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Social inclusion of refugees: How education contributes to integration

Case study of Open Cultural Center (OCC) in Northern Greece

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To all of you,

Who by refusing to abide by wall, map, property line, border, identity document, or legal regime, upset the state’s schemes of exclusion, control, and violence. You do this simply by moving.

Reece Jones

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to give ethnographic evidence of the role played by informal education when involved with asylum seekers. With the purpose of working “with” the community where the researcher is living, in the following pages I illustrate some situations I lived while working in the NGO called Open Cultural Center in the North of Greece. Knowledge, power, community and networks are some of the tools used to illustrate how an anthropologist working in this context can promote processes of concrete experimentation of daily life social integration.

Dear people who will read my thesis and the experience which I am trying to share. I am currently in a 7000 inhabitants town in the north of Greece, just few kilometers away from the border with Macedonia. I am volunteering for two months in an NGO called Open Cultural Center (OCC) which collaborates with the EU through a channel called European Solidarity Corps. While I am writing, I am seated at the so-called “cafeteria”, the reception space of OCC where everyday people from the nearby refugee camp of Nea Kavala come to attend our language courses in the morning or the children's classes in the afternoon. The cafeteria is a colorful place full of details: draws, graffiti, books, board games, a big table, a green sofa and a welcoming area where there is always tea or coffee for everybody and internet access. OCC is a cultural center (potentially open to everybody, and not only to the people of the camp) which works for the inclusion of migrants and refugees through non-formal education and cultural activities. The place where the activities are hosted really gets alive when crowded with different cultures and countries. It gives me the impression of a safe space, where despite the journey, daily life discrimination and struggles people can come to relax, to find again the humanity they have lost on the move. As soon as you get involved in OCC you realize that the project goes far beyond informal education but contributes to a sense of community, inclusion and social transformation. The reason why I came here was to experience on my skin and with my eyes what we are talking about when we refer to the “migration crisis”, how the category of refugees are really stigmatized and if education is a tool to foster integration. Being here for some weeks gave me the chance to become aware of many challenges and daily struggles such as bureaucratic labyrinths, accommodation issues and labor exploitation.

Acknowledgment

If I close my eyes and think back to the time spend in OCC, mi mind remembers many faces, names that I carefully keep in my heart. To begin, my most sincere gratitude goes to all the students, teachers, and coordinators involved in OCC who shared with me important stories of life, experiences and support to keep working on my study. Both in classrooms and during conversations with migrant learners and the other staff members, I really had profound food for thought and reciprocal multicultural learning.

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Thanks to my partner Daniel, who has been supporting since I have decided to conduct my fieldwork and has been bringing me pizza at university during the last long days of work. Thanks to my family for being the most valuable example of what does it mean to be “open” to welcome diversities and to my colleagues at university for being my academic network.

As a final note, I wish to thank migrant artist, P., for allowing me to use his radiant artwork, as the cover of my thesis. This was even of the graffiti in cafeteria, a memory of this beautiful community space.

1. Introduction

After two hours by bus from the airport of Thessaloniki, I managed to reach the town, a small village in the north of Greece. I would have never had the idea to visit this place if it wasn't for the ESC (European Solidarity Corps). I asked the driver to leave me at the bus stop in front of the Chinese shop as OCC, the organization who will host me for the following two months, told me. Once I got off the bus I crossed the street and finally crossed the threshold of Cafeteria. This is where I would spend most of my time and research field work, talking with people and listening to the stories I will tell in the next chapters. Cafeteria is a colorful place where people can gather as they would at the bar. There is a green sofa, a big table, a small kitchen and the wall is full of drawings of the kids. When I first entered it was around 13:00, the people had finished their classes and were waiting for the bus to go back "home". I timidly greeted everybody with a huge smile. The people I am talking about are refugees living at the nearby refugee camp of Nea Kavala while waiting for the documents and the decision of being granted (or not) international protection. Like many European countries, Greece has experienced a significant increase in the number of refugees and migrants in the last decade. Migration movements like these often are being discursively constructed as "refugee crises" in political and media discourses (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018) with a primary focus on the question of how to "integrate" these refugees, emphasizing "cultural differences" as a critical obstacle to success (Mijić, A. & Parzer, M., 2022). I will examine concepts like "Integration," "Inclusion," and "Assimilation," "Integration" is often conceptualized in both politics and academia as adaptation to or assimilation into subordinated, normative units, process that may lead to processes of *Othering* (e.g., Saharso, 2019; Schinkel, 2018). Social research should take a strict approach to differentiating between integration as objective or guiding principle, which is defined as achievable by specific kinds of political intervention (like integration courses) and integration as an analytical concept regarding "the core sociological notion of 'society'" (Schinkel, 2018, p. 1). Integration, in this sense, must not be perceived as the "passive internalization of given structures" but as an interplay between structure and agency, between the (arriving) individual and the surrounding society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Soeffner & Zifonun, 2008), typically characterized by an imbalance of power. (Mijić, A. & Parzer, M., 2022) To reach this understanding of integration, research must not only focus on questions of how the receiving countries respond to refugees and/or how they adapt to the host nations' existing structures but

also more rigorously take into account the experiences of those who are arriving. (Mijić, A. & Parzer, M., 2022)

This research is an ethnographic journey through the thorny concept of integration of refugees. This thesis aims at shedding light on the role of informal education in the process of social integration and personal evolution of adult migrants, enrolled in OCC. This NGO is working, near the Macedonian Greek border since 2016, during the so-called “refugee crisis”. It works towards the inclusion of refugees and migrants through educational and cultural activities such as language classes, sport activities, women's space and more broadly offering a safe space to gather outside of the refugee camp where the beneficiaries are living. OCC’s activities are run by volunteers founded by the European Solidarity Corps program. I have conducted my fieldwork while I was working as a volunteer in order to have a deeper understanding coming from my personal observation rather than relying on the mainstream narratives and distant migration policies. Being in the case study environment allowed me to collect a considerable amount of material, to reflect upon ethical consideration and work actively on my role as a European volunteer and researcher. The study is based on research findings obtained during a case study fieldwork of two months consisting of in-depth interviews with migrant students and staff as well as locals, it also includes extended periods of participant observation in classroom and outside. Interview transcripts and observation notes generated the raw database that is going to be presented in two main empirical themes: “Inclusion within OCC community” and “Integration into the society”. I will then discuss some other considerations that could seem not connected to the topic of Education but still have a considerable impact on the life and wellbeing of the refugees.

This thesis is structured in seven chapters where Chapter 1, Introduction, briefly elucidates the debate around the concept of Integration, the statement of motivation and the reason why I have chosen this case study and to conduct this kind of ethnographic research. Chapter 2, background and literature review, gives an overview of the current situation in Greece regarding the migration flow. I will shortly explain how the process of asylum works and present the case study. In chapter 3, theoretical and conceptual framework, I will use the Social Identity Theory (SIT), terror management Theory (TMT) and Intergroup Contact Theory to frame the “refugee crisis”. Chapter 4, Methodology, comprises the methodological choices and the ethical consideration which represent a conspicuous and relevant part of the research. Chapters 5 & 6,

Empirical findings and Discussion, present the main findings and general discussion. To conclude, chapter 7, Conclusions, summarizes the empirical findings to answer the starting research questions and recommendations and take over from the experience.

1.1. Statement on motivation and relevance to peace and conflict studies

Once A. told me: “When you go to Africa you are tourists, when we go to Europe we are refugees”. 194 is the number of visa-free countries I can enter with my Italian passport. I have never given so much thought to this privilege. Witnessing the demoralizing waits and bureaucratic obstacles associated with the asylum procedure has almost fed into a feeling of guilt on my behalf. As millions of asylum seekers across the world are brutally pushed back from borders and forced to put their lives in the hands of smugglers. That is only a matter of passports' powerfulness, a matter of chance of where we are born.

The aim of the project is not to tell how and why people decide to leave their home countries but to observe, listen and report the process of integration. But integration to what? I interpret it as a “feeling of belonging”, it “happens through seemingly mundane tasks like knowing who to ask for help or where to go out in the weekend” (SecondTree). I couldn't find so much interaction between the people from the camp and the locals, but, on the other side, I couldn't imagine what OCC represents for people, it creates familiarity, a community center that is the very first idea of Europe they will make through a culture of peer-to-peer sharing.

Large-scale migration can strain social cohesion and challenge existing norms and institutions within host communities. This topic is highly relevant to Peace studies since it explores strategies for promoting social integration, fostering intergroup understanding, and managing diversity peacefully. I will not focus on the integration policies but rather on the “everyday peace” interactions that mitigate tensions and contribute to long-term peace and stability as well as the challenges and prejudices that label the group called “refugees”.

My aim is to share the voice of those people to reiterate the responsibilities denied following border policies which continue as the sole objective of preventing the free movement of transiting people. My hope is to address some daily claims actions, to bring denunciation and justice. I want to dedicate my study to all those people who have shared their stories with me, to

those who have been rejected by the coast guard on the European commission. To those who challenge the boundaries inside and outside the walls every day for freedom.

1.2. Research objectives and Research questions

Due to migration and flows of people around the world for different reasons and motivations, we live nowadays in one huge cosmopolitan world where cultures and ethnicities are mixed and have coexist. In order to evaluate the situation, I will consider different variables: the migrants, the NGOs, and the host community. The pathway I decided to follow is a bottom-up approach, where the actors (refugees, NGO's volunteers and locals) are the main sources to consider for the needs assessment.

This research represents a case study of the work conducted by OCC in informal education for adult and children migrants. Describing how social inclusion is conceived and practically implemented in this program aiming to “integrate” migrant students into society, starting from learning a second language as well as the cultural and political environments in which they are into, represents the thesis’ main research focus. On the one hand this thesis seeks to give voice to the refugees’ experiences of integration since they arrived in Greece maximizing their engagement, “redressing social inequalities by giving precedence to the voices of the least advantaged groups in society” (Mertens, Harris & Holmes 2009, p.89), while on the other hand it explores the impact of migration on society (NGOs, local authorities, people from Polykastro). The study rested upon the (following) research questions, which deep into the various ways inclusion is envisaged both within and outside the school environment, as well as the factors that hinder or facilitate its achievement.

1. How does OCC’s informal education’s programme contribute to integration of refugees?
2. What are the experiences of social integration within the society for the participants of OCC?

1.3 Significance of the research study

As it is stated in the *Integration and inclusion action plan 2021-2027* at the European Commission:

“Ensuring the effective integration and inclusion of migrants in the EU is a social and economic investment that makes European societies more cohesive, resilient and prosperous. Integration and inclusion can and should be a win-win process that benefits society as a whole. But for integration and inclusion to succeed, it must also be a two-way process, in which migrants and EU citizens from a migratory background are helped to integrate and, in turn, make an active effort to integrate. The integration process involves the host society, which should create opportunities for the full economic, social, cultural and political participation of immigrants. It also involves adaptation on the part of all migrants, who have both the rights and responsibilities towards the new country of residence.”

I strongly believe that an effective Integration process at a grassroots level is the first step for a peaceful multicultural coexistence.

2.0. Background: People on the move in Greece

2.1. The turning point of 2016

As Ambrosini notices, the recent so-called “migration crisis” in the EU has been perceived by many as new and unprecedented. However, it is part of the long-term process of increased mobility across national borders in combination with insecurity (Ambrosini, 2018, p.1). As a response to increased mobility, some European governments and parties, with the support of mass media, changed their way of communicating what was happening to the public, intensifying the feeling of danger and insecurity in European society (Bonfanti, 2022). All these tensions began to be evident in 2015, after the first wave of refugees reached Greece mainly from Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan (March 2014), when the phenomenon began to be addressed by media and public discourses with the terms “migrant/refugee crisis” (Bonfanti, 2022) and “invasion”. Terrorist attacks (e.g. on the Charlie Hebdo newspaper in 2015) took place in a Europe not yet recovered from the economic crisis of 2008, with an already exhausted population, fertile ground for creating enemies on which to pour out frustrations. In Greece, according to the European parliament data, in 2015 had an unemployment rate of 24.4% (52% of young labor force unemployment rate), with one in five Greeks who have been unemployed for

more than twelve months and more than one in three Greeks who lived in a situation at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Agamben (2013), analyzing the current Western society, describes how “today's crisis has become an instrument of rule. It serves to legitimize political and economic decisions” (De Genova, 2016, p.11). The exact moment in which some European governments realized that the notion of crisis should have been used in the public discourse to legitimize a change of policies coincides with March 2016. As Almustafa (2022) notices, in that period asylum seekers arriving on the shores of Europe were perceived by many politicians as a threat to the national security, identity, and to the social and cultural homogeneity of Europe (Almustafa, 2022, p.2), and consequent measures should have been implemented. This is the case of the so-called “crisis of border control” that is translated into the refugee crisis (De Genova, 2016). Following the crisis logic, two main actions can be highlighted as a reaction by the European Union: the closure of borders and the consequent creation of hotspots. The border closures in 2016 left thousands of people stranded in Greece and obliged them to ask for asylum there. Before this, people arriving from Turkey on the Greek shores were trying to reach Europe from the so-called “Balkan route”, namely crossing through Macedonia and then Serbia or from Albania, then Montenegro, and finally Bosnia. The crossing was regulated by border police officers who were letting groups of people pass every day. To manage the increasing flows, Europe asked these neighboring countries to close their borders and not allow anyone to cross (Bonfanti, 2022). From one day to the other, North Macedonia closed its borders (November 2015) and Idiomeni (that before this date, was a fast crossing point) started to become a longer-term residential camp, with around 12,000-14,000 people living there in awful living conditions (between March and May 2016). Subsequent to the closure of borders, the hotspot strategy was implemented as part of the European Agenda on Migration of 2015 to regulate migration (to securitize and protect the borders). In Greece, five hotspots were created, on the first arrival islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. However, a significant issue arose as these hotspots quickly became overcrowded, unable to ensure the provision of fundamental human rights. Moreover, as Agamben (1995) underlines, what happens in current Western societies (in the management of groups living in conditions of poverty) is that since these groups have nothing else to lose, they are considered morally or sanitary dangerous and must be subjected to suffocating and annihilating social control (Koucharanis, 2018, p.2). The hotspot is the practical example of this strategy; isolated from society, with various forms of securitization and control, often full of

rules that people can do nothing but obey, exhausted, alienated, and passivized individuals who are subject to all forms of control and manipulation (Bonfanti, 2022). Moreover, the structures had inappropriate and hygienically inadequate housing conditions, poor health conditions, and a lack of social care structures that were putting the lives of people seriously in danger. The coordination and organization of the structures were also basically non-existent, with frequent overlapping of tasks between government, NGOs and international agencies, and some tasks that were not filled at all (Kourachanis, 2018).

What happened in Northern Greece is that since the camps in the islands and big cities were already full, people on the move started to settle along the emergency runway near Polykastro, in the small village of Nea Kavala. The number of people staying in Nea Kavala was growing, the living conditions were bad, IOM, some big international NGOs such as Save the Children, Red Cross and some grassroots NGOs such as Wave of Hope or Open Cultural Center started to be active in the area, until Nea Kavala became an official camp for asylum seekers. In April 2021, all the asylum seekers were moved to the new closed facilities, which improved the living conditions but also the level of control and security. the camp is no longer managed by IOM but by the Greek government and its site managers. Drop in the Ocean, that used to work inside the camp was closed because of lack of funds, currently only OCC is working outside the camp to provide some services for the people. “In the island, there are more organizations who work to supply food, clothes, sport, classes. the most useful thing is printing” (E., OCC student).

The current main entry points are: Evros, it is the name of the river that divides Greece from Turkey and is the main passage the last years, Lesbos is the biggest island of eastern Aegean and is where Moria camp used to be, Chios is the island which is closer to Turkish mainland, Samos is another crossing point where the “new era” first Reception and identification center started operating, The island of Kos.

861630 arrivals in 2015, 177234 in 2016, 36310 in 2017, 62190 in 2018, 50508 in 2019. From 2019 onwards there is no need to speak about numbers since the government started implementing the pushback policy and sending people back to Turkey violating human rights. To be noted that in 2021 the Greek ministry of migration has declared 5000 asylum requests while the Greek Coast Guard counts 45000 rescue attempts in the same period of time. Those who manage to enter the country and not be pushed back need to get a Police Note from the police station before being transferred to a “Reception and Registration Center” where the asylum

procedure starts with the issuance of the Asylum card. The Reception and Registration Center is not a camp. Once the person enters, can only exit after the conclusion of his/her registration. Once the person has obtained the asylum card, can be transferred and allocated in a Long Term Accommodation Center, aka refugee camp.

