DES516
PPDP

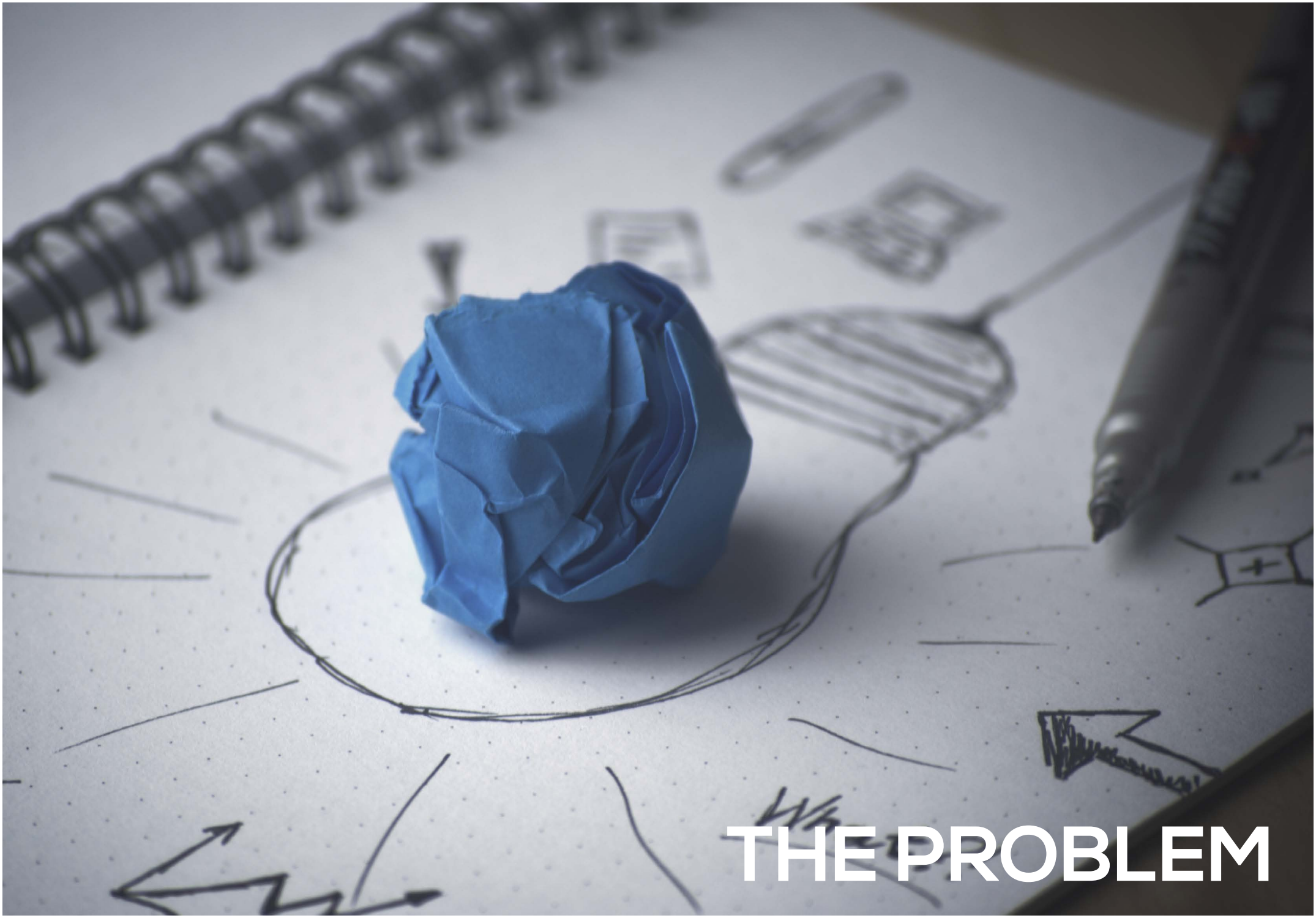
(PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DESIGN PROJECTS)

HEATHER MALLON

BRIEF

What's Your Problem?

Increasingly, the definition of design has expanded to include not just artifacts but strategic services and systems. As the challenges and opportunities facing business and society grows more complex, "design thinking" is playing a greater role in finding meaningful working solutions. At the heart of this approach is a deep sensitivity to the needs of people, whether they are consumers, clients, or everyday citizens. The user experiences holds the key to the design solution.


THE PROBLEM



BACKGROUND

How was the problem discovered?

Over the summer period I went to Japan for 2 weeks, on the way I passed through Heathrow Airport briefly. It was easily one of the most stressful things I experienced in a while.

It was difficult to navigate as direction signs would appear and disappear randomly and there was very little staff about to help and the ones who were around to help didn't seem to know enough to help.

After leaving Heathrow and continuing on my journey I passed through 2 more airports in Japan and an additional 2 on the journey back.

Considering that 2 of these other airports were Japanese and 1 was Finnish, I found it easier to traverse these airports than Heathrow. From this experience, I realised that Heathrow has a big way-finding problem.


