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Doing action research with young migrants in vulnerable conditions

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Participatory action research (PAR) epistemologically acknowledges the value of incorporating the people whose experiences are being studied in the research endeavour, recognizing them as rightful experts in their own experiential challenges. By incorporating the voices of research participants, it is hoped that the scientific models or theoretical perspectives that arise from PAR will have a better fit with reality and be superiorly equipped to inform best practices and policies; by empowering them, we ultimately strive to make a positive impact on people's lives. In recent years, PAR has become especially relevant in the field of migration studies to incorporate the voices of and "empower" research participants in their integration endeavours, especially when the groups under study are considered as experiencing conditions of vulnerability. Within PAR, peer and art-based research are salient illustrations of such an epistemological approach. By welcoming in the research or art endeavours the active contribution of people from the communities being studied, both methodologies acknowledge their expertise concerning their own lived experiences by attributing them a new epistemological positionality that legitimizes their contribution in the processes of constructing meaning and interpreting information. The present working paper presents contributions to the incorporation of peer researchers and the use of art-based methods in migration research drawn from the H2020 MIMY project (EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions), hoping to further contribute to existing literature on Participatory Action Research by exploring its complexities, limitations but also opportunities and advantages. The main goal of MIMY as an EU-funded project was to study and help improve the situation of young migrants coming from third countries in vulnerable conditions throughout Europe. This working paper presents contributions from the H2020 MIMY project partners on the use of PAR methodologies. After an introduction to the use of PAR, a first section will focus on Peer Research and a second section on Art-based events. The first section, reserved to Peer Research, encompasses three chapters: the first focuses on the incorporation of Peer Researchers in the MIMY project (Chapter 1), the second explores the role of Peer Researchers when studying integration through an intergenerational lens (Chapter 2), the third addresses the ethical implications of Peer Research (Chapter 3). The second section, on Art-based events, is also composed of three chapters: the first focusing on the use of LEGO© Serious Play© as an empowering tool for the integration of young migrants (Chapter 1); the second presenting Photovoice as an instrument to explore migrant integration in local communities (Chapter 2); the third also exploring the use of Photovoice with young migrants in vulnerable conditions in Romania (Chapter 3). The working paper ends with a concluding chapter on the theoretical, methodological and ethical challenges of using PAR.

Keywords: Methods, Participatory Action Research, Peer research, Art-based Events, Migration, Youth, Integration

Introduction: Peer and Art-based Research as Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) epistemologically acknowledges the value of bringing the people whose experiences are being studied to the forefront of the research endeavour, recognizing them as rightful experts in their own experiential challenges. In that way and despite known risks and limitations (e.g. Mata-Codesal, 2020), it is hoped that the scientific models or theoretical perspectives that arise from PAR will have a better fit with reality and thus be of superior value in tackling immediate problems and informing best practices and policies. Such research endeavours, in which the people concerned actively participate, are usually also oriented to improve the participants' practices and living contexts (e.g. Kemmis et al., 2014). In the context of a noticeable move towards post-colonial approaches and methodologies, a renewed attention has been given to PAR as an important tool to bring about more horizontally driven ways of knowledge construction as a result of a collaborative endeavour of both researchers and research participants. Within PAR, peer and art-based research are salient illustrations of such an epistemological approach. By welcoming in the research or art endeavours the active contribution of people from the communities being studied, both methodologies acknowledge their expertise concerning their own lived experiences by acknowledging them a new epistemological positionality that legitimizes their contribution in the processes of constructing meaning and interpreting information (Temple, 2002).

Peer research. Peer research as an action research methodology aims to profit from the expertise of the research participants in the actual object of study, their own lived experiences. Accordingly, they are given a central role in the research endeavour and recognized as co-constructors of knowledge. In this sense, peer researchers, using their personal experiences and understanding of the context in which they live, provide valuable insights and directions to the research process by generating information about their peers (Edwards & Alexander, 2011). Their involvement can, thus, be quite broad and range from assisting in the definition of the research design and the development of research tools to data collection and data analysis and, finally, the dissemination of findings.

A peer research approach can entail a host of advantages. At the level of conducting the research itself, peer research may allow access to less heard voices: belonging to the community or group that is being studied, peer researchers may, through their own social networks, have privileged access to potential participants and be in an advantaged position to motivate participation (Elliott et al., 2001; Ryan et al., 2011). At the level of the quality of the data gathered, as peer researchers bring their experienced knowledge of the issue under study, they convey richness, nuance and a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the reality under scrutiny (Dixon et al., 2019). Moreover, as they possess a common experience with the community or group being studied, their participation decreases the risks of misunderstandings between participants and researchers and promotes a direction of inquiry that is better attuned to the real issues of concern for that group or community (Smith et al., 2002). Additionally, the experienced familiarity between peer researchers and participants enhances the chances that participants will more freely and honestly express their views and opinions and engage in self-disclosure regarding their lived experiences (e.g. Littlechild et al., 2015). Overall, at the knowledge production level, peer researchers' participation may contribute to reducing power imbalances or asymmetries between researchers and participants, thus promoting bias reduction and a heightened understanding of the issues at hand, with significant positive effects in terms of informing policies

and practices (Lushey & Munro, 2015). By conducting research with and for the people whose experiences are being studied, the peer research approach can also promote a better understanding by peer researchers of their own situation and living condition, thus producing empowering effects by opening avenues for positive changes or movements, both at the individual and at the community levels (Lushey & Munro, 2015). Within this action activating potentiality, peer research (as participatory approaches, in general) may promote self-critical communities and stimulate transformative practices for the improvement of well-being and the fulfilling of individual and communal potentialities (MacDonald, 2012; Selenger, 1997). Lastly, peer researchers themselves may individually benefit from their participation in the research endeavour in several domains: in terms of work experience and training, which may foster future employability (Dixon et al., 2019); in the potentiality for self-esteem and self-efficacy development (e.g. Dixon et al., 2019); in gaining a sense of inclusion, in the case of individuals belonging to stigmatized and marginalized social groups (Littlechild et al., 2015; Tait & Lester, 2005).

Art-based research. Art-based research, on its turn and according to McNiff (2008), encompasses the systematic usage of artistic activities and expressions to understand or construct meaning from the actual experiences of both research participants and researchers. Participatory and collaborative in nature (Finley, 2008; Matarasso, 2019), art-based events allow the co-construction of new and ultimately emancipatory or empowering perspectives and actions through the functional and agile use of creativity and storytelling.

The emancipatory or empowering possibilities associated with the use of art-based methods can be achieved either by the (1) production of counter-narratives emerging from artistic practices or (2) through the stimulation of agency and decision-making. The elaboration of alternative or diverse counter-narratives about people's lived experiences can be a powerful way of uncovering innovative ways of knowing and gaining or elaborating new perspectives (new ways of seeing and constructing meaning) relative to those experiences. By associating rigorous scientific inquiry and artistic processes (involving creativity and the exploration of alternative narratives), such methodology can open the way to uncover novel ways of knowing (O'Neill, 2018) by exploring alternative knowledge sources (Knowles & Cole, 2008). As a meeting point for both scientific methods and artistic activities, it opens the door to a new epistemological space of knowledge production fuelled by the contributions of researchers and research participants.

The emphasis on creativity and imagination that is at the heart of art-based methods has, according to Eisner (2008), the merit of producing several benefits: they can generate nuance, uncovering a world beneath appearances; they can promote empathy through the sharing of experiences and the stimulation of perspective-taking; they can generate a fresh perspective as a new tool to interpret the world; they can provoke emotions able to fuel self-discovery. Finally, art-based research integrates and expresses the voices of often marginalized knowledge holders (Lenette, 2019).

Participatory action research – Incorporating the voices of research participants. In recent years, Participatory Action Research has become especially relevant in the field of migration studies to incorporate de voices of and "empower" research participants in their integration endeavours. However, to do so has not been an easy task since it has been acknowledged that often-times the conditions for their full participation in the research process have not been met. Drawing on this point, Montero-Sieburth (2020) calls attention to the fact that most qualitative studies so far fail to achieve PAR's goals since the commonly denominated act of "giving voice" to participants (although prevalent) has been mostly based on the researchers own

research premises. Consequently, the actual voice of participants has been seldom brought to the forefront of migration research. To do so, one has to recognize that often marginalized migrants' voices are entangled in power dynamics that critically need to be addressed by embracing a notion of cultural humility that poses the need for researchers to lower their own voices (abstaining from unilaterally imposing or even solely departing from the existing scientific literature and research agenda) in order to actually bring participants' voices to light (Montero-Sieburth, 2020).

The present working paper aims at further contributing to the existing literature on PAR within migration studies by further illustrating the continuous challenges of applying participatory research in this domain. The following contributions to the use of PAR are drawn from the H2020 MIMY project (EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions). The main goals of MIMY as an EU-funded project were to study the situation of young migrants coming from third countries in vulnerable conditions throughout Europe and make policy recommendations aimed at improving their condition. By, vulnerable conditions, the project aimed at referring to any life condition perceived by the migrant as having the effect of rendering him/ her vulnerable in some way. As such, the project abstained from imposing *a priori* conditions of vulnerability. Inevitably, as a way of recruiting participants, researchers had to depart from certain, more externally visible and definable conditions of vulnerability such as being in a NEET condition (not in employment, education or training) or evidencing problems in finding appropriate housing. Yet, it must be stated that researchers remained open to every source of perceived vulnerability presented by prospective participants in the research endeavour. In fact, the clarification and more precise definition of conditions of vulnerability became one of the endeavours of the project. As such, during the project, Gilodi et al. (2022) have proposed a comprehensive conceptual model of vulnerability in the context of migration. This model views vulnerability as multi-layered, dynamic, and deeply rooted in specific socioeconomic, political, historical, and cultural contexts. Unlike traditional approaches that attempt to reduce vulnerability to fixed and measurable conditions, this model recognizes vulnerability as something that is not innate, situational, or entirely structural. Instead, the model takes on an ecological, developmental, and systemic perspective, emphasizing how vulnerability is embedded within existing socio-political hierarchies that involve ongoing power dynamics. These dynamics are continually unfolding and are influenced by local systems and interpersonal relationships throughout an individual's life course (Gilodi et al., 2022). As a result, vulnerability was conceptualized as an individualized experience that must be assessed within a specific space and time, at various points in an individual's life. It is the outcome of a continuous interplay between various factors, including structural, situational, social, biographical, and psychological. This holistic approach offers a more nuanced understanding of vulnerability in the context of migration, acknowledging its complex and ever-changing nature (Gilodi et al., 2022).

To derive evidence-based policy recommendations, the research project examined the effectiveness of integration policies and practices in an interdisciplinary research endeavour that encompassed a vast array of methodological tools (e.g. interviews and focus groups with various actors working in the field of migrants' integration, and young migrants themselves). Most importantly, MIMY aimed at putting the experiences of young migrants at the centre of its activities by directly involving them as Peer Researchers and addressing their integration challenges using Art-based methods. By bringing research participants to the core of the scientific inquiry, through the incorporation of peer researchers and the use of art-based methodologies, MIMY aimed at attaining the following goals: (1) to challenge dominant research paradigms by rightfully acknowledging research participants themselves as co-constructors of scientific

knowledge and, thus, opening new alternative ways of understanding and sharing that knowledge (Knowles & Cole, 2008); (2) to challenge the usual power differentials between knowledge holders (Lenette, 2019); (3) to bring a personal nuance to the scientific inquiry that is often absent from more impersonal methods such as surveys. In so doing, the integration of peer researchers and the use of art-based methodologies was able to bring a critical approach that contests established ideologies on what constitutes and legitimizes knowledge (Knowles & Cole, 2008) and on who has the power to speak within the realm of science (Burge et al., 2016). Last, but not least, the use of PAR methodologies aimed at empowering research participants themselves in the context of the research process. Being an EU-funded project, MIMY incorporated peer researchers and participants in the art-based activities after the initial definition of its aims and methodological procedures. Yet, in conducting the project, efforts were made to incorporate their contribution in as much research tasks as possible. Their participation inevitably varied from country to country, due to differing contextual conditions in the running of the research activities. Yet, such participation ranged from recruiting participants, conducting interviews, participating in focus groups, discussing the results, producing a reflective blog and actively creating art-based events.

This working paper presents contributions from MIMY partners on the use of PAR methodologies. After an introduction to the use of PAR, a first section will focus on Peer Research and a second section on Art-based events. The first section, reserved to Peer Research, encompasses three chapters: the first focuses on the incorporation of Peer Researchers in the MIMY project (Chapter 1), the second explores the role of Peer Researchers when studying integration through an intergenerational lens (Chapter 2), the third addresses the ethical implications of Peer Research (Chapter 3). The second section, on Art-based events, is also composed of three chapters: the first on the use of LEGO© Serious Play© as an empowering tool for the integration of young migrants (Chapter 1); the second presenting Photovoice as an instrument to explore migrant integration in local communities (Chapter 2); the third also by exploring the use of Photovoice with young migrants in vulnerable conditions in Romania (Chapter 3). The working paper ends with a concluding chapter on the theoretical, methodological and ethical challenges of using PAR.

