

***EXPERIENCING HOSPITALITY THROUGH
COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING BETWEEN
FORCIBLY DISPLACED PEOPLE AND THE HOST
COMMUNITY:
NARRATIVES FROM AN IRISH UNIVERSITY OF
SANCTUARY***

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Date: __01/09/2022_____

To the Migrants, to the Others

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Table of contents:

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	iii
List of figures	x
List of tables	xi
List of abbreviations	xii
Abstract	xiii
Choice of terminology	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Rationale for the study and research questions	2
3. Aims of the study	4
4. Thesis overview	5
Chapter 2: Forced migration in recent European history: reception and integration of forcibly displaced populations.	8
1. Introduction	8
2. Part 1: Forced migration in recent European history and the specificity of Ireland	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Contextual background	10
2.2.1 A brief overview of migration flows in Europe from the 1950s to the Millennial Era	10
2.2.2 Migration in the Irish context	17
2.2.2.1 Reception of International Protection Applicants in Ireland	19
2.3 Educational Context	21
2.3.1 The Irish Universities of Sanctuary movement	21
2.3.2 The Mellie Project	23
2.4 Conclusion	23
3. Part 2: What constitutes sustainable integration?	25
3.1 Introduction	25
3.2 What is integration?	25
3.2.1 Operationalisation of the concept	27
3.2.2 Cross-cultural adaptation theories	27
3.2.2.1 Culture shock theory	28
3.2.2.2 Acculturation: living well in two cultures	30

3.2.2.3 Framing core domains of integration	34
3.3 Navigating the space in between: Integration as reciprocity and democracy	37
3.3.1 The importance of social capital	37
3.3.2 Agency and reciprocity	38
3.3.3 Fostering a sense of belonging: from local contacts to friendships	40
3.3.4 Accessing equal rights	42
3.3.5 Democracy to come	43
3.4 Conclusion	45
Chapter 3. Theoretical frameworks: Hospitality and Critical Pedagogy	47
1. Introduction	47
2. Part 1: Hospitality	47
2.1 Introduction	47
2.2 Hospitality as a core concept of humankind	48
2.2.1 Hospitality's foundational sources	49
2.2.2 The Self and the Other	51
2.2.3 Borders	52
2.3 Conceptualisation of hospitality in a Derridean approach	55
2.3.1 Origins	55
2.3.2 Previous contributions	56
2.3.3 The aporias of hospitality	58
2.4 A concept contradictory by nature	59
2.5 Conditional hospitality vs unconditional hospitality	60
2.6 Between hospitality and inhospitality	63
2.6.1 Hospitality, a space for risk and reciprocal violence	63
2.6.2 The violence of the question and the imbalance in language	65
2.6.3 'We do not know what hospitality is' ... not yet: negotiating the space in between	67
2.6.4 The act of kindness	68
2.7 Conclusion: Hospitality as a negotiation of the space in between	69
3. Part 2. Using critical Pedagogy to explore multiliteracies and intercultural education in a non-formal context	70
3.1 Introduction	70
3.2 Framing learning as socially situated	71
3.2.1 Non-formal learning: a space for humanised pedagogy to thrive	71
3.2.2 Non formal education	72

3.2.3 The humanisation of pedagogy and the importance of dialogue	74
3.3 Critical Language teaching and learning in a global context	76
3.3.1 Learning beyond the classroom	76
3.3.1.1 The new literacy turn	77
3.3.1.2 The ecology of language learning	79
3.3.1.2.1 <i>The ecology turn</i>	80
3.3.1.2.2 <i>The complexity approach</i>	82
3.4 Language acquisition in a migrant context	83
3.4.1 Framing some inadequacies around language provision for adult migrants	84
3.4.2 Alternative approaches to language education: Learning language in a way that matters	87
3.4.2.1 Language provision based on needs	89
3.4.3 Learning how to be socially literate	90
3.5 Intercultural Education: Learning to live well together	91
3.5.1 Theories of intercultural education	93
3.5.1.1 Intercultural Competence theories	94
3.5.1.2 From contact hypothesis to learning how to negotiate the ‘zone of discomfort’	98
3.6 Ethics and Academic Hospitality	103
4. Conclusion	105
Chapter 4. Methodology: Action research, more than a methodology	106
1. Introduction	106
2. Participatory action research as an overarching methodology	107
2.1 Action research in theory	108
2.1.1 Defining AR: a link between theory and practice	109
2.1.2 Advantages and limitations of action research	111
2.1.3 Ethics and values in action research: a code of conduct	113
2.2 Aspects borrowed from other methodological approaches	115
2.2.1 The case study	116
2.2.2 Ethnography	117
3. PAR in practice in the Mellie Project: more than a methodology	118
3.1 Context of the research and background of participants	118
3.1.1 Recruitment	119
3.2 The Mellie AR cycles	120
3.2.1 The Mellie sessions	121

3.2.2 Methods which have inspired the design of the Mellie project	123
3.2.2.1 Critical Pedagogy	123
3.2.2.2 Storytelling	124
3.2.2.3 Photovoice	126
3.3 The Mellie sessions over time	127
3.3.1 Scheduling and duration of the project	129
3.3.2 The development of training	130
3.3.3 The introduction of the visual element	132
3.3.4 Development of digital literacies	133
3.3.5 The failure of traditional methods of language testing	134
3.3.6 Other elements: managing an endearing chaos	135
4. Ethics and positionality	138
4.1 Ethics when the research involves people in situations of forced migration	138
4.2 Me as a researcher practitioner: the ambiguous position of the insider-outsider	141
4.2.2 Navigating the multilingual space	142
4.2.2 Navigating relationships	144
4.2.3 Mediation	146
4.2.4 Observation	147
5. Research methods	148
5.1 Questionnaires	149
5.2 Research journal and observation	150
5.3 Focus groups	150
6. Data analysis	153
6.1 Transcription	154
6.2 Coding and analysis	155
Chapter 5. Practising hospitality: towards a shared sense of belonging	159
1. Introduction	159
2. Part 1. Creating a reciprocal learning space: stories of personal development and mutual growth	160
2.1 Introduction	160
2.2 An unexpected space in a sea of in-betweenness	160
2.2.1 From liminality to a sense of place	161
2.3 From liminality to a sense of time	167
2.3.1 Time and forced migration	167
2.3.2 The present	168

2.3.3 The past	173
2.3.4 The future	177
2.4 A space for learning	182
2.4.1 Liminality of the non-formal learning space	182
2.4.2 Various learning styles and expectations	183
2.4.3 Something to learn for everybody, something to learn from everybody	188
2.4.3.1 From the self to a new self: a space of personal growth	189
2.4.3.2 From the self to the Other: a space for collective growth	196
2.5 Conclusion	202
3. Part 2. Opening the public space: learning how to live well together	204
3.1 Introduction	204
3.2 From interaction to sustainable integration	205
3.2.1 Of building social capital	207
3.2.2 Making friendships	212
3.2.3 Fostering intercultural dialogue	219
3.3 From a shared sense of co-belonging toward furthering democratic praxis?	227
3.3.1 Boarding the ‘boat of the impossible’: from everyday hospitality to a democracy to come	227
3.3.2 Acts of reciprocity: to contribute and to give back	232
3.3.3 Practising democracy: representation, participation and the opening of the public sphere	237
3.4 Concluding thoughts	247
Chapter 6: Conclusion	248
1. Introduction	248
2. Summary	248
3. Answers to the research questions	249
4. Contributions	256
5. Limitations	258
6. Directions for future research and concluding remarks	261
References	263
APPENDIX A: Focus group questions (2019a)	294
APPENDIX B: Focus group questions (2009b)	296
APPENDIX C: Focus group questions (2020a)	298
APPENDIX D: Focus group questions (2020b)	301
APPENDIX E: Plain language statement	304

APPENDIX F : Informed Consent Form	307
APPENDIX G: Visual prompt samples	310
APPENDIX H: Guided questionnaire for the Mellie sessions (sample)	313
APPENDIX I: Photovoice Panels (samples)	320

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Depiction of Oberg's U-Curve of Cross-Cultural as reproduced in Martinsen 2007	29
Figure 2: Kim's model of adaptation (Kim 2000 p.57)	32
Figure 3: A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration (Ager and Strang 2008 p.170)	34
Figure 4: ICC Savoirs by Byram (1997)	95
Figure 5: Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2006;2009)	96
Figure 6: Kemmins and McTaggarts as reproduced in Koshy 2005 p.4	111
Figure 7: English skills in Mellie 2018	189
Figure 8: Befriending opportunity in Mellie 2017	213
Figure 9: Befriending opportunity in Mellie 2018	213
Figure 10: Feedback after exhibition, Mellie 2019	244
Figure 11: Personal learning process in Mellie	253
Figure 12: The Mellie Space	254
Figure 13: The boat of the impossible	256

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Mellie sessions over time	128
Table 2: Focus groups: participants profile and sessions descriptor	151
Table 3: Coding essential questions (Adapted from Liamputtong 2011)	156

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR: Action Research

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

DCU: Dublin City University

DP: Direct Provision

IMMA: Irish Museum of Modern Art

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

IPA: International Protection Applicant(s)

IPO: International Protection Office

Mellie: Migrant English Language Literacy and Intercultural Education

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal(s)

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

PAR: Participatory Action Research

SALIS: School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UoSI: University of Sanctuary Ireland

VaKE: Value and Knowledge Education

ABSTRACT

Experiencing hospitality through collaborative storytelling between forcibly displaced people and the host community: Narratives from an Irish University of Sanctuary

Julie Daniel

The reception of populations in situations of forced migration in Europe has been at the heart of many heated debates, with the question of the integration of newcomers having received particular attention. In the Irish context, the reception and accommodation system for international protection applicants, known as Direct Provision (DP), while ensuring that basic needs are met, has been criticised for isolating people in its care and depriving them of their agency. This research project focuses on intercultural education through the medium of collaborative storytelling. Drawing on the Derridean views of hospitality for its theoretical framework, it explores concepts of hospitality and reciprocity as democratic praxis, and aims to answer the research question: How can collaborative storytelling between forcibly displaced people and the host community facilitate hospitality?

Developed as an action research project, the study follows four cycles of a collaborative storytelling project, including photovoice methodology, which pairs-up university student and staff and people in situations of forced migration to exchange life stories, with a focus on shared human experience. Qualitative data were collected from various sources including focus group interviews, evaluations, artifacts, classroom observations and journal reflections.

Exploring the workings of the physical and symbolic spaces created by the project, findings show that through participatory methods and democratic approaches, it is possible to develop mutual understanding and respect. In addition, there is evidence that participation in the storytelling project contributed to a recovery of agency by the participants residing in DP, from alleviating boredom to creating new opportunities for participation in the wider community. Finally, it revitalises the notion of integration through the dual lenses of hospitality and reciprocity and questions notions of vulnerability or benevolence towards people in refugee-like situations, favouring those of agency and democracy instead.

CHOICE OF TERMINOLOGY

Forcibly displaced adults are the subject of this study. The terminology used in public discourse can lead to confusion. For instance, the terms ‘migrants’, ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘refugees’ are frequently used interchangeably. However, they convey important legal differences. *Refugees* are defined and protected in international law under the 1951 Geneva Convention as people who cannot return to their country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution, conflict, violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order, and who, as a result, require international protection (UNHCR 2022). *Asylum seekers* are people who have fled from persecution in their home country and are seeking international protection, but have not yet received any legal recognition or status. The term *person in need of international protection* is also used in the relevant legal and scientific literature. According to the UNHCR, this includes persons outside their country of origin (or habitual residence) and who are unable to return as their country is unable or unwilling to protect them. This may include people who do not qualify as refugees under international law and who are unable to return such as persons displaced across an international border in the context of disasters or climate change (UNHCR 2022). However, to this latter term I prefer the more agentic terminology of *international protection applicant* (IPA) (see also Cernadas 2016). Finally, a *migrant* is any person who moves from one place to another, in order to find work or better living conditions (UNHCR 2022). When, for convenience, I refer to the term ‘migrant’, it is to speak about anybody who has travelled and who is settling into a new place, regardless of their legal statu

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

*“An emancipated society, [...] would not be a unitary state,
but the realisation of universality in the reconciliation of differences.”*

Theodor Adorno

This thesis follows four iterations of the Mellie Project, a collaborative storytelling project between recently arrived International Protection Applicants (IPA) and the staff and students of Dublin City University (DCU), in Dublin, Ireland. In this study, I draw on the concept of hospitality, mainly framed within a Derrideran approach, to explore the symbolic space created by the project and all its participants, newcomers and host society alike. I suggest that through engaging in reciprocal and democratic praxis it is possible to gain a better understanding of the Other in order to reach mutual respect and a shared sense of belonging, to the benefit of social cohesion. Exploring the mutual learnings and relationship-building process among the participants of a storytelling project, this research

revisits the notion of integration by considering the interplay between IPAs and settled members of society. In so doing, it seeks to further understanding of the host/guest relationship as well as to challenge stereotypes present in the wider society.

In this introduction, I will discuss the rationale behind this study and how it aims to answer my research question and sub-questions. I will then give an overview of each of the 6 chapters that constitute this thesis.

2. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

“Man is by nature a social animal”, writes Aristotle (Aristotle 1943 p.58). It is within our nature to seek and create systems and structures of interaction. Paradoxically our interaction with the *Other* (someone different and distinct from oneself) is often complex and far from effortless; it requires work and constant negotiations (Derrida 2001; Noble 2009). Migration, which according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is considered one of the defining global issues of the early twenty-first century (IOM 2022), multiplies the number and type of situations in which One comes across an Other who may appear to be more visibly different and coming from further away. In 2022 there are some 192 million people living outside their place of birth, accounting for approximately three per cent of the world’s population (IOM 2022). There are many reasons behind migratory movements, including for education, work or even love. Without

underestimating the challenges that such a move may occasion, it is, in most cases, well planned and, more importantly, wanted (Garcia 2017). This distinction is crucial when discussing forcibly displaced populations, who are the focal point of this study. In fact, in this case, if some elements of the journey may be planned, the displacement itself is not chosen (Arendt 1996) nor the destination in many cases (BenEzer and Zetter 2015). At the other end, the reception of these populations is at the heart of many heated debates among host societies. This is the case in Europe, where the question of the integration of newcomers has received particular attention. Ireland has a specific state-funded reception system, known as Direct Provision (DP) directed at IPAs who cannot benefit from the support of family and friends already settled in the community. While people are offered the choice not to avail of this system, the vast majority (over 80%) seek state provided accommodation (Day 2020). Although the system ensures that people's basic needs are met (such as provision for shelter, food and basic necessities) the system has been criticised for isolating people in its care, thus making integration challenging (Murphy 2021; Ní Raghallaigh et al. 2016; O'Reilly 2018;). This research project explores concepts of hospitality and reciprocity as democratic praxis, and aims to answer the following question: *How can collaborative storytelling between forcibly displaced persons and members of the host community facilitate hospitality?*

This main question is answered by addressing the following sub-questions:

- How can non-formal educational projects support sustainable integration?
- What learnings emerge when members of the host society and forcibly displaced persons participate in a common project?

- How does collaborative storytelling support dialogue between host communities and forcibly displaced persons?
- How can the principle of reciprocity between host societies and forcibly displaced persons contribute to social cohesion?

3. AIMS OF THE STUDY

This research was inspired by a Derridean understanding of the concept of hospitality, which brings to the fore the reciprocity of the guest/host relationship. In this view, hosts and guests are seen as bound by a common human experience. The practice of hospitality is tightly linked with migration, insofar as humans, as they move, will inevitably face the Other and need to mediate their encounters. In fact, it is not uncommon for tensions or a reciprocal sense of unsettlement and de-rootedness among both the newcomers and the host society to occur. To be hospitable requires constant negotiation, which, in order to be successful, involves a deep and reciprocal understanding by both parties involved. This doctoral research explores human relations, with a focus on mutual learning, within the physical and metaphorical space of the DCU collaborative storytelling project, Mellie. It aims to contribute to the practical application of the concept of hospitality and to highlight its potential to foster integration and support social cohesion. In doing so, it seeks to further explore the understanding of the host/guest relationship. It aims to disprove polarised opinions, often present in the wider society, that the host/guest relationship can only be viewed through the lens of hostility (of the host society) and threats (coming from the inflow of migrants). Yet, it also challenges the notions of kindness or generosity of the host

community and of vulnerability of the people in refugee-like situations and suggests those of agency and reciprocity instead.

4. THESIS OVERVIEW

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into five further chapters, These include:

Chapter 2: Forced migration in recent European history: reception and integration of forcibly displaced populations.

This second chapter introduces the context in which this research took place. The first part gives a brief overview of the European social, economic and political background from the aftermaths of the Second World War (WW2) to the 2015 peak in migration flows, often perceived by European institutions and wider societies as a 'crisis' and which has shaped the current debate around migration and asylum issues to some extent. Then, the Irish context will be analysed, contextualising Direct Provision, a much debated state-funded system of reception and accommodation of IPAs. In addition, this chapter situates the project within the current Irish Higher Education context, looking at the creation of the Irish University of Sanctuary movement and subsequently at the development of the Mellie Project. After shedding light on the general context of this study, the second part of this chapter explores the concept of integration as currently debated in the relevant literature.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework: Hospitality and Critical Pedagogy

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework which underpins this research. In the first part, it explores the concept of hospitality and its relevance when investigating the relationships between host communities and newcomers in a forced migration context. Mainly inspired by the Derridean approach, this section also situates the concept within a larger framework to discuss its origins as well as other views such as those of Kant or Arendt. The second part of this chapter looks at the pedagogical theories which have underpinned the creation of the Mellie Project, the focus of this study. Drawing on Freirean views on critical education, it situates the project within a non-formal approach and explores literacy acquisition with a particular focus on language learning.

Chapter 4: Participatory Action Research, more than a methodology

This chapter looks at the methodology chosen for this research, on the one hand, and for the Mellie Project on the other, exploring how they are inherently linked and how they complement each other. The chapter accounts for how this research is understood as a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR) which also borrows from other methodologies such as anthropological research. I discuss my positionality as both a researcher and a project manager, paying particular attention to the ethical implications of this research. Secondly I describe the methodology used in the Mellie Project with a particular focus on storytelling. Finally, I detail how data was collected and analysed.

Chapter 5: Practising Hospitality

This chapter explores the physical and symbolic space created within the Mellie Project by the participants for themselves and discusses the outcomes of the project. Drawing on the data collected, the first part explores in detail the learnings which took place at the individual level. The second part looks at outcomes at the group level. It analyses the potential transformative repercussions that participation in such a project may have had, whether participants are newcomers or already settled members of the community. Finally it discusses how such a project may impact positively on the integration process by bringing together both host societies and newcomers, thus contributing to a shared sense of belonging and social cohesion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this sixth and final chapter, I revisit the key points covered in the thesis and draw a set of conclusions. I discuss the limitations of the project and suggest directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: FORCED MIGRATION IN RECENT EUROPEAN HISTORY: RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED POPULATIONS.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter which looks at forced migration within the European context is divided into two parts. The first part gives an overview of forced migration in recent European history before exploring the specificity of the Irish context. The second part investigates the concept of integration as currently debated in the relevant literature.

2. PART 1: FORCED MIGRATION IN RECENT EUROPEAN HISTORY AND THE SPECIFICITY OF IRELAND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Migration flows have shaped humankind; they have contributed to the rational use of natural and human resources on any given land (Marchetti 2017; Naydenov 2018). From a sociological point of view, migration happens when an individual moves from their original community, that is a network of human relations with a reference to a specific territory, to

another one (Marchetti 2017). If the phenomenon is as old as human society itself and one of the most common social processes (Duszczyl et al. 2020), it has more recently been considered from a political lense rather than understood in an anthropological sense (Marchetti 2017; Duszczuk et al. 2020). In fact, this political reading of the definition of migration coincides with the formation of Nation States and the emergence of a modern understanding of citizenship. It introduces the difference between *emigration* and *immigration* and focuses on the admission of a foreigner into a host political society (Marchetti 2017). In that view, states, particularly in the post WW2 Western world, developed sets of regulations (migration policies) covering entries and exits as well as long-term settlement of the newcomers (Gońda et al. 2020). In that regard, refugees constitute a specific type of migration as they are forced out of their countries by conflict, violence or persecution (UNHCR 2022). As such, their status is defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol which outline the rights of refugees and the legal obligations of the signatory states members to protect them.

In recent years, certain European migration policies and political discourses have reflected popular beliefs that migration is a source of problems such as crime or raised poverty levels among receiving countries (Duszczuk et al. 2020). In fact, migration represents a particular paradox of the globalisation era. On the one hand, it is desired as it allows for positive developments such as easier international transports, enhanced technologies and financial capabilities (Marchetti 2017), while on the other hand, it is limited by host societies' migration policies as it triggers local societal tensions, underpinned by political

communitarianism and nationalist and racist feelings (Collier 2013; Marchetti 2017; Naydenov 2018; Trimikliniotis 2019).

This section will briefly look at the European social, economic and political context from the aftermath of WW2 to 2015 migration flows, perceived by European society as a 'refugee crisis' thus shaping the current debate around migration and asylum issues. It will then focus on Ireland and its system of reception of International Protection Applicants (IPA), known as Direct Provision (DP). Then, a section will be dedicated specifically to the educational background in which this inquiry took place, shedding light on the creation of the Irish Universities of Sanctuary movement and its attempt to facilitate a culture of welcome for IPAs and refugees into Institutes of Higher Education. Finally, it will give a short introduction to the Mellie Project, a collaborative storytelling project between IPAs living in DP and the students and staff of a Dublin-based university (DCU).

2.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1 A brief overview of migration flows in Europe from the 1950s to the Millennial Era

It is generally acknowledged that three phenomena have impacted migration patterns in Europe since the second half of the 20th century: European decolonisation, the shortage of workforce in Northern and Western Europe in its recovery after World War II, and the rise and subsequent collapse of the Communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe (Naydenov 2018; Trimikliniotis 2019).

From the 1950s to the mid 1970s, the Western European economy was booming (Trimikliniotis 2019; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). Increased industrialisation and growing possibilities for social mobility facilitated by the development of education meant that local populations were no longer eager to take up employment in sectors such as agriculture, cleaning, construction or mining which they saw as unhealthy and poorly paid (Van Mol and De Valk 2016). To compensate for the lack of a local workforce, north-western European governments, specifically, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland, started to recruit work forces in peripheral countries, mainly from Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, which were less industrialised and experienced high unemployment rates (Ibid). In this context, foreign workers were expected to return home after completing their work and were given very few rights, such as limited or no access to welfare support (Boyle et al. 1998). Importantly, during that period, while the Iron Curtain, which represented a notional barrier between the Soviet bloc and the West, limited East-West mobility it did not completely stop it, especially following political crises such those of Hungary (1956-1957), Czechoslovakia (1968-1969), and Poland (1980-1981) (Castels et al. 2008; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). During this period, labour migration was generally viewed positively, both by the sending and the receiving countries, because of its economic benefits. For instance, in the Mediterranean regions, emigration contributed to alleviate pressures on the labour market, as these areas were affected by significant low productivity and incomes (Castels et al. 2008). Yet at the same time, this period was also characterised by another migration inflow towards Europe's former colonial powers as a result of the process of decolonisation

(Castels et al. 2008). Many of these migrants were legally considered citizens and as such 'returning' to the homeland (Ibid). According to Van Mol and De Valk (2016), around 7 million people of European origin returned from the colonies: with main migration flows being from Kenya, India, and Malaysia to the UK; from Northern Africa to France and Italy; from the Congo to Belgium; and from Indonesia to the Netherlands. Along with the people of European origin also came others such as Algerian *Harkis* (North African auxiliaries in the French colonial army) in France and Asian Ugandans in Britain (Ibid). Many had difficulties to (re)insert themselves with ease into the mother country's social fabric and those of non-European origin in particular "were economically and socially deprived and also often discriminated" (Van Mol and De Valk 2016 p. 34).

The oil crisis of 1973 considerably changed the economic landscape of Europe. In fact, the economic recession it triggered reduced the need for foreign labour and operated a shift in Western's economic considerations as faith in an unbridled growth diminished (Van Mol and De Valk 2016). As a result, governments of Northern and Western Europe took measures aiming to control and reduce migration (Ibid). Yet it is to be noted that, by the 1970s, the nature of migration itself had changed with an increased number of migrants coming from outside of Europe. In fact, as previously mentioned, most Western European countries recruited guest-workers (temporary labour migrants) "to fuel the postwar boom" (Castels 1986 p. 761) with permits that could limit their rights such as, for example, criteria of eligibility restricted to certain jobs, or that would force the workers to go back to their country of origin for a length of time per year thus preventing them access to certain social rights (Ibid). However, despite their initial efforts, governments were unsuccessful in

limiting family reunification as it was considered a fundamental human right under Article 19 of the European Social Charter of 1961 (ESC 1961; Castels et al. 2008; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). This resulted in a rise of migrant workers settling more permanently, and bringing their families, on the one hand; and in a decision from governments to stop the guest-workers schemes from 1974 onwards, on the other (Castels et al. 2008; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). It thus became apparent that immigrant populations were there to stay and that there was a need for adequate integration policies (Van Mol and De Valk 2016). From the mid 1970s, the topic of migration played a larger role in national political and public debates as the consequences of the economic recession “fuelled hostility, racism, and xenophobia towards certain “visible” groups of resident migrants” (Van Mol and De Valk 2016 p.35). From that period through the 1980s, migration started to take a new shape with new refugee flows induced by upheavals in Eastern Europe and armed conflicts in parts of Asia (i.e Vietnam) and Africa (i.e. Somalia) (Hatton 2004; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). In fact, the European Union, at that time comprising 12 member states, saw a rise in asylum applications from 100,000 in the mid 1980s to about 650,000 in 1989 (Hatton 2004).