In order for the Greek authorities to check the validity of every request for asylum, the asylum seekers must undergo an interview where all the reasons that forced him/her to leave his/her country of origin have to be presented.

In the summer of 2020, Greece designated Turkey as a safe third country for nationals of Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. For those nationalities during the interview every applicant for international protection has to present significant reasons that make Turkey not safe for them. If the asylum office accepts the proof presented by the applicant, then the procedure continues as everybody with a second interview. The problem is that it is up to the country in which a person submits the claim for asylum, to decide if the person meets the criteria of the Geneva definition and therefore if she can be recognized as a refugee. After months of waiting, if the decision is *positive*, the asylum seekers become beneficiaries of international protection and are divided in two groups: Recognised Refugees and Beneficiaries of Subsidiary Protection. In both cases for the residence permit they will have to proceed to the closest asylum office in order to give fingerprints, photos and all the necessary documents. Recognised refugees will need to issue a passport by the Greek police, booking an appointment, give fingerprint, fotos. If the decision is *negative*/ the asylum claim is not granted, the first appeal over the rejection or the petition for annulment are long and expensive procedures. (Bonfanti, 2022) in this case people decide to try to illegally cross the border.

In Nea Kavala food is provided by a catering company and covers 3 meals per day, moreover every asylum seeker is entitles for cash assistance. Adults are receiving 75 euros per months, up to 245 euros for families with more than 6 members. Cash assistance stops whenever a person receives a positive asylum decision, while it continues when a person receives a negative decision on first degree but stops if the asylum application is also rejected on a second degree. In the camp there are some rules (more or less official) that can be broken with some favoritism. Considering that Greece is a “transit country” where they have to issue asylum but are intended to move to other European countries with better standards of living (Germany mostly).

2.2 Case study description: OPEN CULTURAL CENTER (OCC)

Back in 2015 when after Macedonia closed entirely its southern border, the Eidomeni Refugee camp was installed trying to give a shelter to those 14000 people who were no more allowed to cross becoming the largest informal camp in Europe

(<https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2016-06/refugee-stories-idomeni-greece-karen-emmerich-martin-trabalik/>) The infrastructures were inadequate for those number, the tents were flooded and people didn't have their basic need guaranteed. A group of Spanish friends (who are the founders of OCC) wanted to help, distribute some goods, make some fundraising and they started calling themselves Eidomeni Cultural Center. When Eidomeni was "evacuated" by the Greek government (March 2016), many of the remaining inhabitants were bussed to camps administered by the Greek army and police. In February 2017, OCC established in the very north part of Greece, still very close to the border with Macedonia, this location is due to the proximity with the camp of Nea Kavala. Since then their objective was to focus on the inclusion and integration of the refugees and asylum seekers. After a few years of functioning with a very small initiative they started to move some of the work to Spain and they established another branch. The two sites collaborate, OCC Spain takes part in the fundraising while OCC Greece is more working with the practicality on the field. OCC started providing language lessons and a bus service to bring up and forth the students from the camp, since IOM that was functioning inside the camp and helping with the mobility left (2019). OCC mission is to promote the social and economic integration of migrants at a local level, and to be an important voice advocating for policies that protect the rights of migrants and favor their inclusion within a diverse European society. OCC equips migrants with tools to access opportunities and build a future through intercultural exchange, education, and advocacy.

OCC is managed by a coordinating team (project coordinator, site coordinator, Eu project manager, volunteer coordinator) but the NGO itself is runned by a group of volunteers which belongs to the European Solidarity Corps programme, a Eu Projects which "brings together young people to build a more inclusive society, supporting vulnerable people and responding to societal challenges. It offers an inspiring and empowering experience for young people who want to help, learn and develop". (https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/mission_en) and resident volunteers, people resident in the camp, who offer to share their time and energies to take active part in the organization of the activities both in the adult and children classes.

The work conducted by OCC and its volunteers is mainly to give language class to adults in the morning and propose a weekly plan of activities for children which include going to the park, movie day, art and craft and early literature. The English programme is structured around five educational streams: Literacy, Literacy +, English level 1, 2 and 3 in order to allow students of the same level to be grouped together. Thus, literacy and literacy + correspond to a level A1/A2 it included students who had none or insufficient knowledge of the Latin alphabet and no understanding of the English language. Every two months, the duration of the flow of volunteers, the students can upgrade to the upper level after taking a small test to prove to have gained sufficient competences to attend the next course. There are also two levels of German language courses and a Computer Lab Course to gain some IT skills. On Mondays the center remains closed, but the team comes together to discuss the attendance of the previous week and have lunch together. During these meetings, the organization becomes horizontal and the decisions about how to run to school are taken together, every teacher can discuss the challenges of his/her class and keep monitored the weekly attendance of the students. On Monday's afternoon the so-called "Women space" is held by the girls volunteers to enjoy women's moments of interaction, such as Joga, makeup, painting.

Cafeteria is the common area where the reception and kitchen of the center are located. Here people gather while they are waiting for their class, can drink coffee or tea, or play board games. During the sunny days the sidewalk and step in front of the big glass door was a very pleasant place to smoke a cigarette or have some small chat while enjoying the weather. At the end of my stay, after 7 years of OCC operating in these facilities, the NGO moved to a new location, much brighter and bigger. Volunteers and some students helped out actively to paint, moving the stuff and reorganizing the new environment to make it welcoming and cozy as the old one. I had already left when the people were welcome for the first time in the new space, by then the walls were clean and shining, I am sure that they will soon be full of new memories and life.

Since the camp is located outside of the city, OCC provides a bus which runs up and down taking people to class, in the past a Bike Space was renting out bikes for the people registered to OCC to move with more freedom from the camp, the project is currently in standby because some bike got stolen inside the camp and there was not enough way to keep control of them. Being a volunteer doesn't require having specialized educational background in teaching English as a foreign language. In fact, none had pedagogical qualifications. During my period of

participant observation, I followed the daily routines of the English level 3. The group comprised around 10 students, they were studying at an B2 language benchmark level and had developed a good understanding of the English language. The majority of students were from Sierra Leone, Iran, Somalia, Ethiopia, one guy from India. Only one girl from Afghanistan was part of the class.

During the pre-arrival training the responsible of the volunteer advise us regarding “who do we work with at OCC”, the role of OCC and some challenges. As stated, : “Every refugee have faced severe forms of collective adversity”: Since the start of journey where they have left their countries, faced possible pushbacks, up to now with the degrading conditions and discrimination inside the camp, the obstacles of passing the border and the situation of uncertainty regarding their future. Those events generate trauma among other coping strategies, mistrust in authorities and psychological challenges. We have to be aware of our role as a European volunteer, as well as the privilege and inequalities. In this context, the role of OCC is to take care of these people and give them the basic psycho-social support. OCC is more a community than a language center, a safe and friendly environment which organizes learning activities.

2.3. Literature Review and Gap in research

There is a gap between the integration intended by policy-makers, which in fact refer to the integration in the labor market and consider the migration crisis mainly as a security issue and the social integration, and the one undertaken by NGOs which intend to explore the bottom-up approaches to the topic.

To foster the inclusion of migrants, Greece set up its third National strategy for the social integration of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection in 2021. This new national strategy, which replaced the previous 2019 national strategy aimed at third-country nationals, focuses exclusively on asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, and is harmonized with the current legislative framework of Greece. It includes four main pillars such as pre-integration of asylum seekers, social integration of beneficiaries of international protection, prevention of and effective protection from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, and monitoring the integration process. This research’s aim is to highlight the discrepancies between the social integration that the programme is aiming to promote and the actual situation in one small area of the country. Since no official assessment of the integration

strategy has so far been carried out. The contributions proposed in this thesis, through the stories of the refugees and the testimonies of the Ngo operators, aims at recognizing the gap between policies and practices, “between the programs designed by political decision makers and their technical collaborators, and the concrete implementations of such programs that are carried out by operators who are on the front line in welcoming and supporting the complexity brought by refugees” (Manocchi & Marchetti, 2016, p. 34). The idea is to ask those directly interested what are their main needs and implementing practices and actions which arise from below and which are then exercised outside the system from the non-governmental organizations. Asylum seekers will find themselves coming to terms with an institutional and bureaucratic universe that officially should look for their protection but in practice contribute to their discrimination. Selecting studies which meaningfully connect with the topic of social integration and informal education programs of adult refugees within Greece was not so easy. Therefore, I have chosen to highlight relevant international studies which address social inclusion of refugees and educational programs for migrants. Those gave me some useful and critical thinking insights about how to reconsider the concept of “integration”.

F Aarsæther (2021) explores how Norwegian schools facilitate education and social inclusion for newly arrived migrant children, based on qualitative data from separate programmes for newcomers. The findings show a large variation as to how the schools emphasize the teaching of subjects and how they facilitate active learning processes for newcomers. However, as far as inclusion is concerned, the schools, however, show quite similar results: none of them succeed in creating arenas for interaction between newcomers and mainstream peers.

The work conducted by T. Pötzsch (2020) was undoubtedly the most inspiring since he conducted a multiple case study in Finland and Canada where he explored the process of social inclusion of adult migrant learners enrolled in integration education programs. He drew upon Anti-oppressive methodologies (AOP), as well as perspectives integrated from Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Critical Migration Studies (CMS) as a theoretical framework . Despite Chiara Bonfanti’s project (2022) about the ESTIA programme being focused on housing, it is still very interesting to see how she framed the situation in the same town and how she related this topic with the development studies. Since she interviewed some people from OCC and even volunteered there for some time, the context we are talking about is the same and even the methodology used.

3.0. Theoretical and conceptual framework

3.1. Terminology

Before starting to talk about people on the move it is necessary to make some distinctions and clarify some terminology. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a migrant is “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from her habitual place of residence, regardless of the person's legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, what the causes for the movement are; or what the length of the stay is” (IOM, 2019). This is a more general term, not defined by international law. In conducting my research, I find it necessary to define more precise terms, particularly because the focus of my interviews is on refugees and asylum seekers. Still relying on the IOM glossary on migration, it states that an asylum seeker is “an individual who is seeking international protection, because the condition of living in his usual country of residence doesn’t allow her to be safe and sound.” This legal label defines a particular period of life, while people are waiting for the answer to their claim of asylum; after that, if the application is accepted, they usually become recognized refugees or beneficiaries of international protection. This means that not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker (Bonfanti, 2022).

The Geneva Convention of 1951 gave the famous definition of the refugee as someone 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, as the Convention continues, ‘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’. (UNHCR, 1951)

It is important to understand the different concepts since the word “refugee” is often used in the common language to indicate every category of people on the move. But legally speaking the rights associated with Recognized refugees and beneficiary of subsidiary protections differ. In fact international protection is “the protection that is accorded by the international community to individuals or groups who are outside their own country and are unable to return home because their return would infringe upon the principle of non-refoulement, and their country is unable or

unwilling to protect them” (IOM, 2019) The rights recognized to people who have been granted international protection are inferior than the ones recognized to refugees.

When talking about refugees, an important aspect to consider is how they have been portrayed by the media. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York, in 2004 in Madrid and in 2005 in London, migration and terrorism became the central part of international agendas, terrorist attacks have had a securitizing effect of migrations. Refugees and in a broader sense migrants become synonymous with possible terrorists, there is a real fear towards them, especially if recognizably of Islamic religion. As the political and media climate deteriorates, the refugee becomes part of a suffered immigration, an uncomfortable and unwelcome presence, less recognizable than in the past compared to the economic migrant.

The common narrative used by media and that usually labels migrants as illegal or clandestine is fake since even if they reach the state in an illegal way, once they reach it they cannot be classified as illegals until their asylum claim will be examined and after receiving a negative examination of the claim (Bonfanti, 2022). The condition of “illegal stay” according to IOM state that “the presence on the territory of a State, of a non-national who does not fulfill, or no longer fulfills the conditions of entry, stay or residence in the State” (IOM, 2019).

All attempts made to recognize and define these people, in response to bureaucratic needs, in fact contain a shadow side that it implies and hides a process of disavowal of the person becoming increasingly the subject of policies but fewer and fewer political subjects (Van Aken, 2005). Roger Zatter (1991) focuses on what consequences entails the attribution of refugee status (labelling) with respect to the transformation of identity and its manipulation in the context of public policies and bureaucratic practices. starting from stereotyping, which includes standardization and the creation of precise categories and is the moment when, in a institutional context, a client group is defined to which a series of needs are referred predefined (water, food, protection...). Personal cases are thus traced back to bureaucratic "cases" and individual identity is replaced by a stereotyped one that reproduces the political and bureaucratic values that built it. Stereotyping newcomers (NCs), based on their ethnicity, nationality or any other inherent characteristic, is misguided and demeaning. When decision makers (DMs) assume that a person is simply the inevitable result of vague cultural traits, they are rejecting the notion that every human is unique and diminishing that person's freedom to self-determine.

The process of labelling and stereotyping connects to the idea of “otherness”. In the context of service providers, this image of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers as inherently different

from the host society, this can have both sympathetic and unsympathetic origins. Once decision makers (DMs) may believe that successful collaboration is not possible, because NCs are traumatized or disadvantaged; another may think the exact same thing, but because he or she sees NCs as uncivilized or uneducated. Regardless of whether this opinion is rooted in the idea that NCs are victims (and therefore incapable) or villains (and therefore worthy of contempt), the outcome is surprisingly similar: the gulf between the two groups is considered too big to bridge. Through rigorous self-reflection on the biases, prejudices or preconceived ideas that DMs hold, the internal narratives which so often guide common opinions on what NCs are capable of, will be replaced by much sharper image of what is true: that NCs and DMs share much more similarities than differences (Embrace Project, D2.5 training curricula).

Before elucidating the concept of integration, inclusion and assimilation in order to understand what are people included or integrated it is necessary to define the concept of society (Gesellschaft) and community Gemeinschaft (Tönnies,1887). These two German words are used to describe social interaction, more specifically according to Tönnies, community is comprised of personal social ties and in-person interactions where people feel they belong together via something (e.g.religious) while people in society are guided by formal values and beliefs that are directed by rationality and efficiency, as well as by economic, political, and self-interests. When we talk about integration, usually, it is intended to society (e.g. have an income as a parameter to be integrated in the society), on the other hand you can be part of different communities and still be part of the same society (ex Muslims in Europe).

3.2 Assimilation, inclusion, Integration

Assimilation, Integration and Inclusion, are all labels describing processes. The meanings of these terms are actively debated and critically contested (Pötzsch, 2020). Sometimes the terms of social integration and inclusion are used interchangeably in juxtaposing them with assimilationist immigration ideologies, which stand as the antitheses to diversity and egalitarian cultural plurality (Pötzsch, 2018). Therefore in order to go deeper into the definition of these concepts it is needed to critically examine what is the meaning they carry with them.

Social Inclusion has been defined as the “realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in [immigrants’] new country” (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003, p.1) Angus Stewart, therefore, posits that a commitment to social inclusion necessitates the pursuit of deliberative democracy and a distributive justice of

equality.” Such a pursuit addresses inequalities of class, gender, race, and religion as structured obstacles to the effective exercise of political agency and confronts institutional domination whether bureaucratic, economic or cultural” (2000, p. 69). Inclusion so envisaged is not based on “integrationist” responses which often presume absorption into something; into a predefined, static, national entity. Instead, it entails a “participationist” response. (Pöttsch, 2018) To make an example concerning the learning environment, in practical means social inclusion would mean not to place people with mental slow down development in special school but rather together in school with other kids.

The word Integration is widespread in the literature of immigration. Miller (2016) explains that “Social integration describes a pattern of behavior. The people who live in a particular place are socially integrated to the extent that they regularly interact with one another across a range of social contexts: for example, they work alongside each other, join the same clubs and associations, live as neighbors and talk to one another when they meet, and so forth. Elizabeth Anderson distinguishes four stages of integration: “formal desegregation, spatial integration, formal social integration, and informal social integration.” One key point that Anderson makes is that it is not sufficient for full integration for people to occupy the same physical space if within that space they divide into separate social units (e.g., “in Greek public school refugee students attend different tracked classes than Greek students or locate the refugee camps far outside of the city). A second point is that even if members of different groups are participating in the same institutions or associations, the way they interact with each other is still important: “informal social integration involves cooperation, ease, welcome, trust, affiliation and intimacy that go beyond the requirements of organizationally defined roles.” Using Anderson’s helpful categories (which she admits need not always be fulfilled in a linear sequence), we can see that, if we begin from a situation of complete segregation or “parallel societies,” then moving to full social integration requires several things to happen, involving not only creating a rich pattern of social interaction but also interaction of the right kind, involving friendly, respectful relationships between equals. (Miller, 2016) This is what I argue that OCC is contributing to.