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Section 1: Peer Research

Chapter 1. A roadmap for working with Peer Research: some reflections on how to include and empower migrant youth in a multi-national research project

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Abstract

In the context of the H2020 project MIMY, investigating the integration processes of young non-EU migrants living in vulnerable conditions in 9 European countries, the implementation of the Peer Research methodology was grounded in a commitment to render knowledge production more democratic and inclusive through a participatory approach. The MIMY project set out to include young non-EU migrants as peer researchers, thus promoting their empowerment. Despite this clear and common approach, the decision to involve young migrants as collaborators in the research teams of a European project was not straightforward. Within the MIMY consortium, researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds and working in different institutional and geo-political contexts faced diverse and particular challenges, making necessary a flexible implementation of this methodology within the consortium but also revealing important lessons on the practice behind the theory. Building on the lessons learned within the MIMY project, this article presents some reflections around the main critical points to consider when implementing a peer research methodology: how can we reconcile practical challenges and constraints while still pursuing goals of empowerment and inclusion of migrant youth? By doing so, the goal of this article is to create a roadmap of elements to consider for researchers interested in adopting the peer research methodology while also presenting some of the great benefits of working with peer researchers.

Introduction to Peer Research in the MIMY project

The H2020 project MIMY, set out to investigate the integration processes of non-EU migrant youth aged between 18-29, living in vulnerable conditions in nine European countries. Building on a critical awareness of the normative and essentialized understandings of vulnerability in the context of migration and their potentially stigmatizing effect (Gilodi et al. 2022), the target group of the project was kept purposefully broad and inclusive. This group included young people who arrived in MIMY partner countries for a variety of reasons (e.g., 'fleeing conflict', studies,

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work, etc.), through different means (e.g., asylum application, family reunification, study or work VISAs, etc.) and lived in different conditions of vulnerability (e.g., racialized people facing discrimination, marginalized groups, people living in precarious economic conditions, people with no support systems, etc.).

Additionally, recognizing the power asymmetries often at play in social research and the mechanisms of exclusion of migrant voices in migration policy debates around Europe, empowering migrant youth who are experiencing vulnerable conditions was a core principle of the MIMY project. Rather than simply studying migrant youth as 'research subjects', our project aimed at actively involving young migrants through participatory methods. We achieved this throughout the project using different methods and empirical activities. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on the inclusion of young migrants as peer researchers, highlighting some practical challenges and critical points as well as the benefits of this method.

'Peer researchers are members of a population under study who have a decision-making role or staff position on a research team' (Eaton et al., 2019, p. 591).

Working with peer researchers (PRs) was written into the study design of MIMY from the initial grant application phase and reflected the project's commitment to render knowledge production more democratic and inclusive through a participatory and empowering approach. Indeed, it has been argued that peer research can be a form of empowerment, as those with specific lived experience of the research topic are invited to become active members of the research team (Ibáñez-Carrasco et al., 2019; Marlowe et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2011). It is known that the active involvement of communities is not only good for the research but also a matter of good research ethics (Maiter et al., 2008). However, it is necessary to avoid 'tokenism' when applying a peer research approach (Eaton, et al, 2019). For example, there is a risk that peer researchers (PRs) are simply used as 'cheap data collectors' or as a convenient way to access and recruit particular study participants. The tenets of peer research suggest that their role should involve more active involvement in informing the shape of the project, recruitment of participants, engaging with the wider communities, feeding into the analysis process and being invited to take part in dissemination events (Edwards & Alexander, 2011). The role of PRs should be visible in the research process and, with their permission, their voices should be heard in the research outputs. However, there is a fine balance between opportunity and burden.

 In order to be empowering, peer research should involve wider and on-going training so that PRs learn a range of skills and have the opportunity, if they wish, to acquire more skills and knowledge through the project. Accordingly, working with PRs carries a duty for research teams to protect them from exploitation rather than uncritically assume the benefits produced by their participation. This includes recognizing their work and contribution to the research and avoid paternalistic outlooks on their role within the research team.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that PRs are diverse. Their intersectional identities both reflect and inform specific lived experiences. Their insider status cannot be simply assumed because they share a similar ethnicity, language, or age as the research participants (Ryan, 2015; Ryan et al., 2011). As Marlowe et al note in their work with peer researchers to study the experiences of refugees in New Zealand: 'participants had different lines of demarcation defined possibly by culture, gender, age, shared experience, and linguistic competencies' (2015, p. 14).

Thus, PRs should not be expected to be experts on all aspects of the research topic just because of their ethnic or migration background (Eaton et al., 2019). This raises a key question

about how to strike the right balance between 'peer' and 'researchers'. After all, PRs are researchers, part of a research project and involved in carrying out research alongside professional researchers. Their skills and contribution as researchers need to be valued not simply because they are peers. Simultaneously, PRs have to be recognized within the team as knowledge holders (besides or beyond the academic knowledge of the researchers) and not only as knowledge vessels.

Training Peer Researchers

As a European project involving nine countries, MIMY researchers were working across different languages, diverse immigration regimes, varied institutional settings with specific regulations and different migrant populations with varied migration trajectories. Hence, in recruiting PRs and designing training packages, it was necessary to take account of these country-specific factors.

The training pack was designed as a set of PowerPoint presentations and online resources. Louise Ryan, as someone with considerable experience of working with this method (see Ryan et al., 2011), designed the training and delivered sessions to train the trainers. The 'train the trainers' sessions were designed to introduce Peer Research to the researchers in the project who had different levels of familiarity with it. Thus, the training firstly began by explaining the fundamental aspect of the peer research and its scope and purpose within the MIMY project. A key element of that training focused on the ethical implications of using this approach and the practical issues associated with recruiting, training and supporting PRs throughout the project.

The training resources also included specific materials aimed at the PRs such as explaining their role on the project, addressing how to recruit participants, how to negotiate informed consent, how to undertake an interview and a focus group. These training resources were fairly generic in nature as they needed to be translated and adapted by each country team to their own specific context. Accordingly, researchers from each team adapted the training pack based on the specific geo-political context and on the specific profiles of their PRs (see next section) and delivered PR training in the own country.

Peer Research Methodology in practice: setting up the stage for inclusion

In implementing the peer research methodology in the MIMY Project a certain level of flexibility was conceived to mirror the very different research contexts across the 10 distinct partners in 9 European countries. Yet, some key principles were identified as underpinning the PR approach in MIMY and guided its application in each research context. These included primarily non-exploitation of the PRs, recognizing young migrants as experts in their lives, promoting a culture of learning from them, avoiding power asymmetries and promoting inclusion of PRs as a part of democratic knowledge production. Depending on the contextual limitations of each partner institution, there were challenges in implementing these principles. Such challenges pushed each team to find creative solutions to their contextual barriers in order to include young migrants as PRs. It is important to mention that the Covid-19 pandemic, although not precluding the implementation of PR, strongly affected the overall project, which ran from February 2020 to January 2023, and its research activities, and affected also the work of PRs.

Overall, throughout the MIMY Project, 42 PRs were recruited by the MIMY partners. Setting up the recruitment of PRs was closely related to issues of renumeration and recognition. In line with the principle of non-exploitation, it was pivotal to compensate PRs for their contribution to the project. In terms of financial compensation, however, some partners realized that their initial financial projections, developed in the application phase of this complex and inter-

disciplinary project and partially impacted by strains posed by the pandemic, were not entirely sufficient. This created concerns regarding the funding available to compensate the work of the PRs. To face this limitation, different strategies were developed, while being mindful of the need to be fair to the PRs. Some partners reduced the number of PRs recruited or the length of their involvement. Other partners found different sources of funding from their institutions to tackle this financial obligation. Finally, two out of ten partners could not offer any financial renumeration, and alternatively structured the inclusion of PRs in the team as trainees or interns with a final certification and accreditation, thus recognising their contributions and supporting their educational and professional development.

In line with MIMY's principle of learning from members of the group under research, partners were encouraged to recruit PRs in vulnerable conditions. Yet, apart from the availability of monetary resources, institutional and national policies were decisive in determining who could be recruited and for which type of official position. For instance, legal status and the respective entitlements such as holding a working permit for the country of residence, carried great importance in recruitment and was often a basic condition for the employment of PRs. Additionally, further limitations to the recruitment process were related to the type of job contract and position that could be offered to PRs to formalize their involvement in the project. This in turn, influenced the profiles of young people who were recruited as PRs across the MIMY partners. For example, several MIMY partners could only formally hire PRs as student assistants. In these cases the PRs recruited were university students and thus highly educated, usually possessing already a certain level of knowledge and experience in social sciences research. By contrast, in countries with fewer national and institutional limitations, partners were able to recruit also beyond their academic institutions and managed to reach young people in more precarious or vulnerable social positions, who were contacted with the assistance of NGOs and networks of local stakeholders involved in the project.

As a result, the group of PRs recruited and involved in the MIMY project across different countries was very diverse. For example, the level of formal education varied: some PRs were bachelor students, some master students and some were doctoral candidates while others had no higher education degree. PRs varied also in terms of involvement in migrant communities and knowledge of the local context, with some PRs being activists, volunteers or practitioners (e.g., social worker) in their lived localities and others being relatively new in the arriving context and having less knowledge of local realities.

Diversity across the group of PRs also was partially a by-product of the broadness of the target group of the MIMY Project, described above. The young people included in our research team reflected such diversity coming from a variety of different countries spanning 5 continents, covering the entire age group of interest (the youngest PR involved was 17 years old and the oldest 30) and holding different legal statuses (e.g., refugees, international students, naturalized citizens).

Additionally, differences could be observed in terms of lived experiences, understandings and outlooks among PRs. Yet, following our guiding principles, each young person involved was recognized as a holder of knowledge and provided a unique contribution to the research activities and to the project overall.

The number of PRs recruited in each research team was uneven too. This was partially due to the institutional and budget constraints that were just outlined. The ideal aim was to have a balanced number of PRs for each team to ensure good quality of supervision and care of the PRs by the research team and to give young people the opportunity to provide a meaningful contribution to and involvement in the research activities. Nevertheless, the size of each group of

PRs had different benefits and challenges. Such lessons learned in the MIMY Project might be useful for further implementations of this method. For example, in the case of Luxembourg, a decision was made to recruit a number of PRs big enough to create a group of peers where discussions and reflections could be shared interactively. Accordingly, the four peer researchers engaged continuously with each other throughout their involvement, promoting reflexivity and creating a peer support group, which for some evolved in long-term friendships. The downside of this strategy was that the involvement of all the PRs was limited to a rather short period of time, rather than being spread out over time with different PRs engaging in different research activities across the research process. In addition, their simultaneous supervision required a considerable effort for the research team.

Involving and collaborating with Peer Researchers

In implementing the peer research methodology across the MIMY partners, differences could be observed also in terms of the role PR researchers occupied in the different teams and the type of research tasks in which they were involved. How peer researchers contributed to MIMY research activities resulted partially from the aforementioned challenges and relative solutions devised by each team. Timewise, the involvement of PRs would ideally span the majority of the 3-year-long project, but in practice this was not possible for any of the MIMY partners, for both financial and logistic reasons. On the contrary, the length and timing of their involvement varied considerably and, in some cases, multiple groups or waves of PRs were recruited consecutively.

This meant that depending on the stage of the project at the time of their involvement, the PRs contributed to different empirical activities of the project being carried out with different participants. For instance, some PRs were involved mainly in focus group discussions with older migrants exploring past integration trajectories and learning lessons from the past. Others actively organized interviews with sub-groups of young migrants in vulnerable conditions or migrants with positive integration experience, visible in their contexts of research. And some were involved in art-based participatory research activities. In some cases the involvement and contribution of PR was limited to one specific activities while in others the involvement extended to multiple research tasks.

Additionally, the length of PR involvement hindered or fostered the participation of PRs in different stages of the research process: some were more involved with initial activities (such as the development of interview guidelines and recruitment of participants), others were an integral part of all data collections efforts and in the organization of art-based workshops and events. Although, none of the PR were involved in the overall project design, given the long timeline from proposal writing to implementation of EU project, some of the young people involved had longer-term engagements with their team, which led them to be included also in the data analysis and writing of research outputs as well as other dissemination activities.

It is important to note that the extent and forms of each PR's participation in the project was not only the product of the practical barriers mentioned above but also reflected their own individual aspirations and goals. Indeed, some PRs were involved in specific activities and parts of the research project within a specific timeframe which fit with their broader goals and plans for their lives better than an extensive involvement in the project of several months or even years. Conversely, several PRs chose to engage with and support the project within and beyond their formal involvement (e.g. after the end of their paid contracts), for instance by taking part in workshops organized in academic conferences, which highlights their commitment and sense of ownership over the project's findings.