The 1990's were characterised by the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the subsequent end of the Cold War. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the wars in the former Yugoslavia shaped new migration flows across Europe, leading to a significant increase of asylum application into Western Europe (Castel et al. 2008). For example, in the short period between 1989 (fall of the Berlin wall) and 1992, asylum applications increased from 320,000 to 695,000. The ratification of the Maastricht Treaty by the then 12 member states of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1992 constitutes a cornerstone in shaping

modern Europe. Indeed, it unified the European market and led to the creation of the European Union in 1993, abolishing internal borders to facilitate the circulation of people and goods. However, it also imposed stricter border controls and visa regulations on non EU movement (Castels et al. 2008; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). Interestingly, scholars note that this resulted in an increase of irregular migration which contributed to a shift of EU policies from an economic dimension to the ones of justice and security (Castels et al. 2008; Sio-Lopez and Tedeschi 2014). As such, Glick Schiller and Salazar see in European migration policies “different intersecting regimes of mobility that normalise the movements of some travellers while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others” (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013 p. 189). The dawn of the new millennium also saw the accession of former Eastern European countries to the EU, through the 2004 enlargement process, which posed renewed migration challenges as it highlighted disparities between the different national policies concerning migrants (Sio-Lopez and Tedeschi 2014). In fact, it resulted in a disproportionate movement of migrants towards countries with less restrictive laws (Ibid). Yet, since the 1990’s, the EU has been gradually developing a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) aiming to include comprehensive asylum measures (Day 2020). This can be seen in the ratification of the Dublin Convention, first in 1990, then in 2003 and again 2013, which “lays down criteria for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection (in principle the first country of entry).” (EU Parliament 2021). The first Dublin Convention (1990) was followed by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997. The Treaty of Amsterdam specifically aimed at ensuring intergovernmental cooperation on asylum by transforming the measures on asylum from establishing minimum standards to creating a common system comprising uniform status and uniform procedures, thus granting the EU

institutions new powers to draw up harmonised legislation in the area of asylum (EU Parliament 2021).

Two major events shook the world stage in the first decade of the Millennium and had significant repercussions both on the public debate and on the public opinion on migration across the EU (Strömbäck et al. 2021; Trimikliniotis 2019): the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, and the subsequent the rise of islamophobia; and the economic crisis of 2008 which exacerbated social inequalities as austerity measures were introduced, further eroding the welfare state in many countries (Trimikliniotis 2019). Scholars have also put forward the acceleration of globalisation as an additional factor for a growing fracture between a certain elite, for whom travel and employment were facilitated at a global scale, and less privileged populations, represented in more local and traditional trades who saw their living costs steadily increase (Marchetti 2017; Trimikliniotis 2019). Such a context is said to be favourable to the growth of communitarian and nationalist political movements (Marchetti 2017). In fact, to Marchetti, migration as a phenomenon is caught between two contradicting poles of understanding:

On the one hand, the phenomenon of migration in all its complexity is commonly included in lists of global issues, and yet it is almost exclusively managed by national or regional policies. This ‘disconnect’ reveals a fundamental normative contradiction between claims that are universal to all humans and the communitarian entitlement upheld by mainstream political philosophy as well as national and international laws (Marchetti 2009 p. 57).

She further points to Article 13 of the 1949 Universal Declaration of Human Rights concerning the rights to leave any country, yet not to enter, as a blatant example of this contradictory logic (Marchetti 2009).

According to Wodak (2010), the economic and social transformation experienced by Europe during the first decade of the millennium shaped host societies' perception of migration flows as a fear of identity and wealth loss developed among European populations (Ibid). In her view, this resulted in the growth of a 'politics of fear' which brought further limitations to the European ideal and principle of free movement. She writes:

[W]e observe a normalization of nationalistic, xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric, which primarily works with 'fear': fear of change, of globalization, of loss of welfare, of climate change, of changing gender roles; in principle, almost anything can be constructed as a threat to 'Us', an imagined homogenous people inside a well-protected territory (Wodak 2010, x).

Since 1990 and the ratification of the Dublin Convention, as mentioned above, the EU has been gradually developing a Common European Asylum System and has tried to introduce comprehensive asylum measures (Day 2020). However, for the last two decades, armed conflicts in the Middle East (i.e. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria) and Northern Africa (i.e. Libya, East Africa) have resulted in an increased inflow of forced migration across the Mediterranean sea towards Southeast European countries (such as Greece, Italy and Spain) with a large number of people seeking international protection in these countries, peaking

in 2015 (UNHCR 2022). In fact, Eurostat reports that the number of asylum applications lodged in 2015 (1.32 million) increased by 110 percent from 2014 (627,000) (Eurostat 2022). The added pressure on Southeast European countries, on the front line of having to deal with the processing of claims as well as with the reception of displaced populations, has underscored the difficulty in finding a consensus at EU level to manage migration. In fact, despite the EU aiming at providing the member states with a harmonised legal basis for key provisions of asylum policy, such as time limits for decision-making and access to health care and education for those seeking international protection (Day 2020), the 2015 migration flows highlighted the limitations of the system and demonstrated that the EU is not fit to cope with a larger number of applications for international protection (Ibid).

2.2.2 Migration in the Irish context

Until the late 1990's, Ireland had been, historically, a nation of emigration. In fact it is estimated that, throughout the twentieth century, there was an average of 20,000 emigrants per year, with high peaks during the 1950s and 1980s, due to a stagnant economy and high unemployment level (Cronin et al. 2020). Indeed, an unfavourable economic situation combined with an isolationist view of the world meant that Ireland had welcomed very few refugees in comparison with its European neighbours (Arnold et al 2018; Cronin et al. 2020). However, from the 1990's when the country experienced a rapid economic boom, known as the Celtic Tiger, and until the financial crisis of 2008, Ireland became, for the first time in its history, attractive to economic migrants (Ibid). The Irish Central Statistics Office reports that, in 2016, despite a policy of economic austerity post 2008, the non Irish

population rose to 11.6% from less than 2% in 2001 (Central Statistics Office 2016). The majority of non Irish nationals are from EU countries with the largest groups being Polish (211,515), British (103,113), Lithuanian (36,552) and Romanian (29,186) nationals (Central Statistics Office 2016; Cronin et al. 2020). In contrast, the number of first instance asylum applications processed in Ireland accounts for less than 1% of the total number of applications in the EU - which represents a much lower rate than that of many EU member states (Cronin et al. 2020). Yet, applications for asylum in Ireland increased from just 39 in the early 1990 to 3,500 in 2018 (Eurostat 2019).

This, in turn, facilitated the rise of an anti-immigrant political party (Fanning 2021), and although it did not translate into votes among the Irish electorate, the issue of cultural and national identity is present in the Irish public debate (Ibid). As such, it pushed successive Irish governments to take harsher measures such as, for example, a more restrictive access to Irish Citizenship in 2004 (Cronin et al. 2020). This changed the conception of what it means to be Irish. In fact, before 2004, any child born on the island of Ireland, irrespective of the status of their parents as citizens or otherwise, had an automatic right to Irish nationality (*Ius Soli*), yet, following the referendum (asking people whether this rule should be changed) only children born in Ireland with at least one parent who had a legal right to Irish citizenship could themselves be granted Irish citizenship.

2.2.2.1 Reception of International Protection Applicants in Ireland

There are various ways in which a person can be granted international protection in Ireland. The three main categories are refugee status, subsidiary protection and permission to remain (Day 2020). If these types of status differ in the level of protection offered, in terms of rights, especially regarding length of time to apply for naturalisation and family reunification, they each grant an individual the same access to the labour market, medical care, social welfare benefits and education and training as that of Irish citizens (Ibid). While awaiting for their claim to be processed, applicants in Ireland can avail of various financial and practical supports (McMahon 2015). The main scheme is a state-funded system, known as Direct Provision (DP) which temporarily provides applicants with food and shelter, in various centres around the country, as well as, currently, a weekly allowance of €38.80 per adult and €29.80 per child (McMahon 2015; Day 2020). While some people choose not to avail of the state provision system, the Day report (2020) indicates that since 2015 over 80% of applicants have sought state-provided accommodation. Introduced as a temporary measure in April 2000 to deal with a large increase of applications from 7,724 in 1999 to 11,634 in 2002 (the highest level ever reached), it was designed as a mainly cashless system which would ensure that applicants would not be left homeless. It also sought to respond to the fear, at the time, from Irish society, that open access to social services and welfare would constitute a ‘pull factor’ for economic migrants (McMahon 2015; Day 2020). Day notes, however, that “[g]iven the overall numbers involved these concerns do not seem to have been well-founded” (Day 2020, p. 19).

The system has been subject to a number of criticisms from civil society organisations, such as the Irish Refugee Council or the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI), as well as international bodies such as the UNHCR, which denounce a privatised for-profit system with only seven state owned centres out of a total of 44 (Day 2020). They also condemn the fact that people spend a much greater amount of time in the system than was originally envisaged, maintaining them in a position of dependency as people placed in the system are unable to lead their lives fully within the society at large (McMahon 2015; Day 2020). Research on the DP system indicates that, in addition to a prolonged stay in the system, which is experienced by residents as “an agonising and wasted existence for those waiting” (O’Reilly 2018 p. 824), difficult access to the workforce (only introduced in 2018 and which remains limited) or to further and higher education isolate IPAs from the rest of Irish society, which has a devastating impact on their physical and mental health (Ní Raghallaigh et al. 2016; O’Reilly 2018; Murphy 2021). Further criticisms have been voiced, drawing attention to living conditions in the centres, as some are far from well-connected routes and amenities and lacking in necessary broadband and network coverage (Day 2020). As many of the centres were not originally designed for the reception of IPAs nor for long stays, many applicants are forced to live in cramped rooms with little privacy and no access to cooking facilities (see also Ombudsman for Children’s Office 2021).

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent pandemic in 2020 further highlighted the unsuitability of these congregated living settings and demonstrations were organised to protest against the failings of the DP system (Murphy 2021; Day 2020). In June 2020 commitments by the government were made to “end the direct provision system” and to

“replace it with a new international protection accommodation policy, centred on a not-for-profit approach” (Programme for Government – Our Shared Future, June 2020 p.15 as cited in Day 2020 p. 2021).

2.3 EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

In the Irish education context, while compulsory schooling is accessible to all children of IPAs, this is not the case from the age of 16. Indeed, while it is possible for people with refugee status to access free third level education and student grants if they have been a resident in the country for three of the previous five years, asylum seekers are regarded as international students until they have spent a minimum of three years in the country. As such, they face large fees, as they are not eligible for the main state student support grants outside of exceptional specialised support schemes (Murphy 2020).

2.3.1 The Irish Universities of Sanctuary movement

In this unfavourable context, the University of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) emerged in 2017 as a national network. This initiative was developed as part of the larger City of Sanctuary movement, first founded in the UK in 2005. This grassroots movement consists of a network of community organisations that operates with the ideal of “offer[ing] sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution” and that seeks to create, in the UK, “welcoming places of safety for all” (Cities of Sanctuary 2021). A sister organisation was subsequently

formed in Ireland, with the name of Places of Sanctuary, and the UoSI was established as part of this growing network (Places of Sanctuary 2021). Institutions of Higher Education on the island of Ireland can apply to be designated as institutions of sanctuary based on their commitment to promote and sustain the movement's core principles. These include a) 'learn' (about what it means to be seeking sanctuary), b) 'embed' (take positive action to establish a sustainable culture of welcome) and c) 'share' (share good practice with other education institutions, the local community and beyond) (Murphy 2020). DCU, the setting of this study, became the first university in Ireland to receive the UoS designation. Since the inauguration of the Irish network in 2017, the majority of the growing number of universities in Ireland have likewise been granted the UoS designation (Places of Sanctuary 2021).

Although universities of sanctuary are free to develop their own initiatives to meet their local needs and specificities, in practice, a significant role is given to the provision of scholarships, as financial difficulties remain the main barrier to access education (Murphy 2020). Since 2021 and the introduction of a Government Grant Scheme intended for IPAs, the scholarship offerings have changed to complement the scheme, providing opportunities for people who have not yet spent three years in the country (criteria for eligibility). In addition to scholarships, Universities of Sanctuary commit to promote a culture of welcome across their campuses and among their student and staff bodies. Therefore, many activities are organised, ranging from academic conferences to student refugee weeks and book clubs. The Mellie Project (Migrants English Language and Literacy and Intercultural Education), the focal point of this study, was created in this context.

2.3.2 The Mellie Project

In the spring of 2017, as part of its sanctuary activities, the Mellie project was launched in DCU. Its aim is to pair up volunteer residents in DP together with refugees in the wider community, on the one hand, with volunteer students and staff from the university, on the other, to engage in reciprocal storytelling, in order to promote intercultural dialogue through language and intercultural exchange. Modelled on the work of Sheekey (2015), participants interview each other and produce collaborative and reciprocal narratives from their encounters. During the course of one academic semester, the participants meet on campus, one afternoon per week, and share their life stories and experiences, prompted by a chosen theme such as ‘the self’, ‘the land’ or concepts such as ‘hope’ and ‘hospitality’. This project has run for four consecutive years up to 2020, with the most recent iteration concluding in the summer of 2022¹ and in total has engaged 200+ participants from over 20 different nationalities. The workings of the Mellie project will be further detailed in Chapter 4, in the project methodology section.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Although migration is a phenomenon as old as humankind, it represents a particular paradox of our modern globalised world. For the many opportunities it brings, such as faster connections among people and increase of business opportunities as well as cultural exchanges, it also triggers apprehension from populations which fear both an identity and

¹ The most recent iteration, which ran from January 2022 to May 2022 is outside the scope of this study.

a financial loss as they perceive incoming migration flows as a threat to their already scarce resources (Marchetti 2017; Wodak 2010). This perception is reflected in the ongoing debates about incoming migrants, national sovereignty, and security within the European Union. Ireland is no stranger to these discussions having put in place a specific system, namely DP, to deal with the reception of international protection applicants. While this system is facing criticism, Irish society is at the same time developing a number of creative initiatives, such as UoSI, seeking to alleviate the impact of DP and to provide opportunities for those seeking international protection. This brings us to consider the conditions of reception of forcibly displaced populations and to explore the concept of integration of these populations in the host community.

3. PART 2: WHAT CONSTITUTES SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION?

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the 21st century, immigrant populations in the Global North have grown by 30% (OECD 2015). In 2015, the EU saw an unprecedented growth in international protection applications (Ibid), prompting EU policy makers to reflect on the issue of the integration of the newcomers (Bauböck and Tripkovic 2017). Indeed, if such questions had already been discussed for decades in European countries with a colonial past, such as the UK and France, the debate expanded to other countries, such as Italy and Greece, which became the first recipients of migrant populations emerging from new patterns of migration following ongoing conflicts in the Middle East (see the first part of this chapter). The term integration is used by many and yet the concept is always disputed in scholarly literature. In fact, given the many types of migrants and host societies, it is a highly context-dependent concept and as such, needs to be carefully unpacked. The following section gives an overview of the current debate.

3.2 WHAT IS INTEGRATION?

The term integration is often mentioned by politicians, is widely used in policy-making, and debated in academia (Cheung and Phillimore 2013). Robinson highlights the chaotic nature of the definition of the concept saying it is “a word used by many but understood

differently by most” (Robinson 1998, cited Ager and Strang 2008 p. 167). Castles et al. (2002 p.112) argue that “there is no single generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration” and that “[t]he concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated” (Ibid). Indeed, the term means different things to different actors depending on “their perspective, interests, assumptions and values” (Cheung and Phillimore 2013 p.1). At the level of nation-states, discussions around the concept are often framed by differences between the members of the receiving society and newcomers (Pace and Simsek 2019). This understanding of the concept places the sole responsibility for the “integration process” on the newcomer (Ibid). Scholars in the field of Psychosociology, such as Berry (1994,1997), have challenged this approach, introducing a socio-cultural dimension. This has led to a redefining of the concept as a multidimensional process happening over time, involving both migrant groups and host societies whose rights and responsibilities are clearly outlined (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; EU, 2010; Pace and Simsek 2019). In 2003, the European Commission published an overview on integration policies titled *Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment* (EC, 2003). This report takes a holistic approach to integration, acknowledging reciprocity between migrant populations and host societies and encompassing different dimensions of the concept, such as: economic, social, and political rights; cultural and religious diversity; citizenship and participation. In this view, integration policies are conceived as a balance of rights and duties, where responsibility for integration is also placed on receiving societies and their institutions, thus underlining the importance of social connections between migrants and members of the society (Ager and Strang 2008; EU 2010; Cheung and Phillimore 2013; Pace and Simsek 2019). Yet, it has been argued that the EU, in an attempt to provide unified policies, is favouring a top-down/hierarchical understanding of

integration, thus failing to take into account the characteristics and specificities of the various migrant groups as well as of the host societies (Pace and Simsek 2019). Pace and Simsek (2019) further indicate that such an approach leaves little space for consultation with those directly affected by the integration process and often overlooks the perceptions, aspirations and experiences of those who are asked to ‘integrate’ (Pace and Simsek 2019).

3.2.1 Operationalisation of the concept

The ways in which policymakers and academics conceive the concrete application of the concept of integration can greatly differ. In addition, there are also debates among scholars on what constitutes meaningful integration. However, there is some agreement on its functional dimension and on the importance of social interactions in the process (Cheung and Phillimore 2013). Yet, the main issue remains bringing those aspects together in a way that is useful for policy making and evaluation but that is also satisfying and meaningful for people who are part of the process.

3.2.2 Cross-cultural adaptation theories

The manner in which people from different cultural backgrounds encounter each other, negotiate and compromise to reach satisfying levels of agreement which will allow them to live well together is a topic that has been discussed across many disciplines (Berry 2005; Weber 2013; Derrida 2013). Conceiving integration as a two-way process implies the

presence of two groups, namely migrants and host societies, whose interests and values may be conflicting, which leads to question how newcomers to a country become part of society (Castles et al. 2002). This section will explore some of the cross-cultural theories, which analyse how people communicate across diverse cultures and explain the consequences of these differences.

3.2.2.1 Culture shock theory

During the first half of the 20th century, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists were concerned with the study of group relations and how immigrant groups were to adjust to the different (dominant) culture (Castles et al 2002). The focus was traditionally on the internalisation or replacement of an individual's or a group's personality traits or values with those of the host society (Kim 2000). In this context, integration implied assimilation, with immigrants expected to abandon their culture and integrate into the existing culture of the host society without any reciprocal accommodation (Castles et al 2002). In the majority of cases, studies putting forward an assimilation model relate to experiences of voluntary, professional sojourners and are concerned with their psychological adjustment (Kim 2000; Chen 2013). This is, for example, illustrated in the still popular theory of the 'U' curve, which supposes four stages (i.e honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment, mastery) to the process of adaptation, including the idea of 'culture shock' which Oberg first defined as the "anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (Oberg 1960 as cited Kim 2000 p.18).

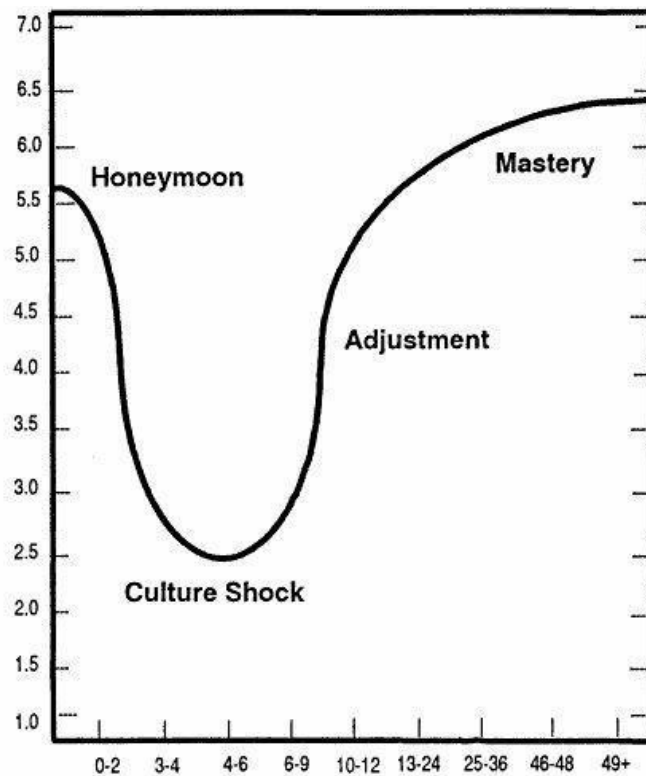


Figure 1: Depiction of Oberg's U-Curve of Cross-Cultural as reproduced in Martinsen 2007

This model has been criticised for being too linear and overly simplistic (Black and Mendenhall 1991) as it does not portray the complexity of the experience of cultural transition (Kim 2000, Chen 2013). Indeed, the model does not take into consideration the reasons for the stay or the different possible types of sojourners (e.g. refugees, exchange students etc.) nor does it differentiate between different patterns of adjustment although many people report different experiences (Kim 2000; Black and Mendenhall 1991).

3.2.2.2 *Acculturation: living well in two cultures*

In his seminal work in the 1990's, Berry explains the concept of 'acculturation' and defines it as the multidimensional process by which newcomer groups adjust to the culture of the host society. He offers an individual's approach, based on the relevance of their own culture and that of the host society. Berry suggests that a newcomer's acquisition of a host community's values and practice does not automatically imply the dismissal of the values and practices of their country of origin. He develops a model of acculturation in which he distinguishes four possible dimensions of acculturation. The first is called *assimilation* and refers to the process by which an individual perceives no value in maintaining one's own culture and identity, resulting in the adoption of the dominant culture. The opposite of assimilation is *separation*, where there is value in maintaining one's own culture but there is also no participation in wider society. *Marginalisation* occurs when individuals reject both their culture of origin and the dominant host culture. In that case there is little opportunity for interaction with society at large. There is also the possibility of cultural loss and maintaining one's own culture can prove difficult. The final dimension is *integration*, where it is possible to maintain one's own culture and to participate in the wider society (Berry 2005). In this model, integration happens where individuals and groups have an interest in maintaining their original cultural identity while also taking part in daily interactions with other groups within the larger societal framework (Castles et al. 2002; Cheung and Phillimore 2013).