RESEARCH

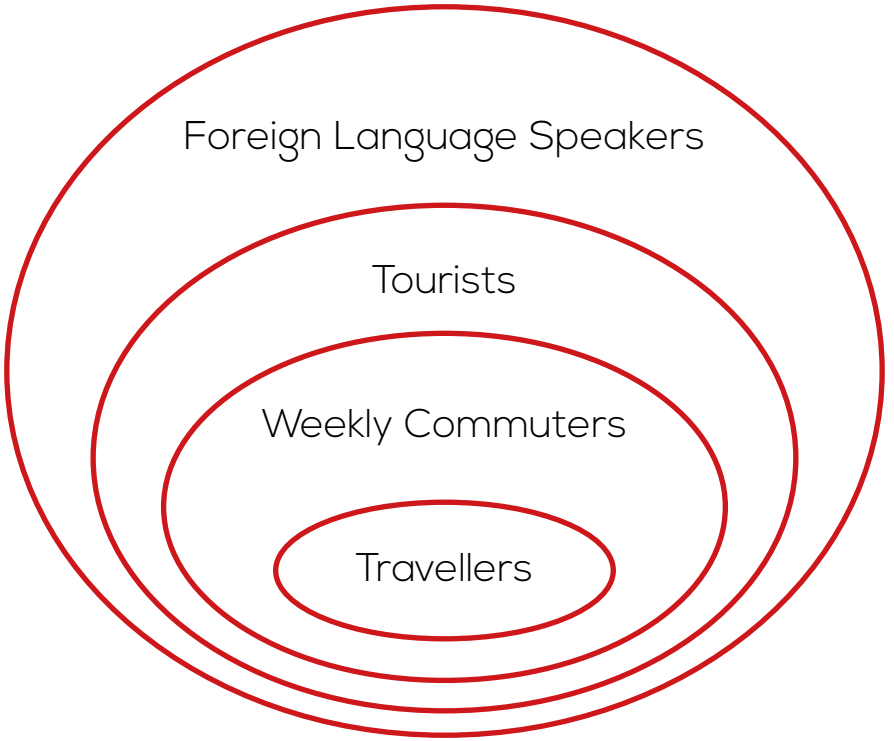


In order to pinpoint exactly what we should be concentrating on for our problem, we completed an exercise which helped us boil down our chosen problems to their most basic state.

EXERCISE

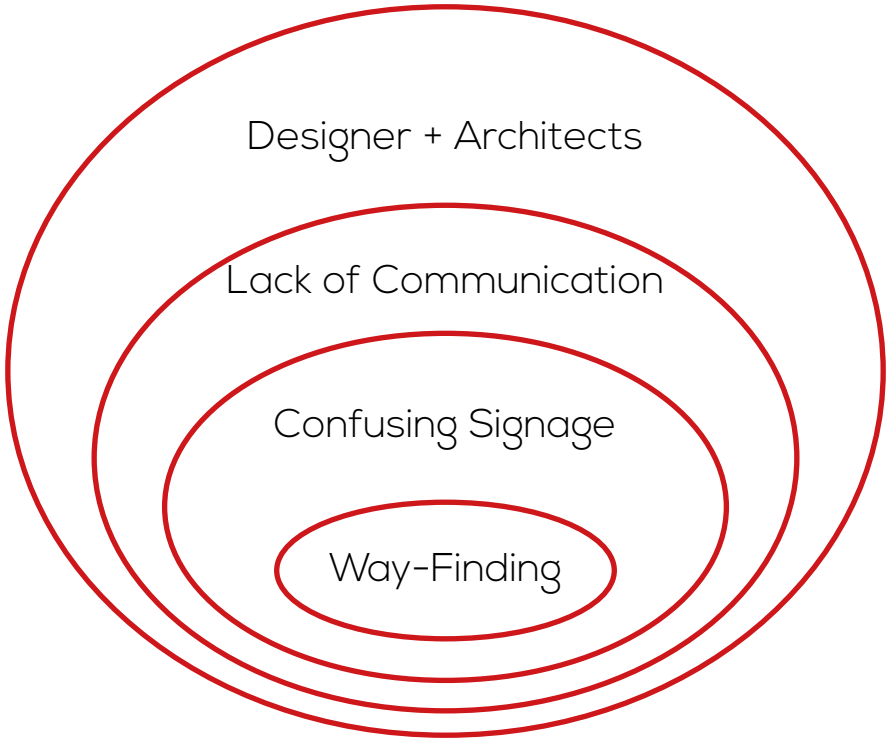
WHO

Who does the problem effect?



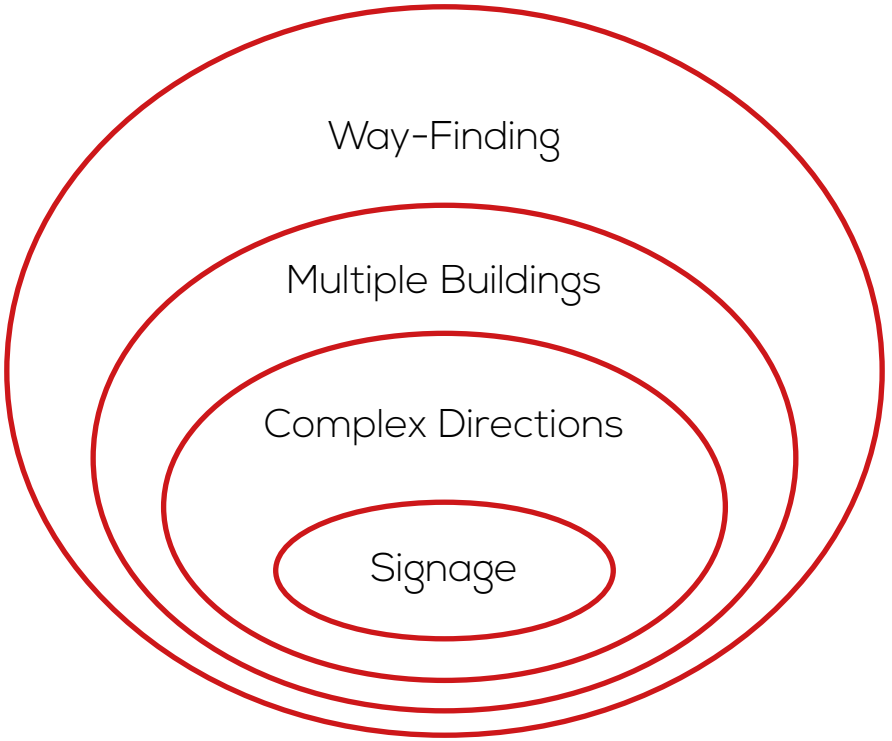
WHY

Why is the problem happening?