The role PRs covered in the research teams and their tasks within research activities was also influenced by their previous knowledge, goals, interests and the capacities of the research team in terms of training, supervision and involvement. Indeed, in line with what is outlined above, PRs across and within MIMY research teams varied greatly in terms of age, language proficiencies, countries of origin, lived experiences and previous research skills and knowledge. This partially affected the type of tasks they could be involved in as well as the amount of training and supervision they needed from the research team.

For instance, the ILS team in Dortmund included two PRs who had refugee background and were university students in social sciences departments. These PRs were enthusiastic to understand migration trajectories of their peers and had a keen interest in being involved in empirical data collection but did not have practical experience of data gathering. Thus, in line with their profiles and interests, a strategy was developed for their involvement in semi-structured interviews with young refugees. A series of fictitious interviews conducted within the team were added to the formal training, covering theoretical and ethical aspects of how to conduct an interview. The PRs then actively contributed to the adaptation of the interview grids and the recruitment of participants before joining a first round of interviews, as observers first and as principal interviewer, supervised by a member of the research team. Once they gained confidence, they kept conducting the interviews autonomously, bringing their own understanding of the lived experiences of their peers as well as a recognition of their milieu, which greatly benefitted the quality of the data gathered.

This example points to several ways in which the involvement of PRs positively impacted the implementation of the MIMY project, its findings and its impact. First, not only in the ILS team, but also across different partners, the contribution of PRs was invaluable in terms of recruitment, by reaching marginalized or difficult to reach populations. Notably, this was not only due to their 'insider' position but also the enthusiasm and energy they brought to the task, characterizing their outreach activities. Second, as showed in this example, PRs across partners were often able to gather more in-depth testimonies and create a trusting interview environment through their shared lived experiences. Of course, 'matching profiles' did not necessarily imply shared understandings of experiences and considerations of how the PRs positionalities affected the research process and findings should always be reflexively evaluated (Ryan et al., 2011). A third benefit that many PRs brought to the project was related to their language proficiency. The matching language skills between PRs and research participants allowed the inclusion of the accounts and experiences of migrants who could speak or fully express themselves in the local language, which greatly enriched the project's findings.

The inclusion of PRs in the case of the University of Luxembourg provides a different example of collaboration with PRs and involvement in research tasks. Some of the PRs involved in the team had recently arrived in the country, had limited social networks and knowledge of the context as well as limited language skills in the three official languages of the country (German, French and Luxembourgish). Although this reflected MIMY's commitment to empower and include young people in more vulnerable conditions, it also impacted the extent to which they could contribute to different research activities. Moreover, in line with their educational paths only one PR was interested in developing research skills as part of her personal development, while the others were mainly interested in engaging with the topics of research explored in the project. Thus, the strategy for the involvement of each PRs in the team was devised as a continuous negotiation between the competences and interests of the PRs and the tasks of the research project and needs of the research team. This meant that the task of each PR varied, with some taking a leading role

in interviews while others preferred to observe and limit their involvement in this setting but contributed more actively to recruitment and outreach activities. Ultimately, each of the PRs brought an invaluable contribution to the efforts of the project but in their own unique way.

As this example shows, the extent to which young people collaborated and contributed to different research activities across MIMY partners changed also based on the personal inclinations, ambitions and competences of each individual PR. Examples from other MIMY partners reflecting on the inclusion of PR in their research team can also be found elsewhere in this working paper.

Some concluding thoughts

The many practical challenges in setting up the inclusion of young people in the research teams created initial concerns and uncertainties about the implementation of peer research methodology in the project. One of the clear lessons that can be drawn from our experience is the importance of carefully planning and structuring the financial compensation of the PRs at the initial design and grant application phase of projects.

Yet, following the commitment of MIMY to a participatory and empowering research approach, each research team was able to develop creative solutions to promote the (sometimes limited) engagement of PRs. Indeed, another important issue to be considered in the design of the project concerns the institutional and national rules and regulations that may limit the eligibility of some PRs for formal payment and the planning of structured alternatives to ensure compensation and non-exploitation.

The variety of solutions adopted in MIMY contributed to the great diversity of profiles of PRs and their roles across and within research teams. Additional challenges were experienced by MIMY partners in supervising and supporting the engagement of PRs within the project and with research participants, which resulted in different strategies. Taken together, these difficulties and the strategies employed to face them, give interesting insights on the multiple ways in which the peer research methodology may be implemented, and allowed us to map out the critical points to consider when adopting a peer research approach.

Despite these complexities, all MIMY partners agreed on the great beneficial impact the peer research methodology and the inclusion of young migrants brought to the MIMY project. Several partners praised the contribution of the PRs in their teams as essential for the execution of the projects' ambitious research agenda and for the inclusion of a broader spectrum of participants. Many also acknowledged how PRs involvement increased the reflexivity in the overall team and promoted deeper critical insights. Finally, some reflected on how this type of collaboration was rewarding for them personally and professionally. Altogether, the experiences and reflections outlined in this paper illustrate that the advantages brought by the inclusion of Peer Researchers greatly outweigh any possible challenges.

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Chapter 2. Intergenerational explorations of 'integration' through youth-led Peer Research

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Abstract

Learning between generations has the potential to build knowledge that connects the past and the present, providing rich and reflexive insights regarding future trajectories. This paper explores the potential of intergenerational learning within research on 'integration' processes, namely between longer-standing migrant communities and newly arrived third-country national young people building their lives in European countries. This research took place within the MIMY project and brought together longer standing migrant communities as research participants, and younger generations of migrants acting as peer researchers alongside university-based researchers. We argue that the analytical knowledge produced between research actors that are both generationally and culturally diverse generates complex and layered knowledge on the dynamics of migration and integration over time. We also find that encounters within the research make visible both power asymmetries and intergenerational solidarities within integration processes. These themes provide a contribution to an emerging theory within the MIMY project of peer research in the intergenerational migrant context.

Why use an intergenerational lens in 'integration' research?

"I am me! I can be something! I fight!' Maybe something will come. Fight, fight, learn more and be out in society. That is the most important. Everyone can learn to swim [pointing at the river]." [Focus group discussion in Malmo, Sweden]

"What I want to see is a legacy for our children and grandchildren, why is all the provision gone, what we had 10 years ago is lost. Every milestone has gone, we're one of the only ones standing?" [Focus group discussion in Sheffield, England (UK)]

Intergenerational learning between longer-standing migrant communities and newly arrived third-country national young people building their lives in European countries has the potential to generate knowledge in support of their empowered futures. Engaging with the relationship between the past, present and future makes visible the changing contexts that young people with migration experiences are building their lives in and the potential of reflexive knowledge sharing to facilitate positive social change. In this brief working paper, we share reflections from the MIMY project on what it means to build knowledge that learns across different generations through youth-led peer research. To do this we draw on relational learning processes between longer-standing migrant communities as research participants, and younger generations of migrants acting as co-researchers alongside university-based researchers within the MIMY project.

MIMY is a research project that explores the integration and empowerment processes of third-country national young people building their lives in Europe. In this paper we analyse experiences in both Sweden and England (UK), to situate insights from the peer research approach within different migration and 'diversity' contexts. Notably, we situate 'integration' within inverted commas in the title of this paper, as within both Sweden and England the research findings highlight the contested nature of the term. This contestation emerges from the position of racialised communities that the MIMY project has engaged with in the research process that have, in spite of 'whole society' narratives, experienced integration as assimilationist, reinforcing of citizen-Other binaries, and steeped in colonial history.

Using an intergenerational frame for exploring the relations, institutions and structures that young people are interacting with in a new place challenges the dominant present-centred orientation of migration and integration studies. A 'crisis-management' approach neglects longer run trends, and policy categorisations that delimit age and life-stage disregard the complexity and connectivity of experiences across life-courses. An intergenerational perspective articulates a conceptualisation of integration, which is changing over time and space, and that interacts with power relations that structure the social terrains that young people are navigating. This makes visible the historical and processual dynamics of integration, and the realities of people embedded within overlapping experiences of migration. Our aim was to explore what happens within and between these times of migration and integration, and how the personal and socio-historical biographies of different generations intersect as people build their lives in different local places. We did this by working with young people as peer researchers to inquire across generations. By developing peer research as an intergenerational approach, we hope to make novel contributions to the field of participatory research methods. The purpose of this working paper is to reflect critically on our evolving methodological approach.

Developing peer research as an intergenerational approach

Peer research is a participatory approach to knowledge production grounded in a commitment to ensuring those affected by social issues coproduce the research about their lives. It is an ethical and political position that understands research itself as a social process, and it is an approach dedicated to establishing egalitarian relationships and addressing power inequalities in how research is done (Banks et al., 2013; Mata-Codesal et al., 2020).

In this paper we are exploring how peer research took place between young people with migration experiences as researchers and longer-standing migrant communities as participants in a project working to support young migrants building their lives in Europe. In Sweden and England, MIMY peer research involved working with young people with experience of moving to each country as third country nationals as paid co-researchers. The young peer researchers' lived experiences were diverse, but they shared a commitment to addressing the conditions of vulnerability being navigated by the young people at the centre of the research, and building shared futures. The approach aimed to be non-extractive and to contribute to the goals and aspirations of young peer researchers, as opposed to external agendas (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019). Together, peer researchers and university-based researchers approached the idea of 'peer' as recognising the complex and multiple identities and experiences of young people who are building new lives in England and Sweden. We aimed to go beyond labels and narrow frames, by connecting to young people's own interests in creating new relational knowledge with others that have shared experiences.

In both research and practice, communicating and understanding the complexities of intergenerational change can be challenging (Denborough, 2010; Nunn, 2017). Our aims in this research were to construct an approach that would support learning within and between generations, and situate that learning within social, political and cultural histories of people and places. We used a focus group method, which was coproduced with young peer researchers and was based on feedback from longer-standing migrant communities. In each context implementation was designed with youth researchers. In the co-design process, it was highlighted that it is important to find decolonising approaches that do not replicate institutional interviews (such as the immigration, welfare or social work interview). Building on arts-based collective narrative practice (Ncube, 2006), the focus groups used an elicitation tool in the form of the metaphor of a river to encourage participants to share their own processes of life-building, and the opportunity structures they encountered (see Figure 1 below). Collective speaking enables people to talk about difficult things in a collaborative way, as the sharing of stories and skills between different members of the community can help people reconnect with their strengths (Jacobs, 2018). The river supported a reflective and open conversation, and the visual metaphor, rather than interview questions, enabled participants and peer researchers to have more ownership in shaping the focus group dialogue.
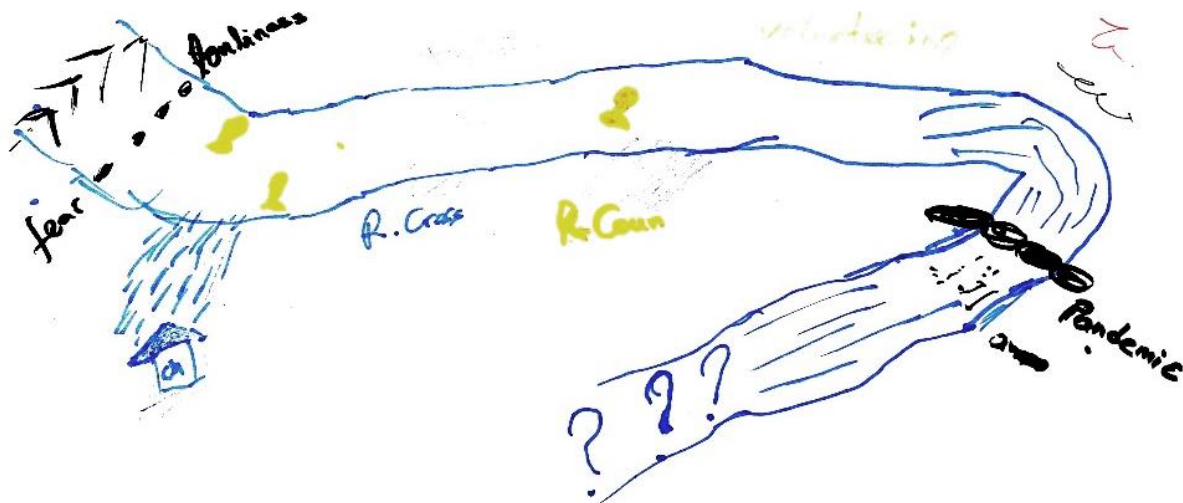
Figure 1 River of life interview method in England (UK) focus group

Doing intergenerational peer research

Social positioning and relational identity played out when organising the focus groups with longer-standing migrant communities. In England, peer researchers played a crucial role in recruiting participants to and engaging participants within focus groups. Peer researchers' understanding of specific migrant communities, and intersectional experiences of inequality (such as gender, race, class), shaped important decisions about the organisation of focus groups. In England, focus groups took place both between peer researchers and participants that had shared countries of origin and that did not. In Sweden, focus groups incorporated participants and peer researchers that had shared countries of origin. This had different implications for the interpretive knowledge that emerged, as is discussed in the rest of this paper.

