

“Good Day! My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen”: problem-solving, knowledge-sharing, and trust in online interaction

The case of family reunification

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This article focuses on opportunities for citizens to interact with public organisations in the processing of individual cases and how this interaction is facilitated by the Internet. We analysed a string of messages from the online forum of the non-governmental organisation Marriage without Borders, which offers dialogue-based advice to members looking for help prior with the complex application process in relation to family reunification visas in Denmark. The trajectory of the problem-solving interaction clearly demonstrates the Internet’s potential for dynamic online interaction, emphasising the timeliness of a joint accomplishment. Our findings also emphasise the potential of non-governmental web forums to address the needs of member publics and to serve as equalisers in relation to the power gap between the more powerful public authorities and the less powerful individuals. A recurrent theme running through these posts is that you trust the members of the community to help as best they can and that expertise is not allocated to the authorities alone.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how an online forum set up by the non-governmental organisation "Marriage without Borders" assists its members with the complex application process for family reunification visas and asylum seeking in Denmark.

Denmark has had one of the strictest sets of immigration and asylum laws in Europe, and over the past decades, Danish governments have seen immigration as both a financial burden and a threat to democracy. The rules that apply in this area are not only extremely complicated and strongly debated but have also been subject to frequent amendments and continuous tightening, which makes it very difficult for ordinary Danes and newcomers in particular to familiarise themselves with the relevant laws and regulations. The fact that more and more everyday phenomena are continuously reframed, both legally and administratively, means that citizens must cope with more and more uncertainty and risk in conducting everyday affairs. One consequence may be an increasing trust deficit in public authorities (Thyssen, 2004).

In order to assist newcomers in their search for information about the regulations in force in Denmark, the Danish Immigration Service (under the Ministry of Justice) has an official Internet web portal called "New to Denmark"¹, which offers advice and information on legal issues related to work, studies, asylum, and family reunification. New to Denmark has information in Danish, English, and a number of other languages. There is a link to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) as well as a guide to telephone guidance. Furthermore, "My Page" enables a person to log in and view the status of his or her case.

The Marriage without Borders (*Ægteskab uden Grænser*)² non-governmental organisation offers assistance on matters related to family reunification, visa applications, etc. The organisation was formed as an online organisation in 1996 in response to the frequent amendments to and tightening of regulations – particularly in relation to family reunification – and aims to defend the rights of citizens to choose their partners freely. By offering support and expertise on rules and regulations related to family reunification, the organisation assists the foreign spouse in applying for a visa and reunification in each individual case. In contrast to the New to Denmark website, which can be seen as communication from the authorities to the public, Marriage without Borders offers support to people through an online forum with open access for anybody who registers as a member. In the forum, members can anonymously ask for advice on how to deal with their problems related to family reunification, and other members on the forum act as "support groups" providing support and offering advice to the questions posted on the forum. Although it is also possible to read the messages posted on the website without enrolling as a member, only members of the organisation can seek the organisation's advice. The members of Marriage without Borders are ordinary citizens working voluntarily to defend individual interests in each individual case, and the organisation can therefore be considered to be one of *experts who are not in power*.

Web-based online interaction

With the proliferation of web-based communication, the Internet is being used more and more by public authorities and organisations to communicate with citizens, and at the same time, more and more people are using the Internet to facilitate problem solving (Chen & Choi, 2011).

If we look at research on web-based communication, the present study is placed at the intersection of research on online social interaction (Baym, 2000, 2010; Bakardjieva, 2003; Hurley, Sullivan, & McCarthy, 2007; Chen & Choi, 2011), with particular focus on support groups, on the one hand and online political interaction (Dahlberg, 2001; Janssen & Kies, 2005; Freelon, 2010), with focus on deliberative democracy, on the other.

According to Kozinets (2009), online communities are considered nearly indispensable by many, as they have become *places of belonging*, offering information and emotional support that people cannot do without. Baym (2010) distinguishes between *emotional* support, *esteem* support, and *information* support. Emotional support refers to the ability to turn to others for comfort and security in times of crisis. Esteem support strengthens a person's sense of competence upon receiving positive responses regarding his competencies, and information support is about offering advice or guidance on how to solve a problem (Baym, 2010, p. 83). Basing her arguments on Cutrona and Russel (1990), Baym claims that people feel that they are needed when they support others, and she lists a number of documented positive effects of supporting others, including better psychological adjustment, higher perceptions of self-efficacy, better coping, and improved task performance. This may explain why many online groups develop a strong sense of group membership, a shared sense of who "we" are, which is why Baym (2010) links social support to social capital.