WHAT

What is the problem?



AIRPORTS

Looking into airports

Most of my research comes from first and second hand accounts of experiences in various airports worldwide, including Heathrow, which is the main target of this project.

Accounts of Heathrow

Over the years Heathrow has become a way-finding mess, with the addition of new buildings it can be hard to even find out what terminal building you need to be in.

One of my personal experiences occurred whilst trying to find Flight Transfers after landing in Heathrow. After following the signs we arrived exited an elevator only to not know where we were to go, we eventually found ourselves at a bus terminal which is supposedly where we were needed to be but there were no signs indicating as such and no staff around to confirm that this is where we to be.

The following is a review which I found of the airport on Google, it highlights various problems which I also came across on my own journey:

"Landed at Heathrow for the first time and found that the signage for pickup to be incredibly poor. There is not a single sign or piece of guidance in the airport to tell you where to go if you are being picked up by a friend or family member.

I went to the information desk and there was not a single mention of pick up points in their guidance. Not even one! But I now know I can rent a car... When I attempted to google this information on their website it didn't work... I then tried to use the airport free wi-fi tablets and it still didn't work so it wasn't my device...

After 20 minutes I found a member of staff and their job was to direct people to the right travel spots. Unfortunately when I asked them they couldn't answer my question...

'You have one job!'"

- Luke Hudson





USER PROFILES



USER ONE

Name: Sarah
Age: 24
Occupation: Unemployed (Currently taking a gap year after graduating from university.)

Reason for being at the airport:
I'm travelling around Europe for a while whilst on my gap year.

Are you in the airport often?
No, this is my first time this year. I only have one other flight on my return, the last time I was in the airport was for a family holiday about 2 years ago.

How did you find navigating the airport?
Alright, I just needed to get to departures so it was fairly simple.

Did the signage help you?
Yeah, it was fairly easy to follow.



USER TWO

Name: Tim
Age: 21
Occupation: Apprentice Electrician

Reason for being at the airport:
My boss got a contract for doing some electrical work in London.

Are you in the airport often?
Yeah, twice a week. Coming over on a Monday morning and heading home on a Friday night.

How did you find navigating the airport?
I'm here a lot so it's pretty much become second nature. I mostly just follow the boss, he knows where he's going.

Did the signage help you?
Sorry, don't really pay attention to it.



USER THREE

Name: Hiroshi and Misako
Age: Over 60
Occupation: Retired

Reason for being at the airport:
Visiting son and his family who now live in London.

Are you in the airport often?
No, haven't flown since they were younger, going on honeymoon, which was a domestic flight.

How did you find navigating the airport?
We don't really understand English so it can be hard if there aren't any people to follow. We got lost after landing because we lost other people from our flight.

Did the signage help you?
Not really, we don't understand much English. It was a lot of guess work.



INSPIRATION

After looking into Heathrow Airport, I started looking into other airports for inspiration and to discover the difference between airports with good way-finding and those with terrible way-finding.

I quickly realised that good way-finding has to transcend every language and has to be easily understood by the majority of people.

The most obvious answer that came to light was the use of **Iconography**.

Iconography in airports is visually similar in most airports in order to keep consistency, and considering recent events and how many people now live in or travel to countries they may not understand the language of, globally understood iconography has never been more important.

Even though there are some minor visual differences to iconography between airports, they are often easily recognised.







EXAMPLES OF EXISTING AIRPORT SIGNAGE[1]

























EXAMPLES OF ICONOGRAPHIC SIGNAGE[2]



