Lived experiences of migration and integration processes meant that peer researchers could highlight pertinent issues that might be affecting recruitment, such as lack of trust in institutions (such as researchers) or in the fact that people would not believe their voices would be heard by decision-makers. Young peer researchers either undertaking recruitment themselves, such as in the UK, or being visible within the research team, which was the case in both countries, had a positive impact on trust, and strengthened relationships with community-organisations that could facilitate access to longer-standing migrant communities.

When starting focus groups, peer researchers were both lead and support facilitators. Either way, they were immediately approached by the participants in a shared language, or engaged by older participants about their new lives in the local area. In this way, the participants and peer researchers were navigating traditional power asymmetries within the research setting, positioning the university researcher in a supporting role. At the same time, the English peer researcher team spent time ahead of the session working through the potential inequalities in power relations between generations within the focus groups, including in relation to conflicting perspectives. In response to these discussions, the peer researchers highlighted the importance of their role being to facilitate and to listen to earlier migrant communities, and being open minded in this.

Following each focus group session, research teams held a reflective discussion with peer researchers on their experience of the focus group dialogue. The purpose was to capture intergenerational learning. In both contexts project teams did this on a more continuous basis, asking peer researchers to reflect on the different aspects of the project, building their ideas into future directions and decision-making. This helped peer researchers to feel that they were listened to and that their opinions and reflections had made a difference to the project. As trust and reciprocity grew within the research group, the peer researchers more and more freely shared their own ideas and thoughts based on their own and their friends' and families' life experiences. This led to more nuanced, and grounded interpretations that challenged academic researchers' conceptualisations and presuppositions. The following section outlines what we learnt together about the knowledge that was produced.

Generating knowledge through intergenerational insights

We argue that the analytical knowledge produced in dialogue between research actors that are both generationally and culturally diverse generates complex and layered knowledge that makes visible the resonance and dissonance across different social positions. This knowledge provides a richer picture of the fabric that young people's lives are woven into and the implications for their futures. The following section shares reflections from this intergenerational learning process, on what we can know and how we can know it. We highlight the possibilities of 'knowing' connected to the relations and life experiences of different actors in the research encounter. The areas of discussion cover: recognising non-typical discourse; identifying silences; nuancing statements; and facilitating intergenerational insight. These themes provide a contribution to an emerging theory within the MIMY project of peer research in the intergenerational migrant context. The examples below serve to show the importance and usefulness of peer research in intergenerational settings that is working towards understanding and facilitating integration processes.

Recognising non-typical discourse

In Sweden and England, some of the young peer researchers were involved in focus group research discussions with longer-standing migrant communities with whom they had shared ethnicities or countries of origin. This provided a specific set of reflections around social position and the construction of discourse. Peer researchers drew on their own lived experience and understanding of attitudes within their wider social worlds to problematise dominant perspectives being communicated within focus groups.

Peer researchers in Sweden found that in two of their focus groups, participants from longer-standing migrant communities talked extensively about the responsibility of the individual to fight for themselves, to learn the language or to find employment. One peer researcher suggested that this is in line with a general discourse among people from the country that the participants were born in; you cannot trust society to fix things for you, so you have to fight for yourself if you are going to succeed. At the same time, the peer researcher questioned this discourse, and reflected on whether the results may have been different if the group had consisted more of people with working-class background like single parents that he knew who struggled in Sweden. The peer researcher felt that parents he has met had lost hope in many ways, as they felt that their children were caught up in 'bad company' while growing up. His experience was that parents often felt that they were not able to contend with the impact of deep-rooted social and economic issues such as poverty, inequality and youth unemployment and that stronger social and economic infrastructure were needed to help their children build their lives. The other peer researcher in Sweden also noticed that the participants in one of the focus groups focussed a lot on the individual's responsibility and not so much on what they expected from state institutions. The peer researcher was surprised by hearing this, saying she was more used to meeting people (with the same country origin) who placed the responsibility on the government and institutions regarding employment and learning the language.

Identifying silences

Peer researchers were committed to listening and learning from the longer-standing migrant communities within this research encounter. In listening actively in this way, peer researchers were surprised by some of the silences in the discussion, about social, political and economic issues that they understand to be important. The identification of these silences highlights the importance of reflexive practice within the research encounter for deepening knowledge.

On the topic of employment, a peer researcher in Sweden had expected participants to be critical of the efforts by authorities aimed at helping migrants to get jobs. She argued that people feel that there is a strong sentiment that the current system locks migrant communities into being dependent on low benefits and low-paid work even though they want to progress and have financial independence. She also reflected that the participants did not bring up the issue of waiting in connection to gaining legal status as people close to her have had very long processes and have been deeply affected by this, or pushed into precarious situations relating to legal status and work. In general, she was surprised that participants seemed to want to focus on what works in terms of how people are building their lives and not on the problems. Her position was that prejudices against migrant communities are dominant in Sweden, and that the stereotypes and discrimination are extremely exhausting and undermining.

In England, a young peer researcher also felt that there could have been more of a focus on the challenges faced and the difficulties, including between generations, rather than on an idealised perspective on getting through something and being on the other side. There are important issues around intergenerational differences, including with regard to the expectations put on young people by families. She also felt that there is an important discussion to be had about what she sees as a generation of youth who are demotivated and have faced racism and exclusion at school. The questions being raised by the youth researcher highlights the importance of all parties in the dialogue having the opportunity to represent their own ideas and concerns within the intergenerational research encounter. This could help better connect this reflective learning to young people's own active work towards building their futures.

Further reflection on the above points within the focus groups could have provided an important layer of knowledge and understanding of the issues under exploration, signalling the additional value of intergenerational learning. A peer researcher in England also highlighted that in the focus group they undertook with older post-war migrants there was limited understanding of, or silence on, the realities young new arrivals were facing today. The peer researcher highlighted that it would be helpful to have more space in the conversation to bring these experiences together. They felt that the merging of knowledge(s) held, could have led to more constructive discussions around solutions.

Nuancing statements

A linked issue to those outlined above about partial knowledge is the issue of partial interpretations. In one of the Swedish focus groups, the importance of migrants learning Swedish was highlighted. The Swedish university-based researcher was surprised how critical the participants were of Swedish authorities who offered interpreters and information translated into their own language. For him, such critiques were controversial, being posited largely by far-right or conservative politicians. One of the peer researchers, however, suggested that the participants' critique may reflect people's wider frustration with having limited opportunities to learn Swedish 'with Swedes'. Another frustration that she was aware of was how interpreters signal the 'migrantisation' (Dahinden, 2016) of people with minority ethnicities in Sweden. Her sister once was provoked when a translator was ordered for her without them asking her; she felt that she could have tried speaking Swedish. The peer researcher has also been provoked when people start speaking English with her, assuming she does not understand Swedish. However, she was critical of the view that interpreters at institutions are problematic. She has never seen this as hindering her integration but rather a motivation, so as to have a chance to understand these institutions. The peer researcher's nuanced exploration of the discussion point from their own lived experience highlighted the complexity of the issue, in a way that did not happen in the focus group.

Facilitating intergenerational insight

In both contexts the focus groups showed the everyday intergenerational mixing that takes place within community-based spaces, and the aspirations for further understanding and relational learning between generations. The intergenerational focus groups provided a platform for dialogue within and between generations. As highlighted in the methodological reflections above, young peer researchers were very aware of different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives held between generations. This played out in the peer researchers' interactions. For example, in Sweden one peer researcher was provoked that some participants suggested young people do not have any

'excuses' not to fight for themselves. She felt that the mental health difficulties that young people face were not recognised in this point. In England, peer researchers also highlighted the assumptions they felt older generations made about them, including about their policing of conservative norms and values.

In England, one of the focus groups took place within a community centre established by members of a longer-standing migrant community in Sheffield. It was set-up in the context of institutionalised neglect of this community's particular needs. The focus group itself brought together older generations, younger generations and peer researchers into dialogue, and showed the potential for bringing together the positions of different generations in understanding support structures (or lack thereof) within educational settings.

> Young Female: So it's a two-way street, there's an immense pressure on the parents but there's also an immense pressure on the children to kind of be this cultural link, a bridge. And I saw it all the time in parents' evenings where the mum and dad for example couldn't speak English or couldn't speak English very well and it was up to the child to translate.
>
> Peer researcher facilitator: Can I ask a question about that because I guess most of you are parents in this room? Did you feel like the school was supportive of your children when they were going through education, do you feel like they relayed that information to you well?
>
> Older Male: It's different schools, different expectations, so kind of general, there's no one answer.
>
> Older Female: I'm the chair governor for two schools, one primary, one secondary …From the get-go the school does not offer mentoring, and that's the problem. …[mothers] they come out of the community and then she's helpless, and then she doesn't know any mentoring groups to put her child in there, so already there's so much barriers and the child already failed to be seen as he can succeed... Some of them absolutely put you in that box and they will put you in that box whether you're a refugee, whether you are Black, whether you are BAME or whether you are different... They won't give you a chance until you have somebody that says a word on you.

The issue of the pressures on parents to manage their own difficulties, and to support their children and partners' lives as well was raised by another peer researcher as a key take away from her focus group, and a point for new understanding and empathy. The potential of this intergenerational learning was also highlighted by young people newly arrived to England, who did not have prior experience and understanding of the histories of migration and integration in their new context. One young peer researcher highlighted that he had never before met with anyone older who had moved to England, and was surprised at the challenges faced and the persistence of the issues over time. This also led young peer researchers to ask how the older generations managed to remain open minded and reflect positively on the difficulties that they have been through, with humour, and to keep going. One young woman highlighted that she would love to know more about how they have achieved this, because this seems out of reach for many young people today. This led to a discussion around intergenerational support structures, and the potential for an initiative for new arrivals to be mentored by people within longer-standing migrant communities, which could also lead to more sustained connections and support over time.

Conclusion

Within wider society, and in particular within the idea of 'migration generations', the dominant narrative constructs generations in homogenised terms. This brief working paper has started to illuminate how intergenerational learning can make visible dimensions of inequality and diversity of lived experience within and between generations, and the potential of finding commonalities shared across generations. Our experience has shown light on the potential of intergenerational research encounters to generate complex and layered knowledge on the dynamics of migration and integration. Intergenerational peer research has the potential to contextualise and problematise research that takes a 'long view', and provides a direct platform for connecting the past, present, and future within knowledge in support of inclusive social change.

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Chapter 3. Peer research approach and its ethical considerations[1]

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to look at the peer research approach in migration studies from the perspective of ethical choices. We discuss ethical considerations concerning the consecutive steps in the research process. We share our thoughts, guidelines, and good practices on working with peer researchers stemming from reflections and discussions among ourselves as researchers and with peer researchers. First, we provide a brief overview of the peer research approach and explain why working with peer researchers constitutes an ethical choice. Then, we provide a comprehensive overview of each stage of the research process – recruitment of peer researchers, their training, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results – and explain what ethical challenges may appear during each stage. The text is elaborated based on our experiences of work with peer researchers within the Polish part of the MIMY project[2].

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to look at the peer research approach in migration studies from the perspective of ethical choices. In this short text, which is elaborated based on our experiences of work with peer researchers[3] within the Polish part of the MIMY project, we discuss ethical considerations concerning the consecutive steps in the research process. We share our thoughts, guidelines and good practices on working with peer researchers stemming from reflections and discussions among ourselves and with peer researchers, whom we would like to thank at this point.

In the first part of the paper, we provide a short overview of the participatory approach and peer research approach. We then discuss the peer researchers' role in the Polish part of the MIMY project. Furthermore, we explain why we assume that working with peer researchers constitutes

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[1] We would like to thank peer researchers engaged in the MIMY project in Poland, especially Kseniya Homel and Ivanna Kyliushyk, whose genuine, in-depth feedback was crucial for this paper.

[2] While the paper is based on the experiences and reflections of Polish team, it must be emphasized that general framework of collaboration with peer researchers was elaborated by the Coordinator's team (Luxembourg University) and by partners from University of Sheffield and London Metropolitan University. We would like to acknowledge particularly Louise Ryan, Amalia Gilodi and Thea Shahrokh for providing guidelines and training. It should also be noted that while certain aspects of work with peer researchers were standardized within consortium, others were left as optional for partners. As a result, it should not be assumed that every team participating in MIMY followed the same scheme described in this working paper. In fact, taking into account different conditions and constraints in different countries, allowing certain flexibility in peer research approach turned out to be beneficial for the effective collaboration with peer researchers.

[3] For the purposes of this paper we use the terms "peer researcher" and "researcher" to distinguish those researchers who are part of the community involved in the study (in the case of MIMY – the migrant community) – "peer researchers", from the researchers who conduct research as outsiders - "researchers". Nevertheless, we want to emphasize that both are considered as equal members of the research team.

an ethical choice. In the main part of the text, we provide a comprehensive overview of each stage of the research process – recruitment of peer researchers, their training, data collection, analysis and dissemination of results - and explain what ethical challenges may appear during each stage. We also share good practices from the MIMY project and discuss how we addressed some of these challenges.