Berry's approach presents integration as the most favourable dimension for the individual; however, this model has also been criticised for making two implicit assumptions: on the one hand, it implies that integration is an individual choice (Kim 2000) and on the other hand, it presumes that the host society's and the newcomers' cultures are compatible (Weinreich 2009). Regarding the first assumption, Kim disputes the idea that acculturation (from marginalisation to integration) is an individual choice. She argues that newcomers cannot completely escape adaptation, for they are functionally dependent on the mainstream culture; neither can they fully assimilate, regardless of time and effort (Kim 2000). Instead she conceptualises cross-cultural adaptation as a "universal human phenomenon" (Kim 2000 p.30) in which adaptation is understood as a "complex, dynamic, and evolutionary process" (Kim 2000 p. xii). Kim's theory acknowledges the internal conflict and stress that inevitably arise as the individual strives to retain aspects of their own culture while also attempting to integrate into the new one, thus creating disequilibrium and anxiety. She focuses on the individual's way of coping with the stress, including avoidance, denial and withdrawal but also regression into pre-existing habits in order to accommodate the possible discomfort in the new environment. She further seeks to identify factors that may prevent or facilitate the adaptation on different levels: intra-personal (e.g. the person needs to be physically and emotionally prepared to enter a new environment); interpersonal (e.g. social connections which will facilitate the transition) and inter-cultural (e.g. some cultures demonstrate more openness and warmth to outsiders than others). The figure below represents Kim's model of adaptation:

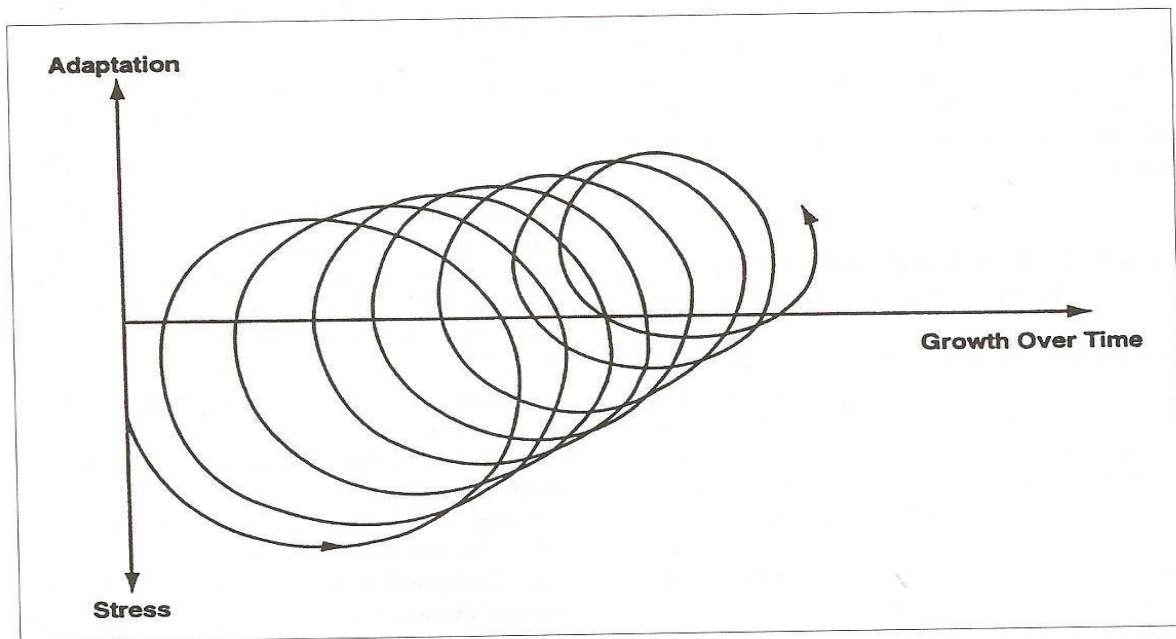


Figure 2: Kim's model of adaptation (Kim 2000 p.57)

Weinreich (2009) criticises Berry's assumption that when people are fleeing persecution as members of minority groups in their home cultures, they find a magnanimous new host culture and that both the newcomers' and the hosts' cultures are compatible with each other. In his view, Berry fails to take into consideration matters such as xenophobia, which remains prevalent in certain communities. He discusses cases, such as South Africa, when apartheid was government policy or the ongoing conflict between China and Tibet, where the more viable option for newcomers is to separate from the dominant host culture (Weinreich 2009). Similarly, some of the newcomers' cultural norms might be seen as clashing with those of the host society (Derrida 2013; Miller 2016). Moreover, Weinreich deems Berry's stand on culture identity too simplistic as it presents the host culture as a homogenous block and does not account for multicultural societies (Weinreich 2009).

Where Berry's model of acculturation is polarised between acceptance or rejection of the dominant culture, Weinreich suggests instead a process of *enculturation* by which newcomers identify with some aspects of the dominant culture while rejecting others. In this context, the term enculturation is

used to emphasise the agentic individual incorporating cultural elements during socialisation, whereas acculturation typically references migrants' movement towards and adoption of the mainstream 'receiving' culture (Weinreich 2009 p.125).

By using the term enculturation, Weinreich draws particular attention to people's agency to incorporate, over time, cultural elements or values, whether they are mainstream or not, that are available and significant to the individual (Weinreich 2009).

This brief overview of the different theories in cross-cultural adaptation highlights the complexity of integration, which has been shown to be a multidimensional, context dependent, process and while it is not linear, it happens over time (Cheung and Phillimore 2013). In order to measure levels of integration, scholars taking a social-psychology approach have concentrated on newcomers' own accounts on their feeling of satisfaction or on their difficulties (Atfield et al. 2007; Berry 1994; Kim 2000). Others have focused on the multidimensional aspect of the process to analyse more objective indicators such as interpersonal relationships, language competence or occupational status (Castels et al 2002; Ager and Strang 2004, 2008; Kim 2000; Cheung and Phillimore 2013). In the UK context, Ager and Strang (2004) have developed a comprehensive analytical framework in an

attempt to bring together the distinctive dimensions of the integration process. Their influential work will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.2.3 Framing core domains of integration

Ager and Strang's (2004, 2008, 2010) integration framework was developed in an effort to combine the multiple dimensions of integration into an expository framework. Putting at distance the psychological prism, inherent to the individual (Berry 2015), Ager and Strang try to operationalise the concept in a sociological way. As such, they define core aspects of integration (Ager and Strang 2008 p.170). (Figure 3 below)

A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration

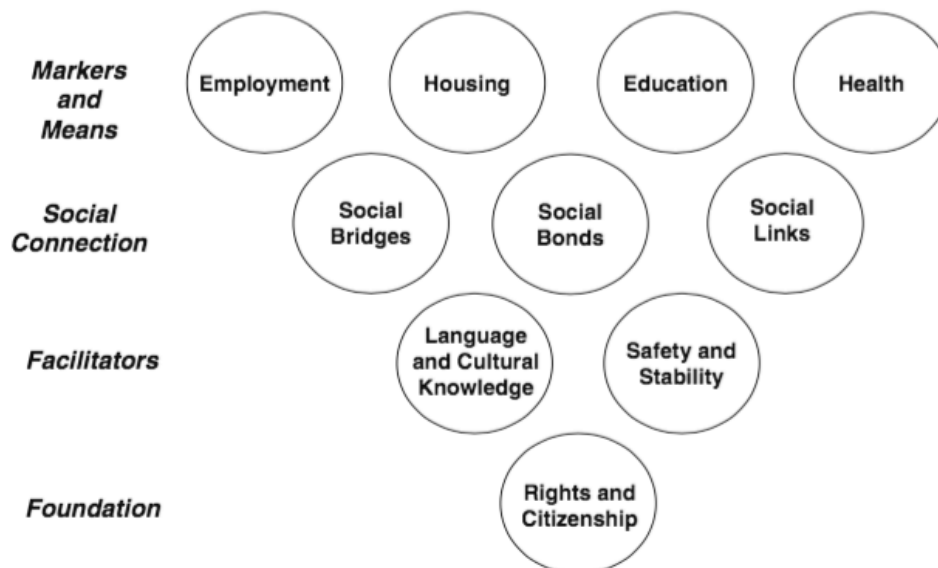


Figure 3: A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration (Ager and Strang 2008 p.170)

In this model, they first isolate four *markers and means* (i.e. employment, housing, education and health) which they have identified as key aspects of integrating into a society. These functional indicators have been selected because they are viewed as satisfactory outcomes when achieved (Cheung and Phillimore 2013). Resonating with Putnam's (2002) work on social capital, the second dimension of the model concerns *social connections*, that is to say the newcomer's degree of belonging to the host society (both in perception and in practice). Indeed, *social bridges* (with other communities), *social bonds* (within a refugee's own community, in this case) and *social links* (to institutions of power and influence) are considered essential mediating influences to surpass the many thresholds and gatekeepers present at every step of the process (Ager and Strang 2008; Wodak 2016; Cheung and Phillimore 2013). The social dimension of integration will be discussed further in the following section.

The third domain is called *facilitators*. This refers, on the one hand, to what are considered the main barriers to a positive engagement within host societies such as language and cultural knowledge and, on the other hand, to conditions of safety and stability, without which the settlement of newcomers is jeopardised by a fear of facing persecution or harassment (Cheung and Phillimore 2013).

Finally, the fourth domain, *foundations*, examines the rights and obligations of the state towards the newcomers as well as what is expected from the latter. Ager and Strang (2008)

stress the importance of ensuring that this mutual agreement is understood by all, thus enabling a sense of equity (Cheung and Phillimore 2013; Pace and Simsek 2019).

The Ager and Strang model has the potential to be utilised as a reference for measuring integration from a state policy-making point of view as well as being adopted as a comprehensive approach to the complexity of the process from the perspective of refugees and host communities (Ibid). However, this work was commissioned by the Home Office in the context of the UK and therefore lacks consideration of the specificities of other host societies or the different experiences of newcomers depending on their status, class, situation and motivation for migration (Pace and Simsek 2019). Consequently, the theory fails to account for many specific situations relating to lived experience of individuals. Pace and Simsek (2019) also argue that, although migrants were consulted during Ager and Strang's study, what are deemed successful achievements such as education and employment are primarily modelled in terms of the host society's expectations.

This brief review of the current state of the scholarly reflection on the integration process highlights dimensions of particular interest for this inquiry: the critical importance of the facilitators such as cultural knowledge; the necessary link between social capital and integration; and the fundamental equal access to rights. The latter two will be looked at particularly in the following sections.

3.3 NAVIGATING THE SPACE IN BETWEEN: INTEGRATION AS RECIPROCITY AND DEMOCRACY

3.3.1 The importance of social capital

Much has been written on migrants' adaptation to new circumstances and cultures (Berry 1997; Kim 2000) and issues have been raised within anti-migration rhetoric, from politicians to the media (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2017), about the increased numbers of migrants arriving to Europe (Migration Advisory Committee 2012) allegedly putting pressure on already scarce resources (Phillimore et al. 2018; Still 2010). In this discourse, the resources migrants bring with them, for example in terms of potential, are rarely acknowledged (Phillimore et al. 2018). Similarly, little attention is paid to the sacrifices often made as resources such as status, home, family and friends are left behind (Ibid). This feeling of loss can result in post-migratory stress, also known as migration grief (Casado et. al 2010). However, there is consensus among migration scholars that social connections (or networks) are critical to reduce stress and overcome 'bereavement', thus facilitating the process of integration (Cheung and Phillimore 2013; Phillimore et al 2018). Moreover, literature shows that social connections benefit the integration of the newcomers while also strengthening the wider communities, thus bringing added value towards greater social cohesion (Ager and Strang 2008; Cheung and Philimore 2013; Kim 2000; Schmidtke 2018; Kindler et al 2015).

Social connections and networks yield *social capital*. The concept here is understood after Putnam (2000) defined it as "connections among individuals – social networks and the

norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” (p.19). In this view, similar to the economic concept of financial capital, social networks are thought to have value. In the context of migration, social capital is identified as an enabler to access resources that would otherwise be unavailable to migrants (Ager and Strang 2008; Phillimore et al 2018). Ager and Strang (2008) define social capital as a ‘connective tissue’ (p.117) facilitating the securement of functional resources such as housing, education, health and employment. Interestingly, they distance themselves from Putnam’s view of bonding connections which he understands as inward looking, reinforcing exclusive identities and promoting homogeneity (Putnam 2000), and establish that intra community socialisation does not limit wider integration into society, contrary to common rhetorical misconception in the current integration debate in Europe which fear communitarianism (Ager and Strang 2008). Supporting this argument, Cheung and Phillimore (2013) reckon that, far from leading to separatism, intra community networks provide critical emotional support to individuals, thus benefiting personal development such as health or language skills. They further conclude that the multiplication of networks (including bonding connections) leads to satisfying integration (Ibid).

3.3.2 Agency and reciprocity

Reviewing Putnam’s definition of social capital, the notion of reciprocity is of particular interest for this study. The Oxford English Dictionary (2021) defines it as “a situation in which two people, countries, etc. provide the same help or advantages to each other”. In order to unpack the concept further, I now turn to the work of Philimore et al. (2018). In

this innovative paper, the authors examine the link between reciprocity and integration and propose to look at integration theories from the angle of agency. Drawing on the work of Mauss and Halls (1954) and of Simmel (as cited in Phillimore et al. 2018) in which reciprocity is seen as the basis of society, as it is through exchanges that networks are formed as well as resources shared, in an almost strategic approach, Philimore et al. argue that migrants engage in reciprocity in order to develop social connections and subsequently access resources. They found, for example, that places of worship or language classes are decisive spaces for migrants to foster relationships based on exchange as the resources they acquire in their new country are circulated between established and new migrants as well as with other indigenous or more established members of the community (Phillimore et al 2018). They further report:

Knowledge of local language, culture and institutions were key resources with considerable exchange value. Those who learned to navigate the system and had networks that yielded social capital in the form of functional resources such as housing and employment were in a position to initiate exchanges (Phillimore et al 2018 p.227).

Although they warn that relations based on reciprocity are complex and culture dependent, Philimore et al. conclude that in most cases they allow individuals to regain agency even if by the sole act of reciprocation (as opposed to the value of the resource itself):

Only through exchange that was based around spending time or offering care or knowledge could they regain or substitute important lost resources: intimate relationships, companionship, self-esteem and purpose (Phillimore et al. 2018 p 228).

Phillimore et al. also add that the study of the relationship between reciprocity and integration is at its early stages and would benefit from further conceptual research to determine, for instance, in which contexts reciprocity is possible and to investigate in depth the outcomes of these exchanges. This study seeks to develop this understanding.

3.3.3 Fostering a sense of belonging: from local contacts to friendships

Exploring the concept of reciprocity in the context of integration highlights the need to create opportunities to develop social connections. Following the 2003 publication, *Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment* (EC, 2003; see also Chapter 2, part 2, section 2), the European Union adopted in 2004 a policy for immigrant integration and proposed eleven Common Basic Principles (CBP) to serve as reference for the implementation of current and future integration policies. CBP 7 reads as follows:

Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, intercultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens (EU 2004).

As previously discussed, social connections have been identified as a key component of an integrated community (Ager and Strang 2008) and there is also evidence that interactions

are crucial to community cohesion (Ager and Strang 2008; Threadgold and Court 2005). The European Commission in the 'Handbook for Integration' (2007 p. 41) clearly calls for local initiatives to promote social cohesion and a sense of belonging:

Many local practices have the aim of making this interaction more fruitful and less conflictual, fostering a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and changing perceptions both inside and outside of [...] neighbourhoods.

Frequent contacts and exchanges of resources (material or immaterial) between the newcomers and the host society are critical as they foster a sense of belonging to the community from all of its components. Ager and Strang remark that if integration often means "at the most basic level, absence of conflict and 'toleration' of different groups" (Ager and Strang 2008 p.177), it is not considered satisfactory by any of the parties concerned with the process of integration. Indeed, many of the participants in their study, both from the migrant community and from local organisations, report that the sense of belonging to the community means in their view the possibility of actively mixing with people from different groups and involves committed friendships, a sense of respect and shared values (Ibid). Interestingly, Ager and Strang also note that shared values neither deny individual identities nor do they suppress diversity and differences. On the contrary, they allow for a wider context in which a common sense of belonging to develop (Ibid). In their report to the UK Home Office, Coley et al. (2019) recommend maintaining high-level social connections within and between communities, as well as partnerships with institutions, as this promotes positive change to the process of integration. This echoes Threadgold and Court's (2005 p.54) argument that:

[P]rogrammes which foster a shared sense of belonging, entitlement and responsibility to the safety and wellbeing of others [...] are vital to the effective integration of refugees and the project of social inclusion

All these studies highlight the crucial role of refugee community groups in creating community cohesion. If they are deemed a key player in the development of policies to promote refugee inclusion and social cohesion, it is also important to note that in most cases, these organisations rely on the voluntary sector due to a lack of funding, thus jeopardising their sustainability (Ager and Strang 2008; Threadgold and Court 2005; Scottish Refugee Council 2010 ; Coley et al. 2019).

To conclude, although social connections are fundamental in building successful integration and maintaining social cohesion, they cannot be separated from the wider societal and political context and integration should be underpinned by equal access to rights, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.3.4 Accessing equal rights

In its 2003 communication on integration policies, the European Commission clearly emphasises that the integration process is based on the reciprocity of rights and obligations of newcomers and host societies (EC 2003) and as such should target all dimensions of integration including human dignity, equality, freedom of cultural choice, justice, security

and independence (Ager and Strang 2008; Pace and Simsek 2019). Based on their extensive research on communities where refugees and non-refugee members live, Ager and Strang find that rights, understood in a broad sense, underpin all other aspects of integration as they are “the foundation of integration policy, to which governments are accountable” (Ager and Strang 2008 p.175). They further argue that there is general agreement among the communities that equal rights are fundamental to integration: “This shared basis of entitlement was seen as an important prerequisite for refugees to live harmoniously with non-refugees” (Ibid p.176). Atfield (2007) notes that prior to obtaining access to rights and entitlements on socio-economic, civic and political levels, the first step towards empowerment is access to the knowledge that these rights exist and to the manner in which they can be used. This knowledge and experience are usually accessed through contacts with the community, thus enabling newcomers to further gain resources and information and to become more integrated (Atfield 2005). Moreover, some reservations need to be made regarding the actual implementation of those rights. While equality of access to rights might be available in theory, this might not be the case in practice. In fact, such equality needs to be contextualised, and the conditions under which the members of the host society themselves have access to them must also be taken into consideration (Scottish Refugee Council 2010).

3.3.5 Democracy to come

Successful integration, a shared sense of belonging, and social cohesion between host society and newcomers, can only be achieved by granting equal rights and opportunities to

all (Castel et al 2002; Scottish Refugee Council 2010). These conditions, together with freedom, are the fundamental pillars of democracy. Castels et al. (2002) suggest that in a democratic context and within a multicultural society, integration can be defined as:

[...] a process through which the whole population acquires civil, social, political, human and cultural rights, which creates the conditions for greater equality. In this approach, integration can also mean that minority groups should be supported in maintaining their cultural and social identities, since the right to cultural choices is intrinsic to democracy (Castel et al. 2002 p.113)

However, in times of crisis, a number of people within host societies tend to walk away from the multiculturalist model to make sure that 'the Other' is more like themselves as the fear of the stranger, coming to 'scrounge' on society, is greater (Philimore et al 2018). Yet, as Derrida proclaims: "*il faut bien vivre ensemble*" (Derrida in Weber 2013 p.23). This familiar phrase can be translated into English as both "We need to live *well* together" and "We *must* live together". Derrida posits that there is no alternative as the experience of living is in itself the one common experience that is shared by all, thus keeping humanity interconnected (Derrida 2013). He notes that living together does not necessarily mean living in harmony with the other, that there can be struggles, although, even in conflict, this remains 'living together'. The concept of 'otherness' is an ambiguous one which moves reciprocally from the feeling of threat to one of fascination; however, in Derrida's view being open to it is at the core of democracy (Derrida 2013; Fritsch 2002).

For Derrida, democracy is a contradictory concept which requires full sovereignty of the people on the one hand but welcomes a plurality of points of views on the other hand, thus jeopardising sovereignty and unity. Derrida proposes to shift the understanding of democracy from an ideal (such as developed by Aristotle or Kant) to a possibility of action within society, something to tend towards, between the present and the future. He calls it a democracy ‘to come’ which in his view is much less defined by popular sovereignty than by free speech, openness to criticism and hospitality to singularity and otherness (Fritsch 2002). This creates an essential space for negotiation and creativity to find ways for *vivre ensemble* (Derrida 2013; Fritsch 2002; Weber 2013). In the context of migration, having the capacity to welcome the other while providing them with enough education and means to be able to participate and take part in public debate is a step towards both integration and democracy (Schmidtke 2019).

3.4 CONCLUSION

This section highlights the complexity of the notion of integration and the challenges that face civil societies and governments who have to negotiate the integration of people with refugee backgrounds into increasingly multicultural host communities. They have to find the necessary balance between juxtaposing differing values, beliefs and practices (Berry 2019) on the one hand and ensuring equitable participation of all the different groups to avoid the risk of marginalisation, exclusion and social divisions (Ibid), on the other. A key aspect of integration is the development of social connection as put forward by Ager and Strang (2008), which they identify as a facilitator of two-way mutual accommodation. They

also stress the importance of the notion of belonging which they see as an important marker of living in an integrated community. This study is particularly interested in these social bridges between the 'host' and the 'guest' and will now, in the following chapter, explore in detail the concept of hospitality which Derrida understands as a practice of welcome.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: HOSPITALITY AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the theoretical framework into which this study is grounded. The first part explores the concept of hospitality and its pertinence when investigating the relationships between host communities and newcomers in a forced migration context. Then, the second part looks at the pedagogical theories which have underpinned the creation of the Mellie Project with a focus on critical education.

2. PART 1: HOSPITALITY

'We don't know what hospitality is.'

Jacques Derrida

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is a notion that most would instinctively be familiar with. As a human experience, we often limit it to the idea of friends and food. Indeed, in the most common usage, it is often associated with one group of people receiving another, mainly in a commercial context (Wrobel 2015). In a context of globalisation, people are brought closer

together at an unprecedented speed and societies of the Western World are forced to question their identity and their framing of social justice. Indeed, in the last two decades the concept of hospitality has been brought to prominent position in the public debate by intellectuals, especially in the US, UK and France, to reflect on the effect of decolonisation and to respond to economic immigration and the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees (Still 2010). In this chapter, I will look at the operationalisation of the concept of hospitality, with particular attention to the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida for whom it consists, both in theory and practice, in the crossing of thresholds (*'seuils'*) (Derrida 2000) such as those between the self and the other, the inside and the outside, the personal and the public, and ethics and politics (Dufourmantelle 2000; Still 2010).

2.2 HOSPITALITY AS A CORE CONCEPT OF HUMANKIND

The Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov once said that unlike trees which have roots, humans have legs (Todorov 2002). While in recent years, after decades of financial difficulties leading to numerous political crises and growing societal divisions, the West sees migration as one of its most challenging issues, the phenomenon is not recent. Whether it is linked to a fundamental necessity to socialise (Vigneau et al. 2000) or to a peacekeeping purpose (Brown 2010), humans have always been on the move. Indeed, as will be discussed in this section, migration is intrinsically human and stories about the 'other', 'the stranger' and their reception can be traced back in literature since the invention of writing.

2.2.1 Hospitality's foundational sources

Many well-known surviving works of ancient literature are narratives relating to the encounters between the guest and the host; between those who seek asylum and those who are asked to provide it (Isayev 2017). Derrida sees in Homer's *Epics* a perfect example of both the desirability and the limits of the concept of hospitality which still resonates today. In ancient Greek society, the code that defined the relation between the stranger and the one who received them was called *xenia* which can be translated by 'guest-friendship'. Indeed, many narratives in Greek Mythology such as the story of Ulysses by Homer prescribe the protection of strangers as a way of honouring the Gods, granting them generous and liberal assistance. One never knew if the stranger who came knocking on the door was not in fact a God in disguise (O'Gorman 2005). As such, it became a central feature of civilised life and a failure to be welcoming to the stranger would be severely punished as can be seen in the *Odyssey* in the story of the Cyclop (O'Gorman 2006). Indeed, the *xenia* defined rules on how to receive the stranger, *xenos*, which involved material and non-material rituals, such as the exchange of gifts and provision of shelter and certain rights (Fotou 2016) creating a reciprocal, two-way relationship between guest and host. Therefore, the Greeks called both the stranger and the host *xenos* because both took part in the relationship of hospitality (Agier 2018).

Similarly, in Roman mythology, Virgil's epic *Aeneid* recounts the journey of the Trojan hero Aeneas and his followers, as they seek a new home after the destruction of their city

of Troy. Eventually, they arrive in Italy and King Latinus allows them to settle once they help him to overcome his enemies (Isayev 2017). Yet, in this account, a shift can be seen in the motives as per one would be granted hospitality that is their potential utility to the host in the future. This represents a move away from the unconditional, somewhat idealised Homeric vision of hospitality as it raises the question of whether utility is a legitimate or ethical dimension that should be considered when granting asylum. Furthermore, what should one think of Caesar's account in his *Gallic Wars* of his own refusal of Alesians who pleaded to be given refuge as they did not even have enough utility to even be enslaved. Isayev (2017) notes that the cold banality in which this episode is narrated in Caesar's memoirs is "lacking any fear of retribution from the Gods or the judgement of peers" (p.86) and reads as an act against humanity.

Other examples of hospitality can be found in founding religious texts. O'Gorman (2007), working through the origins of hospitality, gives an account of the references in the Old and New Testaments that depict hospitality shown to strangers. One of them is the tale of Abraham welcoming the three strangers who pass by his home and to whom he offers his best food. In these accounts, hospitality is seen as a sacred, charitable duty to protect and attend to the needs of the stranger. Similarly, hospitality in the Qur'an is described by Mona Siddiqui (2015 p.11) "as a virtue that lies at the very basis of the Islamic ethical system, a concept rooted in the pre-Islamic Bedouin virtues of welcome and generosity in the harsh desert environment". She further explains that in Muslim traditions, hospitality focuses largely on the host/traveller relationship with an ethical imperative to share food and water and show sociability and solidarity (Siddiqui 2015).

2.2.2 The Self and the Other

“To approach the stranger is to invite the unexpected, release a new force, let the genie out of the bottle. It is to start a new train of events that is beyond your control...”