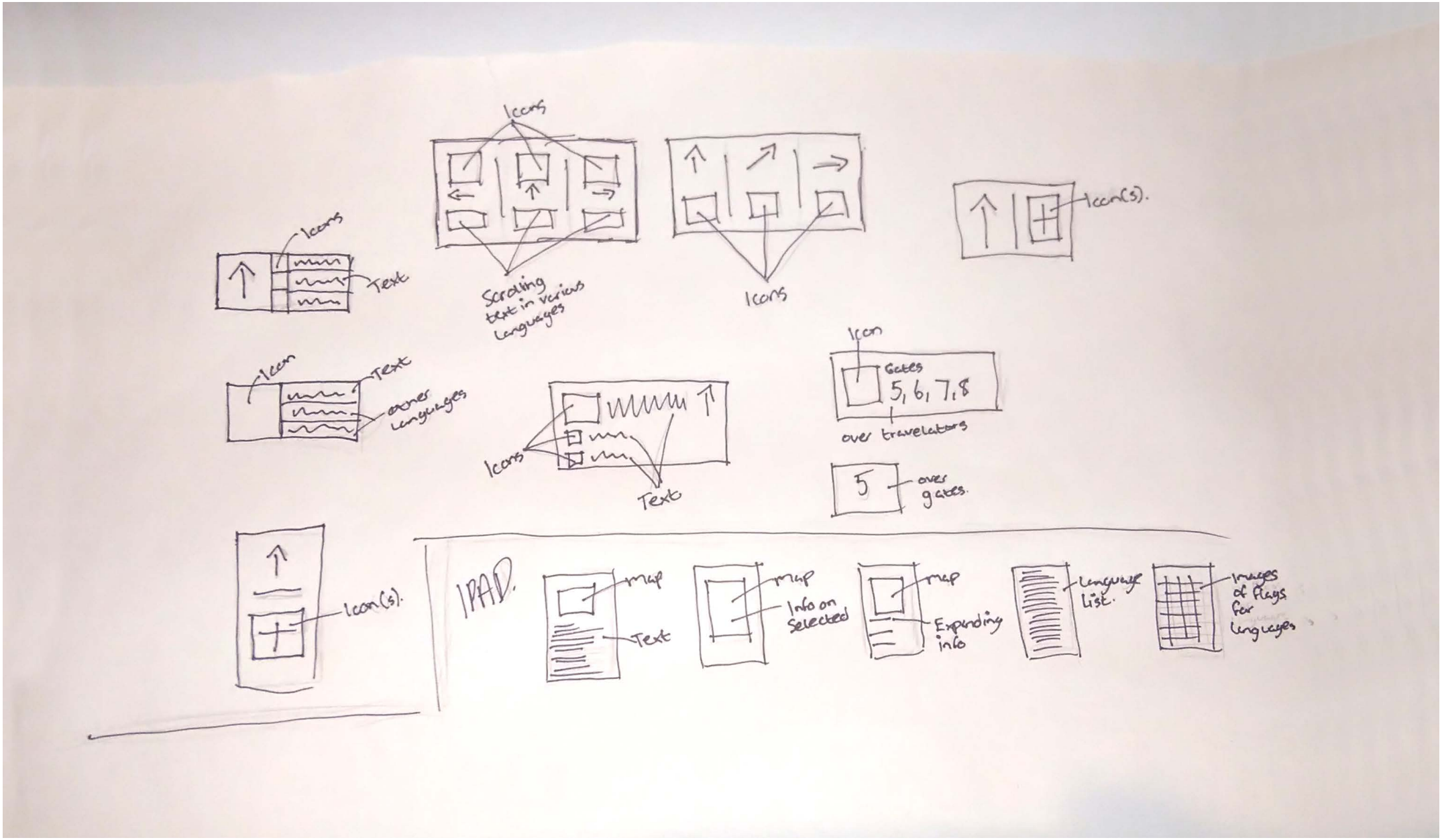




IMPORTANT NOTICE

Whilst researching I did come across a document called **"TRB's Airport Cooperative Research Program (ACRP) Report 52: Wayfinding and Signing Guidelines for Airport Terminals and Landside."**[3]

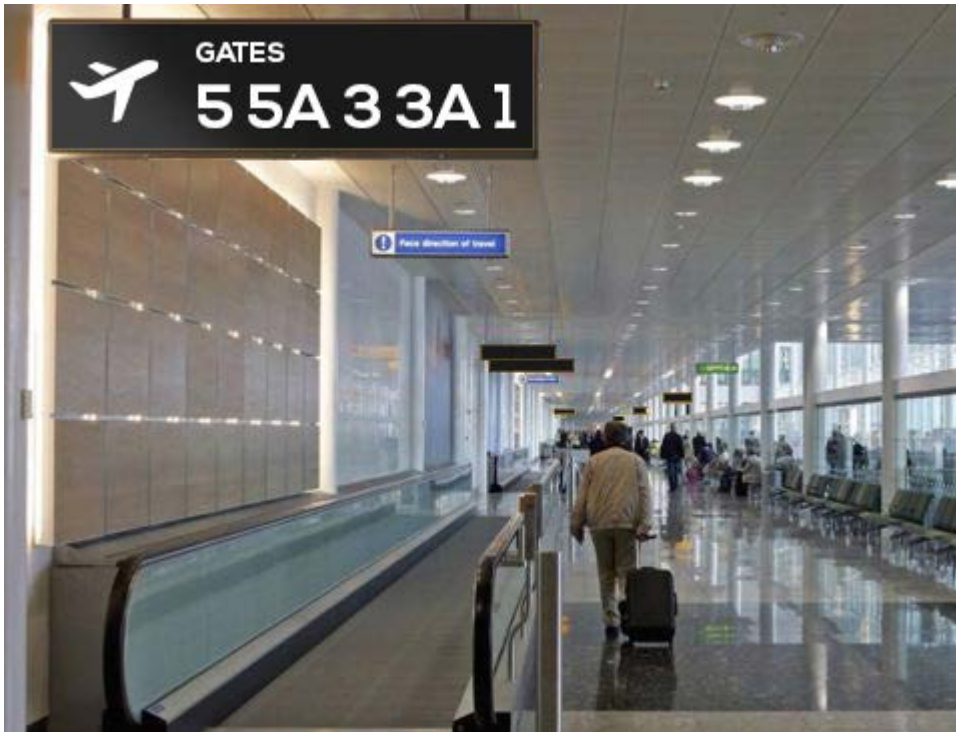
This document seems to be the standard for Airport signage, which would make my version of this project almost impossible to implement in reality but due to the fact that this project is theoretical I decided to continue with it.



IDEA SKETCHES



FINAL OUTCOMES





In order to ensure that signs are easy to understand and follow, I decided to make the iconography as large as possible on the signs and to make important information as prominent as possible.

Due to the various target languages I decided to keep the signs as simple as possible. In areas such as the departure gates I decided to highlight things such as gate numbers and various other information that would be on the persons ticket, in order to make matching information easy to spot, especially for those who don't know English very well.