The role of peer researchers in the participatory research

Over the last decade, the Participatory Research Approach has gained greater recognition in the field of migration studies, especially in the context of knowledge decolonization (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). The traditional research paradigm puts emphasis on "learning about" the research subject while the Participatory Research Approach insists on "learning from and learning about" the research subject (Walsham 2021). Thus, subjects should be involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, interpretation and dissemination of the research project.

An integral part of this approach is cooperation with peer researchers. Peer researchers are "members of a community, kinship, or other social networks, who often with no prior research experience, undertake training in research methods, become trusted, equal members of a research team, and work as researchers within their own communities or networks" (Bell et al. 2021: 19). Lived experiences and contextual understanding of the community allow peer researchers to generate information inaccessible to outsiders (Edwards and Alexander 2011). By doing so, peer researchers can uncover community issues that for certain reasons (e.g. fear, shame, distrust) are not visible to researchers from outside the community. Peer researchers can not only support researchers in discovering hidden problems, but they can also participate in the interpretation of data which, due to researchers' positionality, are overlooked (Ryan et al. 2011).

Goodson and Phillimore (2010) argue that the peer researcher approach allows some local communities to better address certain needs while being involved in the research. Collaboration with peer researchers not only facilitates research, but also reduces the power imbalance between researchers and the studied communities and individuals (Porter 2016). Thus, research that aims to investigate groups in vulnerable conditions can benefit by implementing the peer researcher approach. Empowerment of individuals, as well as groups, by balancing power relations within the research is another benefit of this approach. Peer researchers who are involved in the research may also profit from it. They can acquire and use research skills in their further professional development and be a part of the social change caused by the outcome of the study.

The role of peer researchers in the Polish MIMY research

In the Polish part of the MIMY project we tried to implement the peer research approach broadly, throughout almost the entire project. The number of peer researchers varied over the course of the project. While 10 persons participated in the initial training sessions and were partially involved in the project, 5 peer researchers worked intensively over 11 months, from June 2021 to April 2022. They were offered a contract based on their commitment, and remuneration was linked to the tasks they completed. In addition, they received certificates for their engagement

in the project. Following completion of their contractual involvement, some peer researchers continued to actively engage and support the project.

The scope of peer researchers' engagement was not fixed *a priori*, but deliberately left open. It ensued from a continuous process of mutual learning and negotiation of peer researchers' capabilities, expectations, and goals. The catalogue of tasks that peer researchers were engaged in was comprehensive and included the following: participation in peer research training; co-creation of research tools; participants' recruitment; assisting/conducting research interviews; preparing notes/transcripts; data analysis (including data coding and co-writing reports); reviewing reports; social media activities; participation in events within the project and active promotion of those events; participation in dissemination activities. Additionally, now the project has been completed, we are also planning to co-write articles with some peer researchers. Based on our experience in the Polish MIMY team, we would like to share good practices related to peer research approach.

The peer research approach as an ethical choice

We argue that implementation of the peer researcher approach is not only a methodological decision, but also an ethical choice. Involving community members as gatekeepers, translators, facilitators or interviewers, but still conducting research about and not with them, reinforces ethical asymmetry and power imbalance, and leads to the instrumentalization of the research group. Although such an approach facilitates the research process, and provides easier access to the research community, it strengthens researchers' agency and renders members of the community silent objects of investigation, rather than active subjects.

We argue that an ethical (rather than tokenistic) peer researcher approach is based on values such as diversity, inclusion, social justice, and equity (Flicker et al. 2009). Relations between peer researchers and researchers are built upon mutual respect, trust, openness, partnership, balance of power and established ethical symmetry. Both peer researchers and researchers gain agency within the research process. In the case of peer researchers, involvement in the research further serves as a tool for advocacy and empowerment (Kellett 2011). Migrants' complex positionality is recognised and appreciated - meaning they are not limited to the label of "migrants", but other elements of their identity are recognised and appreciated. In this approach, migrant peer researchers are seen as experts who have greater access to the field due to their lived experiences.

While collaborating with peer researchers during the MIMY project, we acquired new experience and knowledge related to the peer research approach. We spent many hours discussing this method and the ethical challenges related to it. We exchanged our reflections and discussed them with peer researchers, gaining rich and meaningful feedback from them. Over time, we began to find that working with peer researchers required us to think about every element of the research process, so that the values described above were not empty slogans. As a result, our awareness of particular methodological and ethical challenges increased over the course of the research. In the following sections, we discuss the subsequent phases of the research project in detail, with a view to working with peer researchers in an ethical and participatory manner.

Recruitment and sustaining engagement

Recruiting peer researchers who have ability to empathize with and understand research participants through shared lived experiences is the foundation for effective research employing the peer research approach (Lushey and Munro 2014). However, the recruitment of peer researchers can be particularly challenging when the research project focuses on people in vulnerable conditions. Equally difficult can be the subsequent retention of those who initially agreed to participate (Smith et al. 2002). Hence, factors that should be considered during the recruitment process (both in an ethical and practical sense) include transparency, which is related to trust, respect, and recognition of diversity.

During the recruitment process, we should prepare a detailed description of the project (both in substantive and practical terms) and the scope of the peer research role, including individual tasks and associated responsibilities. It is essential to clearly, and in detail, explain the level of commitment expected, the scope of the role, the criteria and time required to fulfil them. Offering agreed forms of remunerations (payment, professional development, ECTS credits etc.) is important requirement to signify that peer researchers' contributions are valued and their rights are respected. Although we are aware that paying peer researchers is not always possible (for instance due to legal issues), it is recommended that they should be recruited into paid positions that set clear contractual boundaries, address the power balance, and support long-term commitment to this role.

In addition to the material profits of research involvement (such as payment for work and a certificate of participation in the study), we should outline benefits related to networking, skills and experience that we hoped the peer researchers would gain from their involvement. Potential peer researchers must have information on what involvement will entail, along with the potential benefits, to enable them to make a conscious decision about whether they are interested in participating in the project. Presenting transparent rules for participation in the project, and accurate information during the recruitment process, facilitates informed consent that may reduce gaps between the expectations of researchers and peer researchers, and thus support the longevity of the cooperation. MIMY's Polish research team recruited peer researchers using various means, including recruitment through migrant support organizations and social media. Potential candidates were asked to send information not only about their age, country of origin or place of residence, but also their life situation, so that it was possible to seek the cooperation of those who had the most similar lived experiences to the research participants. Before sending their application, everyone had the opportunity to get acquainted with the project information in detail.

At the recruitment, careful consideration should be given to issues around accessibility and inclusion. In MIMY, partners were encouraged to recognise peer researchers' diversity in its various dimensions: in terms of their life situation (legal, familial and social, professional and economic, etc.), as well as their competences, expectations and needs regarding their participation in the project. Such diversity results in including different, and often complementing, experiences, points of view as well as reaching to various social circles. In order to manage the diversity within the team, the rules of participation in the project cannot be too rigid. We postulate a high degree of openness and flexibility in the scope of tasks offered and assigned to peer researchers, so that they can choose the degree of their engagement at different stages of the project. In the case of the Polish MIMY research, peer researchers had the opportunity to choose their involvement from a

wide range of research activities. They could decide what tasks they wanted to be involved in, and to what extent. They could also indicate whether they wanted to be named as members of the research team or be fully signed under blog notes (they could use pseudonyms).

Ideally, recruitment of peer researchers should begin in advance of project research funding, as they can be involved in decision-making throughout the research process, from developing research questions to disseminating research findings. This approach to project design strives to equalize power relations between researchers and peer researchers, whereby they become equal partners in the research process rather than 'objects' or 'participants'. Such partnership can help to retain peer researchers' interest and commitment.

Training

If we follow Bell's definition of peer researchers as members of a community or network that may have no prior experience in research (Bell et al. 2021), then it is clear that training is of vital importance. Its principal goal is to prepare peer researchers to take part in conducting research. However, looking at the training process in more detail, we argue that there is much more to it, both in terms of aims and results.

First of all, in order for the training to be successful, it needs to be well adjusted to peer researcher' needs and competencies. While this statement may seem trivial at first sight, accomplishing this goal is far from easy, particularly taking into account the diversity in the group of peer researchers. This diversity, which is generally an asset, as stated above, poses some challenges in terms of efficient and successful training. Within a group we may have people with diverse skills, different language fluency and varying levels of experience with research and academia in general. The aim is to recognize this diversity and to create a flexible training program.

Combining group training sessions with an individual mentoring approach may be a good solution to addrs this issue. Whereas certain parts of the training are relevant to all the peer researchers engaged, other parts may be of interest mainly to those with or little or no experience in conducting research. For instance, in our research team, we cooperated with PhD candidates with experience in research as well as with high school students for whom it was their first contact with research. Taking into account this diversity, we found it important to familiarize everybody with the project, its goals, methodology and the potential tasks of peer researchers, as well as the ethical aspects of conducting this particular study. Meanwhile, the part of the training that introduced participants to conducting qualitative research was dedicated to those who had less experience.

The training process does not end once the introductory sessions are over. Bearing in mind the vital role of practice, peer researchers should have a chance to experience it. In the case of the MIMY project, before they could act as independent researchers, they first observed interviews conducted by other team members, then tried to conduct the interview on their own, but under supervision. It is important to create a space for peer researchers to ask questions, and to share their anxieties and dilemmas before starting the fieldwork. We should also prepare them for potential challenges and problems that they may encounter when conducting research, including those related to the dual role of peer researchers (members of a community and researchers). Group training sessions, particularly those where peer researchers can exchange their reflections and

insights, are a valuable tool for building trust in the team: both towards researchers managing the process and towards other peer researchers. This trust is of vital significance, as it ensures on-going peer support in further stages of the research process.

Notably, participating in a training program may also have longer-term positive effects for peer researchers. The competences they acquire in preparing and conducting research, analysing data, working in a team or writing reports, may be used in different contexts (Goodson and Phillimore 2010). Moreover, working in a team, being paid for this work and expertise, and seeing how the outcomes contribute to the results of the whole project, may have an empowering effect and may enhance self-efficacy and self-esteem (Goodson and Phillimore 2010, Bell et al. 2021).

Conducting research

It seems that in conducting research with peer researchers, three issues are of vital importance: recognition of their knowledge, reflecting on their positionality, and flexibility aimed at respecting their needs. With reference to the first issue, it is worth engaging peer researchers at different stages of the research process, including the early stages, such as constructing the tools or adjusting existing ones. As insiders, peer researchers may refine research tools, adding or reformulating issues that are important to the studied community. Often, they are also responsible for translating research tools into the native languages of interviewees and translating the data back to the main language of the project. In line with this approach, before starting the fieldwork, we invited peer researchers to a meeting where we discussed the interview scenario, so that they could revise it and add some questions. Moreover, when interviews were conducted in participants' own languages, they were also responsible for preparing detailed notes (containing quotes), sometimes including translations from Ukrainian / Russian / Tajik to Polish or English. When engaging peer researchers in the project, it is crucial to keep in mind the risk of their instrumentalization, namely using their knowledge and unique competences (like knowledge of a language) authoritatively to fulfil the project's goals. In order to avoid this risk their voice should be acknowledged when preparing and conducting interviews, and their participation should not automatically end once they have recruited participants and conducted interviews. We will return to the issue of their further engagement later.

Regarding the second issue, it is crucial to recognize the dual role of peer researchers: both as members of the community and as fieldworkers, and to address the needs emerging from this duality. In other words, their positionality should be reflected and discussed (Ryan et al. 2011). On the one hand, as insiders, they may be able to reach participants that, for various reasons, outsider researchers would not be able to recruit, as they may establish trust relationships more easily (Pustułka et al. 2019). Participants may also reveal to peer researchers issues that they have not unveiled in contacts with "outsiders", e.g. doctors or social workers (Goodson and Phillimore 2010). On the other hand, the position of insider brings several challenges. On the emotional level, if peer researchers share similar (very often difficult) experiences with interviewees, it may be hard for them to come back to them during interviews. They may feel overwhelmed by these narratives, particularly when they feel they are not able to help participants. The reluctance to touch upon painful or troublesome subjects may also result in not asking some questions or not developing certain themes. The latter sometimes happens when peer researchers perceive specific experiences as obvious – in such cases they do not deepen themes that could be reflected upon. The duality inherent to the role of peer researchers: being a member of the community and, at the same time, a researcher representing academia or other institutions, sometimes impacts their social

relations. Interviewees may withdraw their trust, being afraid that what they say will be revealed to a wider society, or they may expect some favours or help in return for their participation in the study.

All these challenges can be minimized by the continuous contact and support of tutors (Goodson and Phillimore 2010). This issue brings us to the third point, namely flexibility in recognizing the needs of peer researchers. They should have the chance to discuss not only their hardships, but also the joys and satisfactory moments of doing fieldwork, to talk about their dilemmas and to look for the best solution with more experienced team members. In this domain, the role of tutors is crucial, but exchanging experiences with other peer researchers and seeking their support should not be underestimated. Last but not least, in view of the above mentioned challenges, there should be some flexibility in the team regarding, for instance, the specific tasks ascribed to peer researchers.