The study of online political forums is often concerned with *deliberative democracy*, which can be broadly described as public involvement in civic and political affairs (Dahlberg, 2001; Papacharissi, 2004; Janssen & Kies, 2005; Freelon, 2010). Social media in particular are seen as facilitating various forms of political communication, especially those that have a democratising function, and studies have suggested that "the Internet has had a positive impact on the activities of social movement organisations by increasing the speed, reach and effectiveness of communication" (Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012, p. 5). This is mainly explained by the Internet's ability to empower and connect individuals and groups. Taylor, Kent, and White (2001) also argue that the Internet can be used to increase the power resources available to citizens and interest groups, and in a study of activist organisations' use of the Internet, they argue that all types of organisations could benefit from the web's dialogic potential when engaging the public in a dialogic relationship. They assert that non-governmental organisations in particular seem better prepared to address the needs of member publics and to incorporate dialogic features in their organisations' websites.

When focusing on citizens' opportunities to communicate with public organisations, we find Day's distinction between *public service communication* and *public communication* to be very helpful (Day, 2009). Public service communication can refer to texts produced

by governments and their institutions, which are *experts in power*, for the benefit of citizens, who are novices. Public communication, on the other hand, can refer to the various ways in which society members produce and consume their own discourse within a mass medium. Public interactive communication is a variety of public communication in which citizens interact with one another. Here *experts not in power* and novices communicate about any issue of interest and perceived relevance.

In this paper, we will discuss to what extent the public may be better or worse off in terms of knowledge and trust with public service communication than with public interactive communication.

Problem solving, knowledge and trust

According to Goldman (2006), it is a crucial part of a democratic system to have institutions, structures, or mechanisms that assist citizens in acquiring information relevant to the choices they must make in their everyday affairs. One assumption advanced in this paper is, however, that it involves a certain amount of risk for participants to ask questions and give or receive responses, and seeking advice or asking for support can thus be seen as a balancing act between the two dilemmas of reliability and trust. Relying on others is one of the most fundamental ways of gaining knowledge about ourselves and the society in which we live, making the role of expertise in public decisions within democratic societies an epistemological concern (Origi, 2004). From an epistemological perspective, the big issue is, then, to what extent should we trust one another when we make assertions about the world in which we live.

The concept of trust has been studied by scholars across a number of disciplines (Simmel, 1950; Möllering, 2001; Luhmann, 1979; Lewis & Weigert, 1985), where trust primarily is seen in terms of stable properties of the individual. Thyssen (2004), for instance, defines trust as the acceptance of risky communication since there is always the risk that others are misinforming us. In this definition, he highlights the element of risk entailed in the definition by Simmel (1950, p. 318): "For the individual trust is a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct." This quotation underlines the ambiguity of the concept, an ambiguity that highlights the knowledge deficit that makes trust necessary. Trust as a function compensates for our knowledge deficit and involves a leap into uncertainty. Lewis and Weigert (1985) argue that, from a sociological perspective, trust is a property of collective units, not of isolated individuals, and the foundations on which trust rests should be seen as primarily social. They point to the need for a formalised and integrated sociological theory of trust. Epistemologists too find it necessary to include the social dimension in the analysis of trust, one reason being that we live in an information age in which knowledge is generated more and more often in online interaction, and engaging in collaborative knowledge construction makes sense as our epistemic position will be significantly improved when we rely on others instead of just relying on our own first-hand information.

Internet technology is an example of complex many-to-many communication in which it is easy to disseminate messages and to access messages others have sent. Goldman (2004) points specifically to two public benefits of the Internet. First of all, it is obvious that, in a network society, we will find multiple agents with diverse interests as well as distinct abilities, and when we come across biases, these can and will be identified and corrected by others. Secondly, cooperation is an important element that constitutes a positive force for reliability, as experts can rely on the work of others rather than having to rely exclusively on themselves. Goldman (2004) therefore sees trust as generated in social practices, which can be a relatively simple relationship between two interlocutors or a complex technological or institutional communicative structure. Linell and Keselman (2012, p.156) also emphasise that trust and distrust are intimately linked with interaction, communication, and discourse, and they argue that "it is in interaction between people, or between individuals or groups and their environments that trust and distrust is created, negotiated, sustained, confirmed or disconfirmed." It is from this perspective that we see knowledge as co-constructed in collaboration and thus closely linked to trust and interaction.

