

RE-VOICING THE UNHEARD: META-STUDY ON ARTS-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This study aims to explore and analyse qualitative research on refugee and asylum-seeker interventions for social inclusion that engages a creative, arts-based community approach.

Method. The article describes a meta-study towards discovering meta-theory, meta-methods, and meta-findings across articles on the subject. For this purpose, a broad database search was conducted, which resulted in a total of 7 articles after filtering according to the previously defined exclusion criteria. These articles were analysed by two independent researchers and later reviewed by two independent evaluators.

Results and conclusion. There was an overarching lack of definitions and distinction of and for the terms refugee, migrant and asylum-seeker. A similar problem could also be found regarding social inclusion and integration which were, at times, used interchangeably. Additionally, the majority of the studies opted for an ethnographic approach despite choosing different methods within the said approach. Concerning the meta findings, three main themes emerged across research: space of expression and confidence; transformation process to agency and citizenship; and exchange and dialogue between the host community and arrivals. These themes were discussed and reflected upon, and limitations were pointed out.

Originality. Having identified the lack of refugee and asylum-seeker voices within migration studies, this article sets out to counteract this issue by having included only

those articles that provided space for refugee and asylum-seeking individuals to speak up, thereby authentically understanding arts-based social inclusion interventions from a new and neglected angle.

Key words: meta-study, refugees, asylum-seekers, social inclusion, art, intervention, community

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, the number of people fleeing from their homes is on a dramatic rise. By the end of 2019, UNHCR counted 4.2 million asylum-seekers and 26 million refugees in the world, representing the highest number ever seen. Two-thirds of them originated from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2020). Thus, one of the main challenges going along with these numbers is the pressing urge to find effective ways of including these newcomers into the host society.

Particularly pertinent to the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers (RAS) into the host societies are community-based approaches. Considering the needs of recently arrived RAS who are often required to learn a new language and to adapt to the host culture, not to mention the events preceding their arrival, support systems are indispensable (Mahoney & Siyambalapitiya, 2017). Community-based approaches are particularly crucial as they mobilise individuals and communities, offer them support and empower them, whilst respecting their individual rights. The target communities (e.g., RAS) are able to participate in decision-making and are kept informed throughout the whole process (UNHCR, 2008). Another important aspect of community-based approaches is that they allow RAS to establish new community links (Williams & Thompson, 2010).

Although research on community interventions is vast, it appears to be lacking when it comes to community interventions using art for the social inclusion of RAS (McGregor & Ragab, 2016), in particular when focusing on adults. Art is particularly pertinent as, by its own nature, it is a transformative activity. Thereby, art means any kind of creative process and includes but is not limited to forms of expression such as theatre, performances, film, music, painting, poetry, etc. Indeed, art can be used by people as a form of speaking their truth and expressing themselves, and can be used to pass on cultural traditions, foster intercultural dialogue, and allow a person to find their voice and place in their community, society, and in the wider world. Through all this, art can provoke change, both at the individual and community levels (Netto, 2008; Rix, 2003).

At the individual level, art's potential and use as a therapeutic tool is well-documented. Artistic expression is known to promote self-esteem, it helps people express their emotions, and also facing and dealing with traumatic events from their past. Thus, art is connected with better physical, mental and emotional wellbeing (McGregor & Ragab, 2016). Furthermore, when considering the community level, Pat Rix states "creative thinking and expression lay

at the heart of successful communities” (2003, p. 719). Indeed, the European Union itself stated that cultural institutions are central to promoting human connection and creating a more cohesive and open society (2014). Art, with its promotion of self-expression, allows people to speak about discrimination and dismantles structural barriers to integration and promoting community cohesion, social change, and social inclusion (Martiniello & LaFleur, 2008; McGregor & Ragab, 2016). It is, however, worth noting, that despite its positives, art can also have some exclusion potential as it can be unaffordable or found unreliable by individuals of marginalised groups, such as RAS. Also, such individuals might face language or cultural barriers to understand art (Le, Polonsky, & Arambewela, 2015; McGregor & Ragab, 2016).

Considering our topic, we found it particularly meaningful to focus on the voices of RAS themselves as they should be central to the discussion surrounding policies and interventions that directly affect them. In fact, this has been a point stressed by members of marginalised communities: that their voices should not be ignored when the studies pertain to them and their issues (Mertens, 2014). Thus, we exclusively explored articles about art interventions for RAS that were conducted with and had active participation of the RAS themselves. This way, we aim not only to give a more wholesome overview of effective art interventions but to contribute to respecting and listening to the voices of the target group.

As the terms “refugee,” “asylum-seeker,” and “social inclusion” entail potential to be confused with similar but distinct labels, we will now do a brief overview of the terms and their definitions.

REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKER

According to the definition of UNHCR, a refugee is a person “who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence” with a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” (UNHCR, n.d.). The individual therefore has the right to apply for asylum, making him or her an asylum-seeker. An asylum-seeker is thus defined as a person that has fled his or her nation and seeks for protection and assistance by another country through applying for the recognition as a refugee (UNHCR, n.d.). Therefore, we included interventions focusing on both RAS, as one person may identify and be labelled with both terms.

In contrast, a migrant has made the choice to move from his or her country to improve his or her life, for example, through better economic or educational opportunities, or family reunions. Therefore, he or she does not flee out of a direct threat and may, unlike RAS, safely return back home (UNHCR, 2016). Despite the term’s distinct meanings, they are often used interchangeably in public and media. This is crucial, as they come along with different political and legal implications (UNHCR, 2016).

Even though the following report explicitly focused on social inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers, to ensure well-defined and meaningful result, it should be noted that within academia, defining refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants as distinctive categories is facing scrutiny (Scalettaris, 2007). Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis argue that “[m]igration scholars have long problematized the extent to which it is possible to distinguish clearly and easily between different types of migrants and have argued for the need to move beyond opposing binaries” (2018, p. 50).

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion, though often a part of European discourse, is a rather abstract concept, and it is often less clearly defined than social exclusion. Indeed, the focus tends to be more on social exclusion and how it can be defined. Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional concept made of all the factors – economic, political, cultural, and others – that prohibit individuals, groups and communities from participating in society (Vinson, 2009). In fact, the promotion of social inclusion and its definition appeared due to the concerns about social exclusion. Indeed, Richard Sandell defines social inclusion as being made of the same four categories (economic, social, political, and cultural) which represent systems that might prevent individuals from fully participating in society (1998). The United Nations define social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights” (2016, p. 20).

Another issue arising when defining social inclusion is the fact that the term is often used interchangeably with social integration and social cohesion. Whilst there are significant overlaps, one should be mindful of their differences. Social integration is the integration of individuals or groups into the social structures of the country they are living in (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). Finally, social cohesion is the degree to which a society is living in harmony due to a lack of fractures or divisions and/or the ability to manage them in case they do exist (United Nations, 2016). Thus, whilst social inclusion concerns itself with improving the conditions for disadvantaged individuals or groups, social integration is the degree to which they are able to achieve certain social landmarks (e.g., the access to the job market), and social cohesion concerns societal harmony.

Despite the label used, a wide array of interventions have been implemented to promote and facilitate social inclusion and integration. As noted by several researchers, this has mostly been done in a top-down approach, which did not give sufficient relevance to the voice of the target group itself (Korac, 2003; Morville & Jessen-Winge, 2019). Instead, interventions seem to “not always take into account the needs and wants of the marginalised and oppressed

groups, although the benefits of taking a participatory approach [...] have been identified" (Morville & Jessen-Winge, 2019, p. 55). These findings are in line with the academic tendency to neglect RAS' voices in the research context. For this reason and as already mentioned, the present study will exclusively focus on qualitative research that has been conducted with the target group itself, and thereby excludes research ignoring RAS' voices.

PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

The present study has two main goals: first, it aims to fill the gap of an overarching review of community-based art interventions that have been implemented to include RAS in a new community. Secondly, with this article we focus on the RAS' voices and feedback regarding the interventions, thereby shifting intervention's evaluations from the lens of stakeholders and practitioners to the actual target group and being in line with the ethics of qualitative research for social change (Mertens, 2014). By synthesising the results of previous qualitative studies as well as reflecting upon them and identifying potential underlying and shared characteristics, this study intends to contribute to the improvement of art-based approaches for the social inclusion of RAS.

METHOD

Article selection procedure

To address the research questions, we conducted a qualitative meta-study on studies focused on RAS' experiences and perceptions of art-based community interventions. Thus, we excluded any articles which focused on stakeholders and/or professionals' perspectives and did not give voice to the RAS themselves. We opted to conduct a meta-study as it analyses the previous studies' results and findings as well as their methodology and the socio-historical context in which the research was made, and how that might have influenced said studies and their results (Timulak, 2014). This results not only in synthesising previous findings but also in a new perspective about the phenomena in question (Paterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001). Moreover, meta-study analysis allows for a greater flexibility in the choice of studies for the analysis as it allows synthesising findings from studies with different approaches (Clarke et al., 2014). In sum, the reasons for including articles in the analysis were that they presented art interventions which were composed on a community-level; that these interventions aimed at enhancing and promoting social inclusion; that they focused on adults (i.e., aged 18 and older); and finally, that RAS themselves were the beneficiaries of the interventions. As previously mentioned, in line with the ethics of qualitative studies for social change, it was solely focused on studies in which RAS' voices were central (Mertens, 2014). Other inclusion criteria were that the studies had to be published in English, that they

had to have used a qualitative approach, and that they had to be published in peer-reviewed journals.