T. S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party

Religious and ancient cultural traditions tend to conceive the notion of hospitality as a virtue, whose ethical foundation lies in the opening of one's home (Taylor 2019). This also reminds us of the exilic essence of human beings (today's host may become tomorrow's guest). For Levinas (1969), hospitality governs all human interaction and many contemporary scholars (Agier 2018; Derrida 2001; Levinas 1985; Kristeva 1991) relate to this analysis, as the question of hospitality and therefore of who the 'other' is ultimately brings us to the question of the self and of our own identity. Indeed, if we see it as a positive action to invite our friends to our homes, it becomes more problematic when the other comes unexpectedly and without an invitation. This as such introduces an element of risk and danger (Dufourmantelle 2000) and forces us to 'think beyond the everyday of hospitality' (Taylor 2019 p.18). Who can we let in? Who is the other? And who are we? How do we define ourselves as individuals, as a community or as a nation? One could argue that one's own identity is only understood in relation to the Other (Westmoreland 2008) with one's own identity being defined against the Other's and as such enclosed within strict boundaries (Stamselberg 2017). In this view, the concept of identity is understood as "being internally homogenous" (Stamselberg 2017 p.28). However, Derrida sees the act of

hospitality as an “interruption of the self” (Derrida 1999 p.99) because in order to be hospitable and let the new one in, the host must “give place” (p.25) to the newly arrived which requires to not only re-negotiate one’s own identity by taking into account the identity of the guest themselves, but also to potentially endanger one’s legitimacy in a place and as a host (Derrida 2000). Indeed, from Plato to Camus, the figure of the stranger, in all possible disguises, is unsettling for they challenge the existing order as they arrive, raising questions (Fotou 2019). This reciprocal sense of unsettlement and the need for questioning can be explained by the tensions resulting in the first instance from the sense of displacement, disconnection, or de-rootedness experienced by the newcomers and secondly from the anxiety that members of host societies develop as they fear a fragmentation of community ties and a potential disruption of social cohesion (Stamselberg 2017).

2.2.3 Borders

A reflection on identity ultimately leads to a reflection on the limits of this identity and to an exploration of what is not considered part of our identity and as such left beyond the boundaries of one’s selfdom. When considering migration, crossing boundaries and borders is at the centre of the displaced population’s experience. The effects of this mobility define, for example, the European social, economic and political landscape (Stamselberg 2017), as shown in Chapter 2. A border can be defined as the line that divides two countries or areas (Oxford English Dictionary Online) but this definition seems quite simple and rather incomplete. Indeed, Smith and Varzi (2000) differentiate between what they call *bona fide* (or physical) boundaries which are constituted by natural elements (such as rivers,

mountains etc.) and *fiat* boundaries which are human constructs. While a *bona fide* border is stable, a *fiat* border is not and is contingent on changing events and political determinations. A border can also be metaphorical and in this context Derrida speaks about the notion of threshold (*seuil*). In his view, migration and hospitality are two concepts fundamentally connected as they both consist in crossing thresholds.

If we drop the term immigration and re-interiorize the question of differences, then we should reconsider the question of thresholds, or see it re-emerge, not in the sense of frontiers where foreigners arrive but in the sense of an alterity which is produced or reproduced within a nation, society or culture. Hospitality does not only concern the foreigner (Derrida in Still 2010).

When considering the notion of border in its complexity and porosity (Stamselberg 2017), the figure of the stranger/other and of their integration or non-integration can be understood in spatial terms between proximity and distance (Koefed and Simonsen 2011) or in relational terms; that is to say, a dichotomy between familiarity and alienation (Fotou 2019). Balibar (2009) explores the concept of borders and notes their central relationship between citizenship, as a collective identity, and the political space represented by nation states. He discusses the traditional interplay between sovereignty over a territory and the population that lives within its border and warns that for such understanding of national borders as a reference, any strangers or forms of supranational entities pose a threat. In a context of globalisation he explains that contradictions arise because clear boundaries can no longer be drawn between 'inside' and 'outside'. Balibar revives the concept of borderland to represent an alternative to the dominant model of nation states. He writes:

'Borderland' is the name of the place where the opposites flow into one another, where 'strangers' can be at the same time stigmatized and indiscernible from 'ourselves', where the notion of citizenship, involving at the same time community and universality, once again confronts its intrinsic antinomies (Balibar 2009 p.210).

In regard to citizenship, Balibar proposes a transnational approach where multiple identities and allegiances are made possible and visible in the political, cultural, social and economic dimensions.

In any case, it can be said that the borders, whether they are thresholds (Derrida) or borderlands (Balibar) remain 'mysterious zones of interaction that mediate between different realities' (Galloway 2012). Indeed, they allow for a space, physical or metaphorical, 'where the opposites flow into one another' (Balibar 2009 p.210). Derrida argues that within that space hospitality is experienced, a point which will be developed in the next section.

To conclude, considering hospitality raises questions not only to one's own relation to otherness but also to personal identity. It also brings to the fore aporias and ambiguities (which will be the starting point of Derrida's argument, see Section 3 below): if one feels inclined to be hospitable to the Other, it does not rule out opening the door to potential danger. Yet, it is debatable whether hospitality remains real without the unexpected risk represented by otherness (Bulgin 2018; Derrida 2000)

2.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF HOSPITALITY IN A DERRIDEAN APPROACH

In this section I will look at the concept of hospitality with a philosophical approach as a way to come to terms with the many tensions that migration and the reception by hosts (societies) of displaced people may create. I will turn to Jacques Derrida's work as a main theoretical framework to better understand the uneasiness of the guest/host relationship and the aporia between the ethics and the politics of hospitality.

2.3.1 Origins

The interest of Derrida in hospitality has its origins in the philosopher's reaction to the so-called Debré laws on immigration in 1995, which aimed to harden French laws on immigration and caused mass demonstrations in Paris at the time. This reflection culminated in a series of lectures which have been recorded and subsequently edited by Anne Dufourmantelle (2000) in *'Of Hospitality'* which will be used here as reference work. Drawing on ancient canons of literature (see 2.1 of this Chapter) on the one hand and on the work of previous philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Hannah Arendt or contemporary ones such as Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida makes a unique contribution to the concept of hospitality, through his juxtaposition of what he calls 'unconditional hospitality' with 'conditional hospitality'.

2.3.2 Previous contributions

Before delving further into Derrida's contribution to the concept of hospitality, I will briefly summarise previous understandings which have had an impact on the debate, both in the field of International Relations as well as Philosophy and to which Derrida makes multiple references in his seminal text '*Of Hospitality*'.

Immanuel Kant, in his 1795 essay '*Perpetual Peace*', brings to the fore the stoic notion of cosmopolitanism which sees the world as a single community, its members united by the common gift of reason present in each individual. In this view, cosmopolitanism is a concept of human fellowship and normative commitments (Leung 2013). In the context of the Enlightenment and the emergence of the notion of nation-states, Kant concerns himself with the issue of peacekeeping between people (Fotou 2019). In the Kantian reflection, the cosmopolitan right is a natural law and should be observed by all and granted to all (Stamselsberg 2017). By extension, the natural cosmopolitan right encapsulates the concept of hospitality which Kant defines as 'the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy on his arrival in another's country' (Kant 1983 p.118). In his view, however, hospitality is not a philanthropic gesture and he remarks that 'cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality' (Idib) which in fact, limits the right of hospitality to a simple right of visitation. In the Kantian approach it becomes apparent that the foreigner can be afterwards denied the right to stay if deemed, for example, hostile (Fotou 2019). Indeed, Kant places considerable limits to the right of the visitor, considering that a right to residence should be exceptional and in any case defined and ruled by a different contract,

negotiated with the local inhabitants (Brown, 2010). Derrida criticises the Kantian vision of hospitality, which he finds illegitimately fixed within defined territories, governed by identifiable governments.

All human creatures, all finite beings endowed with reason, have received, in equal proportion, 'common possession of the surface of the earth'. No one can in principle, therefore, legitimately appropriate for himself the aforementioned surface (as such, as a surface-area) and withhold access to another man (Derrida 2001 p. 20).

Addressing similar reservations, political geographers such as Bauman (2004) call for an urgent need to move beyond the state/nation/territory relationship and towards a re-imagining of collectivities that take into account the complex interdependencies of global networks, in particular when dealing with populations such as IPAs and refugees (Aparna and Schapendonk 2020). In fact, in line with Bauman, Derrida argues that identities are not limited by the possession (or not) of '*papiers*', or documents as tokens of a legal origin, and as such neither should they be a condition to citizenship (Derrida 2005).

In the context of the Second World War, Hannah Arendt discussed what it means to be stateless and stresses the need for a Human Rights framework to support forcibly displaced populations. In so doing, she also makes an interesting contribution to the concept of hospitality. In fact, in her 1943 essay "*We Refugees*" she describes the inhospitality toward refugee-like populations which, to her, starts with a discursive issue leading to otherness and exclusion. She says: 'In the first place, we do not like to be called "refugees". We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants"' (Arendt 1996 p.111). In her later

work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), she describes how the disintegration of empires resulted in the emergence of stateless people and minorities and how these new political systems made those groups more vulnerable to violence while contributing to their invisibility (Fotou 2019; Borren 2008). Arendt is one of the first writers to stress the discrepancy between the political practice and the ethical obligations towards the stranger (Fotou 2019). This tension is at the centre of the debate in Levinas' work in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) for whom all ethics derive from a confrontation with the other (Derrida 1999). This is used by Derrida as a starting point for his own discussion as he understands hospitality to be defined by the relationship between ethics, that is, the relations between individuals, and politics, that is, the relations between states or between the individual and the state (Still 2010) which I will comment on further in Section 4.

2.3.3 The aporias of hospitality

Derrida's work on hospitality is of particular interest as it is concerned with exploring the space created by the gaps between ethics and politics. It does so by underlining the limits of both while neither being motivated by an attempt to recover an ethical loss nor leading to the proposition of alternative sets of governing norms (Soufane 2019). To Derrida, hospitality is at the same time a structure that regulates the relations between the outside and the inside (Still 2010) and an aspiration towards which one should aim when experiencing the relations between the self and the other (Dufourmantelle 2000; Still 2010; Noble et al 2016). Yet, Derrida posits it is 'not a concept which lends itself to objective knowledge' (Derrida 2000). Indeed, in his view, hospitality is deeply relational and

concerns above all the human (guest/host) relationship which implies that the structure of hospitality is overlaid with affective elements (Still 2010), thus making it context-dependent and all the more difficult to theorise as it is filled with many grey areas.

2.4 A CONCEPT CONTRADICTION BY NATURE

Derrida approaches his reflection on hospitality in a deconstructive manner, examining the foundations of the concept. To him, the difficulty in theorising the idea of hospitality resides in the fact that the notion is not only self-contradictory but it self-deconstructs when put in practice (Stonks 2008). To Derrida, the origin of the contradiction is semiotic and lies in the linguistic roots of the word itself. He bases his rhetoric on the work of French structural linguist Emile Benveniste (1973) who studied the etymology of the word. According to Benveniste, the modern usage of the word hospitality comes from the Latin *hospes* which is an assemblage of two nouns, *hostis* and *potis*, giving ‘hosti-pet-s’ (Benveniste 1973; Caputo 1997, Taylor 2019). Looking at the roots of both *hostis* and *potis*, it is interesting to note that both contain linguistic ambiguities; *hostis*, as Benveniste shows, means at once ‘guest’ or ‘host’ and *potis* ‘master’ and ‘personal identity’. The linguistic ambivalence of *hostis* originates in the practice of hospitality in ancient Rome where equivalence of rights was given, on an account of reciprocity, to both the Roman citizens and their guests (Taylor 2019). Meanwhile, the ambivalence of *potis* can be traced back to the fact that in ancient Roman social order a master, or lawmaker, was defined by his dependents that comprised his household and property including servants, slaves, dependent women, livestock etc. (Ibid). In that view, the master is indisputably the

lawmaker at home but his power is sourced from place and personal identity rather than from those over whom he rules, which explains the apparent contradiction between the power of the master and the reciprocity of right granted to guests. It is also interesting to note that over time *hostis* came to take the meaning of ‘hostile stranger’. To Derrida, this is because any act of hospitality contains within itself a trace of hostility: ‘the welcome of the guest is a function of the power of the host to remain master of the premises’ (Derrida in Caputo 1997 p.110). Indeed, he explains: ‘when I say “Welcome” to the other, I am not surrendering my property or my identity but I am renouncing my mastery’ (Ibid). For Derrida, the tension between having mastery on the one hand and having to retain it on the other underlies hospitality:

‘Make yourself at home’, this is a self-limiting invitation... it means: please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property.’ (Derrida in Caputo 1997 p.110).

The deconstruction of the term reveals not only the tensions that hospitality entails but of incumbent risks as well as on who is able to offer and receive hospitality and in what conditions.

2.5 CONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY VS UNCONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY

Derrida’s contribution to the problematisation of hospitality can be articulated around the distinction he makes between conditional and unconditional hospitality. Indeed, the

aporetic nature of the concept resides, in his view, between the duty to offer hospitality unconditionally, and the necessity to protect one's home. Drawing on Levinas' work on the notions of Fraternity and Otherness, Derrida (2000) argues that absolute hospitality is an unconditional sacred gesture that is governed by the 'Law of hospitality' which concerns not only the relations to the guest, but generally all human rapports. '[A]bstract, utopian [and] illusory' (Derrida 2000 p.79), unconditional hospitality implies that the host greets the guest without asking him questions, not even his name and origin, nor asking him for something in exchange. Understood in this way, hospitality can be true as it only exists in a vacuum of incentives' (Fotou 2019 p 198). Indeed, as noted by Seffahi, 'Pure hospitality, unconditional or infinite, cannot and should not be anything else than the exposure to risk. If I am certain that the comer I am receiving is perfectly inoffensive, innocent and will be beneficial to me (...) this is not hospitality' (Seffahi 1998 p.169). To Derrida, this unreserved hospitality creates the aporia that lies at the heart of the ethics of hospitality and ethics in general (Derrida 2005). Derrida notes,

[W]e cannot and must not dispense with the reference to an unreserved hospitality. It is an absolute pole, without which the desire, the concept and experience, and the very thought of hospitality would not make any sense (Derrida 2005 p.131).

However, if unconditional hospitality is an 'absolute pole' (Ibid), it is largely impossible to put in practice. Indeed, in this hyperbolic definition, hospitality can lead to a competition between the host and the guest over resources owned by the host and raises the question of legitimacy of ownership. As opening the door to the other bears risks, the unconditional

needs to be framed within the conditional (Derrida 2003). Such conditions are implemented by the laws (plural) which Derrida see as transgressive:

[I]t is as though the laws of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing the law of hospitality, the one that would command that the “new arrival” be offered an unconditional welcome (Derrida 2000 p.76).

Derrida criticises the Kantian understanding as in his view, conceiving a law of hospitality in juridical terms is in essence destroying what it aimed at (Fotou 2019). ‘The law and the laws [of hospitality] are both contradictory, antinomic, and inseparable (...), [t]hey incorporate one another at the moment of excluding one another’ (Derrida 2000 p.81). In the Derridean approach, the law of hospitality and the laws of hospitality cannot be separated, the latter transgressing the former at the same time as it embodies its very essence and gives it its legitimacy.

The law [of unconditional hospitality] is above the laws. It is thus illegal, transgressive, outside the law, like a lawless law, *nomos anomos*, law above the laws and law outside the law (...). But even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, the unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it requires them. This demand is constitutive. It wouldn’t be effectively unconditional, the law, if it didn’t have to become effective, concrete, determined, if that were not its being as *having-to-be*. It would risk being utopian, abstract, illusory and so turning over into its opposite. In order to be what it is, the law thus needs the laws (Derrida 2000 p.79).

According to Derrida, hospitality is a threshold (Still 2010; Fotou 2019) that allows to reconcile the apparent opposition between the unconditioned ideal and the conditioned reality. While it is ‘caught between the impossibility of its unconditionality and the possibility of its often failing laws’ (Fotou 2019 p.198) it can also be understood as a perfectible future to come.

2.6 BETWEEN HOSPITALITY AND INHOSPITALITY

Judith Still asserts that hospitality is necessarily a question of ethics because it touches on ‘boundaries of the human and how we set these up’ (Still 2010 p.4). Indeed, the ethical dimension of hospitality is inseparable from issues of self-identity and otherness, as I discussed in Section 2.2 of this Chapter. The following section will explore how hospitality, as an act, crosses these boundaries to create a space where the matters of difference and alterity are perceived and need to be constantly negotiated between the self and the other, notwithstanding the elements of risk and violence that overstepping human boundaries inevitably bears.

2.6.1 Hospitality, a space for risk and reciprocal violence

Hospitality implies letting the other into one’s own space, and that can be problematic. Still (2010) notes how the fear of potential contamination or strains on already scarce economic resources often leads to conditions to restrict hospitality. Honig (2006) commenting on

Derrida's interest in the phenomenological interrelationship between hospitality and inhospitality says that "hospitality harbours a trace of its double—hostility" (Honing 2006 p.111). Indeed, hospitality carries the risk of potential violence towards the host such as invasive crimes, assault or theft as well as the metaphorical violence of the fear of one's way being replaced by the stranger's, which should not be underestimated (Still 2010). Nonetheless, the possibility of risk is necessarily embedded in the notion of hospitality (Kakoliris 2015; Still 2010; Safouane 2019) and, to Derrida (2000), true hospitality must not discriminate (Kakoliris 2015) so that one should open their door regardless, expecting the unexpected, not knowing who the stranger is, not even their name.

To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner, but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Derrida 2000 p.25)

In *Papier Machine* (2005) he explains how trying to eliminate risk often results in the taking of political decisions which in a context of regulation of migration and arrival of displaced populations can translate into inhospitable practices such as the closure of borders or the building of walls to try to extinguish the fear (Safouane 2019). Interestingly, Still (2010) comments that when trying to limit hospitality, "limitations themselves can provoke transgression – if they are a gesture of mastery" (Still 2010 p.13). Indeed, they re-enact an imbalance of power, to the detriment of the newcomer, which was the very reason for the need for hospitality in the first place (Ibid). It is also noted (Still 2010; Fotou 2019; Taylor 2019) that, without minimising the reality of the potential risk that unconditional hospitality

presents, there is a historical tendency to focus on the duties of the guests more than on the responsibilities of the hosts and to portray the guest as either a parasite (when they fail to fulfil their duties) or a terrorist (when they are seen as betraying the trust of the host) (Still 2010).

2.6.2 The violence of the question and the imbalance in language

'The essence of language is friendship and hospitality.'

Levinas, Totality and Infinity.

In his eulogy in 1995, *Adieu*, to his friend Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida revisits the late philosopher's aphorism '[T]he essence of language is friendship and hospitality' (Levinas 1969 p.305) and questions whether unconditional hospitality should not even consist in suspending language itself (Still 2010). Indeed, to Derrida the non-reciprocity in the host/guest relation and the imbalance of power, or the power of the host to exclude the other, resides in the initial questioning of the other, starting with asking their very name. He notes that universally three questions are asked to the other on a first encounter: 'What is your name?', 'Where are you coming from?' and 'What, do you want?' i.e. are you friend or foe? To him, this questioning, however understandable because of a natural fear of the unknown and for the sake of self-preservation and peacekeeping, constitutes in itself a violence (Derrida 2001). Indeed, referring to Socrates as portrayed in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, he defines the stranger, or the other (*xenos*), as the one who does not speak the

same language and, by extension, the one who does not share or understand the code. Derrida asks whether, if the other was already speaking the same language as the rest of the community, he would still be considered a stranger? And in that case, would talking about asylum or hospitality even be relevant? Here it appears that language is critically linked to hospitality (Still 2010) as what brings a community together, even more than a common space, is language itself. Yet, Derrida explains that when one starts to question the stranger, even as little as to ask “what is your name?”, one is asking the stranger to understand him, and to speak his language, and states that this questioning is intrinsically contradictory. The French psychotherapist, Saglio Yatzimirsky, who works extensively on the notion of trauma and on post-traumatic stress disorder among asylum seekers and refugees, explains how displaced people are doubly dispossessed of their voice, firstly because trauma often comes with an inability to phrase an experience so traumatic that words cannot describe it, and secondly because they have arrived in a place where their mother tongue is not spoken by the rest of the community, which leads to a strong sense of discrimination, as integration then becomes difficult (Saglio-Yatzimirsky 2018). She also deplores the fact that, in Europe, the legal process behind seeking asylum is solely based on testimony, thus requiring an excellent command of the language, not only of the host country, but also of the legal terms, for one to be able to support their case and then be deemed ‘worthy’ or not of international protection. However, the question of the language is not only limited to legal issues. Linguists have demonstrated the critical importance of language when it comes to issues such as identity (Norton), education and participation in society (Freire) all of which will be looked at in this dissertation. Indeed a lack of command of the language of the host country appears to be a major obstacle to integration (Akresh

2014; Beacco 2014) and is linked to a feeling of being dispossessed of one's sense of belonging and ability to take part in a society (Arendt 1943).

Derrida deconstructs the term 'sans-papiers' which can be translated literally from French as 'without papers' and which is used to refer in France to undocumented migrants or, to some extent, to any asylum seeker, in order to express the feeling one can have of being dispossessed of one's own voice and identity (Derrida 1997). Indeed, symbolically, without paper, there is no writing, which means for Derrida that not only does one not have an administrative identity, but also that there is no longer a way to leave a visible, lasting trace of oneself in the world.

2.6.3 'We do not know what hospitality is' ... not yet: negotiating the space in between

For Derrida (2001), true hospitality comes out in practice, as it can never really be known but only experienced, and because of this, it can never be fixed by laws. On the contrary, because of its mutable nature, it needs to be continually negotiated. However, for any negotiations to be successful, that is for both parties to feel satisfied, a deep and reciprocal understanding of the other is fundamental and that understanding only comes out of practice.

2.6.4 The act of kindness

Empathy is often described as a desired feature in the relationship between hosts and guests in a context of forced migration. Indeed, it is envisaged that the higher the level of compassion from the host society towards the migrants, the more likely the transition to integration, as a sense of responsibility grows towards those who have gone through terrible and traumatic situations (Goellnicht 2019). However, in the field of critical migration studies, the question has been raised as to whether empathy in such a context is actually a positive thing (Soufane 2019; Goellnicht 2019) or another manifestation of the host society's power over the other. In a review of keywords for critical migration studies, Goellnicht draws on queer theory to explain how empathy in a context of forced migration leads, in fact, to reduced differences between the self and the other, to blend them into what is considered the desired norm, thus erasing individual differences and resulting into a kind of imperial violence. Soufane (2019) draws on Derrida's work and states how hospitality should not be an act of simple kindness because, as such, this would not lead to a liberation from an imbalanced host/guest relationship. To understand the distinction between hospitality and kindness, Soufane proposes to consider the point of view of the stranger and to shift the question from 'how can we be kind to the other' to 'how can agency be regained'. He takes the example of European agencies such as Frontex which prevent people from drowning at sea but without providing any concrete solutions for the future. He argues that, at the other end of the spectrum, hospitality should be defined as 'an invitation to the migrant to enter and integrate with the receiving society's public space on a basis of equality with the host' (Soufane 2019 p.13). This opening of the public space is the embodiment of what Derrida calls the 'Law of hospitality' and its political

manifestation as it allows the foreigner to take space or place and action in the shared democratic space, resulting in the promotion of individual flourishing. This understanding is also shared by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, who defines as fundamental elements of human quality to be able to take part in the society and to be enabled to speak and act in the public space. Indeed, for Arendt, this participation goes beyond the act of kindness, which deals only with the preservation of lives, because it allows for one to express their own subjectivity which highlights personal identities and contrasts with the homogenous categorisation of ‘migrants’.

2.7 CONCLUSION: HOSPITALITY AS A NEGOTIATION OF THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

If Derrida sees hospitality not only as a self-contradictory concept, which deconstructs when put in practice (Stonks, 2008) but as one always not yet known and yet to come (Aparna, 2018), he also urges to consider how it is a deeply relational one which, in order to be fully functioning, would require constant negotiations between the two parties involved, those who receive and those who are received. He asserts that one should see beyond the aporia and go beyond the threshold (Yoshiy 2017). Dufourmantelle (2012) notes that hospitality in the Derridean understanding, like forgiveness, can only be considered unconditionally. More than a thought, or a philosophical concept which theorises the same and the Other (Still 2010), it is a transaction between the self and the stranger. It is an act that opens a space in which an invitation to the other can happen.

3. PART 2. USING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TO EXPLORE MULTILITERACIES AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN A NON-FORMAL CONTEXT

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools”

Martin Luther King

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Super-diverse societies are increasingly debating the extent of cultural recognition of minorities and the challenges raised in accommodating cultural rights, justice and equality for diverse groups (Mansouri 2017). Where migration is concerned, a prominent part of integration strategies is dedicated to education (Ager and Strang 2014; Mansouri 2017), with a focus on the development of language and intercultural skills (COE 2017, 2018; UNESCO 2015). As a matter of fact, European institutions are multiplying publications establishing links between the promotion of education for all and social cohesion. This is also reflected in a growing number of educational initiatives and programmes. Yet, research is showing that it is far from being a straightforward mechanism (Dasli 2019; Maniatis 2012; Phipps 2014; Todd 2015) and that barriers to education remain for many in a refugee-like situation (see Chapter 2). Drawing on critical education theories, this section will investigate pedagogical frameworks that are relevant within the context of this study. *Critical* will be used here as a dialectic form of inquiry, placing ethics at its centre to study people in their current condition as well as the possibility for their emancipation. Within

the broader context of non-formal education (Mara 2021), particular attention will be paid to language acquisition (Krumm and Plutzer 2008; McNamara 2005) and interculturality (Catarci 202; Dasli 2017; Todd 2015) while framing some of the inadequacies that the population at the heart of this inquiry may encounter.