Analytical approach

The approach we follow draws on the line of research within ethnography that is referred to as ethnomethodology (EM), with its two subfields of analysis: conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA). The distinction between EM/CA can be seen very roughly in EM's interest in ordinary practices of interaction in general, whereas CA's focuses primarily on the organised details of sequences in talk, where sequence simply refers to the orderliness in the production of turns in talk (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). MCA is concerned with the organisation of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk (Day & Wagner, 2008). In this case, categories simply refer to membership categories that are classification types or social types, which may be used to describe people (Hester & Eglin, 1997). Creating sequences and categories are considered to be two interrelated methods that members use in undertaking social activities. EM/CA/MCA rests on the fundamental fact that individuals are able to make shared sense of their circumstances and act on the shared sense they make (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). One of the fundamental assumptions informing the approach is that social interaction is a highly organised, ordered phenomenon. One of the basic tasks of the analyst is to show how socially shared methods used in producing and sharing meaning are a local accomplishment. One basic tool is thus to ensure that the analysis explicates orderly properties of interaction as accomplishments to which participants orient themselves and is not simply based on the assumptions of the analyst. Numerous studies of talk-in-interaction have shown that speakers display in their sequentially subsequent turn an understanding of what the previous turn concerned. This understanding may or may not turn out to be what the previous speaker intended. Whatever the case, it is something that

is displayed in the next turn of the sequence (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). EM/CA/MCA has been profitably applied to analyse patterns of sequential organisation in web-based communication in debate forums (Antaki, Ardévol, Núñez, & Vayreda, 2005; Morrow, 2006; Vayreda & Antaki, 2009; Stommel & Koole, 2010).

In our study, we would like to highlight one particular aspect of the way in which posters manage the sequential organisation of written interaction, namely that of questions and answers (for example, see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Heritage and Clayman pose the question of what the basic logic of the question-answer sequence might be. When people ask questions in interaction, they normally commit to a number of propositions about themselves, their recipients, and the topic of the question. In addition to the social right to ask the question, they claim to be ignorant relative to the question's recipient regarding the state of affairs about which they are asking. They establish an epistemic gradient between questioner and respondent. By projecting the respondent as knowledgeable, questioners generally commit to the idea that the response will be informative and that, once the response is provided, they will be informed, and the epistemic gradient will have been made level. A standard way that questioners indicate that this has occurred is through the use of acknowledgement tokens. The assumption advanced in this paper, however, is that it involves a certain amount of risk for participants to ask questions and give or receive responses and that seeking advice or asking for support may therefore be seen as a balancing act between two dilemmas, one of which concerns reliability and the other of which concerns trust.

Data and analysis

The data selected for this paper comes from the online forum offered by the Marriage without Borders organisation, and the examples we present come from the sub-forum "In English", which includes a total of 108 themes with 400 contributions. We began by reading all of the posted messages in order to familiarise ourselves with the type of communication that occurs in this community. For this paper, however, we have limited ourselves to presenting our analysis of one of the aforementioned themes. This one is called "Filipina living in Denmark for 10 months without visa", consisting of twelve contributions. The data can be found at <http://www.aegteskabudengraenser.dk/forum/> and was last retrieved on February 14, 2012.

The community forum offers people anonymity as well as a shared identity, which is visualised through the use of a forum logo and the following welcome:

Velkommen til ÆUG's Forum. Hvis du ikke kan finde svaret på dine spørgsmål om visum og familiesammenføring mm. under menupunktet "jeg vil...", så kan du sikkert få svar ved at stille dem her. Mvh. ÆUG's bestyrelse

Article: "Good Day! My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen"

[Translation: Welcome to MWB's forum. If you cannot find the answer to your questions about visa and family reunification, etc. under the menu "I will...", you can definitely find your answer by asking your question here. Best regards, MWB's board]. This forum is dedicated to all of our English-speaking members. Please feel free to ask your questions here!

In the following presentation of our analysis, we have decided not to make any changes to names or other identity markers of the posters. As this is an open forum that offers people the option of anonymity, it would not make sense to anonymise further³.

The case opens when a poster (Marika) sends a post on 14/09/2011 at 17:28:21.

Post 1:

A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa

: **14.09.2011 17:28:21**

by **marika**

Good day!

My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen. I have a Filipina girlfriend whose living with me and pregnant for 7months and shes been living here for 10months without visa, I dont want her to come home and apply a residence permit at her country since she is pregnant I want her to gave birth our baby either in Sweden or here at Denmark if itspossible,the problem is I dont know where to start since her situation now is very risky ,but now time is so fast and soon she will gave birth and need to have a proper care from hospital,is there anything you can help me or suggest what would I do?Idontwanna be separate from her and our baby. Am planning to marry her at Sweden cause we cant be married here at Denmark cause of her age shes only 21 turning 22,is it going to help her situation?Do I need to move at Sweden?or I can apply a family reunification?or any kind of visa to make her status legal,but is she allowed to have a check up here at Denmark? and gave birth while we are on process if they accept?Can I bring her here or she will be deported because she doesnt have visa anymore?Is there any chance or hope for our situation to keep her here and not needed to travel to another country to apply?Amsory I have a lot of questions,I really dont know what to do. Please I would really appreciate your kind and consideration of our situation.

Hope you can help us. Hope to hear a respond!Thank you very much!