An important question to consider when the term “integration” is being used, is to clarify who is supposed to be integrated to what, how and by whom? (Eriksen 2015, p.15). “The process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and groups” (IOM 2005, p.459), “acceptance” as the end goal of a reciprocal process involving newcomers and host

societies (Biles & Frideres, 2012), participation in the labor market as well as in welfare services (Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck 2012), demonstrating language proficiency, host country knowledge and the acceptance of a canon of liberal and social values (De Roo, Braeye & De Moor 2016) the aforementioned definitions all clearly target migrants as the who, even if a certain host society reciprocity or “tolerance” is required. The to what is also unequivocal, namely to the present host society where the structural inequalities of said society are rarely interrogated. In discussing the how, integration espouses the ideal of facilitating migrants’ participation in both public and private spheres with responsibilities shared between newcomers and the host society (Reinsch 2001, Kymlicka 2010). (Pöttsch, 2020)

They are not able to be part of the new society as equal citizens, unless – and that is the overall condition imposed to them through the civic integration policy – they fully adjust to the new society, discard their past and the place they have come from and be ‘re-socialized’ and re-educated. (De Roo, Braeye & De Moor 2016, p.10)

The concept of integration “has been criticized as a thinly veiled attempt of many Western countries to *assimilate* cultural and other differences into the essentialist narratives of “homogenous” national cultures, effectively revealing the hypocrisy of the “two-way street” discourse as terminating in a “one-way” of ethnic hierarchies and social exclusion. The domineering arguments used to justify the how of assimilative integration measures are often couched in paternalistic terms citing economic or social justifications which disenfranchise, silence and render migrants legally incompetent. The underlying attitude of “we know what’s best for immigrants” robs the latter of their critical engagement and agency creating relationships of dependence for which they are later chastised (Goldberg 1994, Pöttsch 2018).

Both concepts of integration and inclusion can be problematized if understood in hegemonic and oppressive ways or still holds positive connotations “where the responsibility of the host society to provide resources, services and supports in the adjustment process rests less on the part of the newcomer and more on the ability of agencies to accommodate these so called ‘differential needs’” (Yee, 2005, p.99). Such inclusion presupposes a parity of participation in social arrangements where all social actors participate as equals whether the structural condition in which such participation takes place is dictated by a democratic legitimacy of norms (Hick & Thomas, 2009) In practice, the reality of “parity of participation” is far from being reached and in most European Member States, few opportunities exist for refugees and migrants to participate

in the political and civic life of the host countries they live in. This results in the exclusion of refugees and migrants from the creation and improvement of the policies which most impact their lives, and the community they live in. To this regard it was very interesting for me to discover a project called “EMBRACE” and designed by Second Tree, a grassroots Ngo that works with refugees in Northern Greece, which tries to promote newcomer participation in the design and implementation of integration or related policies.

To conclude, the third concept of “assimilation”, is defined by the Guía de conceptos sobre migraciones racismo e interculturalidad (Malgesini and Giménez, 2000), and reported in the Migration and Home Affairs glossary as: “The gradual process by which a minority group adopts the patterns of behaviour of a majority group or host society and is eventually absorbed by the majority group / host society”. It is a form of “forced adaptation” to the form the other wants you to be. Your identity and culture disappear until you are no longer recognizable for your cultural diversity.

3.3 Theoretical framework: between Us and Them

Those who survive the often arduous flight through deserts and overseas on their way to safety usually find themselves confronted with not only uncertainty about their future, but also mistrust and rejection by local citizens. As a consequence, many withdraw into fringe groups of people who share the same fate. On the other side, citizens in wealthier countries see themselves confronted with rapid and unpredictable changes in their environment and many of them fear they will forfeit their wealth, safety, and traditions by the influx of incoming refugees. The growing popularity of radical right wing parties and movements in many European countries provides painful evidence that a state of such heightened anxiety and uncertainty creates a perfect breeding ground for ethnocentric thinking and antisocial behavior. However, at the same time, many people feel the urge to donate money and clothes to refugees, and volunteer to help them cope with language and administrative barriers (Haji R., McKeown S., Ferguson N., 2016). This chapter is intended to elucidate how people cope with threats that cause them to question their assumptions about themselves or their familiar environment. We focus on people’s need for

epistemic equilibrium, self-esteem, belonging, and control as underlying identity motives. (Lüders et al., 2016) According to the anxiety-to-approach model of threat and defense (Jonas et al., 2014), violations of these needs generate a state of anxious uncertainty and engage in defensive behaviour (Haji R., McKeown S., Ferguson N., 2016). As a consequence, people automatically engage in defensive behaviors to relieve aversive feelings and to re-establish approach motivation. Given that identity motives largely derive from group membership, affirming one's social identity may represent a functional tool for maintaining a positive self-view in the face of threat. Unfortunately, such reactive in-group affirmation is often accompanied by in-group bias and xenophobia and may also foster radical antisocial reactions (Hogg, Kruglanski, & van den Bos, 2013). However, as illustrated above, antisocial thoughts and behaviors are not inevitable consequences of threat. Depending on personality and contextual variables, people may use different threat coping strategies and may even engage in prosocial reactions in terms of intergroup cooperation and appreciation. (Lüders et al., 2016) I apply the terror management model to group-based defenses as a common response to identity threat. On the one hand in-group affirmation is often accompanied by antisocial behavior, such as hostility to out-groups and extremism, on the other hand the intergroup contact theory argues that some moderators (such as empathy, general knowledge of the outgroup, reduced anxiety) help to foster positive relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). "Humans are inherently social beings. These social connections can promote cohesive ties, but they can also create or accentuate divisions between us and those who do not belong to our groups". (Haji R., McKeown S., Ferguson N., 2016) The idea of this chapter is to understand how our group memberships, or social identities, can motivate us toward harm or harmony and how this can apply to the "refugee crisis". I argue that this theoretical approach can be used as a tool to explain processes of exclusion of minorities - including refugees, by the majority group.

3.4 Key concept in Social Identity theory

A theoretical lens which has helped me in conceptualizing and grounding my research design is that of Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory people derive a sense of identity by categorizing themselves and others as members of specific groups and those social groups, whether large demographic categories or small task-oriented teams, provide their members with a shared identity that prescribes and evaluates who they are, what they should believe and how they should behave (group identification). Social identities also,

very critically, highlight how the in-group is positively distinct from relevant out-groups in a particular social context (affective dimension) (Hogg, 2016). Social categorization is an attempt to decrease information complexity by enabling people to define themselves and others on the group level. Crisp and Meleady (2012) argue that humans possess two systems of coalition which are the ones responsible for how we deal with diversity and others. The first system is the automatic process defined by simple “us” versus “them” category boundaries, enabling a clear way of distinguishing friend from foe while the second system is a complex cognitive process which require a safe environment and incentives to correct the mistakes made by the first system and produce counter stereotypical “them”. This need of “epistemic equilibrium” (Hart, 2014) give a kind of explanation of why so many people in Europe (and elsewhere) feel threatened by the changes in their familiar environment that are caused by the influx of incoming refugees such as border controls, congested stations, and accommodation centers in public places (Haji R., McKeown S., Ferguson N., 2016). Group membership provide individuals with “self esteem” meaning the value/ quality/ acceptance that an individual gain from the group he belongs to (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) and a sense of “self control” (Fritsche et al., 2013) where the individual define the self in terms of “we” (and not “I”).

3.5 Attitudes towards out-group members and Terror Management Theory (TMT)

The terror management perspective on intergroup conflict is highly compatible with the central concepts of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Both theories view group membership as an important source of meaning and self-esteem and posit a motive to view oneself and one’s group in a distinctively positive light. Thus emphasizing the superiority and distinctiveness of one’s group relative to others serves a useful psychological function and derogating out-groups and their members can help accomplish this. Social identity theory focuses on the utility of out-group derogation for establishing the identity and value of the in-group, and Hogg and Abrams (1993) suggest that this ultimately functions to provide a stable conception of the social world and reduce uncertainty. TMT does not take issue with these ideas, but adds that certainty regarding the identity and value of one’s group functions, at least in part, to help manage death concerns. TMT propose that human behavior in part is driven by the need to manage the potential for anxiety that arises from the death awareness. (D.R. Weise et al., 2011) In order to cope with this anxiety, the first mechanism rely on a cultural system of meaning, or cultural

worldview. Cultural worldviews provide the world with meaning, order, stability, and permanence, and incorporate standards for what is considered valued behavior, as well as the promise of literal or symbolic immortality to those who live up to these standards (e.g., Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1997). The second mechanism pursue self-esteem, conceiving a valuable contributor to a meaningful universe, ultimately promise either literal or symbolic death transcendence. Symbolic immortality is the idea that one will live on as a part of something greater than oneself, such as a family, nation, political movement, or religious group. Symbolic immortality often takes the form of leaving a permanent mark on others or the culture in general (e.g., by contributing something that will affect future generations, such as a great novel, idea, or work of art). People require consensual validation from others to maintain faith in their cultural worldviews. When others share one's worldview, it increases faith in these conceptions and thus enhances their ability to shield death-related concerns. When others view the world differently than we do, it undermines this faith and thus makes us more vulnerable to existential terror. Consequently, people are attracted to those who share their worldviews and threatened by those who hold different worldviews. From the perspective of TMT, much intergroup conflict and hostility results from the threat to one's worldview and self-esteem posed by those who adhere to alternative worldviews. However, TMT also suggests that mortality concerns can also contribute to tolerance toward out-groups (Greenberg et al., 1992) Studies have supported that, death reminders lead to: (a) Individuals tend to make harsher assessments of those who challenge or go against their cultural beliefs, while showing more positive evaluations of those who uphold or embody them (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). (b) There is a tendency to prefer a simpler social structure (Landau et al., 2004). (c) There is an inclination towards more intense efforts to enhance one's self-esteem. (d) There is a growing inclination to depend on prevalent cultural values. But TMT does not view hostile reactions to out-groups as the only way of managing existential concerns or an inevitable response to reminders of one's mortality. In considering how TMT would affect attitudes toward immigrants can change according to their level of Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) (Altemeyer, 1981) Those with a higher level of RWA would be more threatened by people such as immigrants who are different from themselves, and further, are likely to view such people as inferior and even evil. On the other hand, people who hold less authoritarian, more tolerant, and open-minded attitudes are less likely to perceive out-group members as threatening. To the extent that low RWA individuals value tolerance and diversity, immigrants may offer an avenue for dealing with death concerns

through the expression of these values in the form of positive attitudes toward out-group members. (D.R. Weise et al., 2011)

3.6 Intergroup Contact Theory

In 1954, Gordon Allport introduced a contact hypothesis in his book, “The Nature of Prejudice”. According to Allport (1954), intergroup contact could reduce negative attitudes towards an outgroup if the contact situation involved equal status, cooperation to achieve superordinate goals, and involved institutional support. Allport’s contact hypothesis was inspired by earlier ideas about prejudice, suggesting that individuals’ erroneous beliefs about others may be reduced by meeting and becoming close to people they were prejudiced against 11 (Chrysochoou, 2004)

I would like to point out that in the following pages, although I have tried to escape from the us-them binary, for reasons of clarity of language when I use “them” I am referring to the category of people who have requested asylum, the (legal) condition in which they find themselves and not to their identity. while when I talk about "us" the reference is to the European volunteers. Elaborate

4 Methodological Framework

This chapter aims at describing the methods that have been carried out during the project and the reasons why some strategies have been used rather than others. Since the concept of social integration and how education possibly contributes to it, is a context-based understanding, the research design of this thesis is based on a qualitative research method namely semi structured interviews and participant observation. I chose this method since it facilitates immersion into the research environment. From the start of drafting the project proposal, I was clear that I wanted to conduct ethnographic research. I believe that, especially in social sciences, direct experience and social interaction with the people favors a deeper understanding of the micro- world I wanted to explore.

“Qualitative research seeks a description of ‘the particular’, the specific, the character of a phenomenon. It aims to understand, to describe, and through the synergetic interlocution between all research participants arrive at meaning, or meanings” (Pötzsch, 2020). The “reality” I will share in the following chapters is socially constructed by individuals through interaction and it is the result of my self-reflexivity.

“We will still get part of the telling less than completely correct but that telling can advance the human right not to be invisible – not to be silenced, not to be stereotyped. Such modesty in our narration can affirm the human dignity of those whose lives we describe”. (Denzin & Giardina 2010, p.121)

A lens which has helped me in conceptualizing and grounding my research design is that of bottom-up approach, a participant-centered methodology that allows the local community and local players to express their views. It is participatory in a way that offers an opportunity for people, often excluded or marginalized as for example refugees, to express their conditions, needs and aspirations and to evaluate the implementation of policies and program such as the work conducted by OCC. To do that I conducted semi-structured interviews (in person, online) and participatory observation. It seeks to involve all major stakeholders and facilitate their participation. In my fieldwork I tried to hear and gather information through refugees, social educators of the NGO’s, academia, locals and government authority.

The goal of the report is to describe the study in such a comprehensive manner as to enable the reader to feel as if they had been an active participant in the research (Baxter, P. & Jack, S.,2008) My method chapter is based on the data collection that was carried out during two months fieldwork at Open Cultural Center (OCC) Polykastro in Greece. Open Cultural Center is a non-governmental organization active in Spain and Greece and formed by volunteers who develop educational, cultural, and awareness projects to support refugee and migrant communities in Europe.

Before starting my data collection I had to receive permission from Sikt, that carefully examined my application to handle personal data as well as data management.

4.1 Study area

In a windy field in northern Greece you’ll find a camp called Nea Kavala. It is one of the 24 long term accommodation centers in Greek mainland (<https://medium.com/@BritishRedCross/true-stories-a-day-in-the-life-of-a-refugee-camp-97f5b66e8eb>) and it is situated close to the border between Greece and North Macedonia, just 4 km outside of the town where OCC operates. At the beginning of 2024 around 600 people live here, including Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians and Sierra Leoneans. Many of them have been living in these containers for more than eight months. Here is where, since 2016, the informal settlement of people on the move began to appear. At first the people settled in an emergency landing strip “airport” abandoned facility.

The camp covers 54,925 m² and has a site capacity of 1680 people with 280 shelters (containers). The conditions are awful, almost empty inside (without even mattress), the maintenance is a duty of the Greek ministry but the only service that is kept functioning is the air conditioned, a basic need for survival since the weather condition are extreme both in summer and in winter.

OCC Greece, the NGO in which I have conducted my field work, is located in a small town of around 7000 habitants in Northern Greece which belong to Kilikis region not far from Thessaloniki. The town is very calm, the average age of the population is high since the youth go to school in the city or in the surrounding villages. A small percentage of the people speak English. Due to the presence of a military base, it is not an exception to see tanks passing in the street. As a result the town is habited by military and police people. There is no bus connection between the city center and the camp, most people don't have another option rather than walk for 50 minutes to do some errands such as go to the pharmacy, supermarket or get out of the concrete walls of the camp. In 2021, the Nea Kavala camp turned into a closed camp like all the camps in Greece, with fences and containers with toilets and kitchens in which a maximum of two families can live. This also meant an increase in security and control, with big walls and frequent checks and light always on at night, visible from a faraway point. This produces a feeling of constriction among the people living in it.

4.2 Challenges and critiques

Conducting interviews with both the refugees and the locals could be challenging because of the language. Since I didn't have someone I could rely on all the time who could translate for me, I have tried to address those who could better communicate in English.

