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## **RADIO MUSICHEH?: A PILOT MODEL FOR RESEARCH ON INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN ASYLUM SEEKER CENTRES**

In 2016, the University of Pavia began a research project titled: *MIGRATIONS: toward an INterdisciplinary Governance model*. At the Department of Musicology and Cultural Heritage at Cremona, this project was developed based on the theme of *Music and Migration*<sup>1</sup>, investigating self-representation and expression through music in the daily lives of voluntary migration communities<sup>2</sup> and asylum seekers forced to remain in reception centres. In this last area, I conducted research into the activities of the sub-Saharan African musical group *Oghene Damba*, which was the basis of my bachelor thesis.<sup>3</sup> Parallel to this, I attended the Erasmus+ training course named the *MARS Project*.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the course was to provide appropriate multidisciplinary competences for students to conduct activities of psycho-social intervention through music in deprived and marginalised communities. Thanks to this experience, I had the opportunity to make numerous visits to the asylum seekers' centre at Cremona for a year and a half and to gain familiarity with the process of organisation of the structure and the routine of hosted asylum seekers.

The objective of the whole project was to create a map of asylum seekers' musical interests and competences to promote a theoretical reflection on the possible roles and positive outcomes that musical activities can have in marginalised and multicultural communities, bearing in mind that music is a means to

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1 [http://musicologia.unipv.it/dipartimento/pdf/Migrating\\_Sottoprogrammi21.pdf](http://musicologia.unipv.it/dipartimento/pdf/Migrating_Sottoprogrammi21.pdf)

2 "Voluntary migration is the movement of people into a new region by choice, motivated by an attraction to the new locale" (Kaufman, 2001, p.173).

3 With the support of fellow students: Massimiliano Caruso, Simone Rude, Federica La Rocca

4 <http://www.musicandresilience.net>

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build social, cultural and religious self-identification as well as to contribute to the creation of a positive public opinion on cultural diversity.<sup>5</sup>

These experiences inspired the project *Radio Musicheh*,<sup>6</sup> an independent radio programme in which asylum seekers are the absolute stakeholders, curating the content of the programme and being the broadcasters themselves. The project was brought on as a pilot from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

### **Context of Cremona's Asylum Seekers' Reception Centre**

Cremona's asylum seeker reception centre is managed by Caritas Italiana.<sup>7</sup> When the project began, it hosted 150 migrants in the main building and just as many in other apartments spread out in the city. Most of the beneficiaries were from sub-Saharan Africa, others came from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They were mostly of male adults (18-30 years old). There were a few families with children, there were no unaccompanied minors and the few women were also appropriately accommodated. The minimum length of accommodation was a year and a half. They had a programme for language learning to receive the basic linguistic certification, but it was not as effective as it could have been. Other than the linguistic education, they did not have the opportunity to partake in other activities: most of the time, they stayed in the courtyard listening to music and playing table football. Most of them could not find any work opportunities as well. The great majority belonged to the Muslim or Christian religion. These people were provided vans and drivers by Caritas to attend services and other functions at their respective churches and mosques in nearby cities.

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5 See also: [http://www-wp.unipv.it/migrazione/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Sotto-Tematica\\_21\\_Musica-migrante.pdf](http://www-wp.unipv.it/migrazione/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Sotto-Tematica_21_Musica-migrante.pdf)

6 The project was my final project for the MARS course, and it was developed thanks to the collaboration of the Department of Musicology and Cultural Heritage (University of Pavia – Cremona), which offered technical and technological resources. The asylum seekers' centre, the Department of Musicology and Cultural Heritage and the cultural centre Circolo Arci Arcipelago provided venues and halls. Martina Di Martino and Patrizia Vaccari participated as facilitators with me through the entire process.

7 [http://www.caritasitaliana.it/home\\_page/chi\\_siamo/00003684\\_Statuto.html](http://www.caritasitaliana.it/home_page/chi_siamo/00003684_Statuto.html)

## **Aims of the Intervention**

Reflecting on the necessities required for the proposal of a music project on the model of psycho-social intervention, some possible aspects were individuated.

### **1. Language Learning**

A question arose when analysing the context of Cremona's asylum seeker centre: why are most of the hosted refugees not interested in learning Italian and attending classes? Three possible answers were derived for the same. First, most of them feel as if their journey has not yet ended and that they must continue to move to Northern Europe. Thus, they don't develop the need to create a connection with the actual hosting city as they are not placed in a condition to develop such an interest. This links with the second motivation: the lack of contact with locals in terms of human and professional interactions does not permit them to develop the intention of studying the language. A third motivation might likely be found in the method: classes are mainly conducted in a classroom format, focusing on the teaching of basic grammar through memorisation and written exercises. A more interdisciplinary and interactive method can stimulate refugees to learn the language, thanks to a greater active involvement of each student.

