and journalists in creating the idea of the refugee centre, and in turn a reaction toward refugees.

A recommendation to the local governing body in the future would be to make sure the location of the refugee centre is not disconnected from its surrounding, this way the spatial border can be avoided. Along with this the local government should be aware of the frames and the process of othering during the establishment of a refugee centre and to keep reiterating the importance and legitimacy of a refugee centre to the refugee. This way the humanitarian nature of the place stays in the local consciousness.

Overall, the local response from the inhabitants of Midden-Delfland proved to be the most interesting aspect of the research, as a conversation with these people immediately added nuance to the situation. Just listening to what these people had to say without judgement made these people feel more understood, and just by hearing people out the situation no longer seemed so black and white and it made clear that there are no villains in this story, only people with good intentions.

## 4. Limitations and recommendations

### 4.1 Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. Regarding the media analysis, the choice was made to focus on the frames present in traditional national news media. While this encompasses a lot of the media discourse surrounding a topic like asylum policy and was stated by all interviewed locals as their main source of information, it was not the only source of information. Social media as a source of information by the interviewees. The choice was made however not to incorporate social media in the media analysis to keep the analysis concise. Besides this, on social media the difference between media and local response gets blurred, and to keep a clear distinction between the media and the response of people the choice was made to strictly focus on traditional media.

Related to this is the issue of biased information and misinformation surrounding the topic. The choice was made to focus on reliable objective news sources to get the clearest idea of the way in which these news sources incorporate frames into their articles. However, other sources which are not so objective or reliable can still have a significant impact on the viewpoints and reactions of locals. Leaving these sources out can be considered as one of the limitations of this research.

Another limitation concerns the interview with the councillors to get an idea of the intentions behind the actions of the local government. It is limited to representatives of one political party only and might therefore not be fully indicative of the intentions of the local government as a whole. Because there was no interview with political parties on the other side of the spectrum, the answers of the councillors could not be generalised as the typical political opinion.

A final limitation is the fact that the only interviewee with a positive view on the refugee centre did not live in Den Hoorn where the other interviewees lived, but in the neighbouring town of Schipluiden. They also were the only one that did not feel like they lived close to the location of the refugee centre. This may have caused some of the differences in response and limited the extent to which their answers could be compared with the others.

## 4.2 Recommendations for further research

One of the ways to further research the impact of the refugee centre as a space and to what extent the spatial aspects influence the perceived identity and response to the place, would be to look at refugee centres built from scratch and compare them to refugee centre being placed in existing buildings with an already established place identity.

Another recommendation of further research was requested by one interviewed councillor and encompassed the most effective ways of structuring a citizens information evening, to make sure that the evening stays about the acquisition and does not get taken over by people venting their fears. Comparing bigger scale and smaller scale events and looking at the ways the setting of the event, whether it would happen in a sports hall or community centre and how that influences the way people feel about the evening and the effectiveness in the sharing of information.

## 5. Conclusion

The refugee centre is separate from its environment. It is a distinct place owing to its nature as a place of governance. A clear difference between the inside and the outside is established through fencing. It is a place of contrary purposes utilised both as a shelter for those in need and a deterrent for others like them. It is a place built out of minimums with little to offer to those that do not live inside it. This border created through policy can then be utilised to order the refugee centre and provide it with an identity through framing. Framing which forms an image around the refugee centre in which it contradicts its main purposes. The refugee centre becomes dangerous, unwanted and ineffective. These frames make clear that the refugee centre is a different place from the normal environment, resulting in locals rejecting this place which is so different and with this rejection the process of othering happens. By rejecting the place of a refugee centre, the refugee also gets rejected, pushed away into the identity of the other. This process and innate discrepancies within the place cause an imbalance in society, making division in the community inevitable.

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