Given that this study involved a relatively small number of interviews, It is to be noted that the research was never intended to generate the kind of findings that can be generalized. It cannot be said the findings to be representative of all adult migrant students or staff at OCC. There are obvious difficulties in accepting the reliability of self-report information skepticism and argument. One supposed shortcoming centers on the lack of generalizability from specific case studies in that they only allow for tentative conclusions given that the chosen cases may be too narrowly focused and therefore lack "claims making" potential. Conversely, researchers are also accused of overgeneralizing from specific cases which draw from a limited data base and thus forfeiting the trustworthiness of their studies. (Pöttsch, 2020)

The critique of this narrative method could be about validity and reliability. How to ensure the validity of the findings? my personal experience during the fieldwork and the stories that I have listen and reported in my project seek to express the complexities that come with the topic of immigration, it aims to promote dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints, to provoke readers to broaden their horizon.

Another means of addressing fraudulent research claims is by maximizing the voices of participants (p.82) during all phases of the study, including the final report. With reference to “giving voice” within the monograph, I have endeavored to include many richly descriptive quotes to demonstrate that my voice serves to co-create and corepresent their stories (Stronach & McLure 1997).

4.3 Positionality

Margaret Boushel (2000) argues that reflecting upon one’s social and cultural positioning is crucial in fact we must interrogate the almost unconscious perpetuation of dominant roles given us by our status within powerful groups. The question of bias is fundamental to qualitative research. It refers to the extent to which the researcher’s subjectivity affects the data collection and analysis. It is commonly agreed that qualitative research cannot in any way be free of bias (Peirce, 1995). Since I am an integral part of the research process, my prior experience, assumption and belief will influence the research process and so there are three main aspect to take into account: First, individuals’ structural positions, such as race, gender, age, social class, sexuality, and nationality, construct multifaceted insider-outsider positionalities between the interviewer and the interviewee. Being a white, educated female from a western country makes me belong to a privileged group.

My immigrant experience is very different from those of my students, my skin color allowed me to have privilege and been treated with respect. Regarding my positionality with the other teaching staff, due to the similar structural position, our relationship was facilitated. Except with some Africans, I haven’t shared my experience of having been abroad. I feel somehow guilty to had the chance to move freely while they are fleeing for fear of being persecuted. They still get stuck for months in horrible conditions and keep risking their lives every time they try to cross a

border. The fact of having been traveling for sure makes me more open minded regarding the differences but for sure don't make me able to feel what they are going through. Regarding my positionality with the other teaching staff, due to the similar structural position, our relationship was facilitated.

I have grown up in a big family of six where the doors have always been open to everybody would need it. In my childhood I have never experienced what it means have nothing to eat but at the same time we had to be careful with the expenses, they taught us not to waste any food being respectful for those who don't have any. I grew up in the countryside, a small village where everybody know each other, you can sleep with the door open and the kids can play in the streets with any risks. The perfect environment to live a fulfilled life. Nevertheless a catholic education made me grow up with the idea of helping others and give back in a way the luck we have. We hosted for two times a mother with her baby from Zimbabwe who came to have heart surgery with humanitarian aid, another women who came by boat with her small child... all of these to say that my parents have always been the best example to openness and hospitality. We are so lucky to have health and the chance to live a dignified life that we have to do something for those who are less lucky than us. Since I was very young I have had the chance to live in the Dominican Republic for one year and this experience has been the first big opportunity to move easily, discover new cultures and different habits, learn a language, be welcomed and understand how beautiful and variegated the world is. I had the opportunity to move abroad for longer periods such as in Argentina and Australia, until I recently move to Spain and then immigrating to Norway to attend the Master in peace and Conflict Transformation make me still keep in mind the big luck I have to move and even realize how challenging it is to get adapted to a new country. Compared to those immigrants coming illegally. Not living in the camp, since I am not an asylum seeker, will make me an "outsider".

Everywhere I moved I was warmly welcomed by the local population and never felt discriminated for my origins. Matteo Salvini, an Italian politician, in the occasion of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine he made a speech to the Senate in which he reiterated: "those women and children, who are real refugees fleeing from a real war, very different from other types of arrives that the war brings her to Italy [...] Citizens with Ukrainian passports have all our support because they are a perfectly integrated, hard-working community, culturally and morally close to us and therefore our homes, our families, our schools, our hospitals are absolutely at their

complete disposal.” Speaking of “real refugees” clearly refers to those “Serie A” migrants that, fruit of the selective sympathy, are more welcomed because similar.

I could see this discourse even in Greece referring to those people coming from the ex soviet union that have been able to integrate better than the refugees today.

I worked for a year in Zambia with a catholic NGO, this experience made me reflect a lot about my positionality as a white volunteer and the colonial past related with the humanitarian work. The idea that if “difference” would represent the starting point for discussions on values and behavior, it could constitute a site for social transformation and inclusion instead of exclusion, permeates much of my thesis (Moosa-Mitha 2005).

Moreover, it is crucial to examine the role played by language(s) in shaping communication, involvement and participation. (Pötzsch, 2020) the languages used in interviews, transcriptions, and research reports affect the flow of qualitative interviewing and the accuracy of interpreting subjects’ experiences. Pure Holmes (2017) argues that researchers must interrogate their language practices to ensure that study participants can speak for themselves in processes that involve flexible multilingualism. To this regard, my toolbox was definitely insufficient to engage with my students in their native language. English was the only vehicular language we could use to communicate directly. It would have been very useful to know Turkish, Arabic or Kurmanji. Since translation could be a significant source of bias, a requirement for my interviewees was to have a level of English good enough to have a conversation. Unless it was particularly fundamental for the research to get in touch with a specific non English speaker. I preferred to have simple conversation in English with the participant rather than having to find a translator to assist me. During the interviews with the refugee I have used the translator in the phone for some specific word that I wanted to ask about (ex: what is integration). At first I thought about reaching the majority of Greek locals (who doesn’t speak English) using a questionnaire in Greek where they had to chose between “yes” or “no”. But I encountered the problem of leading questions, in fact it was difficult for me to ask neutral question where the answer where closed option. Due to the fact I couldn’t find someone to prove the accuracy of the translation, the challenging in posing the questions and the lack of resources to analyze the quantitative data I decided to reach fewer locals with in depth interviews rater then more people throughout the questionnaire.

Third, researchers' sensitivity to subjects' cultures, socioeconomic characteristics, and immigration backgrounds is crucial to producing quality interviews and research.

I engage with reflexivity on the one hand using reflexive writing: forms of documentation such as researcher memos, field notes, and other written or recorded reflections occurring at any point in the research process. While on the other hand through collaboration, rely on others researcher or in this case volunteers to uncover my blind spot.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations go far beyond a discussion of issues on informed consent, confidentiality, harm reduction or assurances of taking the ethical codes enshrined in various professional associations into account. Though these are doubtlessly important considerations, Lundqvist, Davies and Mulinari exhort us to dig deeper; to critique our own positionality by examining the power dynamics that underpin and shape our interactions with study participants (Pöttsch, 2020).

The proposed study deals with a sensitive topic especially considering the personal trauma that migrants could have lived during the tough journey to Greece. It shall generate suspicion and trust issues. The researcher shall seek informed consent and confidentiality.

An issue of ethics is related to the researchers' relationship with their research participants, especially when they are friends and colleagues (this is a topic that will be greatly discussed later) In this respect, researchers must establish a clear and transparent relationship and interaction with all the participants during the different phases of research. Specifically, we must differentiate between our personal relationships with them as friends and colleagues and our relationship with them as research participants. To ensure the seriousness and adaptability of their research, researchers must maintain a formal yet relaxed relationship with the research participants during the process of data collection. Researchers should raise participants awareness about their neutral and unbiased stance, otherwise this could result in distortion of the truth and the falsification of the findings (Mirza, 2023).

In my project my role as a researcher goes together with my main role of a volunteer of OCC. The people I interview during my spare time at the center are the same people I have been teaching English to in the morning or refugees that are always around the center. I have to be extremely careful when I ask someone for their consent to participate

in my interviews to make sure they understand what I need this data for and what is my role in this moment (not their teacher but a researcher). Working as a volunteer and working with vulnerable people brings many ethical questions into discussion. With the term vulnerable I refer to people that are in a “limbo” situation, they are struggling to create a new life after leaving for many different reasons their home countries. We (volunteers) can be empathic but we cannot really feel them because we haven’t gone through the same hardship. This instability and this lack of clearness of mind will, together with the everyday challenges of living in a camp, make them even more in need of personal interaction, make friends, and have someone they can rely on.

How to behave? How much “close” should we get? What is the line to not to over trough to not harm? We are here just for few months, it is unfair the fact we will go back to our comfortable house in our comfortable country but we will leave and have some bond with them will make them feel lost and broken again. Keeping distance is a way to protect ourselves and them. My aim when I conduct interviews is to ask about their experience since they came to Greece, I am not professionally trained to handle the trauma they carry and not be able to give them the psychological support they need. To this regard during one of the training at OCC we have been told the episode about one visual activity carried out by another organization where refugees were shown some pictures of people at the camp or during the journey. One girl, a resident volunteer at the project, after a few hours had a very terrible panic attack (for the first time in her life). We don’t know exactly what happened that made her react in this way.

I must be very careful asking questions since they could bring up memories and emotions they cannot handle. I ask very specific questions about the topic of integration and education since their new life started. I avoid questions related to their family, since I don’t know if the family is reunited and safe. We have been told to avoid certain topic that could evocate some trauma. I have been extremely careful not to mention or talk about family or even avoid mentioning the world home since all of them are in a situation of distress.

We are all human, with an empathic attitude, but we must be honest and ask ourselves why we are here. We have to be aware of our selfishness, we are not saviors and we have to keep in mind our limits. Not underestimate how tough this job

can be and the possible burnout of always being immersed in this environment. We are exposed to very negative and sad stories of life, the risk is becoming stone in front of the miseries, and not being able anymore to be happy. It is important to take breaks from the environment we are immersed in everyday. Going and visiting the people at the camp even on the weekend can be riskful for all the above mentioned reasons. We are not only the humanitarian work we are conducting.

When talking about ethical consideration one important point is to talk about fairness. One of my tasks is to pick up the students from the camp with the bus, even though we have some rules to follow such as giving priority to students/ people registered at OCC, sometimes there is no space for everybody and we have to decide who is coming with the bus. Building a special bond with some of them will make it very difficult to be fair, when for example we have to decide who is entering the bus and who is not. Even though we don't want to admit it, there is a power imbalance, some structural inequalities that make us volunteer in a "powerful" condition of western assistance. They want to tell their story to ask for help, assistance, and to find a safe place. It is on us to set emotional boundaries and limits when it comes to interaction and bond to avoid extra harm, not to give false hopes. We must be continuously aware.

"It is more healthy if they become friends among them". We assist them during a part of their journey because of a system which is costing them years of life. We don't have to expect them to thank us, they must forget us as soon as they have their documents and can restart a life somewhere else far from a camp".

Concerning confidentiality and anonymity: It was very important to guarantee anonymity of the research participants and the privacy of the data collected. Anonymity was necessary to create a certain freedom within the interview to discuss institutional failures and bad practice.

Some consideration related to power dynamics and researcher positionality in interaction with students/Staff is going to be touched upon in the discussion chapter. Nevertheless researcher-participant relationship involves a shift from vertical (knower-object) relations to more horizontal ones where the learner-expert paradigm is inverted with the researcher adopting the learner role. Experts are the participants who invite the researcher to share in their world, and their understanding of it. (Pöttsch, 2020) I started to actively collect my data after one/two weeks at the center, not before I built a foundation of trust and

understanding of the multicultural environment. I noticed that soon the relationship with the migrant student group was getting stronger day by day, socializing with them before and after classes helped a lot to quickly familiarize, however I haven't built with all of them the same relationship in fact in some cases the insufficient language proficiency was making harder the interaction. The disadvantage of being so involved emotionally makes it difficult to get outside of it. I even spent my days of holidays visiting other NGOs which work with refugees in order to grasp a bigger picture of the work conducted in Northern Greece.

4.5 Research instruments /Data collection

The main source material for this study was gathered during the period of fieldwork I conducted in OCC. For my research I choose to use autoethnography as a genre of writing and research since it displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Reflexive ethnographies primarily focus on a culture or subculture, authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions. The researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive ethnographies range along a continuum from starting research from one's own experience to ethnographies where the researcher's experience is actually studied along with other participants, to confessional tales where the researcher's experience is of doing the study become the focus on investigation. In summarizing reflexive ethnography and tracing its history thoroughly, Tedlock (1991) distinguishes between ethnographic memoir in which the ethnographer, who is the focus of the story, tells a personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research, and narrative ethnography, where the ethnographer's experience are incorporated into the ethnographic description and analysis of others and the emphasis is on the "ethnographic dialogue or encounter" between the narrator and members of the group being studied (p.78). The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Why does personal narrative matter? The researcher's own empathetic ability - the ability to use one's own experiences as humans among other humans - emotional as well as cognitive ones - to understand the people we want to write about.

Every moment of the experience of field work will be used as a data for analysis: teaching English was an opportunity to get to know better the culture of the people that were attending class and so the difference and challenges they had to face when they moved to Greece, living with other ten volunteers make me aware of the different approaches especially regarding the teacher-student relationship and the different learning styles.

The role of researcher “should be an ethical choice, an honest choice” (Stake 1995, p.103). Becoming a “culturally embedded practitioner” (Pötzsch, 2020) in my case meant becoming part of the OCC community, interacting as much as possible with the people around and learning through direct experience and being part of the environment. Asking humble questions to get into the reality of the people around. I had to balance between the role of teacher, volunteer, researcher and the one of friend. Joining the activities in a most natural and honest way. Despite that, the biggest challenge was undoubtedly “finding the right path between involvement, immersion and empathy on the one hand, and distance and critical thinking on the other” (Pötzsch, 2020).

4.6 Interviews

In total I have conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with OCC operators (among them volunteers and project coordinators), asylum seekers, members of the local community and key informants, four of them were online and conducted after the period of fieldwork. The participants in this study (refugees, long term volunteers and coordinators) were recruited from OCC and the interviews were conducted at OCC despite the background noise that often was impeding my hearing of what was said on the tape/recording. A small sample of locals was chosen because of their connection with the topic and because of the expected difficulty in communicating in English and not having a translator always available to accompany me. This interview style allowed me to “personalize” the dialogues according to the flow and freely detach from the script.

Before starting the interviews, people were assured that their anonymity would be respected and they were asked permission to record the conversation. Moreover, people have been assured that the interviews were done for research purposes and that they would have not interfered with their asylum process. All the people I have talked with were happy to share their experience and answer my questions. In an attempt to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible, I

explained to them that the questions I would ask are only related with their experience since they arrived in Greece. I explained that their names would not be noted to preserve their anonymity. A detailed list of precautions on how to conduct interviews with people who have potentially suffered psychological or physical trauma is present in the appendix, this was for me a useful guideline.

In the interview the refugees were asked to tell their story from the moment they arrived in the host country, their experience at OCC emphasizing their coming to live, adapt and integrate in the new host society and ending with their expectations about the future. They were told to take as much time as they needed and to talk about any issues they felt were relevant. They were thus able to construct their answers in any way they liked, to express their thoughts and feelings as well as experiences without any intervention or prompting from the interviewer. What was important about the initial open question was that it did not define or ask for positive or negative aspects of integration, which would have oriented respondents to a particular mindset, but rather allowed them to define the issue of integration in any way they wished. The openness of this initial question was complemented by more direct open questions concerning the various aspects of integration including employment and education, interaction with the society. However, by taking the refugee as an active agent in the creation of his or her own life story (Rustin, 1998), the methodology used went beyond reporting individual stories of refugee integration and adaptation to the host societies of Europe, to an attempt to understand the mechanisms of adaptation and integration. (Mestheneos, 2006)

4.6.1 Sampling (selection of informants)

In choosing the participants, two criteria guided my selection. One requirement was that students would be able to comprehend and speak English beyond a beginner's level to facilitate communication. I was teaching English to the group with the higher proficiency, this has really been an advantage to grasp the most out of the conversations in class. In case someone wouldn't speak English but was particularly suited for the interview due to his role at OCC (resident volunteer), I had the chance to ask someone to help with the translation. The second criteria was to ensure that they had accumulated a certain amount of time and experience in the learning environments of the integration programs.

Despite the majority of refugees interviewed being men, I managed to talk with two girls that were joining the center. I decided to interview only adult people since this is the main focus of the research and to avoid ethical problems. I have used the experience with the kids as further food for thoughts regarding the role of education in integration.

4.7 Participant observation

According to the definition of participant observation: “the researcher immerses himself or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions. it includes interviewing key informants and studying documents”.