Considering these criteria, we conducted a database search (i.e., PsychInfo, Google Scholar, Proquest, SAGE, B-On, etc.). The keywords “refugee,” “asylum-seeker,” “intervention,” and “inclusion” were combined with the art-related terms “art,” “theatre,” “visual arts,” “drama,” “music,” “poetry,” “film,” “performance,” and “dance” to gain a most comprehensive coverage of the literature. This search resulted in a total of 82 articles which were relevant for the analysis. Next, these articles were filtered according to the aforementioned exclusion criteria leading to the final 7 articles, which were analysed in the present meta-study. The selection procedure is summarised in Figure 1.

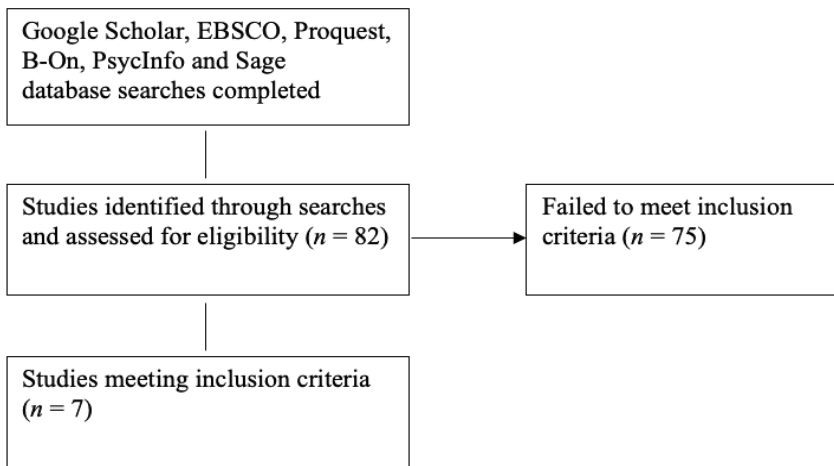


Fig. 1. Article selection procedure.

Source: own research

Short summaries of analysed articles

Glenn Hardaker and Aishah Sabki (2007) focused on the supporting effect of visual arts for the expression of refugee identity by migrant artists. Following a performance ethnography to an international informal multicultural education project, the richness of refugee and migrant voices was identified, whilst it “required a passion by all to the mode of communications (visual arts) and the subject focus of refugee identity” (Hardaker & Sabki, 2007, p. 80).

The research conducted by Anne Margaret McNevin (2010) entailed the observation and documentation of rehearsals and workshops of an activism initiative by asylum-seekers. It thereby identified community theatre to transform asylum-seekers to practice activism and citizenship.

An ethnographic study conducted by Fazila Bhimji (2015) centred around the performative agency and collaboration emerging from theatre with and for refugees. By viewing seven performances and conducting interviews, the scholar found theatre to be a realm for refugees to build and enact political activism.

By drawing from focus group interviews and secondary data, Fara Azmat, Yuka Fuijimoto and Ruth Rentschler (2015) examined cultural inclusion through an arts organisation including various forms of creative expressions. The beneficial role of arts for social inclusion could be confirmed, whilst the importance of customised engagement, reciprocal empowerment and self-development was emphasised.

Maggie O'Neill (2018) incorporated a rather extraordinary methodological approach, walking, to understand the impact of participatory arts on well-being and community. Through the arts-based biographical methods which served both as the intervention itself and as the way to obtain qualitative data, the article pointed out the potential of art to promote inclusion, explore asylum-seeker's resources and performance of citizenship while facilitating contact, discourse, and justice.

In the paper by Sofia Vougioukalou, Rosie Dow, Laura Bradshaw, and Tracy Pallant (2019), the role of a music intervention on the well-being and social inclusion was explored by observing and interviewing a music group. Findings provide evidence for the positive effect of music on social inclusion, well-being, cross-cultural dialogue, and power dynamics.

Finally, Michael Whelan, Freya Wright-Brough, Donna Hancox, and Yanto Browning (2020), analysed creative arts-based programmes including music, dance, and film. This entailed a variety of qualitative methods (workshops, interviews, participatory practice), creative post-school transition programmes were found to enhance strengths, joy, belonging, confidence, creating a safe, inclusive space.

Data Abstraction and Analysis

To conduct the data abstraction, we created a template to be used in the analysis of each article of all categories. This template allowed us to standardise and select certain aspects of the articles to be used in the subsequent analysis, while providing a consensual, common guideline for both researchers who conducted the data abstraction. The template was designed considering the three steps of a meta-study: meta-theory, meta-method, and meta-data analysis/meta-findings. Thus, the template was informed by multiple guiding questions, such as which theories were used and explored in the articles, what methodological approaches were incorporated and how they were described, as well as which central findings resulted and how these were analysed and discussed. The questions also depicted the basis of comparing the articles in order to ensure a thorough analysis and draw final conclusions for the meta-study.