Analysis of the data and knowledge production

Both peer researchers and researchers should have equal access to the analysed data. Those peer researchers who are interested in further academic work should be able to take part in the data analysis along with other team members. Sometimes it takes more time to train peer researchers in using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (in the case of MIMY's Polish team, MAXQDA software was used). Some peer researchers may not be interested in advancing these specific academic skills, but some might see such training as a form of professional development. In our project, only one peer researcher - a PhD candidate - participated in coding data from some parts of the study and writing a report. Others were not interested or resigned from this stage of the project, due to limited time or professional obligations. Although some peer researchers were less interested in advanced academic work (e.g. coding using software) we nevertheless tried to engage them into the process of data interpretation. After completing the interviews, we asked peer researchers for their reflections on the results. Moreover, once the reports on specific research tasks were prepared, we sent them to peer researchers, asking for their feedback and supplementary remarks. We argue that joint analysis builds mutual recognition and supports migrants' agency, as their presence within the research is not instrumental and limited only to conducting or translating interviews. Additionally, as peer researchers' positionalities differ from those of the researchers, their involvement in the data analysis introduces a new interpretative perspective. This can lead to more in-depth analysis and the discovery of unexpected findings (Goodson and Phillimore 2010).

At the same time, joint analysis based on partnership can contribute to researchers' affective and cognitive development because working with peer researchers requires the knowledge and experience of young migrants to be recognised, taken into consideration and discussed as one of the significant perspectives. For some researchers who are used to teaching younger generations, recognising peer researchers' expertise and data interpretation might be difficult - especially if peer researchers are also representatives of the younger generation. However, auto-reflexive researchers may reshape their attitudes and, through emotional effort, open up to further collaboration with non-academic research partners.

Knowledge production within the peer research approach should be democratic and inclusive – it should not be elaborated only by researchers for other researchers (Martin et al. 2019). Thus, deliverables should serve various aims - development of the academic field, providing solutions for the community, explaining research issues in a way that is accessible to

the general public. The deliverables should also be developed in different forms. In co-production of knowledge, not only diversity of content and form, but also of language should be taken into consideration. In conducting research with the migrant community, it is worth creating some deliverables in the native language of the minority group (in the case of research in Poland, in Ukrainian or Russian). Moreover, researchers should be careful not to limit access to research findings by using only formal academic language.

Some peer researchers from the Polish team were involved in the Youth MIMY blog, preparing notes on learning lessons from the past, on their experience as peer researchers, and on their opinions and thoughts on migration and integration. They also took part in workshops, attended conferences and co-wrote reports. We are also planning to co-write some joint articles in the near future. Thanks to this approach it has been possible not only to reach diverse audiences, but also peer researchers have been able to get involved in the development of some deliverables – and in some cases such involvement was empowering. Nevertheless, as in every other part of the research process, involvement in data analysis and knowledge production should be paid.

Conclusion

In this paper we tend to indicate that work with peer researchers is not only a methodological decision, but also an ethical choice. It is a decision which should be preceded by in-depth ethical reflection. If the peer research approach is implemented without such consideration, it may result in the instrumentalization of peer researchers. For instance, due to limited resources (time, money, competencies) peer researchers can be "used" only to collect data. We argue that such a tokenistic approach does not embody the real and ethical peer research approach, which should be based on such values as inclusion, power balance, respect, recognition and empowerment.

Based on our own experiences and reflection, we recommend that researchers who consider choosing this methodological approach should take into account their access to different resources. Cooperation with peer researchers requires extra time (e.g. for recruiting, training, supporting them in collecting data, elaborating non-academic deliverables), extra money and certain academic and social competences. Moreover, this approach must be accompanied by the auto-reflexivity of the whole research team. For instance, on the part of researchers, work with peer researchers may require them to step out of their comfort zone and share their power with representatives of the research group. Although there are challenges related to this method, we are convinced that it can be extremely beneficial - in terms of research, empowerment of the peer researchers and their community, development of reflexivity among researchers and the introduction of more social justice into the world.

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Section 2: Art-based Events

Chapter 1. Playful experiencing and reflection: LEGO® Serious Play® as game-based tool to empower young migrants integrating[4]

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Abstract

Framed by the increasing interest in Participatory Action Research (PAR), there has been a growing debate on the necessity of shifting away from conventional to less-conventional qualitative research methods (e.g. Kindon et al. 2007, Bettmann/Roslon 2013, Aldridge 2014, 2016). This is particularly true for vulnerable groups who, as Aldridge puts it, "often require methodologies and approaches that are less conventional or straightforward" (Aldridge 2014: 114). This changing paradigm in social research is rooted in the intention to center the voices of those people who have not broad possibilities to participate in the opinion building and policy processes. It is not just about the co-creation of "knowledge for understanding", but about creating "knowledge for action" and empowering vulnerable people to become central actors in processes of social change (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995: 1667, cited from von Unger 2014: 46).

In recent years, a variety of low-threshold and often creative methods and tools have been developed, considering the specific requirements of vulnerable persons (e.g. regarding language, physical or cognitive skills), to explore their identities, experiences, knowledge, opinions and needs. Creative exploration methods "allow participants to spend time applying their playful or creative attention to the act of making something symbolic or metaphorical, and then reflecting on it" (Gauntlett 2007: 3).

Initially invented to support consultancy processes inside the LEGO® company, LEGO® Serious Play® nowadays is applied as a strategic tool to develop joint ideas, visions and scenarios in businesses and organisations, and recently as a creative method in research and teaching as well. The idea of LEGO® Serious Play® is closely linked to considerations from play pedagogy. Accordingly, play allows to distance oneself from everyday life by sliding into a world of imaginations, ideas and utopias while concurrently keeping the ties to reality (Heimlich 2015). LEGO® Serious Play® uses metaphors to enable participants to express in a playful way their

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thoughts and ideas. As the building process with Lego bricks is physical and haptic, LEGO® Serious Play® is a low-threshold method to work with vulnerable groups (Cavaliero 2017).

Taking into account potential limitations of PAR (e.g. Ozkul 2020) the following article will concentrate on the use of LEGO® Serious Play® as creative exploration method and its possibilities and limitations when used to empower young migrants in vulnerable conditions. It is based on the H2020 research project MIMY.

Introduction: About the necessity to shift away from conventional qualitative research

"Researching hard-to-reach people is not easy." (Ullah et al. 2020: 365). Although migration research reverts to the wide range of quantitative and qualitative tools, Ullah et al. point to the necessity of a more reflected choice of appropriate methods. They refer to the "precarious conditions [forced] migrants go through" (ibid.: 358) and the vulnerabilities most of them are suffering from. Although qualitative methods in most cases properly contribute to in-depth analyses of complex social structures and thereby seem to be more responsive to the social realities of migrants, they do not always respond to complex challenges in research processes. These challenges concern especially questions of accessing and recruiting target groups as well as ethical issues, such as researcher-researched power relations)(Aldridge 2014, Heard 2022).

Bettmann and Roslon (2013) appeal to be courageous and creative in the development of research designs: it is not about ignoring established ways of doing qualitative research, but about adapting them to individual research contexts. Also Aldridge pleads for more flexibility in the research process by developing and applying "bespoke" methods (Aldridge 2016: 18) that are highly reflexive concerning individual contexts of migrants and which are based on narrative techniques to explicitly focus on migrants as narrators of "their" stories giving them a voice to overcome a "culture of silence" (Montero-Sieburth 2020: 214). Experiences and views can be shared and reflected on "in a novel way that may not be captured in verbal and more conventional research methods" (Mata-Codesal et al. 2020: 204).

Game-based approaches facilitate this methodological turn as they help to dissolve systemic barriers that exist between researchers and researched people. By placing migrants (and other vulnerable groups) as subjects into the centre of the research process power relations to researchers will not be (re-)produced and migrants themselves will be empowered to genuinely participate in processes of social change (ibid., Behrensen 2019). Following this idea, qualitative research can contribute not only to the creation of "knowledge for understanding", but also to the creation of "knowledge for action" (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995: 1667, cited from von Unger 2014: 46).

Game-based methods create interrelations between playful self-fulfillments and social realities which Heimlich calls "central moments of reality experience" (Heimlich 2015: 18). In the process of gaming, realities are anticipated, but they are not real. Gaming thus imparts capabilities to create utopias (Becker 1992) as people are animated to go beyond the visible world by using metaphorical expressions of their thoughts.

While McGonigal (2011) pleads to reconsider the negative connotations widely associated with games as being "timewasters" (Morris et al. 2013: 2) this article argues that game-based approaches can be a proper supplement for qualitative research, especially regarding vulnerable groups. They seem to be appropriate to overcome potential barriers of recruitment as well as subtle or even apparent hierarchies in the research context.

Bricks as bridges: the example LEGO® Serious Play®

LEGO® Serious Play® is a strategic tool to develop joined ideas, visions and scenarios and to reflect on them. LEGO® Serious Play® has been mainly used in consulting purposes (e.g. Grienitz/Schmidt 2012), but it has been used in research on tourism (e.g. Wengel 2020; Wengel, McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten 2019), intercultural studies (e.g. Dunn, Adamson and Thorpe 2017), higher education (e.g. McCusker 2020), social care (e.g. Cavaliero 2017), technology use in refugee camps (e.g. Fisher/Yafi 2018) and teaching (for example: with international nursing students (Ajibade and Hayes 2020; Hayes 2018)).

Lego® bricks have been invented already in 1934 by Ole Kirk Christiansen before they became in the late 1950s in the bricks made of Acrylonitrile-Butadiene Styrene that most of us know nowadays (Muñoz Alvis 2020). Based on Gauntlett, creative methods are using flows to express their identities, needs, experiences and knowledge without using language as the main tool. Especially games offer opportunities to get into a state of cognitive flow, "which is a mental state characterised by extreme involvement, concentration, engrossment, restricted awareness, altered sense of time, insensitiveness to hunger and insensitiveness to fatigue. […] If such states were achieved in schools, the students would not want to leave the school by the end of the day, but continue their work. They would not even hear the school bell ring" (Westera 2015: 1).

LEGO® Serious Play®, as well as other creative exploration methods, are overcoming language issues (such as mutism or lack of speaking the same language). The flow is the important state for the participants to come in "to elicit authentic opinions, ideas and identities for consideration and reflection in a wider group" (McCusker 2020: 148).

LEGO® Serious Play® was invented for consultancy processes inside the LEGO® company and then be applied to other businesses and organisations. (Gauntlett 2007) Until today the main use of LEGO® Serious Play® is for developing businesses and organisations, however, more and more being also used for research purposes (e.g. developing curricula). The method especially uses " a non-judgemental, free-thinking – and therefore playful – kind of environment" (Gauntlett 2007: 129) as well as the equality of all participants and their ideas (McCusker 2020). LEGO® Serious Play® uses metaphors to enable participants to express in a playful way their identity or other abstract concepts. Those metaphors should mean something – especially to people who have the same cultural background. (Gauntlett 2007) As we are using LEGO® Serious Play® in the context of migration cultural backgrounds might be diverse. Solutions can be either to work in a workshop only with participants coming from the same cultural background or to give more time and room for explaining and/or adopting the metaphor to a universal metaphor. Cavaliero (2017) argues that LEGO® bricks are inclusive for a diversity of people, as the building process is physical and haptic.

According to LEGO® Serious Play® (2002: 4), four purposes of adult serious plays are part of LEGO® Serious Play® "1) social bonding, 2) emotional expression, 3) cognitive development, and 4) constructive competition." Gauntlett (2007) sees three steps in the playful using of Lego: "prefiguration", "configuration" and "refiguration" showing the steps from the bricks to their connection/building to the reflection of what was built.

A full LEGO® Serious Play® strategy workshop consists of different phases:

- *Warm up* (three different steps to have a common understanding how Lego bricks can be put together, and what metaphoric use means)
- *Individual and joint identity building process*
- *Landscape of the joint model*
- *Scenarios*
- *Emergencies*
- *Simple Guiding Principles* (as a take-home-message)

The process does not need to go up-to the end every time it is used in a workshop, but no step can be skipped.

Developing a workshop with LEGO® Serious Play® and young migrants in vulnerable conditions

We developed a LEGO® Serious Play® workshop to empower young migrants in vulnerable conditions that we first piloted with a group of 8 international students at the University of the Greater Region- Master in Border Studies at the University of Luxembourg. The students were asked to build in different steps a joint vision of how an integrated society in Luxembourg could look like. The student had given consent that pictures were allowed to be taken of their LEGO® Serious Play® models, and we were allowed to register their "storytelling" about their individual models as well as of their joint models. The workshop took four hours and showed that using LEGO® bricks was unfamiliar to all of them. Therefore, the warm-up phase needs especially attention when dealing with participants from different cultural backgrounds.