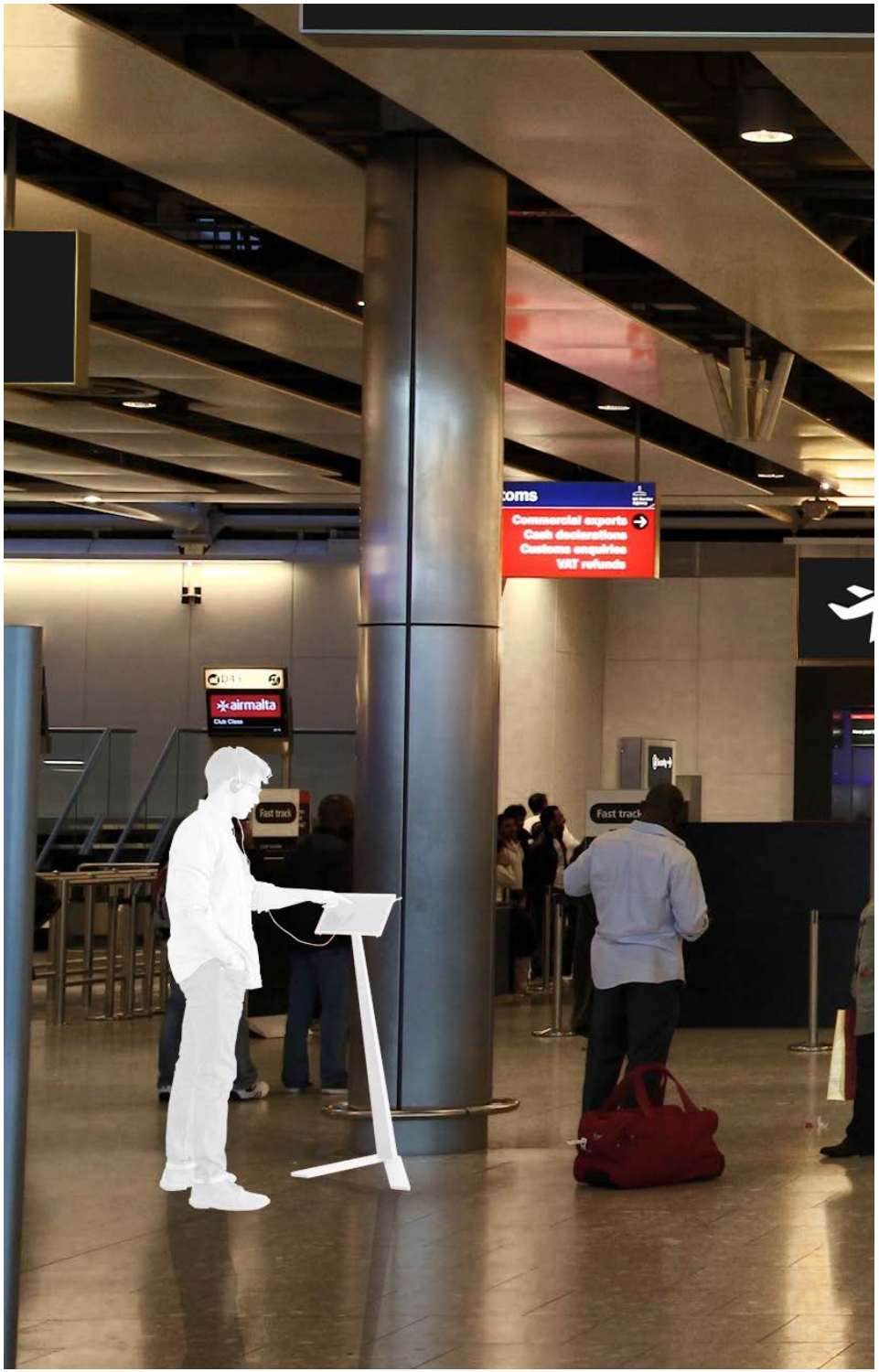
Thanks to the **"TRB's Airport Cooperative Research Program (ACRP) Report 52: Wayfinding and Signing Guidelines for Airport Terminals and Landside"** I decided that most of the signs seemed to be in places which would make sense for the buildings, other than when signs would mysteriously disappear and so in order to improve way-finding I believe that signage should be increased in some areas.



For some of the most important signs I decided it would be important to have some screens within the sign which would scroll through various languages for what the sign says.

In order to differentiate from the English version of the sign, the various other languages would show in a different colour. Due to chosen colour of the signs I found that yellow stood out among the black of the sign and differed from the white of rest of the signs.

Another aspect of the way-finding system is to have "Information Points" placed in every area. The Information Points will mostly be self-service but during busy times it is best to have a dedicated member of staff around in order to help and, if needed, help reduce the number of people looking to use the Information Point.



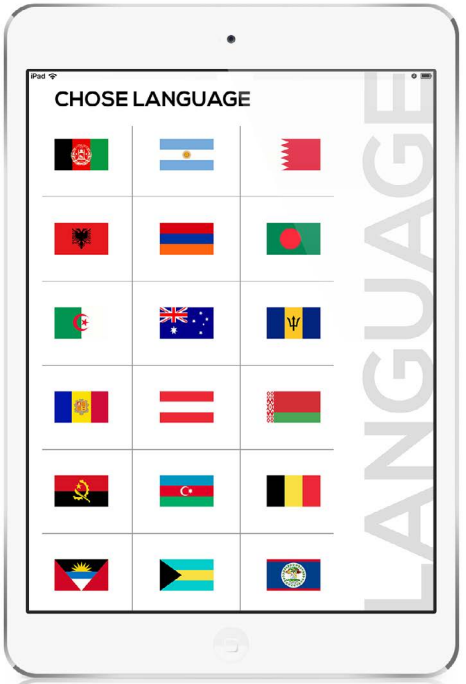
Opposite is an example of the proposed self-service "Information Point." These points will be implemented in various areas around the airport. In order to make sure they are available as often as possible they will placed in key points and in increased numbers in busy areas, such as Arrivals and Departures lounges.