The final selected articles were reviewed and analysed independently by the researchers before discussing and summarising them. These and the original articles were then used to create the meta-theory, meta-methods, and meta-findings. Afterwards, the outcomes were presented to two independent evaluators so they could provide feedback and point out any potential blind spots. This step was implemented to further reflect on and improve the present

analysis. Moreover, data was put in and analysed through text searches with the analysis software NVivo to double check the results found by the researchers. Whilst this methodology attempts to minimise the researchers' biases on the meta-study, it must be highlighted that despite all efforts, biases are unlikely to be completely absent from our study as, by its own nature, it is based on our interpretations of the authors' studies.

META-STUDY' RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Meta-Theory

This section was guided by the question of how theory was used within the articles. Whilst there was significant overlap between the (partly implicit) theories within the analysed articles, there were also some differences.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

In general, the articles did not provide definitions for the terms refugee, asylum-seeker, or migrant. This might be an unfortunate consequence of the belief that due to the ubiquity of the discussion surrounding refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants; readers are already acquainted with the terms, especially with these being scientific papers and thus geared towards academics. This however depicts a pitfall as without the said definitions, it is impossible to determine whether the articles used different theories or definitions. Another potential reason for this absence is the aforementioned debate whether it is, in fact, possible to separate and distinguish these terms (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Scalettaris, 2007). Nonetheless, two articles did provide some distinction between the discussed terms. Hardarker and Sabki (2007) highlighted how most asylum applications come from countries at war or with natural disasters and, in contrast, migrants primarily move for work, thus providing an indirect distinction between asylum-seekers and economic migrants. In the case of Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020), they briefly underline that refugees are not the same as migrants or "new arrivals." Additionally, most articles raised some interesting concerns about the topic, explicitly pointing out the stigmatisation, discrimination and negative experiences which RAS have to face. McNevin (2010) highlighted the perception of illegitimacy surrounding the term asylum-seeker and how that is resulting in a gradual moving away from the term to avoid any confusion with illegal immigration. Still, it might be questionable whether moving away from asylum-seeker will result in actual changes, considering the term refugee itself also has a negative connotation partially due to media as mentioned by Azmat, Fuijimoto and Rentschler (2015) as well as O'Neill (2018). A few of the articles such as Hardarker and Sabki (2007) and Bhimji (2018) also point out the reasons why one becomes a refugee, while O'Neill (2018) specifically alludes to gender-specific reasons for seeking asylum, that is, women fleeing gender-based sexual violence. Furthermore, in the case of Bhimji (2018), the article connects the situations leading to the emer-

gence of refugees (e.g., weak states and human rights abuses) to the growing inequality between the Global North and the Global South. This is an interesting consideration and one can, in fact, take it further hinting to the way the Global North has actively engaged in state terrorism in the Global South or, at the very least, been complicit in it (Blakeley, 2009).

Social inclusion

When it comes to social inclusion, one thing that is particularly pertinent to mention is that the article by Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019) used the terms “social inclusion” and “social integration” interchangeably. Indeed, in the abstract they state, “These findings suggest that the combination of structured musical activity and improvisation may help to foster a sense of wellbeing and social inclusion, shift power dynamics, and create a space for cross-cultural dialogue” (Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, & Pallant, 2019, p. 533), whilst the article’s title itself states it is about integration. Furthermore, the article does not define social inclusion nor social integration. In fact, McNevin (2010), Bhimji (2018), and O’Neill (2018) also do not define social inclusion. Azmat, Fujimoto and Rentschler (2015), whilst focusing more on the cultural aspect of social inclusion, point out the different aspects of social inclusion and how they are interrelated. However, they also end up referring to integration which is understandable as the theory they used was Sandell’s (1998), who somewhat appears to use social inclusion and social integration interchangeably. This interchangeable use of the terms inclusion and integration can be found across research, as mentioned earlier, and is, therefore, not surprising but unfortunate as social integration and social inclusion do not necessarily align. In fact, some scholars such as Rainer Strobl defend that “to improve inclusion it may be necessary to loosen social integration into primary groups and to support normative disintegration to a certain degree” (2015, p. 4439). Only Hardaker and Sabki (2007) and Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020) clearly define social inclusion. Hardaker and Sabki (2007) opted to define social inclusion by firstly defining social integration and then alluding to the differences between these two terms. Explicitly, whilst social integration promotes tolerance from the side of the dominant culture towards minorities, social inclusion moves beyond tolerance and into understanding/acceptance. Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020) cite Gail Whiteford (2017) underlining that one of the core aspects of inclusion is that people’s “unique identities are represented and respected” (as cited in Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, & Browning, 2020, p. 5).