3.2 FRAMING LEARNING AS SOCIALLY SITUATED

3.2.1 Non-formal learning: a space for humanised pedagogy to thrive

Learning can be defined as “the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught” (Online Oxford Dictionary 2022). It is a long-term process that influences one’s knowledge, skills and attitudes. Modern European educational terminology reflects a division of learning into three categories: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning (COE 2022). Formal learning refers to the structured education system that runs from primary school level to higher education institutions. The learning is planned and framed by national curricula and a syllabus elaborated at subject level by the educator. In this context, the learner’s progress and therefore performance is assessed through codified procedures such as exams. Informal learning is situated at the opposite pole; it is the unplanned learning which occurs outside of the formal educational context and that can happen in an everyday situation such as the involvement of the learner in activities not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind. In between the two, non-formal learning takes place. Similar to formal education, it can be planned but is usually

voluntary and does not require a formal syllabus, nor is it governed by institutionalised external accreditation or assessment. It generally happens in the community and is therefore, by nature, more flexible and accessible to a greater number of people (COE 2022; Mara 2021). Where formal higher education is concerned, financial difficulties and issues around recognition of prior learning (see Chapter 2) mean that a number of adult migrants will rely on non-formal learning pathways before hoping to reconnect with formal education in the future (Catarci 2021).

3.2.2 Non formal education

Non-formal education has been an integral part of the discussion around sustainable education since as early as the 1970s (Mara 2021). Often associated with the concept of lifelong learning, it offers an alternative approach to learning which contributes to supporting individuals in developing knowledge and skills as well as transversal competences, such as communication, collaboration skills, critical-thinking, creativity and self-awareness (Ibid). In the field of cognitive psychology, pioneer researchers such as Scribner and Cole (1973) studied ‘out of school learning’ and subsequently coined the term ‘non-formal’ learning, claiming that most things in life, such as language learning, are learned through an informal process (Martin 2004) thus challenging the concept of formal learning as the socio-cultural accepted norm in Western culture (Scribner and Cole 1973). In contrast with formal education, where learning is considered as ‘vertical’ and, as such, passed down from the teacher to the student, non-formal education promotes ‘learning by doing’, whereby learning ‘happens through interaction between participants and the

concrete situations they encounter' (Mara 2021 p.2). This also calls attention to the role of communities as well as the various spaces in which learning and teaching are happening. In this context, learning is seen as a process that takes place in a participatory framework which means that learning and teaching are distributed among those who are part of that community and who take part in the learning context. In that way, learning is seen as a series of praxis that can be present in all sorts of actions, which deconstructs the idea of classical intellectualist theories where knowledge is the privilege of elites (Bourdieu 1984; Kramsch 2015).

Anthropologists (Lave and Wenger 1991) demonstrate that complex learning also happens in settings outside of formal schooling, highlighting learning as a primarily social practice. Lave and Wenger identify social co-participation as essential in learning and move away from the study of the solely cognitive process to rather ask themselves what kind of social engagement provides the proper environment for learning to take place (Lave and Wenger 1991). This shift draws attention to conscious and active participation from the learners themselves in the learning process in which knowledge is used by them to learn how to perform rather than to stock abstract knowledge, which will be later transferred and reapplied in later contexts (Hanks 1991; Lave and Wenger 1991). Mara (2021) notes that the inherent flexibility of non-formal learning makes it inclusive, enabling, through lifelong learning, personal fulfilment as well as active citizenship.

3.2.3 The humanisation of pedagogy and the importance of dialogue

This growing awareness around the possibility of learning happening in settings outside of formal education also resonates with the Freirean philosophy on Humanisation (Freire 1972; 1985). Humanisation is “the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transforming, creative persons who participate in and with the world” (Salazar 2013 p.199). With a critical view on the concept of power at the centre of his philosophy, Freire argues that humans need to become conscious of their place in the social world, both as individuals and collectively, and that such awareness fosters transformation, leading the oppressed to realise their subjugated position, thus contributing to their liberation – “to transform the world is to humanise it” (Freire 1985 p.70). For Freire, such a transformation also extends to the humanisation of pedagogy.

Father of Critical Pedagogy, Freire sees every act of education as political (Giroux 2010), thus establishing empowerment as the pillar of education. The mission of any educator is to develop the learners’ autonomy, leading them to take responsibility for the learning process and to become educated citizens of the world (Freire 1970). He condemns what he calls *banking education* - i.e. where students are passive objects into which knowledge is ‘deposited’, in favour of a problem-posing model in which students are encouraged, through dialogue with the educator, to think critically for themselves. In this dialogic approach, which values prior knowledge and the experience of each learner, students and teachers are the co-constructors of knowledge. From his work with Brazilian farmers, he also questioned the concept of literacy. For Freire, literacy implies ‘reading the word and

reading the world' (Freire 1985). Consequently, he encouraged Brazilian peasants to learn how to read, in order to be able to take an active part in the society in which they lived and worked. Indeed, Freire sees literacy as an act of resistance against the oppressors (i.e. literate elites) and what he calls a "culture of silence" (Freire 2005 p.88), which dominates those who do not have the words to confront social and economic injustice, literacy being therefore an enabler for an active citizenship (Giroux 2010). However, Freire asserts that humanisation must not be individualistic, nor the sole doing of a fraction of the population. He envisages a humanising pedagogy as "teaching in relationship with the other" (Salazar 2013 p.182) aiming at a collective process of critical consciousness which reflects on the social and political conditions that reproduce inequality and oppression and on the manner in which to suppress them (Salazar 2013). Such a collective process is generated through a dialogue between the students and the educators and fosters the commitment of both to critically engage in a creative reflection and transformation of the concepts of language, literacy, culture, ecology, democracy, and humanity (Schugurensky 2011). In this view, *dialogue* is at the centre of the learning process. In Freirean pedagogy, it is the essence of critical thinking as it is instrumental to foster awareness from the learners of their own voice and agency. Drawing on critical thinking, Nussbaum (2006) sees dialogue as the capacity to critically examine oneself as well as one's own values in order to develop the necessary respect for others to understand them. This also echoes the Derridean view's on hospitality, which can never really be known but only experienced, and because of its mutable nature, always needs to be negotiated. Yet, such negotiations cannot succeed without a fundamental reciprocal understanding of the other and can only be achieved through dialogue.

3.3 CRITICAL LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The following section will focus on critical theories around language acquisition. In fact, language skills are often seen as a prerequisite for integration as they are perceived as key pillars to a functional adjustment into a foreign society, including employment, education, social inclusion, and active citizenship (Ager and Strang 2008; Nieuwboer and van't Rood 2016). It is also important to note that proficiency in the official language(s) of the state is frequently used by member states in Europe as a pre-requisite to obtaining citizenship, residency, and sometimes the right to enter the country in the first place (Beacco et al 2014). While this study goes beyond language learning and teaching, many of the theories presented here have been an inspiration and are at the root of this research project.

3.3.1 Learning beyond the classroom

Drawing on the reflection on literacy and dialogue inspired by Critical Pedagogy, a number of researchers in Applied Linguistics have come to take a critical approach to language acquisition. By 'critical', researchers such as Pennycook (2001), Davies (1999) or Quang (2007) mean engaging with social inequalities and social transformations and placing them at the centre of their work (Quang 2007; Pennycook 2010) in order to make Applied Linguistics more politically accountable (Pennycook 2010; Davies 1999). Indeed, they came to realise how power and language were linked in society and impact human relationships at many levels and in many areas such as education (Pennycook 2001). In fact, a central element of critical applied linguistics is to explore language in social contexts that exceed the study of the real-life problem of language learning and teaching to raise

more critical questions that deal with representation, access, disparity, desire, difference and resistance (Kramersch 2015; Pennycook 2010).

3.3.1.1 *The new literacy turn*

Critical applied linguists have used the term *critical* to emphasise the connection between language as a broader social construct and its relation to politics and power (Imperiale 2018). In their view, language education should be understood as performative, that is to say, language does not simply describe the world but operates as a form of social action (Austin 1975), thus going beyond a more traditional and neutral approach which solely looks to frame competences, leading to fixed identities (Gee 2012). Pennycook (2007) argues that language teaching should be rooted in transgression and contextuality. Indeed, placing language in context has led research in sociolinguistics to discuss the combination of language with other social praxis such as customs, behaviours or values within communities (Gee 1990) on the one hand, and to broaden the traditional understanding of literacy as going beyond the ability to read and write on the other hand. In his work, sociolinguist Gee (1990) explored the concept of *discourse*, i.e. language in use, in combination with the concept of *Discourse* i.e. the language of a given community. In this perspective, meaning is always socially constructed within the Discourse of a group and language always occurs in context. This shift of focus away from the individual to social interactions subsequently leads to an expansion of the definition of the concept of literacy itself.

What has been described as the ‘social turn’ (Block 2003; Lantolf 2000; Pavlenko et al. 2004) dates back to the 1990’s when interdisciplinary scholars of the ‘New Literacy Studies’ including Street, Gee and Barton approached the concept from a sociocultural viewpoint, thus moving away from defining it as a merely cognitive process (Horlescu 2017 p.27). This approach reframes language learning through the lens of sociology, meaning that language learning opens a new range of social possibilities. In this view, language is no longer looked at in terms of Psychology, where it is seen as the result of an individual cognitive process, nor in terms of Linguistics exclusively which studies the acquisition of grammar and forms (Wagner 2015). Consequently, this redefines the target of language learning from speaking another language to ‘becom[ing] part of the social and cultural environment in which the language happens’ (Wagner 2015 p.5). Subsequently, an argument for a plurality of literacies emerged, exceeding the individual performance of reading and writing as not only can texts be read in different ways, but ‘being literate is always being literate for entry into a particular community or group’ (Belshaw 2012 p.150).

Furthermore, to complement the ‘social turn’, a ‘semiotic turn’ also developed (Horlescu 2017; Belshaw 2012) which did not consider language as the only way of communicating. In this view, many types of images or symbols have specific signification, so that literacies should be understood as multimodal. Moving away from the sole consideration of text prints, Gee defines literacies as ‘any set of practises that recruits one or more modalities (e.g. oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs, artefacts, etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings’ (Gee 2003 p.18). In a fast-growing global context of multiculturalism and on the basis that globalisation and omnipresent technology were impacting education, the term *multiliteracies* was developed

by a group of ten researchers known as the New London Group (Cazden et al. 1996 p.60-92). They define multiliteracies as:

The multimodal combination of linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural and audio modes in texts in response to the changing nature of communication, increased cultural diversity and plurality of textual practises (Cazden et al 1996 p.65).

They further expound:

Multiliteracies overcomes the limitations of traditional approaches by emphasising how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the working, civic and private lives of students (Cazden et al 1996 p.64).

Such a framework is particularly relevant in a context of culturally and linguistically diverse learners (such as IPAs and refugees) allowing ‘regular returns to lifeworld knowledge and prior experience’ (Cope and Kalantzis 2015 p.15).

3.3.1.2 The ecology of language learning

Having established that learning can happen in all sorts of settings and that informal learning and non-formal learning are complementary to formal learning in that they mutually reinforce elements of a lifelong learning process, researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) started to study the environment in which this particular act of learning that is language learning takes place. The term ‘environment’ is

often used in the literature together with ‘ecology’. Indeed, some scholars have looked at the development of language and compared its evolution to that of a living organism (Mufwene 2001; Nettle and Romaine 2000). However, this is not what will be developed in this study. Indeed, the ecology metaphor has also been used to look at the environment of language learning itself, which encompasses all the external factors that could be of influence in the process. Such an approach is particularly relevant in a context involving forcibly displaced populations, whose lives are all the more complex that they are facing an uncertain future in their receiving society (see Chapter 2).

3.3.1.2.1 The ecology turn

Drawing on the ‘social turn’ (Block 2003) approach to SLA, linguists have started to look at the environments where those social interactions, and with them the language learning, are happening. Pioneer scholars in the field, such as Larsen-Freeman (1997) saw many similarities between Natural Sciences and Linguistics, in particular in the field of Second Language Education, being similarly a form of situated research (van Lier 1998). ‘Ecology refers to the totality of relationships of an organism with the other organisms with which it comes into contact’ (van Lier 2006 p.3). Using the ecological metaphor to describe second language acquisition allows one to consider language education as part of a broader system based on human relationships within a given environment (Imperiale 2018) - or ‘ecosystem’. Moreover, Ecological Linguistics focuses on how people (i.e. language learners) relate effectively to the world (i.e. their learning environment) and on how each interlaces with the other. The concept of *affordance* is central to the approach. It was first

coined by Gibson (1979) to refer to ‘a reciprocal relationship between an organism and a particular feature of its environment’ (Horlescu 2017 p.47). Van Lier (2004) defines it as a relationship between a learner and the environment that signals an opportunity for action. He further explains that affordances are ‘relations of possibility’ (van Lier 2004 p.95), which present learners with various possible actions which they can take to achieve their goals. This concept highlights the active role of the learners, as they need to learn how to recognize affordances, whether they arise naturally or whether they are created intentionally, to actively engage in the learning environment. This also emphasises the fact that learning is not a homogeneous, universal process, that different individuals may have different needs and that the relevance of the resources or tools provided by the environment may differ from an individual to the other as well as from a timescale to another. In other words, a given resource may be useless for a given individual at a given time which is not to say that this will remain the case in the future. Indeed, van Lier speaks about a ‘match’ between something in the environment and the learner’ (van Lier 2004 p.96) leading to a learning process that may vary ‘depending on how learners mediate their beliefs, motivations, and expectations in the interaction’ (Tae youn Ahn 2016 p.167). Such an approach also highlights the role of the educator in the learning process and resonates with critical pedagogy and sociocultural theories as it emphasises the need for a dynamic co-construction between all agents involved in the process as meaning and learning emerge from interaction (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001).

3.3.1.2.2 The complexity approach

Another approach to the ecology metaphor is to pursue research paths that take account of the full complexity and the correlations of the various processes that come together to form an environment (in this case an environment that is conducive to learning). In order to do so, educational linguists taking the ecological path have started to explore the relevance of chaos/complexity theory applied to language learning (Larsen-Freeman 1997; van Lier 1998). The concept, taken from the field of Physics, looks at cause-effect models and how an apparently minor change in a system, which can arise from inside or outside of the system and thus create chaos, can result in the modification of the entire pattern and nonetheless suddenly turn back into order (van Lier 2004). Scientists observe that these systems are adaptive, nonlinear and complex among other properties. For Larsen Freeman (1997), this resonates with her conception of second language acquisition in teaching and learning and facilitates the opening up of a limited understanding of research in the field assuming a simple causal relationship between input and output. Indeed, it allows for the conceptualising an act of learning as not necessarily following a teaching act, that learning has causes and reasons - some of these predictable and others accidental, and finally that it is as likely to happen in the classroom than outside of it (van Lier 2004). This final point is central in the complexity approach as it envisages learning in a more holistic manner, emphasising the need to study the process rather than the causal mechanism.

Looking at language learning as a praxis fundamentally which is socially situated and extremely influenced by external factors, inherent to the complex lived life of each learner,

allows one to have a holistic view of the process. This helps to consider the individual, his or her prior experiences as well as his or her own objectives for learning in order to better address these in the teaching. Such an approach is central to the creation of both a physical and a metaphorical space which supports constructive dialogue between the learners and the educators, or the hosts and the guests, which will be looked at in detail in Chapter 5, Part 1 and 2.

3.4 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN A MIGRANT CONTEXT

Having looked at various pedagogical frameworks and specifically at the field of language teaching and learning, I now will discuss how they can be specifically applied to a migrant population. Research in applied linguistics has informed us on how language awareness is a precedent to all learning and shows how it underpins all subject learning (Cazden 1986; Larsen-Freeman 1997; Lemke 1993). In this view, language is no longer seen as just another school subject but ‘a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language’ (Swain 2006 p.97). The valuing of experience, as well as the learning of how to shape the knowledge in a way that allows the migrant to become literate for his/her new context and therefore participate fully in his/her new community, is essential. In this section, I discuss how, despite a convergent body of research and seemingly supportive institutions, the migrant population in the process of language learning is still confronted with many inadequacies, often resulting in a difficult process of integration. Then, I will discuss alternative approaches to language education, which may be more appropriate to the target population.

3.4.1 Framing some inadequacies around language provision for adult migrants

In terms of education, people in a refugee-like situation are often seen by the media, the institutions or the general population as forming a whole which, often through a deficit lens, is lacking scholarship, language skills and ability to create social networks among the host society (Court 2017). Without underestimating the possible trauma endured by some, their lives having been disrupted by political upheavals, and the educational difficulties which may have resulted from such situations, i.e. extended stays in refugee camps with interrupted schooling and limited access to quality formal education, such an understanding largely underestimates their vast resources (see also Chapter 3), among others: linguistic (Garcia 2017; Beacco et al. 2014), educational (Krumm and Plutzar 2008) and social as, with modern technologies, they are globally connected (Springer 2017). This highlights how the ‘typical migrant’ does not exist (Beacco 2014 p.24) and that in terms of educational capital ‘they range from the illiterate to the highly qualified; and they include vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the deaf, and people serving prison sentences’ (Beacco 2014 p.24).

When considering language needs, there is an argument to be made for providing suitable language courses for adult migrants, inclusive of diversity and culturally aware. As a matter of fact, despite official input from the Council of Europe to provide support, especially towards language learning (See LIAM, Council of Europe 2014; 2020), it remains largely inaccessible to many. The situation has been deplored by researchers as well as practitioners and NGOs (Akresh et al. 2014; Beacco et al.2014; Nieuwboer 2017). In the

Irish context, a research report commissioned by Nasc (Irish immigrant support centre) in 2007, Egan and Dunbar (2007) and Čatibušić et al (2021) all highlight the fact that provision of language classes is minimal and lacks in continuity as well as authenticity and does not guarantee any contact with native speakers other than the teacher. For many international protection applicants, or even in certain cases longer-term migrants, this results, as previously highlighted, in a lack of contact with local communities and with the host language, leading to strong social exclusion (Sheekey 2015). Indeed, not only are the resources around languages classes scarce (Egan and Dunbar 2007) but a large number of this population can also be excluded, due to either financial reasons, as there can be significant fees attached to formal institutional registration and private tuition, or to the fact that formal education is inaccessible to some because of a lower level of literacy (COE 2014; Krumm and Plutzar 2008). In addition, in many cases, the lack of relevance of the proposed formal courses has been noted, being invariably orientated towards the ability to engage in transactional exchanges, thus failing to contribute to developing intercultural competences (Martin 2015). Indeed, the standardisation of syllabi and tests does not account for the diversity of the targeted population which is, as previously noted, extremely diverse in cultural, social, political and educational backgrounds.

In regard to testing, a significant attention is given to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is used as a reference framework to measure and assess language learners' competencies in Europe and beyond. In fact, it has become the norm, commonly referred to in CV and job descriptions or university entry requirements (Byram and Parmenter 2012). Launched in 2001, it had a very successful educational

impact and became a standard tool for assessment (McNamara 2011; Tracy 2017) as well as being perceived as reflecting Europe's embracement of linguistic and cultural diversity and promoting mobility and multilingualism, both seen institutionally as assets (Tracy 2017). However, it has been criticised by scholars in the field of language education for being too vague in its descriptors, inconsistent between levels or inadequate for specific target groups (Kramsch 2006; McNamara 2011; Phipps and Gonzalez 2004; Tracy 2017). Indeed, with a focus on measurable linguistics and intercultural competence, some have seen in this framework a model driven by market needs and success (Crosbie 2014) and regret the lack of a more humane and ontological language learning pedagogy (Davies 1999; Frimberger 2016; Pennycook 2001).

In her doctoral thesis, Imperiale (2018) explains that the CEFR was created in a context of peace where the free mobility of goods and people characterised the European Union, resulting in a focus on education, occupation and the market as a sole prism to measure language proficiency, thus giving little attention to critical, political language education. This highlights the relationship between language and power, as those who do not possess the dominant language are seen as less competent (Garcia 2014; Pennycook, 2010) and raises the questions of who is being tested and by whom? What is being measured and to which purpose? In this context, the validity of the competency focused language testing model designed in accordance with the CEFR descriptors becomes a crucial topic of discussion. In point of fact, the context is rather different from when the framework was published, and the issue of free mobility is not as well perceived in the context of a

European identity crisis, which crystallises the manifestation of its hostility around the reception of migrants.

3.4.2 Alternative approaches to language education: Learning language in a way that matters

In the preamble of its guiding principles for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) project, the Council of Europe writes:

The Council of Europe's project 'Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants' (LIAM) aims to help member states to develop inclusive language policies based on Council of Europe shared values: respect for human rights and the dignity of the person, democracy and the rule of law. Effective respect for these fundamental principles requires a coordinated and principled approach to language policy which cuts across different domains of integration policy (social, employment, health...), and an awareness of the mutual rights and responsibilities of migrants and societies (COE 2022).

This highlights the importance given to language and language acquisition in relation to migrants' integration into European host societies. Echoing Berry's distinction between *assimilation* and *integration*, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2, it challenges the host communities to see migrants with an already formed identity and allows a space for co-creating of a common ground (Krumm and Plutzar 2008). In this view, both the migrants and the receiving countries are enriched culturally, both acquiring new concepts, resulting in an enlarged identity (Krumm and Plutzar 2008). Referring back to Ager and Strang's

markers of integration, mastery of the host society language underpins what is considered a successful integration. Indeed, as previously discussed, it is commonly accepted that being able to speak the language of the receiving community is central to the process of integration as it facilitates the ability to participate in society. If it is instrumental, many scholars in the field of intercultural studies have expressed views against the fact that it would be the sole sufficient condition to integration (Krumm and Plutzar 2008; Garcia 2017; Beacco et al. 2014; Sheekey 2015). Flora and Roses (2015) have, for example, taken the example of the situation of the Afro American in the US in the 1950's to demonstrate that a common language was far from a guarantee of an equal participation in society. Without going too much into such complex political issues, other sociolinguists such as Wagner (2015) report on situations where a competent qualified worker would live in a country while speaking another language both at work and at home, thus having very little reason to properly master the language of the receiving country. Garcia (2017) points out that a distinction should be made between speakers who 'borrow' the other's language for occupational purposes, such as work or any other activities that they might perform in the target language, and migrant speakers who are in a process of integration, which requires a whole reshaping of identity as well as the incorporation of the other's language into their own linguistic repertoire, thus making the target language 'become [their] own (although not [their] sole) everyday lived language' (Garcia 2017 p.18).

3.4.2.1 Language provision based on needs

Given the specificity and diversity of the target population, as well as their mental and psycho-social situations, it is evident that learning a language in a forced migration context differs from any other kind of foreign language learning. Forcibly displaced people are, in general, well aware that they need to master the language of the host society in order to be successful, first in their application to seek international protection, but also, in their new life (Beacco et al 2014). However, the learning needs of migrants differ considerably between individuals and are often very specific depending on their past and current situation. The LIAM report (2016) makes a number of recommendations including tuition that needs to assist learners in communicating successfully in work, bureaucracy, institutions, health and educational contexts following a social/cultural orientation reflecting learner's "language biographies" (Krumm and Plutzar 2008 p.8) and general abilities. The report also raises the question of mental health, which can affect both the learning process and the motivation of the learner (resulting for example in a lack of attendance in the language class) as well as the need for psychosocial support for migrants by social workers while attending language courses as teachers are usually not trained to address these type of issues pertaining to the difficult living conditions of forcibly displaced migrants.

3.4.3 Learning how to be socially literate

The lack of meaningful contact with the local language community has been given as evidence by many scholars of an obstacle to sustainable integration (Akresh et al. 2014; Beacco et al.;2014; Nieuwboer 2017). If language is a key enabler, it remains instrumental in achieving a substantial level of integration only made possible by the building of social capital. Bourdieu (1985) has defined social capital as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (Bourdieu 1985, cited Portes 1998 p.3).