### **2. Creation of a Community Within Hosted Refugees**

The organisation of the asylum seekers' centre creates a dispersive environment for refugees. Different flats and structures, spread all over the city, host the refugees, unfortunately depriving them of the feeling of closeness and familiarity. The increased number of hosted people, the lack of recreational activities and the instability of the length of their stay prevents them from creating an interconnected web of relationships.<sup>8</sup> However, the feeling of being integrated in a community allows people to gain confidence and trust as a basis for health, well-being and integration.<sup>9</sup>

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8 On the other hand, this whole process has been verified in Oghene Damba's musical activity which, being recreational and bonding, permitted them to create a small community inside the asylum seekers' centre. See also Kevorkian 2016.

9 "Community (is, ed) possible because it is founded on intersubjectively shared values" (Stanghellini e Ciglia 2013: 8) and "Mental disorders imply the dislocation of subjective experience from one's own cultural context. Individuals with mental disorders do not participate in the 'inter-subjective valorisation' (De Martino, 1977: 50) of events" (Stanghellini e Ciglia 2013: 10).

3. Creation of a Web of Relationships Within the Realities in the Hosting City  
Linked with the first need, and a consequence of the second one, the creation of a relational web in the hosting society allows empowerment and integration. Cultural, relational and professional lives are the main bases of a socially healthy life in a societal context. All of these aspects overlap and each of them is useful in overall development. Work possibilities are scarce and contact with religious communities does not provide refugees the possibility to be integrated into urban life. Giving opportunities to experience positive relations outside the asylum seekers' centre will permit them to start, step-by-step, the creation of a new social life. The fulfilment of this specific need will provide wellness not only to the hosted refugees but also the local communities that need to remain conscious of the arrival of refugees in their city to be able to adapt the city for integration, avoiding the rise of any racist feelings and uneasiness towards the foreigners.
  
4. Consciousness of Being in a Foreign Space  
An important step is to remain aware of being in a foreign city. To achieve this goal, it's necessary to create a context in which refugees are not marginalised or do not end up isolating themselves on purpose for fear of standing out in a foreign city or uneasiness within an unknown environment. The creation of positive contact in reliable contexts will, first, create a relational channel and help develop the willingness of the refugees to merge themselves in the new context.
  
5. Regaining the Feeling of Time and Its Necessary Organisation  
The length of the refugees' stay in the asylum seekers' centre and the lack of possible activities – recreational or professional – that could fill the time creates a sort of limbo in which the concept of time is altered for the refugees. Not being encouraged to have a journal time schedule, refugees live in an unorganised manner with regard to time, in which they are constantly waiting for bureaucratic processes to end. To ensure the feeling of well-being and integrate them into all the important aspects of social life, it's important to create a time-regulated framework in which to develop a consciousness of responsibilities that can help in establishing a sense of empowerment.<sup>10</sup>

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10 "It is a complex process by which people recover the power they have within themselves through a relationship with one or more people" (Calvot, Pégon & Rizk, Shivji 2013, p. 13).

## **Realisation of the Intervention**

The radio programme as an activity would permit the beneficiaries to tackle the identified needs:

### 1. Language Learning

Being broadcasters on an Italian channel would give them a real opportunity to talk in Italian, allowing them to grow an interest in the language and to learn the same with an immediate satisfaction of its useful purpose.

### 2. Creation of a Community Within Hosted Refugees

Through the radio programme, the beneficiaries are encouraged to share music and experiences, stories of their lives and journeys or stories of their countries. The goal is to spread the project inside the asylum seekers' centre by word of mouth and by public broadcasting of the programme, creating a conceptual link between the broadcasters and the audience. Moreover, being an audience to such a radio programme could encourage the will of the beneficiaries to participate in the programme, share experiences and stories and to increase the immaterial resources shared within the refugees' community. Finally, those broadcasting the programme will be collaborating on a concrete project, creating social and professional relationships. The possibility to change the broadcaster and collaborators for each episode will, bit by bit, increase the number of refugees who become a part of the community.

### 3. Creation of a Web of Relationships Within the Realities in the Hosting City

The programme can be broadcasted in selected public spaces of the city as well. This will raise awareness among the inhabitants regarding the refugees' culture and stories and will create a link between the hosted and the host. The possibility for refugees to go beyond the environment of the asylum seekers' centre will create various possibilities of experiencing positive contact with the city.

### 4. Consciousness of Being in a Foreign Space

Engaging in an activity, which for some can be a professional activity will help the beneficiaries further understand the space they are living in at present. This can be achieved by advancing into an environment different from that of the asylum seekers' centre and establishing relationships with the city while simultaneously experiencing how people interact in a working environment in the host city.