Arts

Considering the focus of this work was using the arts for social inclusion of RAS, it was also pertinent to see how artistic and creative aspects were brought up in the article. Hardaker and Sabki (2007) opted to focus on the pedagogy of the arts which, though interesting, could have been taken further considering Paulo Freire’s (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to Freire, systematic

pedagogy tends to support the interests of the oppressed and since only political power can change it, it is not the best venue for the oppressed to be heard and change systems. Yet, educational projects, such as art interventions carried out by the oppressed, serve towards their organisation. Indeed, Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020) highlight this by citing Ephrat Huss, Roni Kaufman, Amos Avgar, and Eytan Shouker (2015) that “arts-based methods enable communication ‘between different sectors and power levels’ and can destabilise dominant global ‘expert’ knowledge” (Wheland, Wright-Brough, Hancox, & Browning, 2020, p. 6). Additionally, as touched upon by Bhimji (2018), Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019), and Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020), these art projects allow RAS to gain power as they serve as safe spaces thus allowing them to participate and be political despite the lack of political power resulting from their often precarious legal situations. Bhimji states that “an asylum-seeker dispossessed of formal citizenship and the basic right to mobility, is able to reposition her/himself” (2018, p. 8). This is in part due to the fact that art is itself political, thus allowing RAS to reclaim political power for themselves as underscored by McNevin (2010). Furthermore, by their nature, these interventions are transformative as Azmat, Fujimoto and Rentschler (2015) underline. Transformative learning is a particularly relevant approach as it is defined as “the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference [...] to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92). Thus, with transformative learning, not only are the learners themselves changing, they are also effecting social change. Finally, the therapeutic value of art interventions was another of its facets that was often highlighted. McNevin (2010), Azmat, Fujimoto and Rentschler (2015), and Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019) all indicate how the arts contribute to health and well-being.

Meta-Methods

In the present study, the focus is on what were the articles’ methods for exploring RAS social inclusion. Thus, we explored not only the methods used, but why they chose that particular method(s), and whether the studies used more than one method. In general, the reviewed studies (6 out of 7) opted for ethnography. This shows that there appears to be a consensus that it is better to study RAS’s voices in natural contexts.

Azmat, Fujimoto and Rentschler (2015) opted to use focus-group interviews with 43 refugees, artists, audience members, and staff. To this end, they conducted 6 mixed focus-groups and used open-ended questions. One of the issues with focus-groups is the possibility that some voices will dominate the conversation, constructing the “other,” normative discourses, and conflicts and arguments (Smithson, 2000). However, the authors did employ strategies to avoid these issues, for instance, trying to keep groups relatively homogeneous in terms of age to try to avoid some voices silencing others, as well as inviting more quiet members of the groups to participate (Azmat, Fujimoto, &

Rentschler, 2015). For the data analysis itself, the authors developed a framework for culturally inclusive organisations based on Michàlle E. Mor Barak's (2000) and Sandell's (1998) theories. Thus, with the information they collected during these focus groups, they analysed whether the organisation filled the criteria they had defined in their framework.

The rest of the articles employed ethnographic approaches. Explicitly, Bhimji (2018), Hardaker and Sabki (2007), McNevin (2010), O'Neill (2018), Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019), and Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020) opted for ethnography. Ethnography is conducted in everyday contexts rather than artificial research conditions, collects data from various sources but mainly from observation and informal conversations with participants, its data collection is unstructured, its sample size tends to be small but the study is often in-depth, and its data analysis entails interpretation of meanings and functions of the participants' actions not only at the individual level but also at a wider context (Hammersley, 2015).

Bhimji (2018) preferred an ethnographic study approach in which the author saw a theatre piece (i.e., *Die Asyl-Monologue*) performed 7 times, 3 of those being to an audience followed by interviews. Whilst the article does not mention the sample size directly, considering the excerpts and the referred names of participants, one can identify at least 9 to 10 refugees, 3 actors, and one member of the audience. It is, however, possible that more people were observed/interviewed as the sample size is never outright stated. The posterior interviews were done as a way to obtain more data, particularly related to a wider context, especially in regard to German and European asylum policies. Considering the nature of ethnography not having set research design a priori, the author used their results and then corroborated them with theory such as Johnny Saldaña's (2005) definition of ethnodrama.