Indeed, the literature on sociolinguistics suggests that being literate in a language is also being socially literate as learning to navigate the traditions and customs of a place as well as to connect with its locals is as central as the mastery of the linguistic repertoire (Block 2003; Norton and Early 2011; Pavlenko 2002). However, such a level of learning is only made possible through contacts with the host society and by developing meaningful relationships within the community (Beacco et al 2014; Court 2017; Sheekey 2015; Springer 2017). Inspired by critical pedagogy (Freire 1970) and sociocultural approaches (Block 2003), both foregrounding the crucial role of co-construction of knowledge in learning, in the field of experiential learning, Kohonen (2001) explains that learners' experience also plays a significant role in the learning process and recommends interactive practice as it gives participants the opportunity to 'learn from each other's' experiences, being actively and personally engaged in the process' (Kohonen 2001 p.23). Kohonen cites

storytelling as one of these interactive practices, being particularly relevant when dealing with people from different backgrounds, and who have different levels of literacy and diverse experiences. In a context of migrant learners, such a practice makes it ideal to develop literacies and languages skills as the very nature of the narrative discourse not only allows one-to-one exchanges with a native speaker, facilitates direct feedback and develops a large set of competencies in the target language in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also directly affects the ways in which learners experience ‘immigration, settlement and language as the learning is wrapped in the story they hold’ (Bell 2002 p.211). Other collaborative arts-based praxis have been developed in recent studies such as storytelling, including digital storytelling (Lennette et al. 2019) or theatre (Bello 2011; Harvey 2018) with the same focus to aim towards sustainable integration of migrant learners (Nieuwboer and van’t Rood 2015). Storytelling constitutes one of the main overarching methodology of this project and will as such be further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5 INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: LEARNING TO LIVE WELL TOGETHER

Having discussed integration as well as language pedagogies, and having demonstrated the strong relation between the two, it seems important to take a closer look at intercultural education. In fact, as previously mentioned, in a globalised world, governments and institutions have to increasingly consider the process of integration of people in refugee-like situations within multicultural host communities. For Berry (2005; 2019), diversity and equity are the two fundamental elements of any healthy multicultural society, where

distinct cultural groups, with divergent sets of values, beliefs and practices can co-exist and share civic duties and responsibilities. Multicultural societies, such as the EU, foreground inclusion for all, and identify the notion of belonging as an important marker of living in an integrated community (EC 2020) (See also Ager and Strang 2008). Yet, crises around the world, often on the ground of growing wealth inequality as well as trends of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment, can be observed (Lanas 2017; Mansouri 2020; see also discussion in Chapter 2). In this context, intercultural education has been given particular attention over the years, both by scholars and institutions. As such, it has been understood as a means to implement and promote dialogue and cultural comparison through education, aiming to facilitate understanding, tolerance and friendship amid cultural groups and to support social cohesion among all natives and foreigners (Catarci 2021; Dasli 2019). The recognition of the pivotal role of education, and more specifically intercultural education, in maintaining cohesion and peace is not new and has been widely put forward over the last two decades. In fact, the White Paper on intercultural dialogue of 2008 (COE 2008) identifies intercultural education as one of the five key areas to safeguard and develop human rights and democracy (Huber 2012). Similarly, it is stated in the UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education that:

Education shall be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (UNESCO 2006 p.8).

However, scholars are debating whether these good intentions do effectively translate into policies and successful intercultural praxis within institutions (Dasli 2016, 2019; Lanas

2017; Ogay and Edelman 2016; Phipps 2013). Relevant research has pointed out the lack of unity in the definition of the term ‘intercultural’ as resulting in difficulties to implement successful intercultural education (Dasli 2016; Meer and Modood 2012). In addition, an overly narrow focus on the development of competences and cultural knowledge acquisition, without providing authentic engagement across difference (Walton and Webster 2019) as well as neglecting the emotional implication that intercultural matters may bear (Lanas 2017; Todd 2015) have also provoked scholarly criticism.

3.5.1 Theories of intercultural education

What constitutes the desired sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to successfully engage with others from diverse cultural groups, and how they can be acquired, has been extensively debated. In fact, researchers and practitioners alike have attempted to develop frameworks to measure intercultural competences as it is often the case in formal 21st century education settings, that what cannot be charted is considered peripheral (Feng et al. 2009) . In doing so, opinions oscillate between considering experience only, such as travel and contacts with others, to exclusively recognising participation in systematic programmes of instruction (Fleming 2009). Of course, these positions for their extreme opposition are somewhat caricatures as it seems difficult to separate experience from reflection and formalisation without being given a chance to practice (Ibid). It nevertheless highlights the richness and complexity of the human encounters with otherness as well as the potential challenges in attempting to map them. The following subsections will look at some of the intercultural learning theories relevant for this study.

3.5.1.1 Intercultural Competence theories

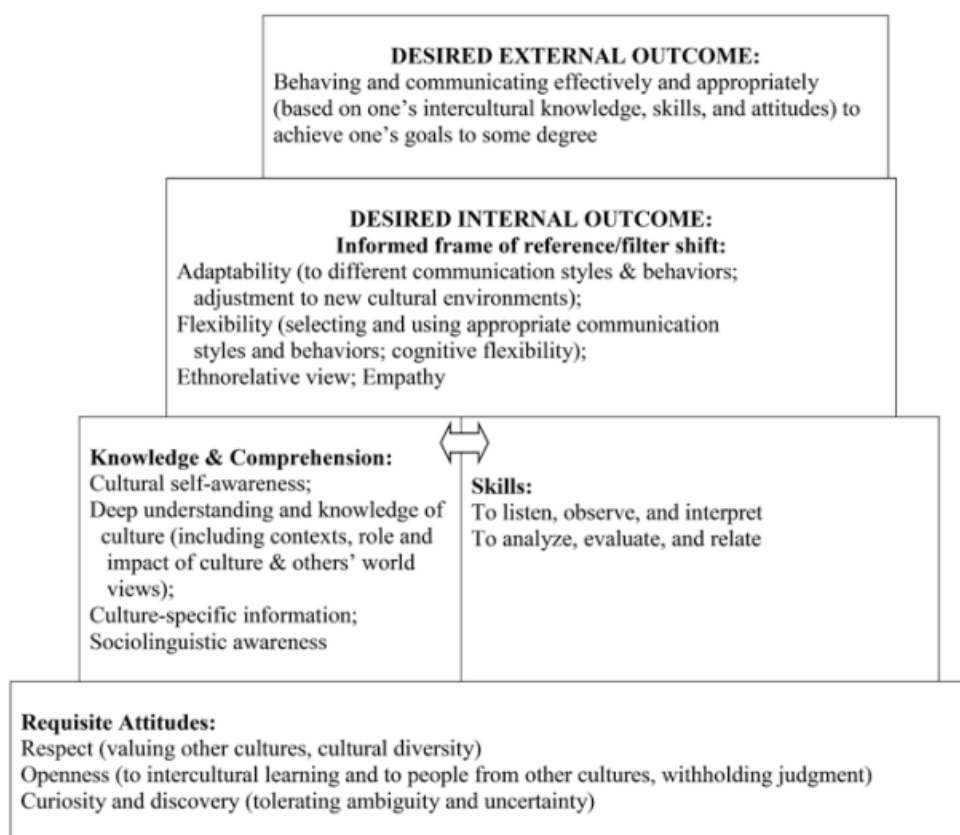
Intercultural competence can be defined as the ability to effectively and appropriately interact in an intercultural context (Bennett 2008; Deardorff 2009). Although there are many different frameworks relating to intercultural competence, two are most frequently used: Byram's intercultural communicative competence model (Byram 1997) and Deardorff's intercultural competence framework (Deardorff 2009, 2019). Byram (1997) draws on the concept of communicative competence as presented in the field of SLA to conceptualise his intercultural communicative competence model. In his view there are five areas of knowledge, '*Savoirs*', playing an important role in developing intercultural competences: *Savoir* (knowledge, although not primarily knowledge about a specific culture but rather critical cultural awareness), *Savoir Comprendre* (ability to understand another culture; that is, interpreting and relating skills), *Savoir Être* (intercultural speaker attitudes of openness and curiosity along with readiness to suspend belief and disbelief), *Savoir s'engager* (ability to reflect critically on other cultures), *Savoir Apprendre/Faire* (ability to acquire new knowledge) (Deardorff 2019).



Figure 4: ICC Savoirs by Byram (1997)

Byram also links these five savoirs to the notion of intercultural citizenship, stressing the importance for communities to take critical action in order to bridge divisions in societies and for social justice to be supported (Crosbie 2014; Deardorff 2019). However, Dervin (2016) remarks that this work was developed within the framework of the work that Byram did for the Council of Europe and that as such one can remain critical of the Euro-centric bias behind it.

Deardorff’s intercultural competence framework is a pyramid model based on knowledge, skills and attitudes aiming to determine “what is necessary for humans to get along together” (Deardorff 2019 p.25).



NOTES:

- Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive level (outcomes)
- Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of underlying elements

Figure 5: Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2006;2009)

In this model, Deardorff makes a list of desired outcomes for exchanges to be meaningful. She makes a distinction between external and internal outcomes and she lists them as follows: behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree; adaptability (to different communication styles and behaviors; adjustment to new cultural environments); flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviors); cognitive flexibility and finally the development of an ethnorelative view and empathy. In her view, all of the outcomes are made possible by requisite knowledge which includes cultural self-awareness, a deep understanding of culture, as well as culture-specific information. This also requires a set of skills which she describes as the ability to listen, observe, interpret, analyse, evaluate and relate. Both those sets of knowledge and skills demand at their bases requisite attitudes that Deardorff understands as respect, openness and curiosity.

Intercultural competence models, such as the two presented above, have gained popularity and are being used beyond the original fields in which they were elaborated such as in business studies. However, criticism has been voiced as to such models conceptualising interculturality only as a set of competences that can be acquired in a step by step way, thus neglecting a more holistic understanding of the process (Dervin 2016; Major et al. 2020). Dervin (2016) suggests that such models rely too much on the performance of one individual and ignore the interactive, relational and co-constructed nature of interculturality (Major et al. 2020). Moreover, a call is also made for a need to critically reflect and deconstruct some of the desired outcomes proposed by competence models, as they can be

potentially biased. Indeed, an argument is made that such competence-based approaches too often conceptualise cultures as homogeneous and monolithic (Dasli 2019; Dervin 2016; Major et al. 2020), thus confining individuals within a particular way of doing and being which can contribute to the reproduction of prejudice and existing power order if the cultural knowledge acquisition is not supported by a critical framework (Dasli 2019; Watson and Webster 2019).

3.5.1.2 From contact hypothesis to learning how to negotiate the 'zone of discomfort'

Research in social psychology has explained, and can help to evaluate, the conditions in which people from antagonistic groups can gain “relational understanding of the self when interacting with another on equitable terms” (Dasli 2019 p.216). Allport (1954) demonstrates that contact alone is not sufficient for meaningful learning and mutual understanding to occur. He suggests that to sustain contact between people from different cultural backgrounds four criteria are required: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities (Deardorff 2019). In this view, if these conditions are met, the contact between groups can reduce social unrest as groups are more likely to become familiar with each other, thus counteracting prejudices and xenophobia (Spulber 2018). Deardorff (2019) notes that the criteria of the contact hypothesis may be useful first steps in understanding relationship building between individuals from rival states or societies. Drawing on Allport's argument, Dasli (2019) concludes that interculturalism goes far beyond passive coexistence and argues that integration policies that too often take an assimilatory standpoint fail to see diversity and risk to fail in their efforts to build mutual respect and dialogue across cultural divides.

Yet, research also shows that encounters may not always be harmonious (Aman 2013; Blasco 2012; Dasli 2019; Lanas 2017; Watson and Webster 2019). Indeed, against the competence model, researchers (Dervin 2016; Lanas 2017; Wang 2005) argue that interculturality can not be taught from the top down because of its very nature which Wang defines as a “poetic experiencing of contradictions” (Wang 2005 p.59). Drawing on this idea, Lanas (2017) explains that intercultural knowledge is ‘difficult’ knowledge as it requires learners to enter a ‘zone of discomfort’ (see also Zembylas 2010) and to recognise and subsequently crush their own biases in order to “rethink not only the world around them but also themselves in the world ” (Lanas 2017 p.559). She further concludes that intercultural education can be at times “discomforting and painful” (Ibid). Todd (2015), in reference to Levinas, links it to the inherent violence implied with the existential conditions that frame any human encounters with otherness. Recent theories on the development of interculturality call for what Dervin calls a ‘liquid realism approach’ (Dervin 2016 p.81) by which educators and learners alike not only attend to their own prejudices, such as ethnocentrism and stereotyping, but also critically deconstruct their emotional response to difference (Catalano and Morales 2022). Indeed, Lanas would argue that although acquiring emotion-free and painless knowledge is perceived as a positive educational experience, intercultural education differs in that it “constitutes a process in which all kinds of emotions are essential and must be addressed openly” (Lanas 2017 p.562). She draws on research on emotions to suggest that emotions make a link between the personal self and broader societal issues as, despite the fact that they are commonly thought to be unique, personal and private, they are in fact, socially constructed, influenced by social, historical

and cultural contexts and, as such, shared (Lanas 2017). In this view, emotional response to intercultural issues should be examined as they determine one's sense of belonging as well as influence reactions when negotiating with the other (Lanas 2017; Zembylas 2012). It is to be noted that it is central in critical intercultural education to deconstruct such emotional responses (Ibid).

In this perspective, Dervin proposes that intercultural educators “create situations of encounters that can help students to test their resistance to discomfort and potential failure, and to learn to be reflexive” (Dervin 2016 p.83) in an attempt to enhance dialogue and to understand the links between their own selves and lives and those of others (Major et al. 2020). At the same time, Todd (2015) warns against falling for the appeal of notions such as common good and ideas of recognition as while they can be honourable, they are also idealised conceptions of humanity. Indeed, in her opinion, intercultural education may have a tendency to practise wishful thinking for the future and to over emphasise sameness at the expense of difference, thus leading to overlooking the present time reality of a potential violence related to human encounters. In Todd's view, this plays against preparing learners to face the reality of living in a multicultural society. With that in mind, she advocates bringing students to metaphorical liminal spaces, such as those created by non-formal education, for them to confront their views of the world with others, not as they think they should be, but as they really are. She writes:

[S]peaking of multicultural education in light of liminality means having to be open to the experience of the here and now in ways that challenge the borders of the very

categories, concepts, and ideas used to champion multiculturalism itself (Todd 2015 p.55).

Furthermore, Todd deconstructs the concept of dialogue itself which is given a central position by institutions and educators alike when talking about interculturality and which is used as the process to reach consensus that serve the interests of the majority. She goes back to the etymology of the word to explain that it takes its root in the latin *dia* meaning ‘across’, suggesting the image of a bridge that connects over differences rather than engaging in something that is shared, or the idea of ‘common good’. She cautions against maintaining democratic dialogical models that promote vertically tolerance and accommodation but that are divorced from emotions affecting students' lived experiences (Todd 2015). Rather, she revives the notion of conversation which she suggests is better suited to “fac[e] humanity, in all its difficult manifestations, without simply smoothing over the tensions and conflicts that arise through an appeal to a deliberative dialogical stance” (Todd 2015 p.60). Again, she points out to the Latin root of ‘conversation’, *conversatio*, meaning the ‘act of living with’ which when understood literally can be translated as ‘to turn about with’. She draws on this etymology to explain that the concept of conversation conveys the idea of a transformation of the self through a capacity to encounter and engage with the other to live with the other. She explains:

In this sense [conversation] acts as a practice of engagement, unlike dialogue, which can act as a teleological practice that always has one eye on a future outcome. [...] I am promoting the idea that we create spaces of transformation only from our commitment to what is going on, here and now, with our students, with their lives, and with themselves. My point here is that it is not by refining our abstract political

goals that we will create more justice in the world—multicultural and otherwise— but by encountering actual persons who compel each one of us to learn to shudder— and to learn to live with that existential shuddering responsively (Todd 2015 p.60).

Finally, Todd points to the ethical dimension of engaging in conversation with the other as it is an invitation to learn from the other, without a specific aim or formal initiation, and to reflect on a common presence in the world, thus implying mutual responsibility (Todd 2015). Dasli (2015) also discusses the notion of responsibility in intercultural education. Drawing on Derrida's notion of hospitality she posits that the ethical relation of responsibility which one must have for the other, and that underpins unconditional hospitality, serves intercultural education better than its often preferred concept of tolerance. Indeed, as also demonstrated in Zembylas (2011) tolerance does not always result in a peaceful coexistence, specifically in conflicting societies. As a matter of fact, Dasli (2017) argues that not all behaviours can or should be tolerated, however, referring to tolerance in such moral conflict may lead to either pure segregation (Zembylas 2011) or be resolved by all differences being absorbed in moral absolutism, with the Other forced to adapt in the ways of the majority (Dalsi 2017; Zembylas 2011). On the contrary, hospitality demands to make space for the other (see Chapter 3 part 1) and as such to engage in an active welcome which surpasses tolerance. Derrida declares:

Tolerance is actually the opposite of hospitality. Or at least its limit. If I think I am being hospitable because I am tolerant, it is because I wish to limit my welcome, to retain power and maintain control over the limits of my 'home', my sovereignty, my 'I can' (my territory, my house, my language, my culture, my religion, and so on) (Derrida 2003 p.127).

In that view, tolerance is comparable to conditional hospitality as conceptualised by Derrida (see Chapter 3, part 1 section 3.5) and opposed to unconditional hospitality (Zembylas 2011). Yet, Zembylas (2011) also notes that if the notion of ethics of responsibility and hospitality offer interesting new perspectives in the debate around interculturality, it also needs to be critically questioned in order to avoid the pitfalls of hegemonic perceptions of tolerance.

3.6 ETHICS AND ACADEMIC HOSPITALITY

Reflecting on the critical frame required to carry out any intercultural initiative begs the question of the prominence of Western values and Eurocentric culture often dominant in institutions of higher education (Santos 2020). This is particularly pertinent to this research which largely draws on European (French) philosophical frameworks for the study of non-European IPAs.

Critical intercultural scholars, educators and intellectuals have critiqued the neoliberal agendas of universities which consolidate the power base of the Global North hegemonic social and political forces to the detriment of other epistemologies (Ladegaard and Phipps 2020; Ndhlovu 2020; Santos 2020; Phipps 2019). In their views, academia often considers having addressed the issue by writing White Papers pledging to increase diversity but lacking concrete actions to effectively enforce their recommendations. In that regard, they argue in favour of the decolonisation of both knowledge and praxis within research, among

institutions and educators alike (ibid). Santos insists on the

urgent [...] need to recognize the epistemological diversity of the world in order to enlarge and deepen world experience and conversation (Santos 2019 p.230)

Yet, Yung (1999, as quoted in Santos 2020) recognises a certain merit in using a framework with which one is familiar, at least as a starting point, on which to build on critically, thus expanding knowledge by welcoming other ways of thinking about the world. This thesis draws on the concept of hospitality as understood by Derrida, not only because, given my French educational background, I as a researcher felt more at ease in critically expanding on this theory but also because by practising hospitality as an ethical framework, it ontologically welcomes diverse epistemologies. As such, hospitality in the context of education is understood as having the potential to create open, transformational pedagogical spaces (Imperiale et al. 2020; Ruitenberg 2018). Bulley (2015) and Zembylas (2019) note that such spaces also have significant emotional dimensions when the Self and the Other's values interact; yet these are not necessarily overtly political spaces. In fact these hospitable educational spaces share the 'quiet politics' of non-formal spaces as developed by Askins (2015) (see also Chapter 5) where individuals, through the formation of emotional bonds, are invited to deconstruct dominant discourses. In that view, choosing to enact hospitality as praxis within a pedagogical space such as the one created by the Mellie project is an invitation to all of its stakeholders to "to learn, to decolonise and to decreate" (Imperiale et al. p. 274 ; Phipps 2019).

4.CONCLUSION

This chapter concerned itself with the theoretical framework of this study, both philosophical and pedagogical. It explored the concept of Hospitality where mainly drawing on the Derridean contribution (Derrida 2000), it is understood as a practice which invites the Other within one's own space into which, in order to manage the potential violence inherent to the situation, the host and the guest need to negotiate and dialogue. Dialogue is also at the heart of Critical Pedagogy as understood by Freire (1970) and has informed scholars in the field of SLA and intercultural education. In this view, learning is understood as a holistic and socially situated process in the middle of which are placed the learners and their experiences. This approach, which focuses first on the process and then on the outcomes presents the acts of learning and teaching as reciprocal. The concept of reciprocity is fundamental to both hospitality and critical intercultural education as it is an ethical invitation to encounter and engage with the other in an act of mutual learning and shared reflection on a common presence in the world which implies mutual responsibility (Todd 2015).

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY: ACTION RESEARCH, MORE THAN A METHODOLOGY

“Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply "blah, blah, blah, " and practice, pure activism.”

Paolo Freire

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will present the methodology chosen for this research project as well as the research design. This research project involved four cycles of observations, planning, development, delivery and evaluation of an extracurricular intercultural exchange and literacies development programme (Mellie) offered by DCU as part of its University of Sanctuary commitment (see Chapter 2, part 1 section 3) to residents in DP and DCU students and staff (see Chapter 2, part 1 section 2.3). Given the small scale of the project and its non-formal educational nature as well as my role as a coordinator and my implication in its cyclic pattern, I chose to use a form of participatory action research (PAR) as an overarching methodology to answer the underlying research question: *How*

can collaborative storytelling between forcibly displaced people and the host community facilitate hospitality? However, as is often the case in qualitative research, the research study also draws on a number of other methodological tools, namely case study, ethnography and phenomenology, in order to better make sense of the liminal space where this research is held, between theory and practice. This chapter is organised as follows. It will start by defining action research (AR) as well as PAR, encompassing their values, advantages and drawbacks (section 2.1.2); it will then analyse how PAR has been applied to the study of the Mellie project and how other methods have also inspired its design. Then, I will look into the workings of the Mellie project itself and into the methodology which has supported its construction. Finally, I will discuss in detail the question of ethics that such a project involves and I will reflect on my own role as a researcher.

2. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AS AN OVERARCHING METHODOLOGY

This inquiry is qualitative in nature and it was designed to have democracy and hospitality as its core founding principles. Considering the philosophical background of this research as well as the intention to co-create learning and knowledge, and due to its participatory elements, the chosen overarching methodology was identified as PAR. Although this project sometimes borrowed from other research methods, such as ethnography or case study, those, by themselves, would not have suited the purpose of this study.

In the relevant literature, the line between action research (AR) and participatory action research (PAR) is blurred. It is generally admitted that PAR is a form of AR (Duesbery and Twyman 2019; Denscombe 2017). Indeed, they have the word ‘action’ in common which, in this context, refers to a type of research that seeks to generate activity and change. However, some differences emerge regarding the term ‘participatory’ with some authors considering that AR is participatory by nature (Reason and Bradbury 2008) and others arguing that AR does not necessarily engage participants in the research process, at least directly (Kindon et al. 2007). I consider that this inquiry is a type of participatory action research which, drawing on AR, seeks systemic change with a focus on collaborative learning and social action while attempting to include participants in the research process. Yet, it is worth noting that, in reality, the contingency of practice often came in the way of my participatory ideals which I will discuss in Chapter 4, section 4.

2.1 ACTION RESEARCH IN THEORY

In this section, I will give a brief overview of AR as a research methodology. AR’s purpose can be said to be to create new knowledge based on enquiries set in practical contexts. Being participatory in nature, it associates all individuals possibly affected by the research in its process and is characterised by a cyclic pattern involving phases of observation, reflection, evaluation, action and change (McNiff 2017; Bradbury 2015; Kemmins et al. 2013).

2.1.1 Defining AR: a link between theory and practice

In the literature on qualitative research methodology, AR is often described as a practical form of inquiry which examines the behaviour of a practitioner in an effort to improve practice - generally his/her own (Duesbery and Twyman 2019; McNiff 2017). In doing so, it links *action* which refers to doing something and *research* which refers to ‘think[ing] critically and logically about a problem’ (Duesbery and Twyman 2019 p.3). The concept of AR can be traced back to the Aristotelian philosophical approach of *practical wisdom*, which considered that knowledge can not solely be acquired through theoretical rules but by putting that learning in practice in specific circumstances (Bradbury 2015). In academic research, it is generally agreed that the phrase was first coined in the 1940’s by Kurt Lewin in the field of Social Psychology (Bradbury 2015; Crosbie 2013; Duesbery and Twyman 2019). The term AR has since been associated in social science with small scale studies in a variety of settings such as Education or Health Sciences but also Business and Management (Denscombe 2017).