Kind and Regards

Martin

The poster (Marika) immediately identifies himself as Martin and as a Danish citizen, which is central to the problem he presents. The presentation of the problem clearly indexes his immediate need for advice, as his girlfriend comes from the Philippines and has been living illegally in Denmark for close to one year. As an additional complication, she is seven months pregnant. Martin then lists a number of problems, thereby emphasising the seriousness and the urgency of the matter, which also includes the fact that his girlfriend is only 21. This means that they cannot get married in Denmark and have this count toward a family

reunification visa, for which both parties must be at least 24 years old. She is also in urgent need of proper care. The genuineness of his account is accomplished not only through the delicate information he provides but also through his motivational orientation. He is aware of his own epistemic inferiority when he portrays himself as partly knowledgeable about potential solutions and displays a willingness to act according to the advice he is given, within certain limits. He does not want to be separated from his girlfriend and their baby and thus does not want her to go back to her home country, the Philippines, where she could legally apply for a Danish residence permit. By portraying himself as a *family father*, he is presenting himself as responsible and caring, and he emphasises a need for them to stay together, which involves a wish for her to give birth *either in Denmark or in Sweden*. However, we can also infer that he doubts that his girlfriend can give birth to their baby at a Danish hospital due to her illegal status in Denmark, and this is probably the reason he introduces the option of going to Sweden. His post lists six questions, which in itself indexes his need for help, but which he also explicitly articulates himself. The purpose and relevance of his post to this forum (instead of, for instance, making direct contact to the Danish Immigration Service) is accentuated by the fact that he is in urgent need of a solution, which requires an immediate response, as well as by the complicated and delicate nature of the problem. By ending his message with a series of questions and a cry for help, Martin attempts to gain recognition of the seriousness of the situation as well as his own helplessness. By posing a series of questions, he appeals to the support and empathy of the community, and by thanking them in advance, he signals that he trusts the community to help him rather than judge him. This post reflects not just a need for information but also a need for help and sympathy, or what Baym (2010) refers to as *emotional support*.

Post 2: Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa

: 15.09.2011 04:36:45

by **fundiver199**

You will not be able to get married in Denmark, when your girlfriend don't have legal residence here (i.e. a valid visa). However it should be possible to get married in Sweden. If you get married, you can take advantage of the right to free movement in EU. Please read "jegvil..flyttetilSverige/EU".

It is not possible to hand in an application for family reunion in Denmark, if your girlfriend don't have legal residence here (i.e. a valid visa).

As a last remark, Philippines have absolutely decent private hospitals, so there is really no reason at all, why your girlfriend can not deliver her baby there. Just only your feelings. If you like to be present, when the baby is born, you can join your girlfriend in the Philippines. Danish citizens can enter there free of visa for 21 days, and it is a pure formality to extend a visa for up to 2 years.

Article: "Good Day! My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen"

Two plane tickets to the Philippines and the bill from delivering a baby at a decent private hospital there is probably less expensive than the bill from delivering a baby at a danish hospital without being covered by any kind of health insurance.

Also I would presume, that if your girlfriend deliver her baby at a danish hospital, then it will be noticed, that she is illegal here in Denmark, and that the police would then take action to expell her, after the baby is born.

So what your girlfriend **should** have done was to go back in her own country a long time ago. However if she is 7 month pregnant already, it is probably to late for her to fly anywhere now. She must therefore deliver her baby at a danish hospital. And after that she will be expelled and banned from getting a new visa to Denmark for at least 3 years.

I have never heard about this situation before. But I will presume, that if you declare openly, who the father is (which you should of course do for the benefit of your child), the father will then need to pay the bill at the hospital, since presumably in this situation the mother will not be able to pay it herself.

It is quite a mess, that the two of you have created together for yourself and your future child, and you are extremely late in seeking advice about how to solve it

Approximately 11 hours later, a person who identifies himself as Fundiver199 posts a reply. Responding to the list of questions in the previous post, he implicitly invokes the identity of being an expert vis-à-vis Martin. His epistemic basis for doing so is based on Martin's own description of his situation. But how can Fundiver199 know that Martin's account conveys true information? The short answer is that he cannot. But as far we can see, he in no way monitors for further information that can indicate something about Martin's trustworthiness and the genuineness of his account. Fundiver199 simply trusts Martin's account of the situation at face value.

In his response, Fundiver199 constructs himself as an expert who clearly and concisely provides the requested information. Without a valid visa, it is not possible to marry in Denmark, and it is not possible to apply for family reunification either. He informs Martin that *it is possible to get married in Sweden*, and he kindly refers Martin to the page "jegvil..flyttetil-Sverige/EU" ("I want..to move to Sweden/EU"), which is available on the same website.