Hardaker and Sabki (2007) chose a performance ethnography approach. However, they did somewhat define ways to collect the data and analyse it rather than following a fully unstructured perspective of ethnography. They state that they based their approach on a multiracial cultural studies perspective as per Norman K. Denzin (2003). Additionally, *Black Day to Freedom* follows Clifford G. Christians' (2011) interconnected criteria shaping one's representations of the world, and Yvonna S. Lincoln's (1995) authentic adequacy. Another interesting aspect of this article was that whilst the sample was never disclosed, we could identify 8 refugee voices by the names mentioned, and these refugees were currently spread out through the globe. That is, this is the single study in which the sample is not restricted to a single country, but to a more global perspective of refugee experiences.

McNevin (2010) never explicitly states that her study is ethnographic. However, through the method description, i.e., following 19 RAS and 10 actors for an unidentified amount of time in which they worked on and later staged their theatre performance *Journey of Asylum – Waiting*, it can be identified as such. Additionally, she used observation and documentation of the workshops and rehearsals, conversations, and group discussions, methods which are tra-

ditionally employed in ethnography per Martyn Hammersley (2015). However, one shortcoming of this article is that it is rather unclear with the timeline of the research and its methodology.

O'Neill (2018) employed arts-based research which combined walking with storytelling, biographical, participatory, and visual/photographic/filmic methods. This combination allows for a more shared understanding and promotes "creative and transformative impact on the people, situation, environment and policy terrain, through the research process, findings and outputs" (Cornell, 1995, as cited in O'Neill, 2018, p. 80). Additionally, by using arts-based research and analysing how people tell their life-story, understanding the complexity of their lives and society itself was facilitated, a process called ethno-mimesis. Moreover, walking is considered a prime way of attaining information in ethnographic research (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). Furthermore, the arts-based biographical methods served not only as the intervention itself, but also as the way to gather data. There were 10 asylum-seeker participants, one artist, and two researchers in the group, all of them women. This was so that this project was fully women-centred.

Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019) incorporated a duo-ethnography approach in which they first analysed the experiences and used observation, and then followed that with a questionnaire and informal open-ended interviews. Whilst the *Oasis World Choir and Band* had a maximum of 55 participants (maximum 40 RAS and 15 locals), they firstly focused on the "experiences and observations of two group leaders and a local community participant in the music group between 2017 and 2019 and its effects on participants" (Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, & Pallant, 2019, p. 536), followed by having 15 participants completing a questionnaire and participating in informal open-ended interviews.

Finally, Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020) also does not specifically identify their study as ethnography, however, just like in the case of McNevin (2010), their choice of methods, as well as the fact that the research was conducted in the natural context rather than artificial research conditions, allows us to identify it as such. Their choice of methodology was a combination of art-based consultation workshops, participatory creative practice, and semi-structured interviews. Indeed, this study can fit the category of art-based ethnography as art-based methods, such as the ones employed in this study, are being increasingly used and transforming ethnographic research (Pussetti, 2018). There was a selection of 16 student participants in *Classroom 17* with diverse backgrounds and picked by the leadership team. Depending on the session, hour, and even the task being performed, the number of participants at a determinate time fluctuated. Additionally, other people were also involved in *Classroom 17* and were interviewed during this research project, such as teachers and academic staff.

In conclusion, the vast majority of the articles opted for some form of ethnographic research. This is likely because in ethnography the data is attained in the normal daily contexts rather than artificial research conditions. Therefore,

it tries to get a more natural response from participants, because ethnography allows for identifying and analysing unforeseen issues, and allows for a more in-depth analysis (Hammersley, 2015; Logan, n.d.). Additionally, this might have been their choice because of the tradition and growing literature on the potential of using art-based methods within ethnographic research (Pussetti, 2018). Finally, one cannot end this analysis of the used methods without mentioning that, unfortunately, with the exception of Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019), there appeared to be a lack of reflection on potential researcher biases. This is particularly dangerous as in ethnographic research there is the issue of “going native,” that is, getting too involved in the community and losing objectivity by becoming completely immersed in the object of study and likely ending up abandoning the project (O’Reilly, 2009). However, there is also the opposite danger, in which instead of empathising and understanding the object of study, one keeps their own biases and preconceptions. Thus, one has to carefully balance empathy towards the study subject(s) and distance from them (O’Reilly, 2009). Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, it was unclear whether most of the analysed studies were capable of this balancing act.

Meta-Findings

Through text searches and subsequent coding using NVivo data analysis software, three main themes which overlap and interact with one another emerged: creative interventions were found to be a space of expression for RAS, thereby promoting confidence; they increased and functioned as a space for transformation from a one-dimensional RAS identity to multidimensional agents and citizens; and finally they stimulated and facilitated exchange between the local nationals and the RAS. These three categories were created because they were mentioned in some way across all the analysed articles, that is, Azmat, Fujimoto and Rentschler (2015), Bhimji (2018), Hardaker and Sabki (2007), McNevin (2010), O’Neill (2018), Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019), and Whelan, Wright-Brough, Hancox, and Browning (2020). However, it is crucial to mention at this point, that many scholars pointed out the difficulties and challenges to measure and understand which impact art-based interventions have due to the danger of instrumentalising the value of arts, the lack of methods to evaluate results as well as various approaches, needs and contexts of arts projects (see, for example, Barraket, 2005; Belfiore, 2002). Therefore, the following main themes should only be understood as an attempt to discover and explore meta-findings within art-based interventions for RAS.