AR takes a constructivist epistemological approach where knowledge is considered a human and social construct. It acknowledges both that knowledge is a collective process and that the researcher is also part of the research (Bradbury 2015; Crosbie 2013). Indeed, AR assumes an understanding that partnership and participation as well as reflexivity, that is the role of the researcher in their own research, are central to the work of an action researcher (Bradbury 2015). I will further discuss both points respectively in section 4 of

this chapter. Being pragmatic and concerned with “knowing *with* and not [...] *about* people” (Bradbury 2015 p.1), AR draws on a variety of ways of knowing (Reason and Bradbury 2008). It corresponds to a set of practices where people who engage with AR often act creatively to respond to a pressing concern in their communities (McNiff 2017). AR always aims to address issues and needs arising from ‘real world’ situations (Denscombe 2017). Crucially, the notion of change, or a willingness to change things, is a core feature of AR. It is rooted in the idea that research should not only be used to gain a better understanding of problems arising in everyday practice but ‘actually set[s] out to alter things’ (Denscombe 2017 p.126). AR commits to a process in which implementation of change and evaluation of its impact on the practice become part of a cycle of research. In doing so, it seeks to meet two objectives: solving a practical pressing matter and contributing to the theory (Lewin 1948). This process calls for an engagement with those that are affected by the research process to further involve them in the design and implementation of said research. The cyclic nature of AR opens up the opportunity to explore a phenomenon in depth and allows for an informed decision-making process enhanced by understanding at a higher level each time (Koshy 2005). Kemmins and McTaggart have modelled the spiral of the AR process as follows:

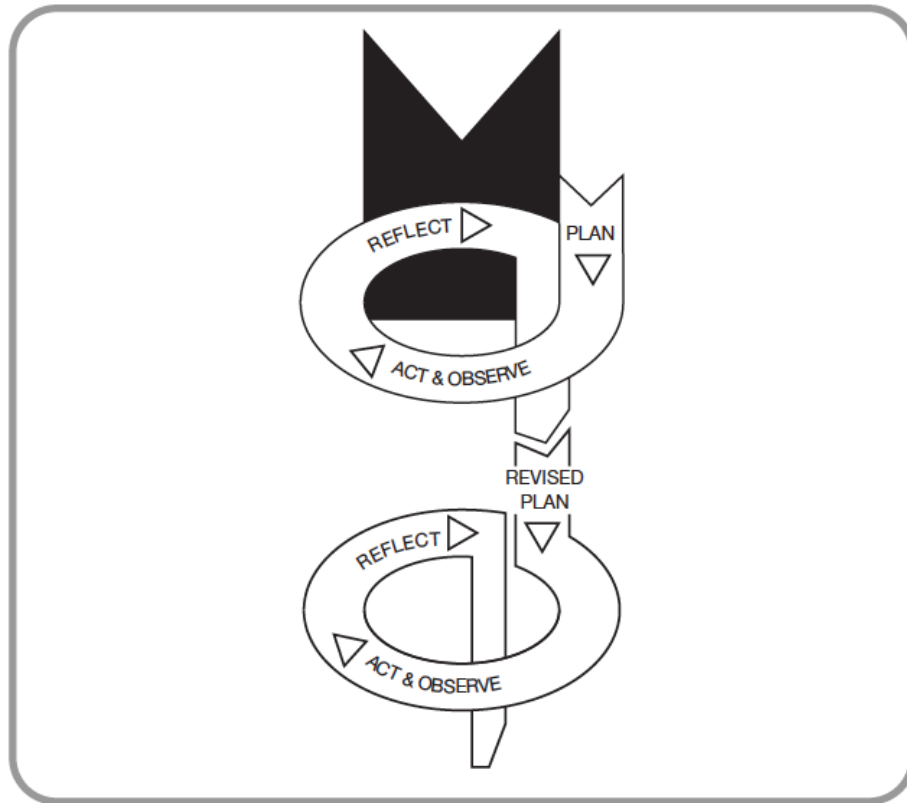


Figure 6: Kemmins and McTaggart as reproduced in Koshy 2005 p.4

This model is one among several but gives a good representation of how knowledge emerges through the research process. However, its authors have warned against holding onto too rigid a structure as “in reality the process is likely to be more fluid, open and responsive.” (Koshy 2005 p.5).

2.1.2 Advantages and limitations of action research

AR takes a phenomenological stance and explores the lived aspects of a particular construct (Koshy 2005; Denscombe 2017). In that regard it suits small-scale studies. Yet, questions

may arise as to a possible generalisation of the phenomenon observed and whether the data collected are representative enough to match scientific objectivity and analysis. However, phenomenologists and action researchers alike find value in observing the aspects of everyday life ‘from within’ because it is fundamental for understanding the nature of the social world (Kemmins et al 2013; Denscombe 2017). The fact that the researcher-practitioner is necessarily involved in the process has also raised some concerns regarding the impartiality of the inquiry as it contrasts with the approach of classic science (Denscombe 2017). Yet, action researchers acknowledge that the work is located in one’s context. With that in mind, triangulation ensures a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and a constant engagement with others who are involved in the context of the study guarantees that what has been gathered is as unbiased as possible (Koshy 2005; Kemmins et al. 2013). Unlike other research methods, AR is an unpredictable and living process which develops as those engaged gain understanding and deepen their knowledge, both individually and collectively (Reason and Bradbury 2008). For McNiff, the cyclic nature of AR calls for a collaborative relationship which opens communicative spaces where development and dialogue can flourish (McNiff 2017). As it may promote dialogue at grassroots level (Doukmak 2019), AR can be perceived as an empowering approach and, as such, has often been linked with social justice (Reason and Bradbury 2008; Crosbie 2013; Duesbery and Twyman 2020). Fundamentally value-orientated, AR is, for the most part, concerned with the flourishing of human beings and the wider ecology in which they live.

2.1.3 Ethics and values in action research: a code of conduct

‘ We strive to change the world – there is nothing more dangerous than that, and we must take responsibility for the possibility of risk inherent in this commitment to change.’

Mary Brydon-Miller

When engaging in AR, the researcher recognises “the improvement of human life as a goal” (Noffke as cited in Brydon-Miller 2008 p.199). Yet, complacency would be blameable and asserting that one is engaged in social justice is not enough without a strong moral and ethical code and actions to match these commitments (McNiff 2017; Brydon-Miller 2008). AR is different from traditional types of inquiry in that it represents a firm shift away from an assumed neutrality on the part of the researcher toward their direct involvement and participation in the research process. In doing so, it also shifts from an individualist conception of knowledge construction and research to a collectivist one (Kemmins et al 2013). Indeed, action researchers recognise a plurality of knowledge in a variety of places (Kindon et al 2007). From this perspective, AR may seek a democratic and egalitarian value base with the belief that everybody can take part in the research process. Brydon-Miller writes:

[..] all individuals have the capacity to contribute to the process of knowledge generation and the right to play an active role in shaping policies and processes that affect their own well-being and that of their families and communities (Brydon-Miller 2008 p 202)

This involvement of all individuals in the ongoing learning process acknowledges their capacity to influence their own practice and that of others, which requires honesty and the ability to act on critical feedback (McNiff 2017). AR is socially committed which means that people need to hold themselves accountable for ensuring good practice. Drawing on Ricoeur's hermeneutics of action which considers human beings as agents responsible for their actions, McNiff explains: "Each participant learns to recognise themselves as other to the other, subject to the same social rules as others." (McNiff 2017 p.50). This process requires a strong capacity for introspection on the part of the researchers. It is critical for them to be aware of the different power dynamics involved, as well as the influences coming from various stakeholders, such as institutions and communities, whereby the forces at play in relation to the various interaction styles and diverse interests of all parties may, at times, be counterproductive. (Brydon Miller 2008). This includes the researchers' own prejudices and agenda for it is their responsibility to question how they themselves have influenced the research process and outcomes (Brydon Miller 2008; McNiff 2017; Kindon et al. 2007; Kemmins et al. 2013). It is also their responsibility to ensure that the decision-making process is based on a complex balance between individual and collective action in order to neutralise the power relationships as much as possible (Brydon Miller 2008). In doing so, action researchers should also challenge notions such as 'beneficence' and 'justice' and make sure that the demand to address significant social issues comes from the members of the community themselves and is not determined by patronising, albeit well-meaning, views (Brydon Miller 2008).

2. 2 ASPECTS BORROWED FROM OTHER METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The object of this inquiry is the study of the Mellie Project with a focus on intercultural exchange and the acquisition of multiliteracies through collaborative learning. This programme recruited approximately two hundred volunteers from diverse demographic backgrounds (culturally, linguistically, etc.) over the course of four years. To fully encompass the variety of experiences and identities of the participants which, following a PAR approach, were included in the research design, I worked as a *bricoleur*. Indeed, in addition to PAR, an array of various research methods have also influenced the design of this study which is articulated around two axes: on the one hand the design of the Mellie Project itself and on the other my own doctoral inquiry. I found the metaphor of the critical researcher working as a *bricoleur* particularly inspiring when considering my work and experience in this doctoral journey. Indeed, the term is borrowed from French and refers to a handyman who finds the most appropriate tools to creatively complete his work and to ‘fix things’ (Kincheloe 2017). Often used in the spirit of Claude Levis-Strauss and his 1968 work *The Savage Mind*, the notion of *bricolage* in research implies combining disciplines to make sense of the complexity of the world beyond strict conceptual thinking and to open to new forms of knowledge-making (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Kincheloe 2017). I will now briefly mention other methodological tools that have informed this participatory action research.

2.2.1 The case study

This inquiry could have been framed as a case study. My involvement in the Mellie project started as an observer of a short 6-week extracurricular pilot project launched by two of my colleagues (Veronica Crosbie and Philip McKinley). As previously stated, this project aims to welcome on campus residents in Direct Provision and to exchange life stories following a model of reciprocal interviews previously used in Dublin by Peter Sheekey in his English language school for long term migrants (Sheekey 2015). My interest in the concepts of hospitality and reciprocity arose from this first phase of observation and I decided to investigate further their potential implication in regards to integration. Similarly to a case study framework, I sought to gain insights into the ways in which learning takes place during the sessions by looking at particular accounts of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring during the project (Denscombe 2010). In the field of Language Education, van Lier (2005) explains that a case study approach is a powerful tool to observe and understand the learning process because it involves a holistic stance which allows one to focus on the process of the phenomenon rather than seeing facts as being isolated. Indeed, the strength of the case study is to explain why certain outcomes might happen as it acknowledges that relationships and processes in social settings are interrelated (Denscombe 2010).

Characteristically, a case study framework allows the researcher to collect data from a wide range of sources. With that in mind, I have included in my dataset my own notes and observations on the host institution and the physical space where the project was held as

well as more traditional sources of evidence, such as questionnaires and focus groups. The question of the researcher's involvement in the research project, going from mere observer to full agent, is often discussed in the literature (van Lier 2005; Flyvbjerg 2011). In fact, it has been commented that the case study stands between an ethnographic approach and action research (van Lier 2005; Denscombe 2010). While I acknowledge that this inquiry has been in many aspects influenced by a case study approach, I believe that my involvement in developing the pilot project beyond its initial six weeks, involving participants in the process, exceeds the framework of a case study.

2.2.2 Ethnography

This study also brings tools borrowed from ethnographic research. A research design based on ethnography explores a cultural phenomenon or pattern from the point of view of the subject of the study (Atkinson et al. 2001). In doing so, the ethnographer spends a significant amount of time in the field sharing the lived experience of the people who are being studied (Denscombe 2010). In the course of the Mellie project, the participants and I experienced a shared journey of discovery, where learning was reciprocal. Typically, my understanding of the process - of which I was both a part and a witness - emerged over time from the observations of this everyday life (Denscombe 2010). I also learned from ethnography to value the mundane aspects of everyday life and to give them a particular attention from an insider's perspective. As a matter of fact, conversations over coffee breaks, bus journeys and exchanged WhatsApp text messages turned out to be of the utmost importance to inform my research.

To conclude, this study, framed as a participatory action research, also benefited from other methodological tools. All of them helped me to make sense of the complexity of the liminal process of which I was both an actor and a witness. I understand this study as a shared epistemic journey between myself and all/the participants, where their feedback and insights informed my practice and helped me improve it.

3. PAR IN PRACTICE IN THE MELLIE PROJECT: MORE THAN A METHODOLOGY

This section will expand on the manner in which participatory action research has been applied to the design of the Mellie project. After giving an overview of the context in which this inquiry took place as well as the background of participants, I will explain the workings of the Mellie project. Then, I will outline how other methodologies have been woven in, such as critical pedagogy, storytelling and photovoice.

3.1 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

The design and further implementation of the Mellie project arose from the observation that residents living in Direct Provision often reported to be isolated with virtually no contacts with Irish society apart from appointments with their doctors, lawyers or interviewers from the Department of Justice and exchanges, not always meaningful, with

the staff of their centres (see Chapter 2). While the Irish system of reception of asylum seekers may guarantee to meet basic needs, people lack agency and opportunities to participate in the wider community (McMahon 2015; Day 2020). This doctoral thesis investigates how a higher education institution can create opportunities beneficial to this marginalised population, thus facilitating integration. My experience as a foreigner living and working abroad, teaching my mother tongue in the School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) in DCU, contributed to raising my own awareness on some of the linguistic and intercultural difficulties which non English speakers face. Despite limitations such as access to financial resources or sustainability, which will be discussed in the final Chapter, the Mellie project aims to act as a bridge between two populations, people in refugee-like situations on the one hand and university students and staff on the other, who have very few opportunities to meet in another context. Furthermore, as the project was led by SALIS, it was envisaged that we would be ideally positioned to offer language support, intercultural exchange and social connections.

3.1.1 Recruitment

Participant volunteers were recruited, on the one hand, from the student and staff body in DCU, and on the other, from residents of DP centres. Recruitment followed two different processes given the difference in contexts. The DCU participants were recruited among students and staff on a volunteer basis. The project was advertised via staff and student mail lists and subsequently a form (see appendix) was circulated for potential participants to register their interest and answer questions regarding their motivations to take part in the

project and their past experience. Each year, the number of interested participants was high which allowed for a very strict and competitive recruitment process.

Once the agreed number of DCU participants was reached, the recruitment process of their potential partners residing in Direct Provision started. In order to do so, contacts with DP staff had to be established for the project to be advertised and to gain access to the residents. It was initially envisaged that DP residents would be recruited from the closest DP centre from DCU, however, word about the project circulated fast and people residing in other centres also showed interest and were successfully recruited. Although the project was advertised to target those with an English language level of a minimum of A2/ B1(CEFR), and explanations were given regarding both the methodology and the outcomes of the project, it proved difficult to select participants in such a way. Indeed, it was extremely problematic, and would have contradicted the hospitable ideal of the project, to dismiss people's enthusiasm and curiosity to participate solely because they might not be best suited academically. This largely resulted in a heterogeneous group of participants, contributing to the complexity of the project which will be discussed in section 3 of this Chapter and in Chapter 5 .

3.2 THE MELLIE AR CYCLES

Drawing on the democratic values at the root of the action research philosophy, the Mellie project was designed to involve all participants in the same way, regardless of their

background, and to work toward a common goal. Following the theoretical framework organised around the concept of hospitality, the aim was that participants would exchange life stories and then collaboratively write them to gain valuable insights into the other's experience, thus debunking apprehensions and stereotypes while developing meaningful relationships.

3.2.1 The Mellie sessions

Following the pilot programme which ran in 2017, it was decided thereafter that participants would meet once a week on campus for the duration of an academic semester, i.e. 12 weeks. The location was chosen for practical reasons: on the one hand, it would be easier for the DCU members to attend the sessions, and on the other hand it was conceived as an act of hospitality, in which DP residents would be welcomed into the institution. A typical session was articulated around five main phases:

- Greetings
- Partnering up and reciprocal interviews
- Coffee break
- Collaborative writing up
- Goodbyes

The framing of each session by greetings and goodbyes meant that DCU participants would take the time to welcome their partners upon their arrival on campus. This was deemed extremely valuable and contributed to facilitate a feeling of welcome and strengthen

relationships among partners. The process of partnering up was developed ad hoc. Indeed, it was originally thought that during the first introductory session, pairs would form organically as there would be one DCU partner for one DP resident partner. It was expected that participants would remain paired up until the end of the project. However, if this proved to be the case for most participants, there were also instances when the numbers were uneven due to irregular attendance, commitment issues or unexpected guests brought along by participants themselves. It is also worth noting that while most of the pairs remained happily partnered until the end of the project, in some instances, some mediation and adjustments were needed. The first half of the session was typically dedicated to storytelling (see section 3.2.2.2) with each partner interviewing the other, following a set of guided questions articulated around a theme (see appendix). While the questions were only indicative and no participant was obliged to answer them, they were useful to structure the conversation and operated as an ice breaker for the less outgoing pairs. It is important to note that the same list of questions was given to both partners. In that regard, an effort was made for the themes to be universal and participants were given the opportunity to collectively suggest and agree with some of them.

At the end of the first half of the session there was a break, during which participants were offered refreshments - which they often voluntarily contributed to by bringing some home-made food - while they mingled and relaxed. Exchanges over that period of time were crucial to strengthening the foundation of the group as well as individual relationships between the participants, sometimes outside of their pair. Many participants reported that they felt most comfortable and welcomed during those coffee breaks.

Subsequently, the participants were paired up again to embark on the process of collaborative writing. From the notes taken during the interview at the start of the session, they each wrote their partner's story using a third person voice. In order to ensure consent and avoid misunderstanding, they then showed their writing to their partner for edits and/or additional comments. This process was repeated weekly.

3.2.2 Methods which have inspired the design of the Mellie project

The design of the Mellie programme was inspired by three methodologies used in the field of education: critical pedagogy, storytelling and photovoice.

3.2.2.1 Critical Pedagogy

One of the philosophical foundations of the Mellie project is to be found in the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1985). As discussed in Chapter 3, part 2, the Freirean philosophy of praxis particularly resonates with the context of this inquiry as well as its other philosophical foundation, hospitality. Indeed, Freire, who was concerned with human suffering, designed his pedagogical engagement with people, which he considered partners, as a dialogue from which the possibility of social transformation arises (Freire 1985). Anchoring the Mellie project within a critical pedagogy approach is an acknowledgement

that the Other is recognised as equally human, equally capable, and “knowledgeable in their diverse ontologies and epistemologies” (Kincheloe et al p. 422).

3.2.2.2 *Storytelling*

“We are the storytelling species. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Stories inform, inspire, teach, and guide us.”

Life Story Commons, University of Southern Maine

Embedded within a social constructivist framework, the design of the Mellie project draws on a narrative approach to promote learning, including language and intercultural skills (see also Chapter 3). Reciprocal storytelling was chosen as a method to enable language learning as it is considered an innovative way of enhancing language competencies (Kohonen 2001; Sheekey 2015). As a socially situated practice, storytelling allows participants to work on all language competencies. The Mellie participants engaged in the collaborative process of sharing stories were able to develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in a way that corresponded to their own expectations and needs at that time. They would also exchange valuable cultural insights, which is a fundamental process for participants to get to know one another in a meaningful way, while building on their intercultural competencies as well as their social capital. Storytelling is relational, reflective, informal and flexible (Kovach 2017). It also represents a powerful tool for people to make sense of their past experiences and their selves (Bamberg and

Georgakopoulou 2008). Narratives are embedded in discourse and help give shape to otherwise random thoughts and events (Chase 2017; Tedlock 2017). In addition to the therapeutic benefits that such a praxis may bear (Woods 2011), as people can make sense of processes such as migration (Bell 2002), storytelling also has powerful ethical values. In the field of moral philosophy, Martha Nussbaum (2016) emphasises the didactic functions of narrative praxis which, in her view, develop the capacity to empathise with the other's experiences. She argues that to understand the complexity of the world, facts and logic alone are not sufficient, they also need what she calls 'narrative imagination' defined as :

The ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have (Nussbaum 2016 p.95).

Through a process of reciprocity, a desired outcome is that the Mellie participants reach a better understanding of another human life as they re-tell their partner's stories with a focus on common hopes, aspirations and experiences which counteracts the sensationalist stance of migration accounts often featured in the media. It is also worth noting that, while traditional storytelling tends to deal with past events, the deliberate choice to move away from people's past stories allows for an enlarged space where people can engage with the future and contemplate building new - possibly common- experiences.

3.2.2.3 *Photovoice*

During the course of the project, it was decided to add a visual element to the storytelling process. The photographic element was considered particularly suited to the group targeted by the Mellie project, as it allows for greater participation. A photovoice method was subsequently chosen. Drawing on critical pedagogy, the method was first developed by Wang and Burris (1997) as a way to promote women's health in rural China. Originally designed as a participatory needs assessment tool through image making, it quickly became a successful way to understand and engage with marginalised communities (DeVault 2017). The method typically involves three strategies: recording information, critical dialogue, and communication to policy makers. In fact, the participant-photographers lead the participatory knowledge making as they are involved in taking and then selecting pictures to display. The images are then contextualised through the process of storytelling in a dialogue with the other community members, resulting in bringing to the fore previously unheard pressing issues (Ibid).

Similarly, the Mellie participants were tasked with taking photographs, using their own smartphones, which would represent for them the themes discussed during the project (i.e. hospitality, the self, the land, education, hope etc.). In order to avoid some of the pitfalls of photovoice such as the victimisation of the populations portrayed (Margolis and Zunjarward 2018) it was fundamental that all participants had to take part in the process on an equal basis, regardless of their cultural, social or educational background. In her 2015 work, Mejia warns against what she calls the “messy backstage world of photovoice”

(p.665) describing the challenges regarding power/authority and interests in the work which are inevitably a part of a fully participatory project involving individuals with very different educational credentials (DeVault 2017). She suggests for example not to underestimate the role of the researcher, which in her sense needs to go beyond the reflexive process as envisaged by action research in order to reach a full involvement (Mejia 2015). In the Mellie project, this sometimes led the course leaders to bring personal photos for discussion along with those of any other participants. Finally, although the method used in the Mellie project never intended to be overtly political, it resulted in a shift away from narratives around migration and integration processes, as more commonly seen in the public discourse, as the images produced pictured the communality of human experience, thus transcending the differences of language and culture.

3.3 THE MELLIE SESSIONS OVER TIME

From the spring semester of 2017, when my role during the initial pilot phase was one of observer, to the following semester onwards, when I became fully involved, the Mellie project evolved significantly. Indeed, in an action research manner, I introduced changes as the project developed based on the guidance of my supervisor, my own experience as project manager, my observations in the field and taking on board the feedback from participants. In this section, I will present those changes and explain the rationale behind them.

Table 1: Mellie sessions over time

Year	Duration of the project	Training	Language testing	Photovoice	Other workshop/ Teaching and learning	Outcomes
2017 - pilot	6 weeks/ 2hrs weekly	Training of the DCU participants - 1 day	No	No	N/A	N/A
2018	12 weeks/ 2 hrs weekly	Training of the DCU participants - 2 days	Yes	In part - 1 session	Arabic Creative Writing	N/A
2019	12 weeks/ 2.30 hrs weekly	Training of the DCU participants - ½ day	In part	Yes - fully incorporated with professional	Photography Creative writing with	Photovoice exhibition in DCU for

				photographer involvement	Fighting Words	ANAM festival
2020	12 weeks/ 3hrs weekly	Training of the DCU participants and orientation - 1 day Session for the residents living in DP - ½ day	No	Yes - fully incorporated with professional photographer involvement	Photography Digital literacies and computer workshops	Photovoice exhibition in IMMA

3.3.1 Scheduling and duration of the project

The first main structural change which was implemented concerns the duration of the project itself. Following the feedback from participants, collected via Google Forms at the end of the pilot in the spring 2017, it was decided to double the length of the project's duration, from its initial 6 weeks to a full academic semester of 12 weeks. This adjustment

was made in line with the project objective to build relationships and friendships among participants, which requires a certain amount of trust-building, and in which time has an important role to play. It was decided that an academic semester would be the best option, bearing in mind practical constraints such as the time needed for recruitment and other preparations of the project (i.e finding funding etc.). This arrangement was thought convenient as half of our volunteers were university students and staff who were based on campus during that time, thus ensuring a stronger commitment to the project. Regarding the length of the sessions themselves, it also became apparent that participants found them too short. In fact, at times, they indicated feeling rushed in their conversations and activities. In order to address this concern, the sessions were extended to two and a half hours in 2019, and to a full three hours in 2020. Being mindful of people's time and possible other commitments, some flexibility was built in and extra time following the initial two hours was not compulsory for the DCU partners. In order to better facilitate the need of the IPA participants in 2020 the last hour was dedicated to a separate computer workshop to foster digital literacies on the one hand and to give time for the write-up of the stories on the other hand (see section 2.2.3.4.)

3.3.2 The development of training

At every step of the project design, careful thought was given to ethical considerations, bearing in mind that delicate situations could arise due to the nature of the project and the vulnerability of some of the participants. Attention was, therefore, given to the development of training for participants before the start of the semester. For the initial pilot

year, Peter Sheekey, director of Intercultural Language Service, a learning centre for migrants in Dublin, was invited as the main facilitator.

In the following years, the course coordinators, Veronica Crosbie and myself took over the training. Initially designed for the DCU cohort, it aimed to provide essential information regarding the reception of IPAs in Ireland as well as a broad overview of the challenges of intercultural dialogue. The storytelling methodology was also explained through practical workshops and part of the training was dedicated to language teaching and learning. Past participants were invited to talk about their experience. Although this training did not intend to transform the volunteers into experts in any of the areas covered, it sought to cater for the wide range of profiles and various experiences as well as to flag potential pitfalls which could be faced by the participants. The training sessions were compulsory for all DCU volunteers.