By giving Martin the Danish name of the link, he takes it for granted that Martin's self-identification as a Danish citizen can be trusted. The fact that Fundiver199 refers Martin to this page requires two additional comments. In the first place, Fundiver199 constructs himself as expert member of the organisation. He could have given Martin the information directly, but by referring him to information offered on the Marriage without Borders website, he shows that his expertise deals not only reunification rules in Denmark but also with what kind of information is accessible on the organisation's website. He also seems to

convey a message about the accessibility of the information: "The information is out there – actually it is on our own website". The *raison d'être* of the organisation is precisely to bridge the information gap between the public information available on New to Denmark and the problems encountered by its own members by offering easily comprehensible advice on dealing with problems related to international relationships. Instead of requesting information that is already available on the website, members are meant to navigate the website themselves to find it. The implicit norm is that you should post your questions to the forum if you cannot find the necessary information on the website. This leads us to the point that Fundiver199 implicitly constructs Martin as a somewhat *lazy* problem solver. After having advised Martin and his girlfriend to go to Sweden, Fundiver199 continues his message by pointing to a second solution: You should both go to the Philippines. This is constructed by Fundiver199 as "a last remark" and picks up on Martin's initial message, arguing against Martin's explicit statement, i.e. that he does not want his girlfriend to go to the Philippines and apply for a residence permit there, as she is pregnant and needs proper care from hospital. This statement could be read as a negative assessment of Philippine hospitals. This, at least, is how Fundiver199 treats it. The robustness of the preference for agreement norm in talk-in-interaction has been extensively described in CA literature. We, however, argue that it does not apply with the same rigour to online interaction. What we can observe in the present instance is, however, that not only does Fundiver199 produce a second assessment that is contrary to Martin's but that it is even upgraded twice. The Philippines has absolutely decent private hospitals, and there is no reason at all why Martin's girlfriend should not go to the Philippines to give birth. Martin is portrayed as the source of the problem, as his reluctance to send his girlfriend to the Philippines is based only on Martin's personal sentiment against Philippine hospitals. Fundiver199 clearly sees the option of going to the Philippines as the most realistic and sensible solution. He even extends his advice by offering additional information on visa rules in the Philippines. At this point, what Fundiver199 initially introduced as *a last remark* must be considered complete. However, continuing his interaction as an expert, he adds four additional comments, whereby he extends the position of informing to include his own personal position towards Martin as well. He now becomes rather judgmental in his reply as he outlines the economic and legal consequences of giving birth to the child at a Danish hospital, explicitly emphasising the illegal position of Martin's girlfriend. He continues by outlining the steps his girlfriend *should have taken* in due time, adding the complication of the pregnancy by constructing her seven months' pregnancy as incompatible with the act of flying. Furthermore, Fundiver199 now introduces the topic of economic and moral (ir)responsibility on the part of Martin as a father-to-be, drawing on his experience as an advice giver by stating that he has never heard about a situation like this before. He calls it a mess and notes the urgency regarding time. He is not offering Martin any emotional support in this particular situation.

We will conclude our analysis of this post by adding a few comments on how Fundiver199 manages his superior authority. Producing this sequence of negative assessments, he runs

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the risk of appearing too intrusive relative to Martin's private domain. To answer this, we first recall that the assessments are based on information provided by Martin himself. Next, if we look at it from an organisational point of view, a debate forum is also one-to-many communication, meaning that the moral underpinnings of Fundiver199's response might be read not only by Martin but also by other members of this forum who find themselves in a similar situation. The implicit message forwarded to them is to take the necessary steps in due time.

Post 3: Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa
: 15.09.2011 08:36:59
by **marika**

Thank u very much for the answer

U think were allowed to move at Sweden eventhough my girlfriend doesn't have visa? Is there anything I need to do here at Denmark to notify them that I will move to Sweden and then go back here again.Thanksagain

Only four hours later Martin responds to the post by Fundiver199 by sending a new post in which he begins with the acknowledgement "Thank u very much for the answer" and then continues by asking two new questions, which are based on the first solution offered by Fundiver199 received in the previous post, i.e. moving to Sweden. By completely ignoring the second suggestion, i.e. going back to the Philippines, he clearly rejects that option and chooses to move on with Fundiver199's first solution. However, by pursuing the trajectory of moving to Sweden, he indicates that he has given epistemic authority to Fundiver199 and has taken him to be a reliable source of information. This is further confirmed by his signing off with "Thanks again" as a sign of gratefulness.

Post 4: Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa
: 15.09.2011 09:44:43
by **soreng**

You should be able to get married in sweden.
So the best way of solving this mess if you really do not want to have this baby in Philippines, would be that you move to sweden as soon as possible...Tomorrow is better than monday... (look under "Jegvill..." "FlyttetilSverige").