Through this involvement, they aim to gain a deeper understanding of the subject’s perspectives, behaviors and social dynamics. My tasks as a volunteer at OCC include one hour of English class in the morning (English level 3) and two hours of activities in the afternoon with the Eagles, a group of 8 to 12 years old children for a total of eight weeks. A part of this fixed time responsibilities I have had the chance to hang around Cafeteria (the common space of the center) even before or after the classes. This moment is when I had the chance to randomly talk with people about daily topics or ask more specific questions useful for my research such as if their children were attending the public school in the morning or whether they had the chance to get to know some Greek people. I really enjoyed this time because it helped to build trust and confidence. This aspect is crucial in participant observation; in fact the informal embedded nature of this method means that you cannot always just delve straight into all the topics that address your research issues. You must spend time both building rapport and observing or participating for a long enough period to have a sufficient range of experiences, conversations, and relatively unstructured interviews for your analysis.

Data collected through participant observation are the information I could gather just by spending time at OCC, getting to know how the system works from inside with small talks and sharing. I have observed how the beneficiaries of the center gather before or after the class, sometimes they spend time with people of their own countries (e.g. afghan women), sometimes they go to do some groceries or errands in town taking advantage of the OCC bus ride, playing or drinking coffee as they were in a bar with friends. I have tried to be always careful to capture these glimpses of normality.

Attending the Mondays Women Space was another useful resource to capture honest interaction between women and how power inequalities can be canceled just by spending time together.

Classroom observation was conducted in migrant language lessons in non-formal educational settings. It focused on relationships between teachers and students, on the challenges and needs during the language teaching lessons on both sides (Richards & Farrell, 2011) Some notes were taken during the adult class (in the morning) to capture some specific comments of my students, or immediately after the activities. Those notes described the observation's setting and the participants' actions and words. Data includes conversations with other teachers about the challenges faced in class, the educational material and the teacher-student relationship. Since I was alone in my adult class, I had to figure out my approach to language learning and the degree of teaching interaction.

My observations and thoughts have been recorded in a blue notebook I have been carrying around. These include what was happening every day, it is helpful to access the lived emotions while the memory is still fresh. Detailed written descriptions on the computer took place lately. A part when reporting what someone said, the overall notes are written from my point of view with the purpose of making the reader experience my experience.

The goal of my initial observations in becoming familiar with the world of integration program insiders, was to describe the mundane – the physical situations, the institutions' layout, the number and composition of staff and students, etc., in order to become conscious of the environment in which interactions took place. These, often unfocused reflections also sought to give a glimpse into the atmosphere of the schools and convey the general climate of interpersonal relations. As an observer, one is often encouraged to be as detailed as possible in the first days or weeks in the research setting because one will never again, to the same degree, have this opportunity to view the place from an outsider's perspective (Jorgensen 1992). In subsequent weeks, my observations began to focus more deeply on different themes, such as student participation and ownership of learning, power relations, as well as the structural factors shaping and circumscribing the interactions between teachers and migrant students (Pötzsch, 2020)

4.8 Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using inductive content analysis of transcribed interview and observation notes. I highlighted the portion of text (single word or a sentence) where some key concepts were reported. I then collected/organized the raw data which could belong to the same categories (e.g. Interaction with the locals, challenges of the stay in Greece, strength of OCC.

The visibility of the refugee: between prejudice and solidarity, in doing that I had to go back and forth to the original material to check their completeness and integrity. Occ coordinator's interview helped to create a first draft of categories since a semi structure guide was follow more accurately than with the students. "The theming stage entails amalgamating larger data categories around core themes. It is here the researcher selects what s/he considers to be the most meaningful and central themes and elucidates their relationships to other categories while mentally juxtaposing them with the theoretical background" (Pötzsch, 2020, p.116). Lastly I decided on the written format that could present the chosen empirical findings and connect them with the theoretical framework, narrative analysis was what best suited my research. since I could mix the informant voices and conceptual/theoretical explanation. It is worth saying that every piece of information (even the one that hasn't been transposed to the empirical findings chapter have been extremely important to build up my understanding of the situation I am researching. The most challenging part of the analysis was to sort the information into meaningful units and to find a red line to make sense of them.

5 Empirical Findings

In presenting my empirical findings, I have chosen a narrative approach that focuses on interpreting the core narratives from a study group's personal stories. In order to maximize the impact of the participants' stories I have decided to include a wide selection of primary quotes. The theoretical framework is used as a backup tool to interpret the data. This chapter is composed of two themes: 1) Integration within the OCC community, and 2) Integration into Society. On the one hand, "Integration within OCC community" which discusses the role of a L2 learning process as a way to get integrated, some curricular aspects of OCC and its interpersonal role of intermediary with the more broadly European environment. On the other hand the "Integration into the Society" where locals were asked how they live together with the people from the camp. I have tried to frame the topic of immigration and integration into a larger context.

5.1 Inclusion within OCC community

The question I have tried to answer in this first theme is how OCC contributes to "Integration" of refugees. During my data collection I soon realized what the responsible of OCC said: "We are

not talking about the integration in Greece but about the general concept of integration in Europe, there is where OCC plays a role”. I have asked this question both to coordinator/volunteer and asylum seekers who attend the center in order to have an inclusive perspective, I have noticed that the word “integration” was often difficult to conceptualize in practical terms. The chapter is formulated in three subchapters that represent the three main answers to the question.

“We teach them the language, how to do a CV, we share cultural celebrations, through the volunteers they start observing how Italians/ Spanish/ French act, but further than that OCC is a space where to feel safe and dignified, where they are individually kept into consideration. They are received into a friendlier environment” (OCC responsible).

5.1.1 Language courses

“I used to write pages and pages of vocabulary to memorize them”, “I soon understand that I need to be able to communicate, it is a must, nobody will help you out. I was going to OCC everyday”. (OCC student)

As reported by UNHCR: “Target language competence is a basic requirement for achieving independence in day-to-day matters such as shopping, banking and obtaining a driver’s license, as well as for negotiating systems such as health care and education. Resettled refugees who can communicate in the language of the receiving community will have access to a wider range of employment opportunities and are better equipped to participate in further education and training. It enables them to participate in informal interactions in neighborhoods, whilst shopping and in community facilities; and ultimately to form meaningful social connections with others and keep up to date with current events (feel ‘part’ of the receiving community).” The European Council report on the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM, 2014) also emphasizes the strong correlation between language proficiency and successful integration. However, language learning alone doesn’t guarantee integration but it is affected by other social factors, to mention one: prejudice. For illustration, here is notations from a conversation between me, the researcher (R) and one of my interview subjects (IS):

- IS: “I am not white as a first thing, in the office of the camp they are not very sociable to communicate with the refugees. People are happy to speak their language, sometimes they don’t want to speak in English. The other day a woman was carrying a big thing, she was walking to the car. In my tradition if you see someone, a woman or old, you have to

help so I try to ask her “can I help you?” and she said “No”, even if they need they don’t like to”.

- R: “Was the women able to understand you in English?”
- IS: “I say it in Greek”
- R: “Wow, where did you learn Greek!?”
- IS: Yes, when I was in Lesvos I go to Greek school and even in Drop. Simple conversation, numbers, days, month”.

Of course this is just one example and we cannot generalize saying that all people are scared or mistrusted when they say a young black man proposing to help, but it is honest to admit that here is where the prejudice and “fear of the difference and stereotype comes to mind“. The conversation with E. continued in the loud cafeteria on a Tuesday afternoon. I asked what he understood with the word “integration”. I soon realized this concept was a bit too vague and I tried to narrow it down with some examples. IS: “I don’t have any experience with the community, how can I integrate?!” be part of the society. Every time I feel like stranger. If you have everything: documents, passport, you are still stranger. “the willing of the people to say something, is the first thing to integrate, to upgrade the relationship with the society is the willing to speak. I am ok, I am happy, I have been six months studying Greek but now I want to practice, and you need to talk with local people”. If you say something they are silent, if you greet, for example “Hello” they don’t want to talk, not even in Greek. That happen maybe everyday, in the camp”.

This feeling that E. was describing as “stranger” is something that is hard to grasp if you have never been in a minority position. The staff of the community center (OCC), for many students, are often the first and most frequent interaction with the majority, the society.

OCC language program provide English and German classes, so people couldn’t really learn Greek coming to the center, this is because of the lack of Greek volunteers and considering the fact that the majority of people is in “transit”, they intend to move away as soon as they get the documents, learning English as a second language is a tool that they can potentially use everywhere (more than Greek). Nevertheless the aim of OCC, with its informal education program, goes much further than the mere language courses. Informal education is about knowledge and skills acquired in a non-formal teaching setting. It is about building Self

advocacy where this term is defined as “an individual’s ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert their interests, desires, needs and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions” (Van Reusen et al. 1994). For the vast majority of people, in the moment that we leave their home country and go to an unfamiliar place, the resources and tools that we rely upon to advocate for ourselves are diminished and the simplest tasks may have become extremely complex; asking a question or finding the correct person to talk to. “OCC helped me to be more social, creative. I was introverted, scared to meet new people. Even though the purpose is to learn a language, what you get from people is even more“ (Ex OCC student). On the one hand, learning the language is intended as understanding the words and be able to speak them, for practical necessity. Without this minimum knowledge all kinds of mistakes can happen (misunderstanding the red or green light), on the other hand a language are words for norms and relations (behavior and emotion). OCC language courses encompasses these double meaning of language, it provides the migrants with a luggage of soft skills (aka cognitive and emotional tools) which start from learning the second language (L2) to building self advocacy, impact on the quality of their life, boost the self confidence and eventually connect (and function) with the larger society they are getting into. “Even though no one expects them to speak fluent in English or German at OCC, they familiarize themselves with the language, with some words. It is very helpful not to feel so strange, it is really important in psychological terms” (coordinator OCC) and since the teachers themselves were not English native speakers neither, the main objective of the program is not to teach/learn a “perfect English”.

“I found myself on a Tuesday morning in front of around ten students without having the slightest idea of what to say to them! We played games for one hour” (OCC teacher). I remember to be worried as well the first day, since I am not a teacher, and not even an English native speaker, “What can I teach them?” I was asking myself when trying to design the first class. Then I finally met my students. We did a very nice game where they had to write three sentences about themselves where only one was correct, and the rest of the class had to guess what was the right one. We got to know our names and nationalities to break the ice, it is not easy to change the teacher every two months, especially getting emotionally attached. Well, going back to my first class, the key for me was to simply ask them what they were interested in learning, what language skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) were they most weak in, what were the grammar topics they remembered from the last flow, in short what were they

expecting from me, or better said, from the two new months that were coming. I took this opportunity to share with them my limits as an Italian “teaching” English and tried to lay the foundation for a safe, informal and comfortable learning environment where mistakes were welcomed and to stress that the aim was not to become English native speakers while to improve their communicative skills.

Tailoring learning to individuals and building upon students’ previous competences in meeting their needs was the key (customized learning approach). Despite that, the decision concerning the exercises and the program is still a subjective prerogative/choice of the teacher, something that will still remind of a “traditional paternalistic approach”. Since my class level was ‘English level 3’, the highest (B2) I could easily speak with my students (small classes with maximum 12 people) and I really appreciate the freedom to set the class and the curriculum according to our perception. In classes with lower level of English (including illiterate learners) would be much more complicate to negotiate and discuss the curriculum among student and the teacher. Even the teaching method was negotiated between staff and students. I feel this makes the classes all different and engaging. Some colleagues, on the contrary, felt frustrated by the little preparation and organization of the classes. “Everything remains quite random” (OCC teacher) Since everything is left on the teacher (volunteers) there is no structure and clear line to follow. “The biggest challenge was probably that we didn’t have a curriculum from the beginning, so we had to make a lot of decisions about what we wanted to teach. But on the other hand this allowed us to listen a lot to our students and shape the classes according to their needs and wants” (computer class teacher). A colleague from level 1 was quite disappointed once while she was teaching ‘the months of the year’ and she heard that the colleague in the Literacy + level was giving exactly the same topic. “There is no defined curriculum and boundaries, responsibility for creating teaching materials is all on the teacher” (OCC teacher).

Some people who joined OCC literature class were illiterate in their native language, It could seem impossible to start from zero teaching a new language but “even only learning words such as “thanks” and “sorry” will be open them some doors” (OCC volunteer coordinator). "It was a challenge, you have to teach English to people who don't know the alphabet. You even need to question how the language itself works, what is the best way to teach, to question the linguistic barrier (whether they will understand or not) and be very insistent. A serious difficulty is that it is a completely different language and that they are adults, they have different ways of learning” (OCC Volunteer).

Just as there are different ways of learning there are also different ways of teaching. In the last week of my stay, one of my student, C., became a resident volunteer and started collaborating with me to prepare the classes, there were not many left though. He once explained the First Conditional, a topic we had already covered the previous week. It was really a turning point observing how a class can be taught differently according to our learning method and experience, how students interact with him and how the learning environment becomes more horizontal.

Mr. R., the most extrovert and sociable man I have ever known started coming to OCC when Drop left the camp. Since his first language is French and this is his biggest passion, he proposed to start a “French cafe” as he was calling it. He was greeting everybody, every morning with a “bonjour!!” that was able to lift everybody’s mood . He always had different activities, games and speaking exercises to practice and learn new words. Around the table of cafeteria he was able to create a very informal, comfortable and cheering space. This way to get the people involved in the classes, the feeling that everybody could bring some value to the community, was what made OCC more than just a language school.

It is interesting when during for example a reading comprehension, if there is an unknown word they try to explain each other the word (in English) coming up with different reasoning. Another example is the student-created material in the computer class. While exploring graphic design with Canva, the teacher proposed to the students to develop their own project where they have the chance to share things about their own country/culture. Everyone welcomed the idea and worked independently on their posters for a week. Then they had the chance to present it to the class and receive some feedback, the posters were printed out and hung to have a physical representation of their work, they were proud of their creations.

The point is not only to educate for language proficiency but seeking to improve student civic engagement or labor market familiarization. That is why, even in less advanced classes were “real-life focus” in order to engage with the language learning with the objective to facilitate the student’s inclusion in the society, the topic that were touched upon where for example employment, asking for direction, ‘at the doctor’, acquire “real-life skills” that would be helpful as the material become a resource more than a source. Once in class we did a reading comprehension about “Thessaloniki” the biggest nearest city. They go there quite often for document-related issues and never stop by after their errands to visit and discover the city. Reading about the history and some tourist attractions made them interested in visiting the place with another perspective.

Since some students were very interested in learning the grammar and have a more “frontal class” we agreed to practice the grammar (not more than) two times a week. I really wanted to avoid the monotony of the unique language-grammar focus. Especially because most of my students had already attended English level 3 more than once. I really wanted to engage with them and to integrate their experiences, background and competencies in class. For example, one day after watching a very touching and empowering Ted Talk about “the danger of a single story”, I asked them to write their own story.

I believe that being creative and discussing some common challenges with the other teachers are good resources to overcome some barriers. One common difficulty was the fact that students within the same class can have quite different levels of English. “Half of the students can obtain their documents and therefore leave Greece quickly. So, new students start coming to class with a level that is necessarily less advanced than the rest. How to proceed? Start the curriculum again from the beginning with each new arrival? That would be unfair to the rest of the class” (OCC teacher). This required giving special attention to some of them or to give extra exercises to those who were more advanced. Every teacher coped with this challenge in a different way, I have decided to use laptops to do the exercises. This allowed them to carry out independently the exercises, sometimes it was even possible to correct them immediately. Dialogue, discussion, peer teaching, games were other teaching methodologies used to overcome such challenges. There are several factors which affect a resettled refugee’s capacity to acquire a second language, these impact psychologically on students’ abilities to devote themselves to studies and concretely plan their future lives (Pötzsch, 2020, p.213). Immigration policies contribute to placing refugees in a ‘limbo’, where they are wasting their time, combined with financial insecurity. Sometimes it is difficult to give priority to language learning over other tasks of integration such as for example bureaucracy issues concerning documents and the asylum procedure. After my class, I had a chance to ask A. if he was ok since he didn’t show up in class. He had a call with his mother who is stranded in Gaza and he is seriously concerned for her safety. Another day in class, one of my students, C. (with the highest level of English), was visibly not concentrated during one listening activity. I asked him if everything was fine and he said that he couldn’t focus since he was worried about the fact that they had not received the monthly assistance and that the following day there was a Job Fair in Thessaloniki that he really didn’t want to miss and that he could not attend without the money for the transport. Since this was a common concern and the listening we were doing was probably too complicated as well, I

decided to stop the activity and we spent the rest of the time talking about this money issue (that was worrying the rest of the students as well). This experience taught me to tailor the teaching resources / materials/ methods based on the students' needs. If an aspect of a student's personal life is impacting their performance in the classroom, broach the topic as I would in any other circumstances.