Photo 1: "Getting lost in Luxembourg" (Warm-up model on the first experience in Luxembourg)

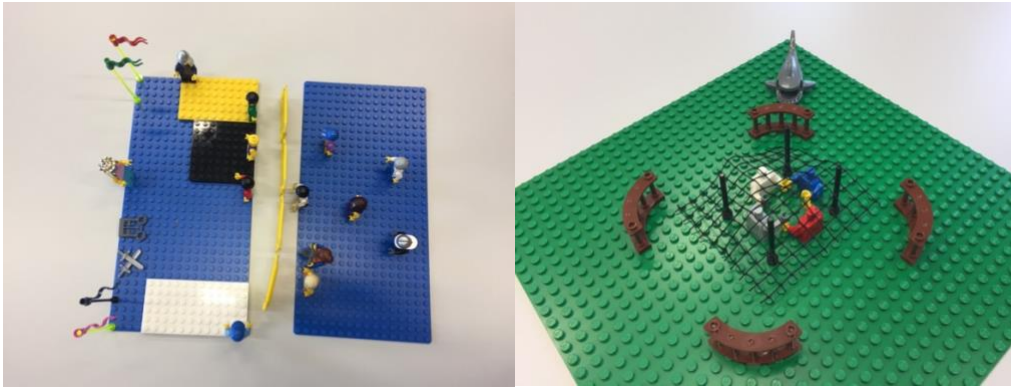Photos 2 and 3: "*My* vision of integration" (individual identity model)

Photo 4: Working on "*Our* vision of integration" (joint identity model)

The workshop was then revised to be more according to the needs of an international and intercultural context as it has then been used (or slightly adopted) in the case studies of the North of Luxembourg in the context of the MIMY project :

Duration (in minutes)	Unit	Information
5	Welcome	
2	Goals	Explain what is to be achieved today and present the roadmap. Asking participants to engage with new things and simply trust the process in the hour ahead
60	Skills Building : Tower	"Build a tower that is higher than 15 cm and that includes an apartment with the mini figure. You have 5 minutes."

		Task, Build, Discuss, Reflect (how it worked)
	Skills-Building: Turtle	"Please build the turtle as described on the paper in front of you." - what metaphor a turtle can be meant for? Explain that LEGO® Serious Play® uses metaphors. "Use the snail – if you want – to build a model on "My first experience in Luxembourg". Let your hands build it and use metaphors!" Storytelling and reflect
	Skills-Building : Describe	"What integration means for me?" Storytelling and reflect
Break		
60	"My vision of integration in Luxembourg 2025" (Individual identity step)	"Build a model on the following question: - "What would the migrants do to get to have an integrated society in 2025?" - What would the Luxembourgers do to get to have an integrated society in 2025?" - "What will do differently in 2025 to have a more integrated society in Luxembourg in which all people feel welcome?" Explain and reflect
60	"Our vision of integration" (Joint identity step)	"Mark the element of your model that is most important to you". Explanation what joint model means. "Now build a joint model. The questions are still valid." Explain with video and reflect (show agreement "thumps up or down")

This workshop was carried out with migrants in vulnerable conditions in the North of Luxembourg. Four participants were exercising the LEGO® Serious Play®, three men and a woman, two from Iran, two from Afghanistan. All in their 20s. The languages used were English and French between all fours, and then also Farsi between the two Iranians.

Conclusion: Potentials and limitations of game-based approaches for co-research

The participants were unfamiliar with LEGO®. Therefore, it took some time at the beginning to warm up and get used to the material. After some time, they figured out the potential of the bricks. Also it was an outcome that using a snail - that none of them knew as an animal – in the warm-up phase to discuss what a metaphor is, it was seen as being complicated. So, other animals were discussed additionally. However, not being used to it, being an extremely hot day, and also coming directly after a long day of school, motivation was needed in between. Even though there were several challenges, the participants got into the LEGO® Serious Play® and build first individually and then also a joint model of their vision of integration. It showed also that "thinking with hands" brought a lot of ideas which the participants would not have been able to express with words only. This empowered them also for the joint vision to express their thoughts. Even though here, different language and different educational skills empowered especially one participant more than the others.

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Chapter 2. Using Photovoice to explore integration in local communities

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Abstract

Photovoice is a participatory action research method that allows exploring people's living contexts through the photographs they snap. Participants express their stories, needs, ideas, and emotions through photographs and then they discuss them in group to reflect on their community. Photovoice promotes community exploration, critical discussions, and social change involving people who are usually excluded from decision-making processes. People can identify barriers and resources and then improve the contexts in which they are inserted using the photographic language, becoming active participants in the process.

Photographs have the potential to help people express deeper and hidden emotions or ideas on complex issues. The photographic language is equal, imminent, and universal, representing an efficient way to communicate, especially among people with different languages, backgrounds, and experiences.

The present study aims at investigating the emotional and cognitive representations of the young participants (immigrants and non-immigrants) on integration in their living context understood as the neighbourhood in which they spend most of their time.

12 young people aged between 19 and 29 living in the city of Milan took part in the photovoice: 4 young psychology students from the Catholic University of Milan, 2 peer researchers involved in the MIMY project, and 6 young migrants.

These different target groups of young people allowed us to open a composite and unprecedented look at the territorial contexts of life in order to highlight how these can act as facilitating and/or hindering factors in the integration process. The presence of natives and migrants enabled reciprocity on the concept of integration in line with the definition of integration as a dynamic and interactive process between host society and newcomers.

A qualitative analysis of the narratives that accompanied the sharing of the photos taken by the participants was conducted, which made it possible to identify certain themes around which the discussion focused.

Results show how photovoice projects involving participants from different backgrounds conceptualise integration according to different themes: 1. The universal languages (of music, art, food) to convey integration; 2. The importance of education, culture, and history as a vehicle for multiculturalism; 3. Diversity as a value or as a threat; 4. Travel as a metaphor for encounter; 5. Emotions linked to integration (nostalgia for one's own country above all); and solidarity as a universal gesture. Implications of the results are discussed.

Introduction

Photovoice is a participatory action research method that helps exploring people's stories and living context by means of the photographic language (Wang, 2003).
Participants take pictures that are representative of their stories, needs, ideas, and emotions related to a theme or context and subsequently engage in group discussions to reflect on their community.

This technique works at multiple levels. Firstly, people are individually activated to reflect on their contexts and are themselves protagonists in the research. Second, engaging in groups, participants identify limitations and resources of a context and what are the determinants of and the drivers behind the issues at hand. Third, the group is prompted to reflect on what changes can be implemented to improve their context, sharing results and proposals with the broader community. Overall, the photovoice technique advances community exploration, critical discussions, and social change by directly involving people who experience the problem or context investigated. People can identify barriers and resources and then improve the contexts in which they are inserted using the photographic language, becoming active participants in the process (Wang, & Burris, 1997).

Furthermore, photovoice appears to be conducive to deepening the understanding of resources and needs for different issues and contexts (Catalani & Minkler, 2010), and a recent study has shown the advantages of using photovoice in qualitative research across nations in a European project (Gaboardi et al., 2022). Indeed, photographs have the potential to help people express deeper and hidden emotions, stories, or ideas about complex issues beyond language and cultural barriers. The photographic language represents an efficient way to communicate, especially among young people with different cultures and backgrounds (Migliorini, & Rania, 2017). Visual and participatory methodologies may overcome issues of language, power, and vulnerability, especially with refugee youth (Vecchio et al., 2017). In Europe, several studies have involved young people in photovoice projects concerning intercultural integration (Rania et al., 2014), young migrants' conditions for health (Lögdberg et al., 2020), and how culturally and ethnically diverse youth reimagine urban and rural spaces (see Greene et al., 2018 for a review).

Participation of young people using visual methodologies is crucial to learn about their experience and stories allowing them to have a safe and empowering space for group discussion (Rania et al., 2015). Considering the already mentioned advantages of photovoice, in the present article we propose the adoption of this methodology for research involving young people from different backgrounds (immigrants and non-immigrants) with the aim of investigating the emotional and cognitive representations on integration in the living context in which they spend most of their time (neighborhood, city).

The process

The participants of the study were 12 young people aged between 19 and 29 living in Milan. The group was composed of 2 peer researchers involved in the MIMY project, 4 young psychology students from the Catholic University of Milan, and 6 young migrants.

These different target groups of young people allowed us to sketch a composite and unprecedented view of the territorial contexts to highlight how these can act as facilitating and/or hindering factors in integration processes. The presence of natives and African migrants enabled reciprocity on the concept of integration in line with the definition of integration as a dynamic and interactive process between host society and newcomers. Moreover, the role of peer researchers was very important. Peer researchers are young people with migration experiences who are involved into the project as important collaborators within the research team. The peer researchers who participated in photovoice were an Iranian man who is an expert in photography and an Albanian woman who works in cultural mediation.

The photovoice was organized into two meetings, the first one lasting two hours and the second one 4 hours. In the first meeting, facilitator (a researcher psychologist) met with the participants to present the photovoice process, and the photographic task was assigned[5]. Practical guidance on how to proceed with the photographs was also given, e.g., ethics and privacy issues were discussed. This first meeting was followed by a week in which the young participants were invited to go around their neighborhood to take photos responding the task. Participants were asked to bring 6 photos: 3 representing hindering factors for integration and 3 representing facilitating factors for integration and 3. Everyone sent the requested photos and thus a total of 72 photos were collected. The photos were then sent to the photovoice facilitator who collected them and organized them in a file so that they could be shared. During the second meeting, participants shared and discussed on the photos. Individually and in groups, meanings were attributed to the photos and a reflection was initiated based on what was stimulated by the photo. There was then a joint reflection on the themes evoked by the photos (process of consciousness-raising) and finally the choice of the photos to be included in the final exhibition (group choice) as well as the elaboration of captions for each chosen photo.

The young people involved in the project participated in all phases of the photovoice with interest and perseverance. The two group meetings were audio-recorded and edited to have adequate written material for the analysis of the content that were discussed.
Initially all the photos produced were presented and commented on, after which the group chose only those that they considered to be the most significant and representative of the themes discussed, arriving at a final number of 20 photos.

The themes were generated based on participants' thoughtful exchange. The facilitator captured the elements of the discussion by trying to connect them around themes that were then proposed to the group to continue their discussion and definition. Then, a qualitative thematic analysis of the narratives that accompanied the sharing of the photos taken by the participants was conducted, which made it possible to identify certain themes around which the discussion focused.

Results showed how participants from different backgrounds conceptualize integration. Six main themes were identified: 1. The universal languages (of music, art, food) to convey integration; 2. The importance of education, culture, and history as a vehicle for multiculturalism;

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[5] In your community (meaning the place where you live or where you spend most of your time) what facilitates and what hinders integration (or positive experiences) between migrants and the local population (especially young people)?

3. Diversity as a value or as a threat; 4. Travel as a metaphor for encounter; 5. Emotions linked to integration (nostalgia for one's own country above all); and 6. Solidarity as a universal gesture.

An example of the first theme is a photo showing a group of young people of different nationalities eating around a table. It is a moment from an Erasmus Project that involved several countries. The group chose it and decided to comment on it like this, "*Projects such as Erasmus are a travel opportunity to bring people from different countries together and get to know each other's cultures better, without discrimination*".

More examples are to be found in the two photos depicting moments of collaboration and solidarity for people in need carried out by immigrants and Italians: "*Collaboration and solidarity are the building blocks for building fairer, multicultural societies*".

Considering the pictures taken, it is interesting to note the difference between those brought by young immigrants and those brought by students. Immigrant participants took photos with more personal and intimate meanings: for example, one participant photographed a tree in a city park that reminds him of the one in his home country highlighting it as an environmental element that makes him feel integrated. Students, on the other hand, mostly photographed city life contexts (bookstores, stations, bars) portraying a more impersonal and distant idea of integration or non-integration.

Lastly, a photographic exhibition was organized with the participants in which the twenty photos selected and commented on by the group were displayed. The exhibition was set up in the atrium of one of the premises of the Catholic University of Milan at the end of a workshop involving other young students and young immigrants. The photovoice participants took part in the exhibition by taking on the role of "guides", explaining to visitors the path taken and the meaning of the photos on display.

Reflections and lessons learned

The photovoice allowed participants to get into the full cognitive and emotional dimensions of the integration process. Regarding the results of the process, we can highlight how all participants described integration as a two-way, reciprocal process between immigrants and the local population (Maldonado & Licona, 2007). As Jobst and Skrobaneck (2020) stated, integration should be conceptualized as a never-ending, contingent process of change–stability dynamics, marked by individual and institutional processes (Jobst & Skrobanek, 2020; Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019). Integration is described as a relational and psychological issue, very much linked to states of mind and the possibility of having meaningful people around.

Culture, art, and knowledge are recognized as key factors for the dissemination of a multicultural mindset and the promotion of welcoming societies. A special attention deserves solidarity and cooperation that are identified as effective tools for building integration and fostering dialogue and growth: even for immigrants, participating in one's own community can be a vehicle for greater integration.

From an initial assessment of the process, we can conclude that the photovoice has: enabled real participation of young immigrants; gave a voice to often unheard minorities; brought to light new perspectives on integration and social inclusion; and enabled an authentic exchange between young migrants and young people from the host country by fostering a culture of solidarity and respect (Rania et al., 2014; Vecchio et al., 2017).