Space of expression and confidence

In the articles analysed within this paper, individuals who participated in the interventions indicated the creative experience to have been a space where they could express themselves freely and openly. Expressing personal views, emotions, needs, and stories appeared to be a crucial factor for the effectiveness

in participating in these art-based projects. Whilst RAS are often denied a space where they can share whatever comes to their mind or heart, arts-based interventions, such as a theatre stage provide a platform to do so. Thereby, many participants reported to feel an increase of confidence. Programmes that also included participants or audiences from the local community further served as multipliers of the effect as the expressions could be shared with, directed to and received by the host community, which we will more closely examine later on.

The beneficial outcomes of arts-based interventions for the participants personal development has been found consistently across researches (e.g., Barraket, 2005; Durrer, 2008, Georgiou, 2020). While Huss, Kaufman, Avgar, and Shouker (2015) stated these methods generate “a safe, indirect symbolic space for those without power to define their needs” (p. 685). Despite the positive picture drawn from this research, having a space of expression can also present a challenge, particularly for vulnerable individuals. This aspect has only been dwelled on in the article by McNevin (2010), describing the participants to face the challenge of trauma revival when acting out their experiences on stage or feeling a sense of embarrassment and over-exposure after having shared their stories extensively. As art can present a very personal, informal and thus intriguing way of expressing oneself, we expect these obstacles to be occurring in various forms of arts interventions. Therefore, it seemed to us that some authors may have been neglecting the difficulties of creating such a space, only focusing on the positive outcomes while overlooking, at times, the troublesome process behind them. Indeed, other scholars, such as Michalis Georgiou (2020), explored how refugees who took part in theatre projects were concerned about becoming a target when performing their religious views and enlisted linguistic barriers to be one of the main challenges throughout the projects.

Transformation process to agency and citizenship

The second main topic that emerged from the analysis was the transformative effect which arts-based interventions can initiate. Participants of the projects, meaning not just RAS but also locals, could benefit from these interventions at the individual level, but the transformative effect also extended to the community and societal level. While RAS specifically transformed from the often impressed one-dimensional identity of “refugee” / “asylum-seeker” to the expression and realisation of their multidimensional identities (actor, father, daughter, friend, artist), they managed to find and regain a feeling of agency. This transformation was particularly pertinent in the political and social dimensions, on the one hand, enabling them to have and express a political voice that is heard unjudged, and on the other hand, challenging, resisting, and changing their social and public image. The creative interventions thus provided the opportunity for them to become their own spokespersons. This transformative power of art (and music) interventions, creating a sense of agency, power and citizenship, has been recognised by countless studies (Barraket, 2005; Long

et al., 2002; Monti, Aiello, & Carroll, 2016; O'Neill, 2008). While Eleonora Belfiore (2002) registers the empowering aspect of art interventions, she also expresses the shared concern that the social impact of these kind of initiatives is rather difficult to measure which goes along with Jo Barraket's (2005) conclusion that their effects highly depend on how, where and with whom such activities are set into practice. Simultaneously, scholars have pointed out that these kinds of "[i]nterventions should be responsive rather than prescriptive" (Phillips, 2020, p. 354), taking into consideration the oftentimes precarious and unstable situations of RAS. An example of an intervention engaging this approach may be Georgiou (2020), who observed how refugee participants of a theatre project incorporated their fears and views emerging from a terrorist attack that had happened during the production process, altering it "to a continual work-in-progress" (Georgiou, 2020, p. 267). Similarly, Barbara Caveng and Dachil Sado (2020), reflecting upon the participatory art platform *KUNSTASYL*, pinpoint the project's acentric, durable and multidimensional approach to be crucial for its success, clearing the way for "spatial and horizontal thinking, instead of the pyramid principle or vertical thinking" (p. 172).

Exchange and dialogue between host community and arriving individuals

Based on and fostered by RAS regaining agency and a voice, arts-based community interventions analysed for this meta-study found the promotion of an exchange and dialogue between the local community and the RAS to emerge from the implementation of and participation in the projects. This was facilitated firstly through the mere aspect that the interventions created a platform where both groups could meet in a "neutral," informal space. By hearing and listening to the voices of the very people that are often presented rather stereotypically and in a one-dimensional way, i.e., RAS, local society could interact, engage and challenge their own stereotypes and images of this group. This process could be fostered by just being the audience of a theatre created and played by RAS, by standing on the stage together, or by performing musical activities as one group. At the same time, dialogue and cultural exchange was promoted throughout the interventions, further facilitating critical thinking and reciprocal benefits.