Once a student told me that the main reason for them to come to OCC was to “escape” from the camp, to interact with people. “Aren't people coming to learn a new language and invest in their education?” I was asking myself. I was at first disappointed by that, but then I reflected on the Maslow pyramid of needs and I placed OCC within the second step of “safety needs”. The need to feel safe (physically, emotionally and mentally) is something that in a vulnerable and distressed situation is “more needed” than the language learning itself. which is more targeted to boost their esteem and achievement. Being separated from loved ones and struggling with intractable immigration authorities accentuate feelings of being between the old and the new homeland. I was flexible if they missed class for some issues or even just because they don't feel motivated or are worried about some other things. They usually told me if they had any issue with why they couldn't come. On the other hand, there were some rules to follow to be enrolled in class, such as attending at least 50% of the times per week. This rule was because the waiting list to come to OCC class was long, and it is fair to give the chance to attend the classes to those really interested in them.

Despite language education may not be the first priority of refugees, the majority of those participating in the classes were very engaged and the entire educational setting, was probably fulfilling other more urgent (and non-linguistic) needs. “It felt very rewarding teaching students who are so eager to learn. I felt that the students really wanted to be there and learn. They eagerly asked questions and listened when we would demonstrate things” (OCC teacher) Restoring their self-confidence, encouraging social interaction in the host country, fostering willingness to make plans for the future and, of course, raising their motivation and interest to communicate in the language of the host country were some of the needs that teachers in these settings were eager to respond to.

5.1.2 “Teaching Culture”

Although the issue of language competence receives dominant attention, literature review and qualitative interviews with refugees impacted communities consistently highlight the

value of a broader cultural knowledge in enabling integration processes and outcomes. This included both refugees' knowledge of national and local procedures, customs and facilities and, though to a lesser extent, non-refugees' knowledge of the circumstances and culture of refugees (Pötzsch, 2020, p.254).

An ex-OCC student reports: "Knowing the country you are entering, the rules, the rights, the political party ruling will make you understand, this will make you find your way in the society and not waste time". He kept adding that acquire this kind of knowledge is both an individual responsibility and a government one, in fact the newcomers have to push themselves to know the country they have come to, but it is not only on them. The responsibility of providing counseling, education, psychologist, layers, people that could help to understand the new society is on the recipient country. When I asked one of the students I interviewed what he would have needed as soon as he came to Greece, he said: "We need some kind of training about how things work here" (E., OCC student).

Talking with M., the responsible of the project coordinating from Spain, I got to know a European project coordinated by Open Cultural Center (started officially on April 1, 2022) called TOCL ("Translation of Cultural Language"). Its aim is to combine culture and language learning to facilitate the inclusion of migrant and refugee communities into local communities. It aims at developing an interactive e-learning platform to allow migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to learn their host country's culture as well as the local language, and thus support their integration in Europe. A very engaging and interesting activity proposed in class was a listening exercise where three people were talking about cultural way to communicate that could lead to misunderstanding (ex: speaking very loudly, keep interrupting the speaker, touch the other person, looking in the eyes while speaking etc.). I discovered that in Somalia, for example, it is never allowed to touch a woman (a friend), for a handshake for example. After this class I had to reflect on my way of expressing/ approaching with the student and to be careful with small gestures (body language). "Give a pat on the back" as a positive reinforcement or "giving a hug", a way of expressing care very common in my country (Italy) could annoy or alienate someone who is not used to these attitudes.

During the same class one of my student shared as follow:

"Culture is different, there is freedom here. in Islamic countries there are a lot of restrictions especially for women, a different way to interact and socialize. Here you talk with a lot of

women, sometimes is difficult to get used to something completely different to what you have grown up with. Sometimes people cannot handle this situation get frustrate”. And he keeps adding “So many people come to Europe with no idea, zero education, no language and interaction skills” (OCC student)

In my opinion, being respectful of the other culture doesn't mean you have to change your way of being (e.g. dressing or interact)

It was the International Women's day, with my students we watched a video promoted by UN Women about the struggle for gender equality. Afterwards we discussed this concept and shared the different roles of women in the country we came from. I was first disappointed inside when for some of my students was perfectly normal that the women is “relegated” to the household and it is obviously the one taking care of the kids, economically maintained by the husband that is the one who provide for the family. I have noticed that the term gender equality was unknown among my students and I really had to carefully choose my words when I explain how in “Europe ” or in Italy things works concerning the role of women in the society. After class the same topic came out with other people from other classes, and through a Sudanese girl who was translating into Arabic we had a very intense conversation about the role of women. The Syrian man I was talking with was extremely jealous of his wife to the point of not accept her to be in spaces with men, he would not like her to attend OCC, not working in a restaurant or in a supermarket. I was asking questions, very curious and eager to get him involved in the conversation, but inside of me I was having a cultural shock.

In turning to the day-to-day negotiations of cultural diversity, at OCC during the period I was there we celebrated Newroz as well as carnival with the children. At OCC we used to have community lunch after the morning meeting with all the international and resident volunteers. Despite the resident volunteer having the same power as the international volunteers, during the last monitoring and evaluation focus group some residents still expressed to feel a form of “discrimination” (they don't feel totally taken into consideration by the short-term volunteers, e.g. when planning the lessons).

But my question is if these efforts were more indicative of a (superficial) celebration of multiculturalism, rather than the bearers of a “real” and more meaningful change. This is a way of getting to know other cultures but even about cultural negotiation and by that I refer to compromise.

The discussion here is: “how much are we learning from “them” and co-constructing the way we live together?”.

Some authors therefore question if teaching culture as a disassociated classroom topic is even possible or if direct observation through cultural immersion in society are better ways to achieve this (Fleming 2003) According to this perspective OCC responsible A. argue that “First of all, people get connected/socialize with people from Europe (Volunteers), the way of speaking, reacting to what we hear. This is the first step to integration, the first barrier to break. Someone from the mountain of Iraq, which have hardly ever seen a European and he comes to Greece he imagine a German person but he doesn’t know how German person reacts to agree or disagree even with the body language. The first step is to visualize the person you are about to meet in the next step of your life.”

The question that I posed to my students in one of the first classes, while we were practicing the conditionals, was: “Would the world be a more peaceful place if we spoke the same language?” Of course, the answer goes far beyond the conditional structure of the question. A nice discussion came up and everybody had the same opinion on the fact that it is not the language or the different culture the reason for war, even though some misunderstanding can come from it. In sum, from the immigrant's perspective there is a willing to keep their cultural identity, it is a form of resistance.

“I enjoyed joking around with the students and getting to know them on a more personal level, their hopes and dreams, their past and struggles. I learned a lot from the time I spent with them” (OCC volunteer). The time spent in class was an amazing moment of sharing, but often the moments when you really have the chance to connect with people is during extra curricular activities, where you create a network that goes even beyond the few months spent at OCC. A very simple act as for example having a picnic next to the camp, where everyone cooks something, is something that have been discussed for so long and has probably been the most divisive topic amongst the volunteers. My last weekend, some volunteers had planned to go to meet the people outside of the camp, spending some time together, making some tea and a fire. My plan was to go, it was the last opportunity to live this experience and interact with them outside of OCC. Until that moment I had decided to “keep a professional distance”, this is because of the code of conduct and some ethical consideration (provided by the organization we were in, as it was a rule to “protect everyone from getting too close and potentially hurt”). Since I have become especially close with two volunteers who were against the idea of spending their

free time with beneficiaries, these opinions influenced me and, as if I didn't want to disappoint them or to lack in coherence, at the end I decided to spend my time only with other volunteers that were going to the beach. According to Migacheva and Tropp (2008), the relationship between intergroup contact and the desire to make cross-group friends was mediated by perceived ingroup norms. Those who still went to the camp had the most enriching experience of interaction and sharing that goes much beyond the closeness during the school hours. I regret, I felt that myself I create a too big barrier between Us and Them, that big to be scared to overcome probably because of the "pressure" to follow the "rules of the association" or getting too close to someone vulnerable. I was myself a victim of the same prejudices I have blamed the society for carrying on.

5.1.3 Prevent the camp residents from being institutionalized.

"Inside the camp everything is white, the same. It is very easy to forget why they are here, why they have risked their life to reach Europe. Not permitting them to forget why they are here, if they forget, if they lose hope, their life will take a bad turn (psychological, alcohol, depression)" (OCC coordinator). Get out from the camp, and "break the wall" is the third contribution of OCC. This point is something that I didn't totally understand at first during the pre-arrival training, but it is related to the fact of making the refugees invisible and relegated to the camp (outside of the city and poorly connected). "If you are in the middle of the fields, you could be in Macedonia or in Germany, make you feel lost. Coming to town, even just by getting off the bus and entering cafeteria reminds you that you are a person. Inside a camp you are thrown into containers with people you don't know and who perhaps speak other languages, the fact of being treated like numbers leads to an identity crisis and a feeling of dehumanization" (OCC volunteer). The routine of coming to class helps a lot to recover that sense of human dignity, it's like going to work every morning.

Cafeteria is an open space, potentially a place to encounter and connect even with locals. This is the link with the society that unfortunately does not really work. Once it happened that a curious man approached a volunteer sitting outside of the entrance of OCC asking what was this place, He could see the sign with written "cafeteria", but it didn't look there was coffee there". It turned out this man was a teacher and that he had some students from the camp in the past and he agreed to come inside and answer some of my questions. We used the translator to understand

each other. I was so happy that a Greek person would enter and breathe a bit of the intercultural vibes of OCC. M., a young guy who is attending Greek school suddenly got involved in the conversation and they exchanged some words in Greek. I felt the distance suddenly became smaller. I strongly agree that interpersonal interactions and getting to know each other will reduce prejudice and xenophobia. This is the argument of Allport and Tropp (2011) in the interpersonal contact theory, that will be elaborated in the discussion chapter below. “The straightforward idea is that successful intergroup contact will provide you with useful knowledge about the outgroup, reduce your anxiety in intergroup encounters, and help you to take the perspective of outgroup members and empathize with their concerns. Such changes, it is hypothesized, will in turn reduce prejudice and enhance the potential for meaningful, trusting cross-group relationships” (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011)

5.2 Integration into society

As much as there may be a sense of community within OCC, a belonging that goes beyond mere language lessons; to pursue integration it is necessary to engage with society, with “the world outside”. This theme “Integration into society” seeks to discover the point of view of the society, what are the opinions of the people regarding the issue of immigration in their small town, how they live with the fact of having a refugee camp a few kilometers away. My interest was to look at quotidian practices of everyday life interaction such as encounters in the street, at the queue of the hospital or simply shopping at the supermarket both from a local and refugee’s point of view.

5.2.1 Greek outreach

I noticed that the interaction between the people from the camp and the society was almost zero. In my mind, the fact of being a small town would have facilitated the interaction between people but apparently the result is the opposite. “The town is a really conservative, small city inhabited by policemen and people who serve the army, not the perfect audience to address as a foreigner in another language. Until March 2023 the linguistic barrier was huge, now we socialize with the plumber, electrician, we start having a circle of people who get to know the organization”. (OCC coordinator).

Despite OCC being located in the main road of the town I had the perception that it was like a “bubble”. The responsible of the project told me that in the past they tried to open up and reaching out. A very concrete and small example was to put outside OCC a blackboard with

some information in Greek such as “Free English class”, “Movie night” to invite them to come inside but it was never so successful.

Another NGO based in Northern Greece, that I went to visit, had this very interesting program called “Greek outreach” which aim at advocating locals, make them aware, since there the camp is away from the center some people don’t even know that hundreds of people are living there. Apparently, the government is succeeding in hiding the refugees, relegating them within the walls.

Despite the lack of interest in interacting, the terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg et al., 1997) has been a useful lens to illustrate how the perception of a threat, especially after 2020 “Evros events” and Turkey’s use of the migrants as an orchestrated invasion (Kostopoulos & Mylonas, 2024), shape the opinion of the people. “Greece must protect the border of EU”, this is a sentence which spontaneously came up from a conversation with an exponent of the municipality. It made me understand how real and close the potential and perceived threat from the Turkish border is. TMT is a psychological theory, not an “action theory“. It proposes that the human inevitable and unpredictable fear of death, and the self preservation instinct, is managed “by clinging to salient beliefs and values that are central to their internalized worldview. Research has shown that reminders of mortality often intensify derogation of out-group members” (Weise et al., 2011). This affects attitudes towards immigrants: due to this mechanism, immigrants may be perceived as a physical threat (invasion), or a threat to the culture and unity of the in-group, and thus questioning their beliefs and cultural unity (fear of “the Muslims” as a category and an identity is clearly an example of this).

5.2.2 Civic Integration

Speaking with locals one common point they were raising was the fact that “the refugees don’t really want to learn Greek and Greek customs”, as reported in the following quotation of a member of the Municipality: “Greece is used as a path, they don’t want to stay”. This is intended as a sort of disrespect for the receiving society and its norms.

This aspect refers to the so-called “civic integration” by Miller (2016) where people coming to share a set of principles and norms “it extends from simple behavioral rules like queuing for cinema tickets, to more complex issues such as how to handle a dispute that might arise in a neighborhood about the use of a common facility like a hall or a public park”. A number of

European countries, including Austria, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands, have in the last decade introduced the idea of “integration contracts” for newly arrived immigrants that do impose requirements on the immigrants themselves. These, however, relate primarily to civic rather than to social integration. They typically require immigrants to attend language classes if they are not already competent in the language of the host society and also to take classes designed to promote knowledge of the host society and its civic values (Miller, 2016). On the one hand this could be seen as an element of paternalism while on the other hand it is seen as “equip immigrants with the linguistic, social, and political skills that will enable them to take full advantage of the society they are joining” (Miller, 2017).

Will Kymlicka claims that “immigrants cannot expect to reproduce their own “societal culture” in the country they have joined”, e.g. if you come to Greece and your future would be in Greece, you would better learn Greek since nobody would learn Afghan. On the other hand “the rules of the receiving society must adjust in certain ways to accommodate the religious beliefs or ethnic practices of migrants”. It is the difference between private and public culture. On one side stands the culture of the wider society, expressed in its language, its symbols, and its institutions: these must be common property, since there can only be one national flag or national legislature. On the other side, there is room for many different forms of private culture, different religions, different forms of art and literature, different cuisines, and so forth. Multiculturalism is a matter of showing respect for, or perhaps even celebrating, these differences. (Miller, 2017) This is how it works on the theory, but in the reality the attitudes towards the integration of refugees mirrors these quotes: “it is not possible since the culture and the religion is too different”. “Culture is the problem, people from middle east you cannot agree with them, the difference is too big” (conversation with a locals).

There are different approaches to this civil integration scheme. The first one stresses insisting on migrants taking over the rules of the receiving country. E.g. If you come to Norway, boys and girls are equal, we all have the freedom to dress as we want and we drink alcohol: “deal with it!”. or the rule of removing the niqab if you want to work in a shop since we need to see the facial gesture to understand each other and communicate. The second way to approach refugees is in a host/guest understanding where it is polite to learn the custom of our guest, that will enrich us or morally help us. Finally, the option is to learn from one another, this will enrich both parts and make it easier for the migrant to adapt to the new society (which hopefully will be their own new one).

When I asked people how do they cope with the current migrant situation they answered that at first they have been volunteering and helping out at Eidomeni, “for me it is not a problem, but... now they are too many, the town is too small for so many refugees” The first wave was more Syrians while the second more of people from Afghanistan, one of the previous coordinator told me that she heard many comments towards Afghan people like “In Syria they have a war but afghani, why are they coming?” Sometimes people move away from the dramatic consequences of natural disasters, famine or extreme poverty, they are called economic or forced migrants. People who leave their countries for these reasons are usually not considered refugees under international law. Unlike refugees, migrants are not persecuted in their own country and can return home safely. That is why some people don’t understand why they are coming and thus being more intolerant towards their presence.