## 5. Regaining the Concept of Time and Its Necessary Organisation

Working on a radio programme involves great organisational skills: The time to speak and play music on air must always be calculated due to the limited duration of the programme. This will contribute to regaining a precise and regulated understanding of time. Additionally, participating in this project will influence the time schedule for the whole week: beneficiaries will have precise timings on the days during which they will have to go to the radio to broadcast their programme. Moreover, they will have to work on the organisation of the programme, the writing of the speech, and on the choices of music they will broadcast, during the whole week according to the programme's timing.

The principal idea supporting this project is to develop a participatory approach in which each person is at the core of the project and leads the choice of content and musical material used. Self-determination gives the freedom to choose how to present oneself in a foreign environment. The creation of a shared narrative between the asylum seekers strengthens the relationship between each person and gives more possibilities for building long-term relationships. Borrowing a concept from the participatory video format:

“The emphasis [...] is placed on the process rather than the product. [...] the process aims to

- Building confidence of participating individuals & communities
- Increase participation of marginalised groups & individuals
- Develop critical consciousness amongst participants [...]
- Foster understanding and awareness within participating communities [...]
- Empower communities to continue processes of change and development”  
(Benest, 2012, p. 16-17)

This is summarised in four terms: Participation, reflection, empowerment and positive action.

Moreover, giving immediate satisfaction for the achievement of a result and the creation of a product provides a strong empowerment and results in the growth of self-esteem.<sup>11</sup>

The preparation of the material for the broadcast was managed in the following manner:

1. Listening of the songs proposed,
2. Gathering of the questions that the song brought to our minds: what is interesting to focus on in the song?
3. Writing in small groups the answers to all the questions that emerged; and
4. Rehearsals and correction of Italian grammar and pronunciation.

This process was conducted with two groups of two or three people.<sup>12</sup> The first week was dedicated to get acquainted with the whole group of participants, while the next two weeks were dedicated to prepare and record two episodes of the broadcast, one with each group.

### **Outcomes of the Intervention**

The pilot of the project was never completed due to the personal hindrances of the participants. There are still two phases to be verified: the diffusion of the radio programme through a website and through the broadcasting of the programme in selected spaces of the city. However, it was possible to verify the sustainability of the project itself and its effectiveness on the beneficiaries. During the three weeks of organising the pilot, beneficiaries were made to get acquainted with the process of preparation for the programme, knowing how to work and preparing themselves in advance. While the facilitators played a primary role in guiding the whole process during the preparation of the first group of broadcasters, with the second group, we had the chance to move aside – from a leading role to a supporting one, mainly just assisting them with

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11 “Given that psychological well-being is considered to consist of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, the fifth element of well-being to be considered here is accomplishment (see also Seligman, 2010: 236, 2011: 24). Seligman (2010) considered accomplishment to be an important element of positive psychology since “many people are motivated to achieve, to have mastery, to have competence, even if it brings no positive emotion, no engagement, no relationships, and no meaning” (Croom, 2015, p. 234).

12 The beneficiaries’ names are: Modu, Demba, Sheriff, Malami, Musa.

Italian grammar and pronunciation.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, even if the project didn't reach its climax of diffusion, the beneficiaries got in touch with the people and the environment of the hosting city and we could even verify that they carried on this personal network of relations outside the project, being involved in the local context and meeting people they got in touch with on several other occasions.

This aspect was still highly developed thanks to the arrangement of the meeting in environments separate from that of the asylum seekers' centre. They met people from Cremona in the Department of Musicology and Cultural Heritage and in Circolo Arci Arcipelago. The core activities are to form links with peers living in the city and getting to know places per se.

The diffusion within the asylum seekers' centre was verified by the dissemination of the project by word of mouth: the beneficiaries of the project got the chance to create a sense of community and between them, widening it to their friends who came to attend some meetings driven by curiosity.

Regarding the consciousness of time organisation, it is difficult to verify the effect of the project on the same in a short time span. It will be probably deepened with the continuation of the project. However, it was an important discussion topic that was raised during the meeting, since beneficiaries began noticing when they were late or when they weren't respecting the timings of the broadcast during rehearsal; all of these small details can be considered as progressive attention to organisation of time.

The most visible outcome was in the growth of their proficiency in the Italian language: employing the language for a practical goal and for the creation of new personal and social relationships encouraged each of the beneficiaries to develop a greater interest in it. Most of them were embarrassed and found difficulty in talking in Italian at the first meeting. However, during the last week, they felt at ease with communicating in the language. The project served also as a certificate for beneficiaries to support the required documentation in order to obtain a regular permit of stay.

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13 One other aspect to be verified is the dissemination of the technical knowledge, since there wasn't enough time to teach beneficiaries that part of the work. The pilot was conducted using Cubase as the recording programme and a sound card with two microphones. The whole process can be simplified by using smartphone apps for podcasts and open-source programmes.



As a work in progress, the picture is still fragmented and not yet organic. However, at this stage of development, it was still possible to verify three imperative features of the project: involvement of beneficiaries, sustainability of the project and its effectiveness in achieving the established aims.

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