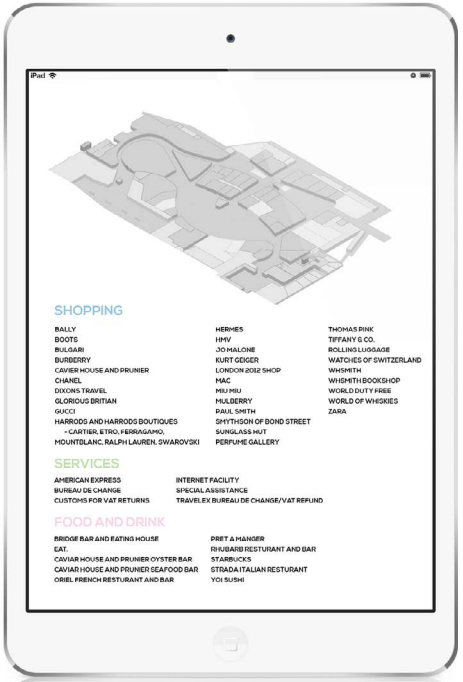
In order to ensure they are easy to use they will be available in as many languages as possible and have detailed maps available in order to help people find their way around.

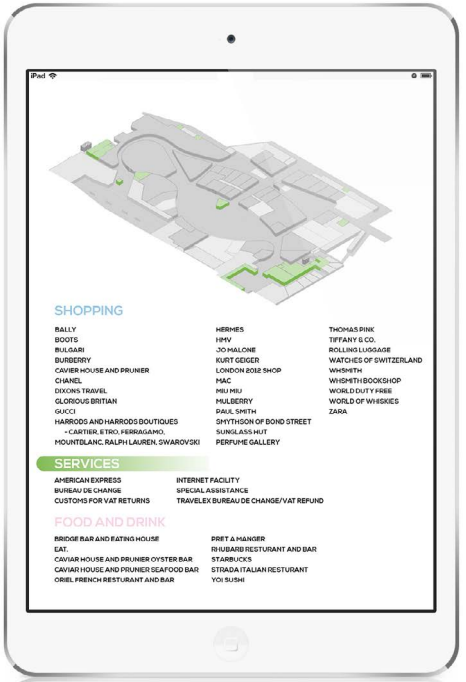
Also, as mentioned before, dedicated members of staff will be on hand at busy times to help people if needed and to also reduce the number of people needing to use the Information Points.

SAMPLE SCREENS (ENGLISH)



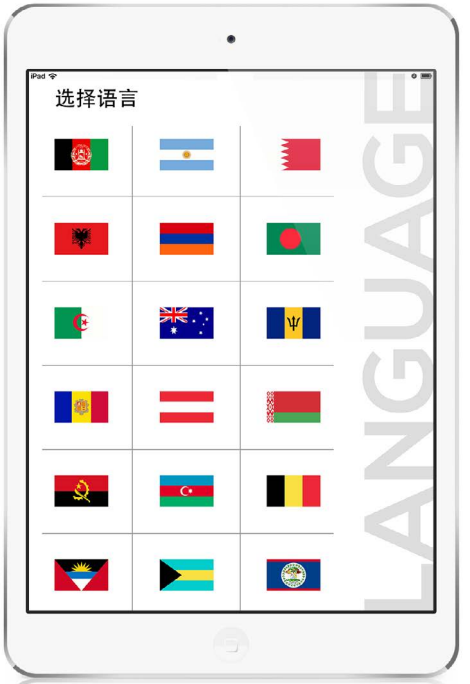


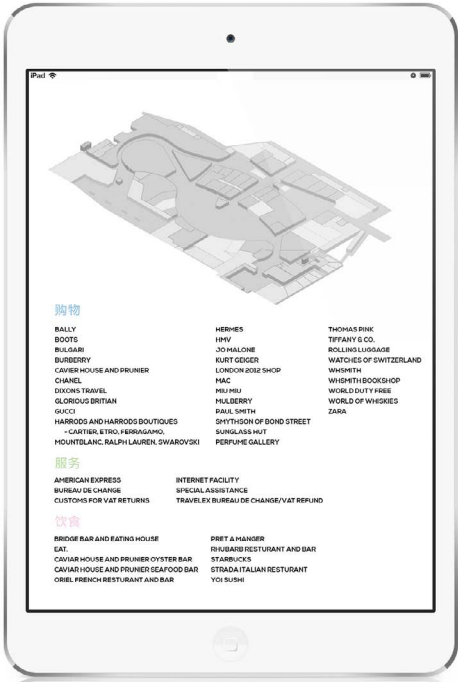




SAMPLE SCREENS (CHINESE SIMPLIFIED)