5.2.3 Employment

I now turn to another practical and crucial point related with the integration of migrant students within the society: namely, employment. As Maslow in his hierarchy of needs explains, the second step “safety” includes economic safety, those which comes from having an income. Although some families are not at all poor (as we usually think), the majority of the people in the camp face economic hardships, a very low percentage during the time I was there were able to find employment (in low-wage work), and those you could finally find one they would drop out from school. Work is a very key point of integration and a feeling of belonging and achievement. I remember H., the handiest person that I ever knew. He has been spending many years in Greece and have collected several work experiences as a carpenter. He was saying “I would go to work even for free. I cannot stay with do nothing”. Many of my students were complaining about the fact that finding a job in Greece is difficult, if you manage to get one it will probably be through illegal channels (intermediaries) and with a very low salary.

“OCC helps them to create and print their CV and cover letter, how to navigate the platform to apply for job, in the past we provided a public service map to facilitate them in their daily life, in order to be able to find the basic services such as the post office, the bank, the hospital, a place to print documents”(OCC coordinator).

Since ‘job hunting’ is not an OCC prerogative, we were sharing with them some links where some job offers were published but without assisting them throughout the application. OCC (as much as possible) serves as a link, informing the students about some opportunity as for example

the job fair organized SolidarityNow and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, in Thessaloniki. A part of that, unfortunately OCC doesn't have direct contacts with suitable labor market actors .

Due to limited spaces and resources OCC doesn't have the strength to organize workshops (where people could actually do, build, learn a job or share their competences with the community to gain something "expendable"). It was interesting to see another NGO, in Ioannina, where the activities are carried out in a very spacious old industrial-style warehouse, different kinds of workshops were set up in every corner (barber shop, bike space, carpentry, beauty shop, sewing, children's corner, computer area) and a relatively small kitchen where both volunteers and resident volunteers cook for up to 100 people a day. Outside they had a vegetable garden, a bookcase installed inside a van, a space for recording audio content and a climbing gym. Their concept was to develop passions, practice professions and learn skills.

More than once, I heard saying: "they are lazy, they don't really want to work", without considering that the forms of employment migrants were pushed into were scarce, with little salary and working conditions most of the time closed to exploitation (in agriculture, or to install solar panels).

Three of my students got a job in a hotel located in a tourist beach area. I was so happy for them but at first I couldn't understand why C. was not that "excited".

- Me: "Aren't you happy?"
- C.: "I am grateful for the opportunity but at the same time "not proud" of myself.

Talking with my colleague in charge of the CV hub she told me that C. has one of the best CV she has done so far, he has a background in academia and before leaving he was the director of a school. Shibao Guo (2009) argues that prevailing attitudes towards difference lie at the root of the "difficulties" in recognizing migrants' educational qualifications and professional experiences. He posits that "difference" is still often equated with "deficiency", which renders the knowledge and expertise of migrant professionals, particularly those from non-Western countries, inferior, and hence invalid.

One of the questions I used to ask to the refugee category of informants was: "did you have any kind of interaction with the locals? If yes, where? Were they positive or negative memories?" I sadly heard the same story more than once. There is a quite big supermarket situated halfway

between town and the camp of Nea Kavala. The prices are modest and due to its accessible location for the people of the camp it is frequented by locals and refugees. To be noted that the food provision they receive (if they are entitled to it) doesn't include cooking oil, onions, spices or other basic ingredients. The encounters with the locals happen outside of the supermarket, if an elderly person is loading groceries into the car, young boys from the camp have offered to help. The response is always a reluctant refusal. Those guys explained me that in their culture (African), help an older person is a very common sign of respect. In this case, the lack of trust and fear of the unknown, together with the color of the skin contribute to labeling the people of the camp as someone to fear or avoid. Another clear example of this discrimination and categorization comes from the experience of young girl from Afghanistan, in fact she told me that she was asked to leave her personal bag at the entrance of the supermarket, fearing that she could steal from the shop. I have never felt uncomfortable walking in the streets, I have never felt discriminate for the fact of being a foreigner. However, one of the long term volunteer of OCC from Spain had a very different experience, that is very relevant to understand the stigma that target the people from the camp. She has beautiful Mediterranean traits, with large dark eyes and olive complexion. Probably due to her appearance, in more than one occasion she has been targeted as “one from the camp” and experienced on her skin a different treatment. Once she went for a coffee, she was welcomed by a weird look and the sentence “the coffee costs 2 Euro, eh”, the person told her to go and drink the coffee outside and since she would smoke there was no problem for her to have it outside. After thirty minutes the guy of the shop, without asking for permission took a chair and sat with her at the table outside. “How long have you been living in the camp?” After her answering that she doesn’t live in the camp, surprised he asked her where was she from. When he understood she is from Spain, he completed changes his attitude, he offered her a pastry and insisted on paying for the coffee. One more time she was sent alone to exchange a 20 euro note into two ten’s banknotes. Three men that were seated at the bar suddenly stopped her, asked what she was doing and they put her hands behind her back. She tried to explain that she works for the NGO and she was sent by the organization to exchange the money for smaller cash. They were

not trusting her and forced her to get into the car and get her document to prove she is Spanish and she volunteer for OCC.

These few example cannot generalize a some people showed solidarity. One girl came to devolve some toys, the teacher stopped by OCC asking for information.

During my data collection period I got the chance to introduce myself as a researcher and volunteer of OCC to the Municipality of the town. I was interested in noticing what was their perspective on immigration, how they were dealing with the nearby refugee camp. When I asked if the Municipality would have agreed to some activity in town to create opportunities of exchange between local and refugee kids he said that the responsibility for every choice is on the minister of migration. I could grasp the lack of communication and cooperation between NGO's and municipality (to the extent of not being aware of the NGO actually working on the field) and that some assumptions foment accusatory feelings such as “since they come without documents, we don’t know who is who, they could be criminals”.

In light of this lack of communication, it was interesting to discover the EMBRACE project (by Second Tree, NGO) which brings together local decision-makers (municipalities, local authorities, councils etc.) and newcomers (refugees, asylum seekers, migrants) to build skills in both groups and help them work collaboratively on solutions to challenges facing the community.

5.2.4 Public School

Even though public education for kids, from 4 to 15 years old, is a right and a duty, they often prefer to join the center or “attend public school in the early afternoon when there are no Greek students anymore” (OCC resident volunteer). This is something that came up during the last monitoring and evaluation assessment with the parents as well, they report racism and interest in learning English rather than Greek. Nevertheless, I consider vitally important that children relate to peers who come from a social context that is different from the one they currently find themselves. I was interested in knowing how kids (refugees and Greek) interact within the public school setting, in an environment more formal than OCC and where they are actually together with Greek peers.

“Some of them they hug each other, they are friends”, “I had a school mate from the camp, he only came once”, “we use Google Translate to communicate”, these are some information I could write down talking with student, teacher or Greek worker in school. The most common

thing that I have heard is: “they are not willing to learn Greek, they are not here to stay”. This is a statement that has validity since the vast majority, not to say all the people, I have met are in Greece just passing through. Learning the language of a country that you intend to leave could be considered useless. But regarding the kids at school where they have the responsibility/opportunity to go to school, learning Greek language could make the integration process easier. One day around 13:00, I was having a coffee at a friend's cafeteria waiting to talk to his mother who is working in the canteen of one school in town. While I was there, the director of the same school passed by and I had the chance to ask her some questions about the refugee kids that are in her school. I was expecting her to be more involved with this topic or probably I was expecting the public school to be more ready to welcome these kids with a special plan or training. The conversation we had was short, because of the language barrier I had to wait for my friend to translate into Spanish for me. She told me that in her school there are 20 students from the camp enrolled but only 6/7 of them actually join the class, that the parents never visited the school and that they attend a different class (which belong to the Zone of Educational Priorities' (ZEP) program operated by the Ministry of Education.) where they learn Greek in a special class.

I had the lucky chance to get in touch with a guy, who is currently in Germany, who spent 7 years with his family in Greece since they got 3 rejections. “Struggling a lot, I have managed to complete high school. At the beginning I couldn't understand anything, I was the only one from the camp going to school and I wanted to give up. I hate it. Lots of people motivated and convinced me to stay, I was so bored in the camp anyways. Now I am so glad that I am in Germany and I just have to learn the language and not go to school.”

5.2.5 Build bridges, not walls

Every Tuesday with eagles was park day. It was only ten minutes walking distance, and most of the time it was empty. I have been told that in summer some local kids stay and play all together. I think this is the most beautiful and at the same time more normal thing about integration. Kids just play together, no matter the origins, no matter the language. It can sound naive, but this is exactly the kind of gesture I was trying to observe. One day, on the same way to the football pitch, some elderly people were sitting outside on some plastic chair, when a group of twenty kids shouting and teasing each other passed in front, their attention could not but be captured.

some children instinctively waved out their arms and received another wave and a smile in return. This is a small sign which however has a great effect against what we called “institutionalization”, against the invisibilizing aim of the government.

The camp is surrounded by a big concrete fence with a huge iron gate with turnstiles, the lights (like the one of a stadium) keep turned on all night. How does building a wall surrounding a refugee camp benefit integration into the local community? What is the reason for this architectural structure? Was it designed to protect who? It looks more like a detention center, especially since March 2024 when a new system of registration was implemented. The security check is strict in fact As one of the informants said every time they go in or out of the camp they have to “show the ID, scan the card, fingerprint, security cameras. It doesn’t matter if you leave for one second or for a year, they scan everything” (OCC student). Other informants added “it is like being in prison”, “sometimes they cannot find in the list some middle eastern names, they are impatient and yell a lot”. All the people I talked to complained about the fact that to get a paper signed it takes an unreasonable time, “come back tomorrow” they always say. The location of the camp is already an obstacle to mobility, a geographical barrier that makes it hard for people to lead normal life. One of the OCC coordinators“ describes the current conditions as intentional: a deliberate attempt on behalf of EU and Greek authorities to create a so-called hostile environment to deter more people from seeking asylum in Europe”.

6.0. Summary and discussion of findings.

In a world where “media and political responses to Europe’s recent ‘refugee crisis’ often portray refugees as either criminal invaders or vulnerable victims, in both cases, as inherently ‘Other’ (Fontana & Pasic, 2023); the need for interculturalism and respect for diversity is something we must first educate ourselves to. The questions that have driven my research are: “How does OCC’s informal education’s program contribute to integration of refugees? and “What are the experiences of social integration for the participants of OCC?”. In order to find answers to these questions, I have tried to assess how integration is conceived and practically implemented in a refugee education center in a small town in Northern Greece, how OCC provide to give tools to be familiar with the European environment and/or to achieve a feeling of belonging to the

community. This chapter summarizes, and thus interprets, the empirical findings (chapter 5) and then discusses them in light of, inter alia, some structural problems. I will be guided by the social-psychological knowledge of processes involved in intergroup relations. The discussion will contribute to a deeper understanding of the cognitive, motivational and affective aspects of intergroup conflict and bias, as well as the conditions under which in-group bias may be transformed into intergroup prejudice and discrimination. Contending approaches on how to structure intergroup contact to reduce intergroup prejudice will be examined.

The findings tell us that OCC contributes to integration in different ways. First of all, providing English classes focus on making the students able to communicate, far from being perfect but still facilitating the basic minimum of communicative skills. The informal education setting allows volunteers to shape their classes according to the students needs, the curriculum is flexible. Secondly, OCC's interaction between volunteers and refugees is a way to grasp cultural differences. OCC is a "smooth landing" in Europe, a place where you start seeing the European customs and traditions and how society works. Cafeteria is a safe space where the people are taken into consideration as individual and to "recover the human dignity". The last point that has been raised is the less visible contribution, namely "avoid refugees to be institutionalized". This relates to the fact that the OCC brings people to the project with the bus, which makes them visible to the society. It becomes a political act of resistance to a structure that tends to isolate refugees from the surrounding European/ Greek society.

Regarding the integration within the society, it is to be said that Greece is a transit country, people on the move get stuck there to claim their asylum but are willing to go elsewhere. On the other side locals are parochial, and the town is a smaller and mentally closed reality that makes integration even more complicated. Talking with locals about refugees I have often come across the expression "they are lazy", however this bias must consider the structural problem such as poor job opportunities and financial crisis that Greece is going through. I have been sadly surprised to notice that interactions between locals and refugees are limited, and so the integration while the exchange between people takes place in the micro environment of the NGOs, schools and local associations. However refugees feel a sense of belonging and integration to OCC community, that represents for them the bridge to EU, as well as providing the tools to "get integrated". It is interesting to use Maslow (1954) Pyramid of Needs (see appendix) to assess the student's needs. While they are on the move, they often don't even see

recognized the ‘physiological needs’, in the hotspot the situation improves but still at a very minimum level, as well as in the long-term accommodation camps “there’s nothing to do, we just wake up, eat and sleep”. The second layer is the one where they start to settle and look for employment in order to find the so called ‘safety needs’. OCC relies on another NGO to provide free legal assistance to get information about how to navigate the complex asylum procedure (a topic which generates much anxiety and stress). I believe that OCC language and community center starts playing a role from the third layer of needs namely ‘love and belonging’. Here is where people socialize and feel part of the community. People get emotionally attached to the place that is giving a sort of psychological support (even just interacting). Creating a safe space is the essential requirement for learning, but often the two inferior levels of needs are not satisfied when people find themselves in a situation of distress or isolation.

The local attitudes towards refugees have changed over time. At first people were more empathic and showing solidarity to those who are fleeing from war, but since March 2020, when thousands of refugees tried to pass from Turkey to Greece through Evros, and Greek government used the words *invasion* and *hybrid war* on behalf of Turkey, the local community started feeling under threat. I have interpreted this shift with the lens of Terror Management Theory (TMT) (Pyszczynski, Greenberg & Solomon, 1997), which hypothesizes the need to ward off existential anxiety (reminder of death) by protecting cultural values from the symbolic threat posed by dissimilar others, in this case the undocumented migrants. TMT premise that people need shared cultural worldviews that provide a sense of meaning and value to their lives, I have noted and perceived the negative attitude and worries of locals especially when migrants were viewed as threats to undermine the integrity of host cultural practices such as language and religious customs (Bassett & Connelly, 2011). Talking to people, many references alluded to the fact that refugees were treated with suspicion because of their religion (and the concern about some cemeteries and deconsecrated churches being damaged) and being annoyed by simple things such as the music they listen to or the food they eat. I believe that this is the result of the fear that the cultures of migrants will replace the local ones, questioning the system of values and habits. I observed a high degree of uncertainty and “nerve” among many of my interviewees: the isolation (and the feeling of being stuck) of the refugees and the camp itself created a strong boundary between the refugee as a group, and the rest of society, into which they are supposed to integrate. Moreover, every person I have talked to showed stress and anxiety due to the long

legal procedure, harsh interviews with the social service, waiting time under uncertainty, and having to share just a few meters square with a number of other people that at first you don't know. "How can you think that you will be integrated when for example, you take your documents and suddenly the site manager says that you have to leave, and nobody has ever spoken to you about how you find a job here or how you find the house. OK, there are some projects, for example from IOM it was the only official project for integration, let's say, but it was not working to be honest." (OCC coordinator)

According to Fontana and Pasic, "Inadequate living conditions often exacerbate power imbalances and minimize people's sense of agency. In such environments, suspicion, rather than trust, dominates interactions among newcomers, and between newcomers and humanitarian workers" (Fontana & Pasic, 2023).