However, some limitations are also to be considered. First, the linguistic dimension has sometimes been a barrier to expression. The part of discussing the photos and elaborating on the meanings attached to the pictures presupposes a certain linguistic competence that not all young immigrants possess. Despite this, the visual language has stimulated reflections using a symbolic language that goes beyond verbalizations (Migliorini, & Rania, 2017). Second, it was difficult to engage young people and invite them to actively participate (immigrants and non-immigrants). Future projects could use incentives for participation (e.g., academic credits for students). Finally, it was difficult to stimulate the group to promote social change. The photovoice aims to go beyond the denunciation of limitations of a community to promote social change but it was difficult to reach this further level of action. Nevertheless, the photographic exhibition allowed having an active involvement of the participants in telling their stories to the student community.

Overall, we have identified two important aspects of the process: the role of peer researchers in the data analysis and in stimulating discussions between immigrants and non-immigrants; and the use of photographs allowed to use a symbolic language to know deep aspects of the stories of the participants.

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Chapter 3. Photovoice: A case study with young migrants in vulnerable conditions in Romania

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Abstract

This study is based on the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a form of knowledge co-creation regarding migrants' experiences in Romania. Participants were asked to contribute to a photographic project with pictures they thought best described their lived experiences in Romania. The PAR revealed certain affective experiences of migrants otherwise difficult to convey through traditional research methods, i.e. the importance that nature and the scenic landscapes in Romania have for migrants, offering them possibilities to cope with difficulties and loneliness. Participants acknowledged the importance of access to education and civic engagement in the host country and the contribution these had to exploring new opportunities.

Introduction

The number of third country migrants living in Romania has seen a constant increase over recent years. As observed by Oltean and Găvruș (2018), Romania emerges as a host society destination for third country nationals. Romania still is a country of net emigration (Anghel et al., 2016), with the number of outgoing migrants considerably exceeding that of incoming migrants (approximately four million Romanian citizens lived abroad as of 2022), which also sets the scientific literature to be more focused on outbound migration from Romania.

The objective of the Photovoice session is to investigate the emotional and cognitive representations that young migrants have about integration in Romania. Locals were also asked to participate for research comparison purposes. The Photovoice event was planned and organized between July and September 2022, with the art exhibitions finding place at the end of October 2022. The group of Photovoice participants was made of 11 participants: 6 young migrants, all female (aged 20, 22, 22, 23, 29, 32), the Republic of Moldova (2), Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria and Syria; 3 young non-migrants (locals, 2 females, 1 male), and 2 peer researchers (both female, from Lebanon and Syria).

To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind among migrants in Romania. The use of PAR methods in Romanian migration studies is welcome, considering that such methods may be effective ways to understand the new immigrants and to foster their integration in the Romania society.

Results and Discussions

The ideas that emerged from the group discussions are organized on several themes. These refer on one hand to the difficulties encountered by participants in Romania and on the other hand to the coping strategies developed for their integration in the host country.

Migration is perceived as a new beginning, an overwhelming experience but necessary in their self-development and for fulfilling their aspirations. Figure 1 (followed by the original narrative) entitled "The golden opportunity" is the photo of an opened door, a symbol for the new opportunities offered by migration.

Figure 1 – Photo / Image depicting the migration journey

"In my perspective, no one in the world is content to leave their country, people, and society. We do it to achieve our goals in life and to take the chances that are not obtainable in our countries. Although not all doors we encounter are open doors, there will always be one, and that's the golden opportunity we run towards. This golden opportunity might be a new job, new position, new home… mine was migration." (Lebanese migrant living in Romania, 22 years, Female)

Another participant photographed the Bucharest airport, her entrance gate to Romania (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Photo / Image depicting the migration journey

"After 21 years, for the first time, I boarded a plane. When I saw it, it was so close to the people that they did not seem to be afraid of it, but I was overwhelmed with awe and astonishment. The planes I saw from my childhood were military planes loaded with missiles to kill us." (Palestinian migrant living in Romania, 23 years, female).

Through her photo she highlighted also the new perspective that planes and airports have for her, as previously she only knew military planes loaded with ammunition. Thus, the airport photo becomes a mirror of the new life which began in Romania, leaving behind the old life.

Difficulties and barriers expressed through photographs

Discrimination was one of the subjects found in the participants' photos when they were asked to take pictures of the main difficulties encountered in Romania. One participant expressed a racist incident that occurred while using the metro (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Exposed to a discriminatory situation

"I didn't pay attention to those around me, but the first time I tried it, about a year after my arrival in Romania, I was drawn to that look directed at me with hatred. And then I was exposed to a racist situation, a man pushed me on the stairs of the metro. I was afraid, I didn't approach people on the street. But I didn't stay long in this state, perhaps because of my love for life and discovery." (Palestinian immigrant living in Romania, female, 23 years)

Several photos have been featured as a topic for the feelings of solitude and isolation brought about by the migrant status. Photos depicting single individuals in the city, on the streets or in train stations reflect the loneliness felt by participants, the continuous search for their true identity and the emotional struggles of creating a new life in a different country while leaving behind their home country. One participant (Figure 3) highlights the impact of the pandemic on worsening the feelings of solitude and isolation.

Figure 3 – Feelings of loneliness and isolation

"The life of a young migrant student in Romania. It's a photo from my college dorm room. It was actually taken during online studying. So sometimes it was hard to get to know Romania or get acclimated while only sitting in my room." (Moldovan immigrant living in Romania, female, 20 years)

Support and coping strategies expressed through photographs

Another string of photos referred to the positive aspects of the migration journey and the coping strategies developed by migrants for their integration in a new society – developing relationships and friendships, discovering Romania and its natural beauty, focusing on education and self-development.

Most participants mentioned the important support received from the local population. Photos with the participants surrounded by friends and groups of people have been submitted to stress this idea. Romanians are perceived as welcoming and supportive, willing to help, opened and friendly. Those who are students mentioned they joined student associations, easing the process of making friends among natives. Photos with social activities conducted within these associations are given to illustrate the important support offered by natives for the migrants' integration in the host society.

Apart from the social support, migrants found an emotional refuge in the natural beauty of Romania. Surprisingly, all participants shared at least one photo depicting a landscape or an image capturing the natural beauty in Romania (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – The beauty of nature as a coping strategy

"The first thing that attracts a foreigner is the charming Romanian landscape: mountains, seaside, woods, parks, etc. Romania is a country where we can still breath fresh air, without suffocating pollution. Those who love nature will be pampered here, just like me!" (Algerian immigrant living in Romania, 29 years, female

Discovering and experiencing the beauty of nature made the participants feel closer to the host country. The natural beauty is considered the main strength of Romania, as mentioned by one of the participants. The same participant shared a photo of her in a train, mentioning that traveling by train and exploring new places is what she likes most in Romania. Part of the photos depicting the natural beauty include also the participants, as a testimony of their feeling of belonging to the scenery and the new country (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – The beauty of nature as a coping strategy

"I was really different from those around me, I just started looking for what I love from nature, discovering and experiencing that first feeling that I've been waiting for 21 years." (Palestinian immigrant living in Romania, female, 23 years).

Another support strategy expressed through photographs was the access to education, as a motivational factor. One participant presented two photos entitled "*The powerful weapon*". Both photos depict the Central University Library in Bucharest, therefore we selected one of them presented in Figure 6. The participant mentioned that the choice of this building was to symbolize education and access to education, representing for her the main reasons for migration.

Figure 6 – Education, the powerful weapon

"I photographed the Central University Library to show the things I like most about Romania, Bucharest. The two reasons

*people migrate are better job opportunities and education. The most thing I like here and I am thankful for is **access to education**. Although in Lebanon we have some of the best universities in the world, and access to education is possible; **pursuing it is not easy**. This is highly due to political issues. In Bucharest, I had access to education and pursued my dream degree. Here, I acquired the powerful weapon.*" (Lebanese immigrant living in Romania, female, 22 years)

One participant mentioned that when she arrived in Romania, she noticed that the general opinion about Arabs was shaped by the war conflict and culinary habits. This aspect motivated her to start an NGO called "*Arab Cultural Center*" (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Arabic Cultural Festival, Sibiu, 2-4 September 2022

"I arrived in Sibiu as a result of the war in Syria. Soon after, I enrolled in college and got to know the city and its people. I immediately realized that most of my Romanian colleagues and friends understood the Arab world in terms of bombs, shawrma, desert and camels. By establishing the Arab Cultural Center in Sibiu, I proposed to make at least some of these aspects of the culture and civilization of the Arab peoples known in Romania." (Syrian immigrant living in Romania, 32 years, female).

Conclusions

Romanian participants communicated through photographs their ideas about their journey as migrants and how it changed their life. Their pictures emphasize a multitude of feelings and emotions lived and experienced by the participants. Some participants mentioned discriminatory situations, while others referred to the friendly nature and hospitality of Romanian society.

References

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Conclusion

Participatory action research within the frame of the MIMY project, as acknowledged in the contributions to this working paper, aimed at incorporating in the research process the experiences of the young migrants who were being studied, recognizing them as rightful experts regarding their integration challenges. On the one hand, such incorporation aimed at a production of knowledge that presents a better fit with the participants' lived experiences and, therefore, arriving at a better understanding of their problems, defies and also resources. On the other hand, research itself aimed at creating the means for the participants' empowerment by giving them the opportunity to explore their lives' conundrums in a structured manner and at different levels (individual, familial, social, economic, political), thus enhancing their own understanding of their life situation and available multi-level resources that can be mobilized to overcome existing challenges.

In doing so, the use of PAR methodologies was a push to move away from more traditional ways of doing qualitative research by introducing an approach that hopes to be more horizontally driven and democratic. Researchers did not assume themselves as the sole holders of the means and legitimacy of the process of knowledge construction. Research participants were not expected to solely and passively adhere to *a priori* models of data collection. Ideally, research becomes a collaborative endeavor where the line between knowledge holders and research "subjects" becomes blurred. Issues of power, legitimacy and ethics are given central stage. Research participants ideally become increasingly empowered as knowledge producers that work hand in hand with researchers, thus overcoming still prevalent power asymmetries. Assuming that participants are privileged knowledge holders on issues pertaining to their own lived experiences, PAR acknowledges their expertise and their inherent and rightful legitimacy as knowledge producers. From an ethical point of view, PAR acknowledges participants as full actors in the research endeavor – respecting their expertise on the subject of study and striving to promote their individual empowerment.

The MIMY project assumed the task of integrating participants in the research process through several methodological means and activities. In the present working paper, we explored such an integration through the incorporation of Peer Researchers and the use of Art-based Methods. Both approaches or methodologies were assumed by the MIMY project as privileged gateways to give research participants an active central role in the research process and thus to take into serious consideration the power, legitimacy and ethical concerns inherent to PAR. Yet, as it becomes evident from the questions and concerns raised in this working paper, to fully operationalize and comply with the PAR principles is a task fraught with numerous challenges. To what extent peer researchers hold the power to actually have a saying in the different stages of the research process? To what extent is their participation actually empowering or stimulated a developmental process? Are participants (whether peer researchers of participants in art-based events) given all the necessary training? Are their individual fragilities taken into consideration and adequate support (e.g. emotional, instrumental, professional) provided? Are the repercussions (e.g. the psychological impact) of their participation taken into consideration and monitored throughout the research process? Are there taken measures to guaranty their support after the research project is over, if deemed needed? All these issues become actual defies when doing PAR and render the operationalization of

such methodologies a complex methodological and ethical challenge. In fact, failing to guarantee all (or most) necessary conditions for the proper use of PAR can have the contrary effects that PAR hopes to achieve: a negative experience of disempowerment and of having been "used" in a research process that failed to properly create the necessary conditions that are essential to achieve PAR's noble goals. Otherwise, managing to provide the preconditions that effectively create the adequate stage for the participation of the people and communities whose issues, problems, challenges and resources one aims to study, can prove extremely profitable in, at least, two ways. On the one hand, in terms of producing knowledge that more accurately reflects their lived experiences. On the other hand, in terms of promoting individual and community empowerment and, hence, the (individual and communal) capacity to produce positive changes in living contexts. Being aware of the challenges of doing PAR is a first step to mobilize all foreseeable needed resources that may warrant the achievement of these two essential goals associated with such an approach: the full acknowledgement of participants as research collaborators (in every stage of the research endeavor) and their ultimate empowerment at the individual and community levels.

The present working paper aimed at presenting the use of PAR within the MIMY project by offering a critical reflection that addresses the complex issues of power relations when doing research, the legitimacies of knowledge production and the intricate ethical concerns involved. In doing so, we aimed at exploring the complexities of doing PAR and contributing to existing literature on the subject by addressing current challenges and hopefully helping pave to way to future uses of PAR that are increasingly consistent with its theoretical, methodological and ethical principles and concerns. In doing so, we hope to strengthen the path to more inclusive, participatory, democratic and ethically informed ways of doing research in migration studies.