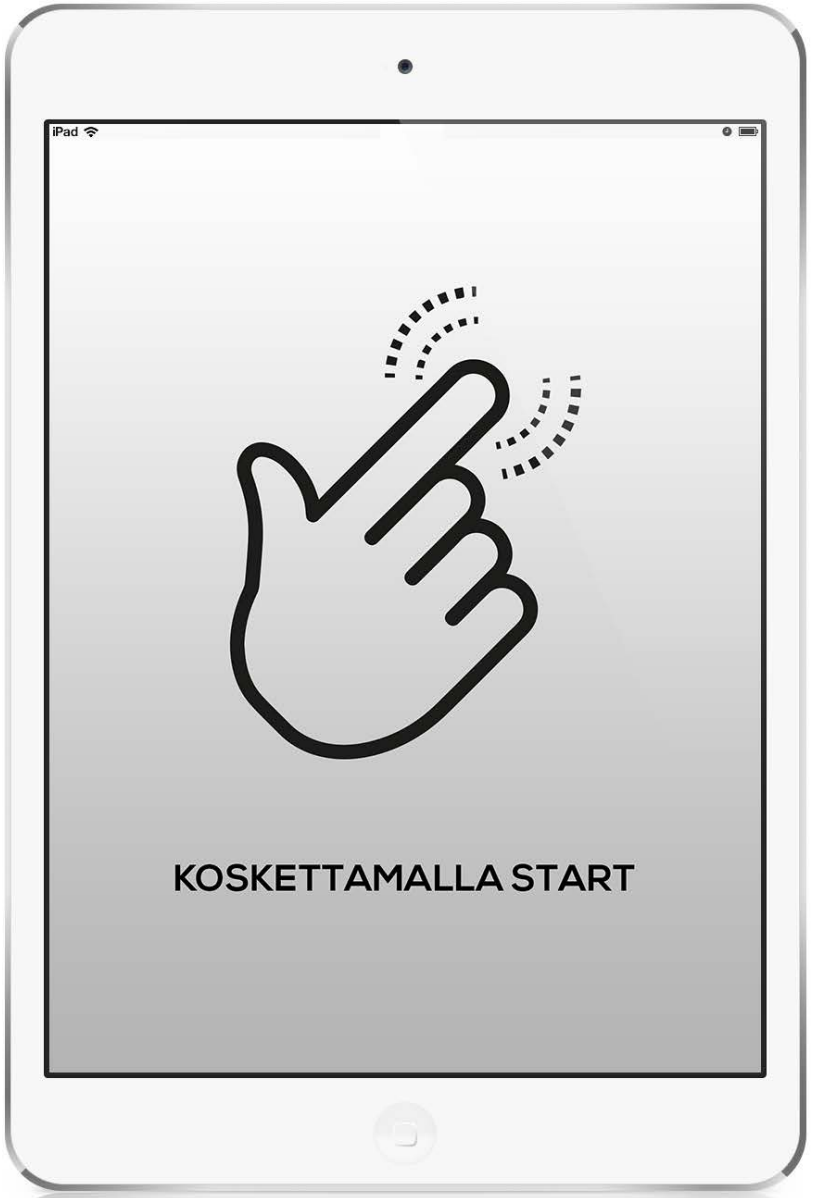


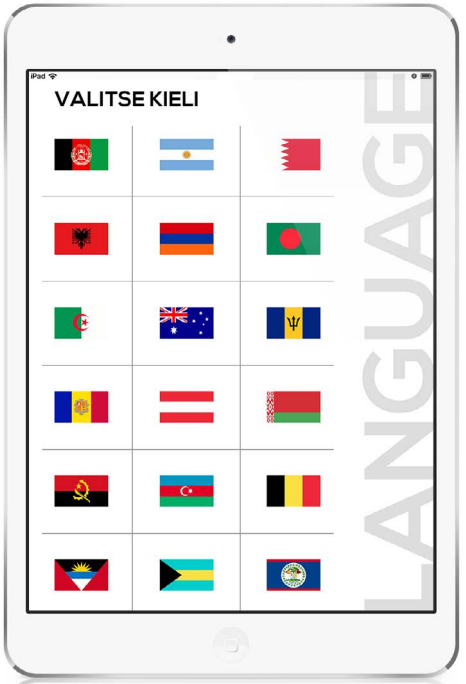


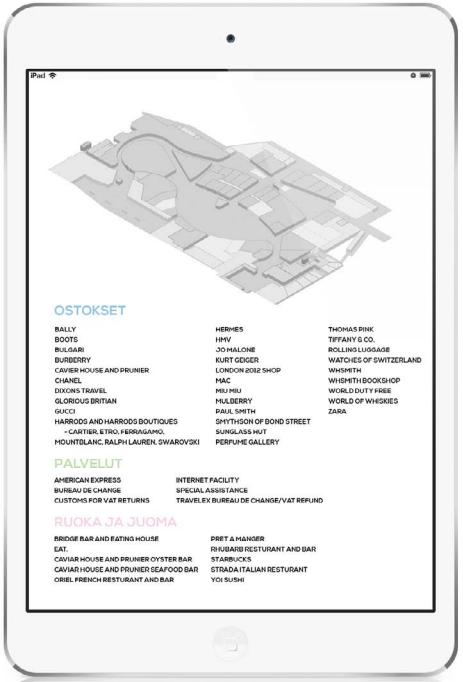


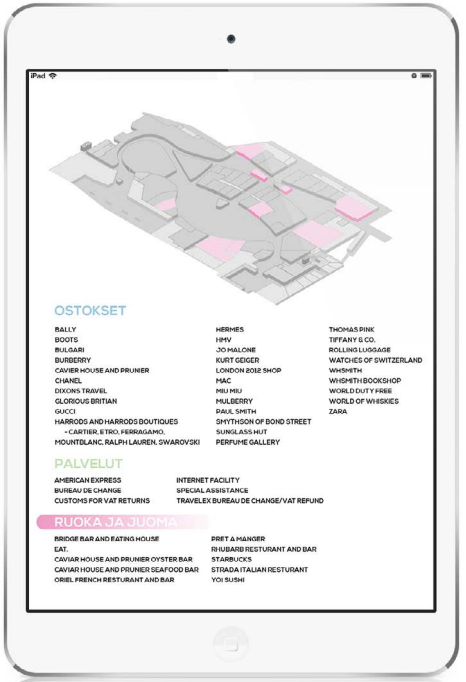


SAMPLE SCREENS (FINNISH)