These findings are supported by various studies, for instance in the literature review by Barraket (2005) resuming to have found "repeated evidence in the literature that participation in the arts strengthens and diversifies personal networks" and "that arts activities build social capital and enhance social cohesion within communities" (Barraket, 2005, p. 10). In his analysis of two theatrical projects with refugees, Georgiou (2020) draws a similar conclusion, adding the dimension of the empathy emerging through theatre plays to foster "a meaningful link between the host society and the refugees" (Georgiou, 2020, p. 265). Mingling people from diverse backgrounds within art-based projects depicts an opportunity for them to learn about each other, communicate and appreciate differences, and solve potential conflicts, thereby enhancing community building (Barraket, 2005; Shaw, 2003) and "a process of reflection on the

sociopolitical and aesthetic relationship” (Georgiou, 2020, p. 270). The aspect that contact and exchange is crucial for decreasing stereotypes and supporting social inclusion presents one of the most fundamental socio-psychological theories by Gordon W. Allport (1954).

LIMITATIONS

While it was necessary for the quality of the meta-study to have very strict inclusion criteria considered for the analysis, this also led to some limitations of the study. Firstly, many interventions and projects that could present interesting sources are not published in peer-reviewed journals but rather in the literature which we could not access in this study. Therefore, important studies and articles may have not been included in this research. We strongly call for future research to conduct a meta-study specified on these sources to ensure that these crucial results will no longer be overlooked in research and academia.

Moreover, this meta-study only considered articles published in English and, consequently, it possibly neglects valuable articles published in other languages. The lack of internationalisation of literature and the necessity of promoting and implementing research translation platforms is thus reinforced in the present study. Likewise, as previously described, the lines between different concepts on the topic of migration and inclusion seem diffuse. Consequently, searching only for specific terms (for example only “inclusion” but not “integration”) may have resulted in excluding research using different labels but that is actually on the same topic.

Besides, the representativeness of the outcomes presented in this meta-study is questionable due to the fact that most analysed research included only small numbers of participants (due to the qualitative methodology). The fact that the majority of studies (5 out of 7) were conducted in Australia or the UK further diminishes the generalisability of our results. Whilst this depicts a typical issue in qualitative studies because of the added importance given to individuals, enriching the data with details, personal aspects and specificities counterbalances this limitation.

Similarly, the higher risk of subjectivity in qualitative research presents a limitation of this study. This is particularly relevant to mention, because almost none of the analysed articles reflected upon the issue of being somewhat biased throughout their analysis. As we have previously pointed out, we, the authors of this study, recognise ourselves not to be immune to subjectivity, despite our best efforts to eliminate it and maintain a neutral balance. While we are convinced of creative interventions’ potential for promoting social inclusion, we are also keenly aware of the downsides and risks that come along with them. Nevertheless, exploring these more closely was rather difficult as the majority of articles did not specifically point out any negative effects of the projects they analysed and only focused on the positives.

CONCLUSION

This meta-study's findings provide an overview of the potential of arts-based interventions for the social inclusion of RAS. It was found that, as expected, the terms "refugee," "asylum-seeker," and "migrant" were often not distinguished within the studies, which was expected since there is debate surrounding whether such a distinction is possible (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Scalettaris, 2007). "Inclusion" and "integration" were also found to be used interchangeably at times. Additionally, in researching art-based interventions for social inclusion, most authors preferred to use ethnography showing a clear preference to attain data in natural environments. Whilst appreciating the benefits of this approach, the downsides were not necessarily reflected upon in the analysed articles. Finally, it was found that, in general, art-based approaches were perceived to promote social inclusion through being a space of expression and confidence, having transformative power, and serving towards exchange and dialogue between RAS and members of the majority culture. In conclusion, we found that RAS as well as the local communities tend to benefit from this particular type of interventions. While the articles depicted insightful sources on the topic informed by various artistic practices, other research found that arts-based interventions appear rather scarcely in academia and that theatre is by far the most researched creative approach to social inclusion (and integration) of and with RAS (McGregor & Ragab, 2016). Therefore, we call for initiatives as well as future research to further explore the usage of the wide array of arts for social inclusion purposes. Conducting meaningful scientific examinations of their potential should further highlight their capacity for promoting social inclusion, community building, agency and well-being. Simultaneously, by identifying the lack of RAS voices in research about topics such as social inclusion, we reckon the essentiality of scholars to include their voices towards designing and catering interventions to RAS experiences, suggestions, and needs.

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