Then the 2 of you get married in Sweden as soon as possible (they do not have the same rules of not marrying people without a valid visa). Then your now wife seek a visa to join you in sweden, and you can now live for at least 3 months in sweden together...After that you can apply for a visa for your wife in denmark.

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If your girlfriend delivers the baby in a danish hospital without insurance (which she cannot have because she is illegal in the country), the hospital will bill her for the service.

You are both in a BIG hurry if you want to do all of this, so forget about finding a good wedding date where family can be there and such things...Everything that can be done today is better than doing it tomorrow. Time is working against you both if you want to make this happen before the birth.

Your first priority should be finding a way of having a visa for your girlfriend, and the fastest way of getting that in your situation is for you to move to sweden and get married with her there... She will need some documents from Philippines stating that she is unmarried, so you might as well use the time you look for an apartment in sweden for also getting those documents for her

About an hour later, a third member enters the forum as Soreng posts his advice, which is based on the information provided in Martin's posts. Soreng also picks up on the Sweden solution, so if Martin does not want to have his baby in the Philippines, they should both move to Sweden. His advice is closely aligned with that of Fundiver199 in all respects. This is thus an example of one expert confirming the information given by another expert. His advice about going to Sweden is also hedged, and he too directs Martin to read the page "jegvil.flyttetilSverige/EU" ("I want .. to move to Sweden/EU"), which gives information on how to proceed. He is in agreement with Fundiver199's assessment of the severity of the situation if the baby is delivered in a Danish hospital. He also emphasises urgency with regards to time, but unlike Fundiver199, he does so several times. Urgency with regards to time is, in fact, the structuring feature of the message's organisation when offering a step by step approach. In contrast to Fundiver199's post, however, this post is more emotionally supportive, as in "forget about finding a good wedding date where the family can be there." The post does, however, introduce a new problem not included in Fundiver199's advice: They will need "some documents," the nature of which remain unspecified in this post.

Post 5: Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa
: 15.09.2011 09:48:39
by **soreng**

marika wrote:

Thank u very much for the answer

U think were allowed to move at Sweden eventhough my girlfriend doesn't have visa? Is there anything I need to do here at Denmark to notify them that I will move to Sweden and then go back here again. Thanks again

And no...It is not good enough that you just "pretend" that you move to sweden. You have to be able to document that you lived

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there for at least 10 weeks (save all receipts when shopping food, your traincards going to and from work everyday from sweden to denmark, rent, heat, telephone, Internet, tv...In short everything you pay for in sweden while you live there you have to remember to save the receipt for, and use creditcards whenever you can instead of paying cash).

This post is a continuation of the previous post by Soreng and is posted only four minutes later, but even though he copies the questions raised in Martin's second post, he does not produce a response directly related to these questions. Instead, Soreng's post is produced as a response to an imagined question along the lines of "Is it possible to simply move to Sweden *pro forma*?"

That this question is relevant at this moment must be related to the "no," which must be the only correct answer to the first question raised by Martin ("U think were allowed to move at Sweden eventhough my girlfriend doesn't have visa?") since this "no" might invite Martin to consider the possibility of moving to Sweden on a *pro forma* basis. It is also a means of clarifying the practicalities of what it means to live in Sweden for ten weeks: "You have to be able to document that you lived there for at least 10 weeks (save all receipts [...] instead of paying cash)."

By replying to an imagined but still relevant question, this poster demonstrates empathetic concerns that epistemically draw upon an understanding of the young couple's difficult situation and presumably upon knowledge acquired through his own or other members' experience of what it means to truly live in Sweden. We may assume that it is not easy for ordinary citizens to access detailed information on how to manoeuvre in everyday affairs. Sharing this type of information to protect members' interests involves a high degree of mutual trust and emotional support.

Post 6: - Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa
: 15.09.2011 12:35:37
by **fundiver199**

In theory your girlfriend need a visa to enter Sweden legally. However she can probably not get such a visa from the embassy in Copenhagen. So if she do not want to go back to her own country, she have no other option than entering Sweden illegally. Since she is already illegal in Denmark, and since both Denmark and Sweden are part of Schengen and have no regular border control, it is hard also to see, why this should be such a big problem.

Once you have moved to Sweden (finding a place **today**, where you can stay, is better than finding one tomorrow), and once you are married, your wife now has a right to live with you in Sweden under EU-rules and should apply for a residence card (opholdskort) at Migrationsverket.

Article: "Good Day! My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen"

In order to get married in Sweden, your girlfriend will need to obtain a CENOMAR (Zero Registration of Marriage) from NSO (National Statistics Office) in her country. I am not sure, if this is possible without personal appearance, but if it is, then perhaps she have family, who can help with this.