Further, the fact that the refugees' only link to society through OCC volunteers, make this interaction highly sensitive and challenging. Now, this is an extreme example of hierarchy and power imbalances that shows how refugees are forced to subordinate to a very uncertain fate in Europe. To me, a way to untangle these borderline considerations (aka interaction with the refugees), is to see the relationship in a professional perspective (top- down), or in a more personal/emotional perspective (horizontal, "peer-to-peer"). These different approaches change the labels that we stick on the actors from teacher/student, humanitarian worker/beneficiary (service provider and client) to a relationship where the power imbalances are rejected. From one side, someone see the work with refugees (albeit as a volunteer) as a job and therefore with some working codes to protect yourself and others. E.g. never immerse yourself too much in the work environment, or going back to the workplace in your free time. This perspective compare the work with refugees to the one of a doctor with his patients, as teacher, as an educator or social worker, anyone who has a personal relationship with people. This point of view argues that there must be a professional relationship between service provider and the beneficiaries, a proper training to the workers to understand the code of conduct, the cultural differences and to avoid confusing work with friendship and sociality. E.g. Partying with alcohol and girls could be a great trauma and a source of misunderstanding on the part of those who come from different cultures. Since the humanitarian worker could almost be the only interlocutors of the beneficiaries, this could lead to a distorted (or partial) image of what is the real society (vs the non-place/ fake society that is OCC or the camp, a place that does not have many cultural roots, apart from those that the volunteers bring). On the other side: Refugees Are People (RAP)

approach, led by Second Tree (NGO) aim to develop a culture in which every person is seen both as a part of the general camp community and a unique individual, rather than as a representative of a subgroup (Syrian or Afghan, refugee or humanitarian worker, Muslim or Christian). Even when used with the intention to protect or support members of a specific group, these labels risk justifying cultural stereotypes and enabling patronizing (all refugees are victims/vulnerable) or romanticizing (all refugees are heroes) attitudes” (Fontana & Pasic, 2023). Both labels see the person only through their experience of fleeing war, reducing the complex individuals identities to a single one, making them “the other” (<https://secondtree.org/our-model/>). This discourse can be theoretically framed within the social identity theory where being a refugee is seen a group identity thus generalized and stereotyped rather than the condition they are in. These depictions/labels lead to inherent biases or prejudices that, according to Intergroup Contact Theory “*may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals*” (Allport, 1954, p. 281) or in other words when engaging with refugees as unique individuals with agency, as it happens in OCC. Due to the fact, as described in the chapter “integration into the society”, that there is a minimal interactions, “contact”, between the people of the camp and the locals, I could not really prove that Allport hypothesis is true and that the increase in interaction will lead to the reduction of prejudice. But I will rely on my autoethnography, aka my experience as a volunteer, to turn the gaze inwards and start looking at the smaller scale, the refugee volunteer/teacher relationship. “The straightforward idea is that successful intergroup contact will provide you with useful knowledge about the outgroup, reduce your anxiety in intergroup encounters, and help you to take the perspective of outgroup members and empathize with their concerns. Such changes, it is hypothesized, will in turn reduce prejudice and enhance the potential for meaningful, trusting cross-group relationships”.

In such a process, the term “integration” becomes a proxy and a legitimization of a process of assimilation. This is a one-way process with two points of view such as those who try to implement it and the person who needs to be integrated. I will discuss, as follows, how integration could be considered a tool for neo colonialism. When I started thinking at my project, I had a “naive” conception of integration that was achieved when multicultural society could be able to accept each other diversities and live peacefully, but as soon as I started diving into the academic materials and reflect on my role as a white European volunteer, I started to critically think about the controversial concept of integration and its deep colonial aspect, in the sense that

it involves situating individuals within a particular context and mandating their adherence to societal norms. The term "integration" often carries connotations of imperialistic imposition upon external cultures seeking refuge or assistance, rooted in the Eurocentric narrative of societal superiority. This paradigm portrays such cultures as inherently deficient or incapable, necessitating their assimilation into the dominant Western framework to prevent marginalization or ineffectiveness. While integration is presented as a more benign alternative to relegating these populations to subaltern status within urban centers, it nonetheless perpetuates a form of coercion, underpinned by imperialist and colonialist ideologies. This process mandates adherence to European norms of conduct, language, and vocational skills, effectively transforming individuals into compliant cogs within the machinery of industrial society. Ultimately, integration emerges as a top-down imposition, enforcing conformity to societal norms upon newcomers, relegating them to functional roles within the established order.

7 Conclusion

I could have stayed home and kept reading the news about the “flow of immigrants”, “the humanitarian crisis” but I wanted to see with my eyes the reality of the situation. I wanted to give names to the people that are generally targeted as ‘Them’, the refugees. I could do that because for me moving in Europe is safe, free from border control and easy to travel. The last evening at OCC, the day ended with an orange and pink sunset, a weird feeling of nostalgia and a nice walk in town with some volunteers and a couple of students. One of them, E., told me: “in my country we say: when you go to visit someone, it is more about the face he puts on than the food he offers”. As Warriner’s (2007) study notes, simply completing an integration course that is primarily language acquisition focused, provided students with few possibilities for long-term social advancement, economic stability, or educational opportunity; but the main goal of OCC, according to me, is exactly about the “face” that E. was talking about, the way of being received in Europe. OCC is placed in a moment of transition into a society you know nothing about (habits, clothes, how they approach, physical contact and European behavioral logic) and it helps to 'smooth landing' into the Western perspective.

“Lifestyle is completely different. People need to adapt. I am still trying. Now I need to become German, a month ago I was trying to become Greek, it takes time to become natural”. This statement, from an ex OCC student that is now living in Germany after seven years stacked in

Greece, remind me to Sara Ahmed in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012, p.156) “the pressure not to assert your culture is lived as a demand to pass and integrate, not necessarily to become white but by being more alike”. The question is: does social inclusion result in a suppression of identity? It is a significant example of problematic *civic integrationism*, which at times resembles assimilationism where to be accepted to be part of the society you need to look alike and almost forget your origins.

There is an ethical debate on how much you can leave your cultural roots behind when you arrive in Europe, how much you have to adapt to the place you go if you want to be integrated and how much responsibility lies with you or the place that welcomes you to be open to your roots. The answer probably lies in a matter of tolerance, where the minority doesn't have to blend and become invisible but still needs to adapt to the new society.

This category of people, on the move, have a strong impact on the society of arrival, they will generate relationship both among themselves and with the host society in how they inhabit social space, how they contribute to the economy and so on. “They are active subjects that create their space in the host community, highlighting with their movement and presence contradictions deeply rooted in Western societies. In order to restore social justice, the whole political and social space of our European societies needs to be rethought, together with people on the move, sharing knowledge, ideas and perspectives” (Bonfanti, 2022) as it is stated by the Embrace Project (Second Tree) as well.

I have focused on one specific aspect of integration that is education. I tried to evaluate how the work conducted by OCC with their informal education activities help to promote integration. Despite Education not being the first needs of people on the move, it is still a pivotal point when it comes to knowing the language spoken by the hosting country or being able to communicate in English and eventually for job hunting.

The living condition and legal challenges that have been addressed from my interviews, shows a negative impact on the well-being of the people and on the integration process. The camp and the hotspot system are not a solution; putting people in a prolonged displacement in a container or a tent, as also expressed by some of the interviewees, lowers their self-perception as human beings, and it is an act of violence. (Bonfanti, 2022) To this regard, OCC helps to avoid people from being ‘institutionalized’, in other words to make them visible; this happens everyday when the bus goes to the camp to pick them up to come to the center, hanging around with other people

remind them of being human and fulfils the psychological needs of belonging of which Maslow (1954) speaks.

I found a discrepancy between inclusion into the OCC and inclusion into the wider society. I have realized that offering language training and a few workshops on how to find a job on some platforms are insufficient institutional measures for inclusion “beyond the school walls”. More could be done to address the structural barriers and “include a political mandate in challenging and collectively addressing such barriers” (Adams, Dominelli & Payne 2002). OCC could be more mediator/ facilitator of engagement with the local society, the idea of the photo exhibition open to everyone at the end of the photography course can be an example of how to engage the local population. OCC could be the promoter of practical opportunity for refugees, as for example the job fair, in order to address the lack of employment.

The integration facilitated by OCC pertains primarily to the adoption of European customs. This process unfolds through the observation of interactions between European volunteers and the nuances of verbal and non-verbal communication, fostering a gradual acclimatization to a new societal milieu devoid of formal instructional settings. This approach aims to mitigate feelings of displacement and unfamiliarity experienced by newcomers, ensuring a smoother transition into their new environment. OCC contributes to create dynamics of exchange between different cultures of refugees/migrants, creates an understanding of how beautiful differences are, and continue to cultivate them instead of having as a model, according to which "we teach them how to live".

During my fieldwork, where I was teaching English at OCC a part of collecting data for this project, I have been questioning myself a lot regarding my role of white European volunteer and the subsequent power imbalance of the “help relationship”. I have been trying to criticize the normative way of seeing humanitarian work, in fact, it frequently results in placing the asylum seekers in a position of dependence (expected to receive assistance) and subordination respect the aid provider. Conversely, equipping asylum seekers with essential tools (primarily information regarding their rights and the legal framework they encounter) can foster a more equitable relationship. This approach shifts the dynamic towards empowerment, enabling asylum seekers to comprehend the system they are navigating and its intricacies, thereby fostering a relationship based on mutual

understanding and agency. I argue that the OCC contributes to this second vision of understanding humanitarian work.

7.1 Study contribution and future research:

This study contributes to practical discourses and methodologies on the social inclusion of adult migrants not only within the fields of education and critical social work but also beyond them in contexts where societies engage with or seek to “manage” the migrant Other. (Potzl, 2020, p. 279)

It would be interesting to do further research on the complex interplay between migration and security. As suggested by Roberta Altin (2017), only by recovering the ethnographic approach can we give more space to migrants and the specificity of contexts, lowering subjects and actions into history, without falling into the trap of the perennial emergency that wants to standardize all processes. Research on refugees must be used for refugees, combining research and action in the field, placing anthropologists with the dual imperative of promoting academic knowledge and ethical action in a synergistic and non-disjunctive manner.

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APPENDIX

These are some rules I had in mind when I started interviewing people. I have got this line guide by a previous volunteer of OCC that was by then writing reports about violence at the border.

1. Establish a relationship of trust, sometimes it was them who started spontaneously sharing things
2. if a woman doesn't speak english, using a women translator, will make her feel more comfortable and speak freely
3. be in a space where they can feel comfortable, without many people around. Reassure them about the fact that nothing of what they will share will be published with their names. Everything they will share can be deleted if they don't want it to be used as evidence.
4. If they want to share about the trip, to avoid them spiraling and going through the trauma again, ask very specific questions using time as a reference ex: when was when you arrived? Summer? Winter? Which day? And conduct all the interview following this timeline
5. Stop the interview if I notice the interviewee to be troubled or stressed, nobody has to feel bad. Ex: ask myself for a break.
6. Do not ask leading questions. Ex: are the conditions at the camp bad? Ask rather: how is the camp? Could you describe it? Everything they say has to be their opinion and not led by me.
7. Be clear about for what I use the interview and explain in a simple way for what I will use their data.
8. Reassure them about the fact they will not be "persecuted" for what they say.

9. To have clear and detailed declarations it is useful to make myself an example. Ex: this morning I woke up early, I had breakfast and I was with two other people etc. focused on what I wanted to emphasize.
10. Explain well what I want from them.
11. Be careful to ask questions about how they feel emotionally in order to avoid very emotional reactions.
12. Every time I ask something, I always make it clear to them to answer if they want, not to feel obliged to answer.
13. Use simple words and be available.

Consent Form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project “*The Integration of refugees*”?

Purpose of the project

You are invited to participate in a research project where the main purpose is to understand whether education contributes to integration and, if yes, how. On the other hand the aim is to investigate which are the main challenges that refugees face when it comes to integration in different aspects of society such as job seek. *This project is part of my Master Thesis project, and data collected will be used for no other reasons.*

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

UiT (The Arctic University of Norway) is responsible for the project (data controller).

Why are you being asked to participate?

Sample are mainly the people (refugees) which join OCC (Open Cultural Center), those who have been living at the camp for longer time and speak better English will be selected for individual interview. There is no a schedule number of participants since a part of interviews, of data are going to be collected trough participant observation. Another sample are the volunteers/coordinators who work at OCC (that it is why you are receiving this inquiry), since their experience could facilitate the understanding of some cultural differences etc.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you answer some informal questions about your experience at the centre related to the topic of integration. It will take approx. 30 minutes. The interview includes questions about how education helps the refugees to integrate and how do they cope in

class. For example which are the more helpful skill they can develop in class or their ability to interact with other people etc. Your answers will be recorded »

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).

- *My supervisor, in connection with the institution responsible for the project, will have access to the personal data.*
- *«I will store your interview with your name in my personal computer where nobody else have access.*

Participants will not be recognizable in publications since the results of the thesis will be collective and in the transcription of the Interview I will not indicate the names. If relevant to the overall argument, the occupation will be published.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The planned end date of the project is *June 2024*. *By then personal data, including any digital recordings, will be deleted as a data itself and will only be included in the results of the thesis.*

At the end of the project no personal data will be stored.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with *UiT*, The Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Chiara Ruggeri (cru030@uit.no) via my Vidar Vambheim (vidar.vambheim@uit.no)(*Supervisor*)
- Our Data Protection Officer: Annikken Steinbakk Email: personvernombud@uit.no
Phone: 00 47 776 46 153 Cell: 00 47 957 30030

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt, contact:

- email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,
Ruggeri Chiara

I have received and understood information about the project *The Integration of Refugee* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in *interview*
- to participate in *participant observation*

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

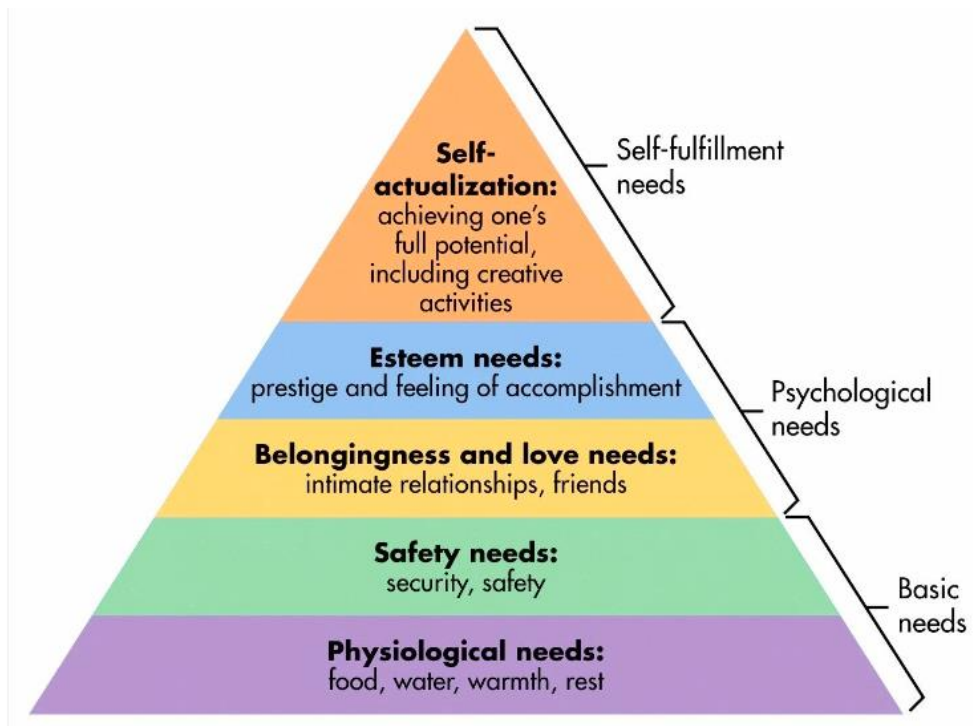
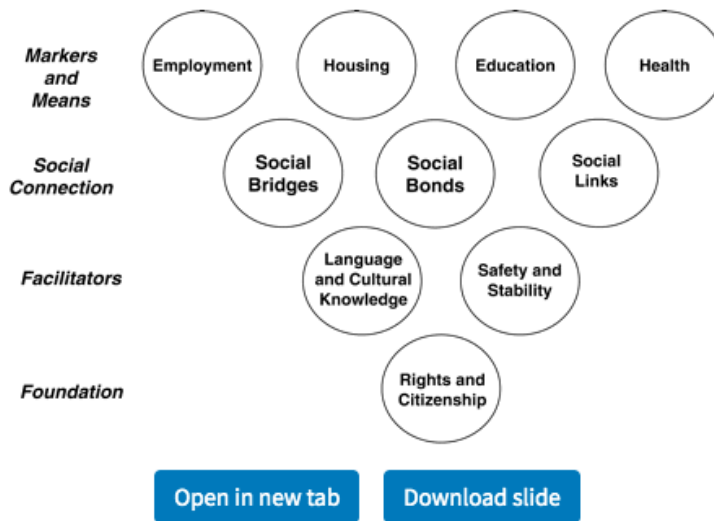


Image from: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Figure 1



A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration

Figure 1 A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration

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