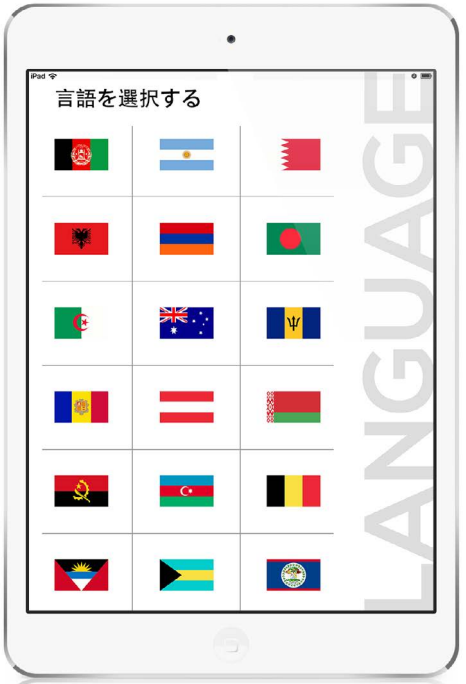


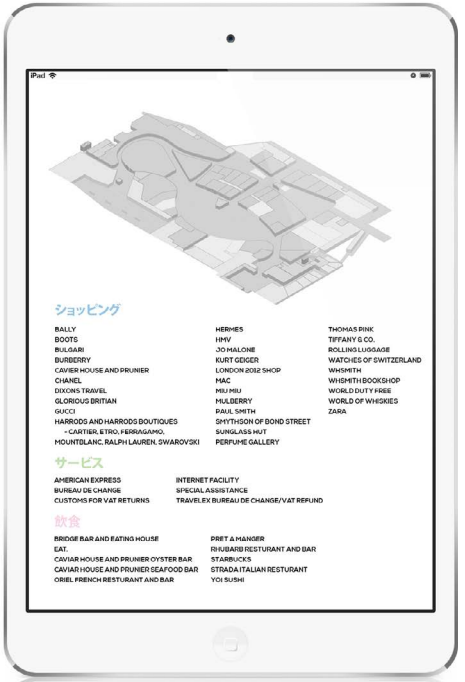


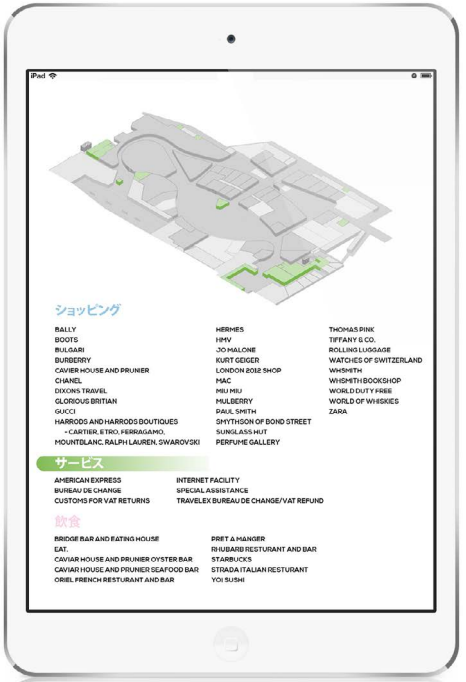


SAMPLE SCREENS (JAPANESE)



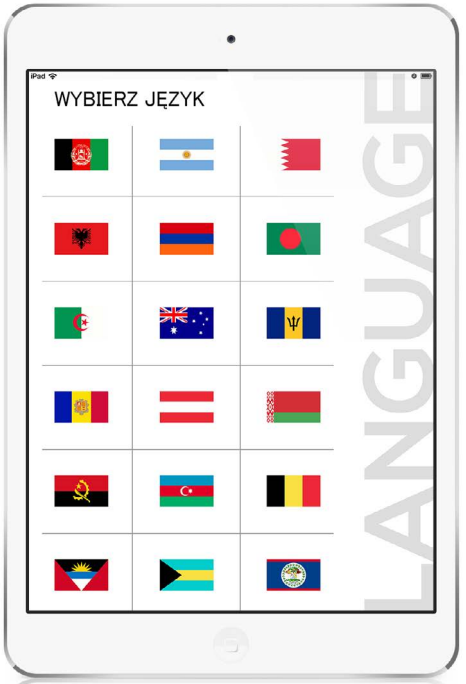


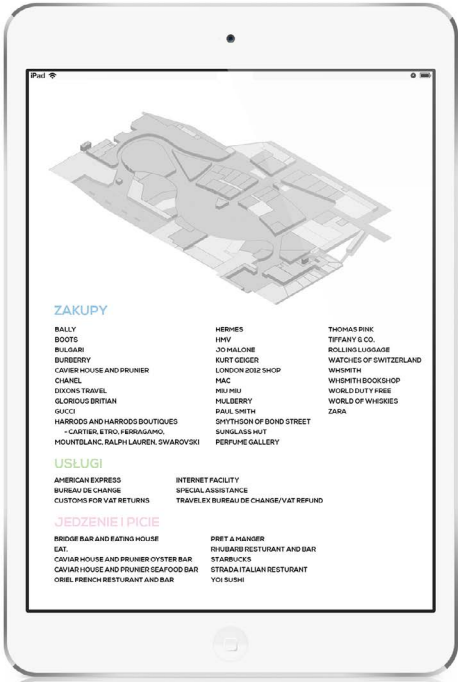




SAMPLE SCREENS (POLISH)









CONCLUSION

For this project, I think there are a lot of potential solutions. I chose this solution as it seemed like one of the most diverse ones as it covers a lot of bases.

The main goal of this project was to target language barriers and to make traversing Heathrow Airport easier. I do believe I have come up with a viable solution to this problem.

I considered many paths for this projects including a downloadable app but due to the fact that the majority of people passing through the airport would only be passing through rarely and possibly for short periods of time it didn't seem viable to ask people download an app for such a short period, also it is a known problem that free wifi at airports can be unreliable.

Due to this I came to the decision to use permanently placed "Information Points." These ensure a more reliable solution whilst still using a flexible platform, such as a custom built app.

In addition to these "Information Points" the improvements to signage improve the overall way-finding problems that Heathrow currently faces.

SOURCES

[1] http://designworkplan.com/design/airport-signage-photo-inspiration.htm

[2] https://uk.pinterest.com/hmallon234/signage-inspiration/

[3] http://www.trb.org/Publications/Blurbs/165910.aspx

All title page images are stock from www.pexels.com

User profile data was taken from first hand accounts, names have been changed and photographs are stock imagery.