You should similarly get hold on an Egteskabsattest from your Danish kommune. This is also a piece of paper stating, that you are not married already, and therefore according to danish law able to legally enter into a marriage. When you have both these papers, then it should be possible for you to get married in Sweden.

Legalization of the CEROMAR might also be required, before it will be recognized by swedish authorities. I doubt if they will have such a requirement regarding papers issued in Denmark. But if they do, this can be done at Udenrigsministeriet for a few hundred danish kroner.

If Soreng's Posts 4 and 5 are not direct responses to Martin's first question raised in Post 4, Fundiver199's Post 6 is. As in his previous post, he sets up alternatives, and based on the information Martin has provided, his girlfriend's only option now will be to go to Sweden illegally.

He uses his superior position as an expert to produce a risk analysis of the girlfriend's situation. It is already extremely risky, and her best option is to run the risk of being caught at the border.

In his presentation of the assessment, he uses an *evidential* verb (see) adding the predicative information "it is hard to see" to assess the state of affairs. He thereby indexes a positive stance (it is not a problem to cross the border illegally since the Schengen agreement means that there is no regular border control) while at the same time replying to an anticipated problematisation of the issue presented by Martin. In his additional advice, he minimises the risk as he presupposes that they already live in Sweden. Once again, he mentions the urgency of the matter and almost sets a step-by-step agenda of the measures Martin must take, once again providing information that Martin could have found himself on the organisation's website ("Once you are married, your wife now has a right to live with you in Sweden under EU-rules and should apply for a residence card (opholdskort) at Migrationsverket."). He then continues by specifying what precisely is meant by the "some documents" to which Soreng referred to in Post 4. Martin's girlfriend will need documents from the Philippines stating that she is unmarried. Even though he portrays himself as possessing expert knowledge, he does not pretend to be in an epistemic position that enables him to give detailed information on all aspects of the legal processing of the documents. He is honest enough to say that he is unsure of how to get those documents and that the required documents may need to go through a legitimisation process. He concludes the message by informing Martin of additional documents required in order to get married—information that relates not to the issue of getting married in Sweden specifically but to getting married in general.

Article: "Good Day! My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen"

By now, Fundiver199 is no longer making reference to moving to the Philippines and seems more inclined to address Martin's specific needs.

Post 7: Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa
: 15.09.2011 17:10:43
by **antoni**

i like to share something about CENOMAR,,, (certificate of no marriage) issued by NSO,,(national statistics office) in philippines,,, if your girlfriend has a family to do right away for that papers,, its possible because the office released that papers within 3 weeks plus sending papers from philippines to denmark its take long time,,, so i suggest that you can request on that NSO office by Internet,, and they will do it as soon as you want,,, <https://www.ecensus.com.ph/Secure/frmIndex.asp> that is the site but you need to pay of course,,, dont be worry,,, everything is under control,,,

In Post 7, a new poster, who identifies himself as Antoni, announces that he has specific knowledge of the Cenomar document, which he would like to share with the others. This enables him to fill the knowledge deficit left by Fundiver199.

Not only does he inform Martin that it is possible for his girlfriend's family to get hold of that document but also that it will take a long time before they receive it. He therefore suggests that they apply for the document online, and he supplements this information by offering the precise Internet address.

Following the trajectory of this particular topic from the first time it was addressed by Soreng in Post 4 ("She will need *some documents* from Philippines stating that she is unmarried"), where the information was so vague and imprecise that further research would be needed in order to act on it, to Post 6, where the issue is addressed much more specifically, we see how the information goes from being extremely vague and imprecise to being much more specific, including details of the name of the document as well as the specific authority from which it can be obtained. There is, however, still a degree of uncertainty in Post 6 as Fundiver199 does not know exactly how to obtain the document. In Post 7, though, that problem is solved as Antoni states that the document can be obtained online and even specifies the precise address. This very cooperative stance is further underlined by his concluding token of reassurance "dont be worry,,, everything is under control,,,," which stands in marked contrast to the urgency of the matter emphasised by Martin, Fundiver199, and Soreng.

Post 8: Re: A Filipina living in denmark for 10 months without visa
: 16.09.2011 08:48:15
by **marika**

Article: "Good Day! My name is Martin and I am Danish citizen"

Thank you very much for the advice we appreciate it a lot

Am doing all the best I can!!

Ill be keep posting you guys

These site is absolutely help us, cheers to the people like you whose giving us info!!

am hoping for the best that we can make it, time is running so fast..

Have a nice day to all

Without a doubt, Martin fully trusts the advice he has received. First, he issues various formulations of thankfulness. Then he displays a willingness to transform these acts into real-life practice. With the assistance of the online community offered by the Marriage without Borders non-governmental organisation, Martin is now able to act. He is equipped with the necessary tools for approaching the relevant authorities, and he knows where to obtain the necessary documents. He knows how to proceed in order to apply for family reunification and eventually bring his girlfriend into Denmark legally.

The trajectory of this problem-solving interaction clearly demonstrates the Internet's potential for dynamic online interaction, emphasising the timeliness of this joint accomplishment. It only took a few hours to reach an agreement that qualifies as realistic assistance in solving Martin's problems: Less than 24 hours elapsed from the first post at 17:28 on 14/09/11 to the final post at 17:10 on 15/09/11.

Discussion and conclusion

During our analysis of the Marriage without Borders online forums, it became increasingly evident that Danish authorities and ordinary citizens have opposing interests in matters concerning international marriage. We found a vast number of cases outlining situations so complex to deal with from a legal and administrative standpoint that it became clear to us that the situations described highlight the need for a more trust-based, interactive approach to public communication.

Particularly helpful is Day's (2009) distinction between public communication and public service communication, as the general question to be raised is to what extent the public is better or worse off in terms of knowledge and trust with public service communication than with public (interactive) communication.

Public service communication refers to texts produced by governments and their institutions, which are experts in power, for the benefit of citizens, who in this respect can be seen as novices. The Danish Immigration Service, subsidiary to the Ministry of Justice, can be seen as a case in point. When processing individual cases or managing requests from ordinary citizens, it is the Danish Immigration Service's duty to administer aspects of the law.

Processing times, however, can be extremely long because allocated resources are scarce. Moreover, case processing is non-negotiable: Once a case has been closed, it is very difficult to have it reopened. So, from a novice's perspective, it can be risky not to fully understand information about legal issues offered by public authorities.

Public communication, on the other hand, refers to the various ways in which society members produce and consume their own discourse within a mass medium. Public interactive communication is a variety of public communication in which citizens interact with one another. The online community set up by the Marriage without Borders organisation is a case in point. Here, experts not in power and novices communicate about any issues concerning international marriage. The members of Marriage without Borders are ordinary citizens working voluntarily to defend individual interests in each individual case.

We analysed a string of messages from the online forum of the Marriage without Borders non-governmental organisation, which offers dialogue-based advice to its members in connection with the complex application process in relation to family reunification visas. The forum is highly active, with several new messages posted each day by people of various national backgrounds. For the purpose of this article, we selected a case in which a Danish citizen, Martin, is in a relationship with a Philippine woman, who has been staying in Denmark without a visa for ten months and who is seven months' pregnant. Her boyfriend consults the Marriage without Borders online forum with a request for help, as they need advice on how they can live legally in Denmark together with their baby. With the assistance of the online community, Martin is quickly equipped with the necessary tools for approaching the relevant authorities. He is informed of which documents he will need and how he should proceed in order to bring his girlfriend legally into Denmark. Martin can now move on with his life.

Baym (2010) distinguishes between emotional support, esteem support, and information support in online forums. In this case, we clearly find that other members of the organisation willingly offer information and show empathetic concern in their posts. However, we also find that the sequence of questions-answers that takes place in the online forum concerns not only information transfer and emotional support. Instead, the interactive nature of the online forum enables people to connect and reach goals in a highly constructive and speedy way. Our analysis nevertheless shows that any advice offered is contingent upon mutual trust, as any recommendation given by the members would serve as a basis for critical decision making in relation to a third party, namely the public authorities. We thus also stress the forum's ability to empower individuals to act.

The trajectory of this problem-solving interaction clearly demonstrates the Internet's potential for dynamic online interaction, emphasising the timeliness of this joint accomplishment. Urgency with regards to time is, in fact, the structuring feature of the organisation of several of the messages, and it took less than 24 hours to reach an agreement that qualified as realistic assistance in solving Martin's problems. We therefore see knowledge and trust as dynamic concepts that are locally constructed by members engaged in social

interaction, and online web forums such as Marriage without Borders clearly facilitate these kinds of supportive group interactions. By exploiting the Internet's dialogic potential, the organisation is able to bridge the information gap between the public information available on the New to Denmark website and the problems encountered by members of the organisation. In this way, the Marriage without Borders website acts as a buffer between its members and the public authorities.

As a result, we conclude that, from the individual's perspective, online interaction between peers in communities is an important instrument in the management of everyday affairs in an increasingly complex society. The analytical approach taken in our analysis demonstrates that problem solving is a joint accomplishment, involving trust-based co-action between two or more parties. It also, however, emphasises the potential of non-governmental web forums to address the needs of the member publics and to serve as equalisers relative to the power gap between the more powerful public authorities and less powerful individuals.

Notes

1. <http://www.nyidanmark.dk/da-dk>, retrieved, 14.02.12
2. <http://www.aegteskabudengraenser.dk>, retrieved, 14.02.12
3. The organisation has given consent to our analysis of the posts in their open forum.

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