In preparation for the 2020 project, the training was extended to the IPA participants. While in previous years, information sessions were held in the DP centres during the recruitment phase, it proved challenging and not very efficient as many of the people who attended those sessions were not necessarily those who ended up taking part in the project. This resulted in confusion or mismatch of expectations among the DP participants. A more formal orientation day, which was compulsory, was thus held on DCU campus, to introduce the project in detail, underlining what was expected of the DP participants, such as levels of commitment. It was also an opportunity to give them a tour of the campus

in order to familiarise them with the rooms and facilities, thus reinforcing the feeling of being welcomed and reducing the possible sense of confusion.

3.3.3 The introduction of the visual element

The visual element, which was first introduced in 2018 as a stand-alone session, arose from a keen interest in visual arts by the course leaders, and was seen as a means to enhance the participation of the participants with lower language proficiency. Indeed, I had observed in previous iterations of the project that many of the pairs were naturally showing each other pictures on their mobile phones of their families or of food they had prepared. It became apparent that photographs were powerful tools to trigger conversation and strengthened the connection between the individuals within the pairs. Participants on both sides were positive about the first photo session and happy to share photographs they had taken for the session's theme, on this occasion, food. For the following years, it was decided to enhance the visual aspect, in the form of a photovoice (see above section 3.2.2.3) in a sustainable way to make it a central pillar of the project which complements the storytelling process. In 2019 and 2020, a visual artist was recruited, himself from a refugee background. The intention was to foster the participants' visual literacies through workshops on photography and to allow them to express their voice in that medium. The main themes were 'The Self' and 'The Land' for the year 2019 and 'Hospitality' and 'Hope' in 2020 with a view to reflect participants' communalities and the shared banality of everyday life.

3.3.4 Development of digital literacies

In parallel to linguistic, intercultural and visual skills, it was important to develop digital literacy among the participants, especially for those living in DP. Indeed, with the increasing development of mobile technologies, it is impossible to frame the concept of migration without consideration for technology and digital media (Kukulska-Hulme et al 2017; Springer 2017). Similarly Norton (2014) stresses how technology enables migrants to maintain contact with their community of origin, forcing them to navigate complex networks of cultures, values and ideologies, making them transnationals able to maintain ties with their home country, while building new relations within their host country. It is critical for educators to recognise this transnationalism and to invest in it in order to help people negotiate the liminal space they find themselves in and to recover agency (Dervin and Norton 2014).

Technology has also overwhelmingly taken over people's administrative lives, with nearly all of the procedures happening online (Springer 2017). Yet, I observed that the vast majority of IPA Mellie participants, while they had an excellent command of their mobile phones, had limited computer literacy including sending emails or typing their stories with word processing technologies. I also noted that those who had some basic skills lacked formal netiquette. This was the rationale behind the additional weekly hour of the Mellie sessions spent in computer labs, as mentioned in section 3.2 of this chapter.

For that purpose, I designed a program which aimed at developing elemental computer literacy with a focus on basic steps to operate the Google suite, including the creation of an email account and using word processing. Mellie DCU volunteers were invited to assist with the sessions and act as peer-mentors. This initiative proved successful insofar as all the participants managed to create and run email accounts which enabled them to share, for example, their photographs. Unfortunately, these were interrupted following the closure of the university due to Covid-19 which did not allow participants to sustain their familiarisation with the digital tools and prevented me from fully measuring their progress. However, it nonetheless resulted in people learning from one another while building relationships outside of their usual pairs which was reported as a welcome outcome.

3.3.5 The failure of traditional methods of language testing

It was initially my intention to measure the linguistic progress of the Mellie participants living in DP. In order to do so, I attempted to implement traditional placement tests following the CEFR descriptors which were to be administered by each DCU participant during the first session. However, the majority of examples I could find were vastly inappropriate for the cohort with whom I was dealing. As a matter of fact, as discussed in Chapter 3, the CEFR was created for privileged contexts such as student mobility or business purposes. Questions such as ‘tell me about your last holiday’ and ‘do you like travelling?’ were ethically problematic to ask to forcibly displaced persons. I therefore designed a different type of test which consisted of a series of questions which would match those which people would and could ask during a first such meeting. Yet, the nature of the

questions was not the only challenge raised by this attempted testing. Indeed, the process was not well received by any of the participants. Some of the DCU participants confided that they found it difficult to follow the test as they were not used to being in a teacher position and some felt uncomfortable with making a qualitative judgement of their partners' language skills. As to the other side of the participants, they politely indicated that they did not care for the testing of their English language skills, with some cheating to get better results and some trying to ask their partners or myself to increase their score, thus defeating the purpose of an transparent diagnostic test. Between 2018 and 2019, I tried to address these concerns by introducing the test in-depth during the training sessions, stressing that it was only a tool designed for the benefit of the participants. Despite this effort, the 2019 cohort reacted similarly to that of 2018. Subsequently, in 2020, I decided to remove the testing element entirely. In fact, I realised that due to my own academic experience, I was trying to force into a rigid formal frame a non formal project in which the learning was happening and developing organically. I was narrowly looking to measure an end result while ignoring the process underlying that result. Doing so, I was also going against the ethos of reciprocity at the core of the project as it clearly upset the power balance between the participants.

3.3.6 Other elements: managing an endearing chaos

In addition to storytelling and visual and digital literacies, other elements were introduced occasionally during the course of the projects, with a varying degree of success. In 2018, inspired by critical pedagogy, the participants were asked if they wanted to share a skill

they had with the group. It can be assumed that many felt intimidated about taking on a workshop by themselves, yet one of them, a young Syrian man, decided to teach basic Arabic language. The session was well received by the group but it was short-lived as the participant had to leave the project soon after that, having been relocated to another DP centre, far away from Dublin. Nonetheless, it inspired other participants to teach a few traditional dance moves. In April 2017, we received an invitation to visit a creative writing centre, based in Dublin inner-city, to take part in one of their workshops. Although it momentarily deviated the project from its core biographical/reciprocal aspect, it was felt that the centre's innovative method to familiarise people with writing was beneficial to those of the group who might have found the writing process somewhat daunting. While I remain doubtful that the session truly benefited those with the lower level of English language proficiency, I acknowledge that it was, at least, a very welcomed distraction. The collaboration was pursued in 2019, with volunteers from the creative writing centre visiting DCU for a full session and subsequently coming in one half hour every week to help with the writing up of the stories. In my view, this collaboration proved to be a missed match as I felt that the volunteers from the creative writing centre too often put aside their role of writing facilitator to take an active part in the conversation which was taking place between the pairs. This resulted in a lack of writing production and if, in general, the pairs welcomed the new participants, some felt overwhelmed by their presence and this is reflected in the feedback. It was decided not to renew our active collaboration with the centre in 2020.

From the early stages of the project, there was an interest in ecology and sustainability. In that regard, the project has been framed in the spirit of the UN sustainable development

goals (SDG), targeting goal number 4 (Quality Education) and 16 (Social Justice) in particular. In 2019, the theme of ‘the land’ was chosen in that regard. It was presented to the group following a workshop held by Veronica Crosbie brainstorming the UN SDGs. The session was well received by the group, however the discussion was in majority led by the DCU side of the participants. Yet, the artefacts produced on the theme of land showed keen interest from both sides of the participants. In order to develop the group’s reflection on ecology while ensuring equal participation in the debate, we invited Prof Frédérique Brossard Borhaug, who contributed to the development of an innovative methodology in the field of intercultural education, (Values and knowledge education: VaKE) to workshop ideas. *Values* and *knowledge* are the two pillars of this approach which aims to

[Combine] values education in the sense of fostering moral judgement, and active, self-directed learning of knowledge from the acquisition of knowledge to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. (Weyringer et al. 2022 p.4)

Typically, with the VaKE approach, the students are invited to work on a dilemma story where the protagonist has to decide on an issue. The dilemma is structured in a way that the participants will identify themselves with the protagonist who will have to break some moral norms in whichever way they choose to ‘solve’ the dilemma. In this approach, it is believed that meaningful discussions will be triggered and that the students will make decisions based on evidence, analytical thinking, and values reflection (Weyringer et al. 2022). One entire week was dedicated to the workshop which used, as a starting point of the reflection, a dilemma which told the fictional story of a young refugee girl who wished to take part in a climate change demonstration. Following the VaKE method, participants

were given the opportunity to debate the dilemma, thus enriching their intercultural communication skills as well as their knowledge (Brossard Børhaug and Harnes 2020; Brossard Børhaug and Weyringer 2019). The session received positive feedback from the participants who felt comfortable in expressing their ideas, challenging their points of views while also learning from their peers.

To conclude, while having the possibility of experiencing many different styles of learning and workshops was a very rich learning experience (and tremendous fun), it also introduced at times an element of instability and may have contributed to a sense of confusion among the participants less welcoming of an apparent lack of structure. In retrospect, I would follow a simpler structure even if it means reducing the potential for enhanced participation from the participants. I believe that it would allow for more time to focus on the building of meaningful relationships which, in my view, should not be lost.

4. ETHICS AND POSITIONALITY

4.1 ETHICS WHEN THE RESEARCH INVOLVES PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS OF FORCED MIGRATION

In all types of research, good practice and ethical conduct are primordial. In fact, the ethical principle ‘do no harm’ should be at the core of any research endeavour. This is fundamental when human participants are involved and particularly when dealing with people in situations of forced migration, as they are considered to be in a particular state of

vulnerability, as stated by the European Commission in 2016 (EC 2016). For this doctoral inquiry, I followed the DCU guidelines when research concerns human participants. I filled in the required forms and submitted them to the DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC) ahead of my first cycle of action research. These comprised a detailed outline of my envisaged research, including an acknowledgement of possible risks for participants from the asylum seeking and refugee community as well as the contact details of a Dublin-based psychologist who agreed to consult with any of the participants should they feel that they required her services following any of the steps of the research process and/or during the storytelling in the Mellie sessions. Fox et al. (2020) remark that it is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of “the inherently complex and multi-dimensional fragility” (Fox et al. p.2) experienced by people in situations of forced displacement when planning and developing the research. In their view, fragility in this context arises

through an unequal distribution of resources and social goods, by various forms of discrimination and through the denial of voice in key decisions impacting upon one’s life (Ibid).

Indeed there have been concerns voiced against research work undertaken with displaced persons where they are ‘subjects of research’, thus raising questions as to whether the research itself might be reinforcing fragility and injustice (Fox et al. 2020; UNESCO 2018). Yet, it is important to note that, despite the critical need to acknowledge the fragility of the participants involved in such research contexts, their labelling of vulnerability might also be looked at with some reservations (Bracken-Roche et al. 2017). Bracken et al. warn that, while the concept of vulnerability has held a central place in research ethics since the United

States Belmont Report of 1979 (as cited in Bracken-Roche et al 2017), the concept is vague and there is some scholarly disagreement regarding its delineation as well as a lack of guidance among different research ethics standards (Bracken-Roche et al. 2017). They further question whether policies and guidelines, which tend to think of vulnerability as a personal characteristic, are not in fact disempowering people and neglecting their agency (Ibid). In contrast, they recommend research contexts where vulnerability is viewed as a

relational feature, borne of power asymmetries between participants and research staff, investigators and institutions (Bracken-Roche et.al 2017 p.16).

Beyond the concept of vulnerability, any research involving forcibly displaced people requires a profound commitment to social justice (Fox et al. 2020). One way of doing so is to ensure that the voices of the displaced are heard both in the design and the dissemination of the research (Fox et al. 2020; Bracken-Roche et al. 2017). Fraser (2010) notes that this allows the research process to overcome injustices by ‘dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction’ (Fraser 2010 p.16 as quoted in Fox et al.).

From my reading of the literature on both AR and research ethics in the context of migration, I grew critically aware of the need to always question my practice, because it involved other people, but also because my position of researcher-practitioner, as well as my deep implication in the Mellie project, could add a layer of complications. In order to navigate the inherent power dynamics of the situation, this inquiry needed to be intrinsically

ethical, from its conception to its design (Crosbie 2014). This is reflected in the choice of methods for both this doctoral research and the Mellie project as well as in the feedback from participants.

4.2 ME AS A RESEARCHER PRACTITIONER: THE AMBIGUOUS POSITION OF THE INSIDER-OUTSIDER

Due to the AR nature of this inquiry and the setting of the Mellie project, I was, as an individual, completely immersed and had to play different roles, sometimes at the same time. Savvides et al. compare the action researcher to a ‘traveller’ meeting people and experiencing different landscapes on their research journeys’ (Savvides et al. 2014 p.413). The position that a researcher takes in relation to the research process and the participants, whether one is an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’, is a fundamental issue in qualitative social research (Savvides et al. 2014). However, action researchers, under the influence of modern philosophical paradigms such as postmodernism and post-structuralism, challenge traditional dichotomies, such as insider/outsider and self/other, often defined by characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or professional status. They recognise the limitations of these dichotomies as well the paramount need to make power and cultural differences discussable from the outset (Reason and Bradbury 2008; Savvides 2014; Arieli and Friedman 2009). I will explore these roles in the following section and I will share some of the considerations and questions which emerged as I was learning how to navigate

this space, trying my best to avoid pitfalls and solve dilemmas which, occasionally, shook my democratic ideals.

4.2.2 Navigating the multilingual space

It is fascinating to think that during the Mellie sessions, at any given time, we were collectively able to speak a large amount of languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, French, Georgian, German, Hindi, Irish, Italian, Pashto, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, to name a few. As a learning space, the project aspired to be truly intercultural and to refrain from “the acquisition of a sham otherness or of cultural awareness” (Phipps and Gonzalez 2004 p.30). This naturally prompted a reflection on the role of language use in the room itself. It was decided that English was going to be the lingua franca to mirror the dominant linguistic practice of Irish society in which we were all living. Yet, some place was also given to all of the other languages through the exchange of poems and proverbs, the gift of new words during conversations and improvised language classes within the sessions. We, for example, learned Arabic greetings with Markwan and danced in Irish with Deirdre- and it was frequent to see people turn to machine translations on their mobile phones. As such, there is evidence to suggest that the Mellie space was a transformative one through languaging, as a collaborative dialogic activity and intercultural being (Phipps and Gonzales 2004; Garcia 2017; see also Chapter 5).

These considerations on the language used in the project space brought me to question my own linguistic practice. While I am a French native speaker, I was also in contact with the

English language from a very young age and although I studied and practised other languages I would consider myself most comfortable in French and English. I live in Dublin and I work in academia; in both of these contexts English is the dominant language. This raises a number of issues (Ndhlovu 2021; Phipps 2019; Phipps and Sitholé 2022; Piller 2019). I only occasionally speak French at home as I do not share my life with a francophone. I work and I write in English, but I am emotionally connected to my mother tongue through phone calls, music, radio programmes I listen to in the morning, non-work related books and my many French speaking friends. In that regard I consider that I translanguage, in the sense developed in the work of Garcia (2014; 2017) who conceptualises the linguistic repertoire of multilingual speakers as forming a unified whole, only larger in size than the one of a monolingual speaker. Garcia also describes the process by which the multilingual speaker learns which part of their repertoire to draw from given the context just as any other speaker needs to adapt their repertoire depending on the circumstances.

This also prompted me to reflect on my approach to language in using and making sense of my chosen theoretical framework for this thesis. In fact, I largely drew on the work of Derrida and to a certain extent of Levinas but also Bourdieu and Foucault, which I initially read in French. However, I quickly became curious about their translations in English as I was increasingly reading the work of others who were commenting on them in English (see the work of Still 2010 for Derrida, for example). At the same time I was also required to communicate about my research in English, so I also became familiar with the translated version of these authors' works. I believe that, mirroring my personal life, I engaged emotionally with the Francophone authors in French while at the same time

operationalising their theories in English. This in itself could be the object of another thesis but is, at this time, beyond the scope of this work.

4.2.2 Navigating relationships

According to Bakhtin (1981 as cited in McNiff p.41) action researchers are never alone. They are always in relations with others, with their ideas and with their environment. Fundamentally socially situated, this project often required that I questioned and negotiated my relations to others. I quickly became aware that there were layers of complications due to my involvement in the project as a coordinator, which came with a certain set of powers and responsibilities and at the same time, due to my own position as a student-researcher-practitioner within a larger institution, which also came with its own set of attributes and implications. The project recruited a large number of people from extremely diverse backgrounds. On the one hand, among the DCU cohort were my supervisors, my students, my colleagues (many far more experienced and senior than myself), my fellow graduate students (with some of whom I had previously developed solid friendships) and on the other hand the participants from the asylum seeking and refugee community, who came from various horizons. If all of them saw me as the central contact point of the project, I believe their perception of my position was of a different nature for I was, for some, their young inexperienced colleague, and for others, the authoritative figure of the teacher.

Navigating the large scope of these relationships proved to be an important aspect of my own personal development throughout this epistemic journey. I learned how to stay flexible and to welcome unexpected ideas and outcomes. I also had to stay open to criticism while asserting myself as a researcher and not losing sight of the fact that I was the one conducting both the research and the project and that I had an overview to justify my choices in directions.

Above all, building and maintaining those relationships gave me invaluable insights on the field and on my practice. In fact, it was often critical feedback from the participants (such as their reaction towards testing) which helped me develop the project in a direction which was deemed meaningful to them and to thus evolve as a researcher and a practitioner. Pedersen et al. (2008) who write on the relational aspect of AR note that, however complicated relationships are, they are at the core of the process as they contextualise knowledge and act as vital safeguards:

Knowledge produced by action research projects is incomprehensible when decontextualised from the relationships that authored its creation. These relationships need, therefore, to be visible so that the produced knowledge reflects the complexity and nuance-richness that characterises real life. We understand that the above is but a rare analytic practice, because an action researcher will only unwillingly enter a situation in which she exposes herself and her project to failure, where she is not capable of establishing contact, interest, and practical impact (Pedersen et al. 2008 p.264).

4.2.3 Mediation

One of the most meaningful aspects of conducting an AR project is that it is situated in concrete social contexts (Pedersen et al. 2008). This is also the case of intercultural educational programmes such as the Mellie project. Yet, true intercultural education, as it moves away from ‘polite’ or ‘neutral’ middle grounds (Kramsch 2009; Phipps 2014) does not come without interpersonal issues (Lanas 2017; Todd 2015), which need to be acknowledged (Phipps 2014). In fact, as conflict is inherent in human relationships, any intercultural dialogue which seeks to avoid it is bound to fail (Ibid). My position as course leader led me on occasion to act as a mediator when situations of conflict arose between participants. Mediation, in this context, can be understood in its classic definition of conflict resolution between two parties. Indeed, during the course of the four iterations of the Mellie project, a number of incidents were reported to me, which required a speedy intervention to ease the tensions. For those occasions, an ad hoc protocol was put in place. It meant that Veronica Crosbie (in her position of course director and research supervisor) and I would speak to the people involved, in a manner that would acknowledge the situation as well as the disagreement. We tried to make sure that both parties were able to keep communicating respectfully with each other despite what sometimes seemed to be irreconcilable differences. However, such situations were not frequent and seemed to be resolved. In most cases, I would see my role as mediator in the Mellie project as the epitome of my role as an intercultural educator. From a sociocultural learning theory perspective, mediation is defined as the process by which artefacts, both material and symbolic, are used to enable human mental activity (Lantolf 1994; Vygotsky 1978; Kohler 2015). According to Kohler, mediation is an integral dimension of (language) teaching (Kohler 2015). She defines it as

a set of practices and ways of being that build connections between learners' existing and new language and culture frameworks, and in doing so, develop their own capability to act as intercultural mediators (Ibid).

This perspective views mediation as a process of navigating diverse cultures, whereby both teachers and learners bridge new information, new learning styles and build connections between existing and new knowledge, thus potentially contributing to social harmony (Kohler 2015). This also echoes van Lier's notion of 'ecology of dynamic relationships' by which new occasions for learning are created at the contact with others, in formal or non formal contexts, accordingly engaging teachers and learners in joint semiotic activities (van Lier 2004). This ecological understanding of the many potential learning situations contributes to redefine mediation as multidirectional and as a reciprocal process of transformation (Kohler 2015).

4.2.4 Observation

Once the pairs were launched into their reciprocal interviews, there were times where I could sit back and observe the room, its atmosphere and the participants' interactions with each other. Field observation is a key feature of ethnographic research whereby the researcher collects data by observing social practice (Denscombe 2010). The main research 'tool' for this method is the researcher themselves which requires an honest reflection on their positionality - whether they have a position of outsider, insider or both- to ensure that potential tensions and biases are acknowledged and that participants of the research and

their identities are fairly represented (Denscombe 2010; Savvides et al. 2104). Yet, Descombe (2010) notes that this type of observation is holistic by nature as it is context sensitive, allowing the study of complex ecologies and realities (Denscombe 2010). During the Mellie sessions, I would make mental notes of my observations to later record them in my diary. Indeed, I was aware of the ambiguous nature of my position as an insider-outsider and I did not want to make anybody feel uncomfortable by my observing presence. Subsequently, my observations of the Mellie field provided me with insights on a sense of the place itself - for example how vibrant and happy the room was or how body language suggested that conversation was ongoing and yet not dominated by either side of the participants. However, observation alone would not have been enough to make sense of the Mellie process. It was important to draw on other methods such as focus groups, questionnaires and participants artefacts to validate my understanding

5. RESEARCH METHODS

In this study I used a variety of tools and collected all genres of artefacts. To describe how I gathered and then made sense of them in the research process, I found the metaphoric concept of *crystallisation* relevant (Ellingson 2009; Crosbie 2013; Imperiale 2017). The term ‘crystallisation’ has been used in social science to describe the data gathering, generating and analysis process which in the Humanities is always multifaceted, multidimensional and interpretative by nature (Crosbie 2013). Weaving formal and informal knowledge, crystallisation incorporates different genres of data which can include

creative methods such as storytelling, images or dialogue in order to discover meaning and allows in the context of an intercultural inquiry to better understand the complexity of the liminal space in which it is set (Imperiale 2017). Rather than compromising on scientific rigour it allows, by acknowledging multiple sources of validity, the researcher to go beyond the strict coding system of thematic data analysis (Ellingson 2009). For the purpose of this study, my sets of methods consisted mainly of focus groups, personal observations collected in research diaries and questionnaires.

5.1 QUESTIONNAIRES

In order to gather feedback from participants as a whole, a number of survey questionnaires was circulated following key moments of the Mellie sessions such as training, at the end of each program's season and following the exhibition held on the DCU campus. The questionnaires were designed with Google Forms and circulated online, although a paper version was also available for those who may not have had easy access to an online connection. All questionnaires were answered on a voluntary basis and were strictly anonymous. The questionnaire following the pilot project in 2017 received 35 answers in total out of 40 participants. In 2018 we received 37 responses in total out of 60 participants and in 2019, 25 participants responded out of the 40 participants. There was no questionnaire circulated in 2020 as the project was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and it did not seem relevant when it officially finished 18 months later in July 2021.

5.2 RESEARCH JOURNAL AND OBSERVATION

Although I was not using ethnography as a research methodology, I used ethnographic techniques such as observation (in that instance the Mellie room) and I recorded my impressions in a research diary. However, as the sessions were often busy and a little messy, I generally did not write my notes in the heat of the moment but rather later the same evening on the bus back home or when I got the chance to sit down at my desk the following day. I also recorded points of interest and learning in order to monitor, reflect and adapt the sessions during the cycles of action research.

5.3 FOCUS GROUPS

As one of the methods of investigation, I chose to conduct focus groups following the 3rd and 4th Mellie cycles. I was seeking participants' feedback as well as trying to learn more about their experience in the Mellie project, particularly in terms of learning outcomes, intercultural exchanges and friendship building. Typically, focus groups are used in social science in order to gather in a relatively short time a vast quantity of information (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005). In fact they involve a group of people who collectively discuss with the help of a moderator similar experiences or concerns (Liamputtong 2011). Due to its collective nature, the aim of the focus group is rarely to reach consensus but rather to gather a range of responses providing a greater understanding of the participants' perspectives on the research issues (Ibid). Liamputtong (2011) notes that a successful focus

group depends heavily on its environment for it must be comfortable and enjoyable for the research participants as it should be as close as possible to a natural conversational setting. In that regard, she advises a less structured form of interview from the moderator who can also be the researcher. In this context, the discussions and interactions between participants provide valuable opportunities for key issues to emerge from the participants rather than from the researcher (Ibid). For this inquiry I conducted a total of 4 focus groups on the DCU campus until the COVID19 pandemic, then online, with participants who had volunteered to also be research informants (see appendix for informed consent). Although I had circulated the invitation to take part in the focus groups both by email and WhatsApp message to the whole group, I note that those who responded eagerly were the participants who were generally the most committed to the project and therefore potentially the ones who were most satisfied. Table 2 (below) details the participants' profile and the sessions' descriptor. All the names used for the purpose of this study are pseudonyms.

Table 2: Focus groups: participants profile and sessions descriptor

Session descriptor	Community represented	Participants profile	Participants country of origin
July 2019 - DCU campus	IPA (5)	3 males (Kharum, Fadi, Rami) 2 females (Celia, Sophia)	Kharum: Pakistan Fadi: Irak Rami: Irak Celia: Zimbabwe Sophia: Zimbabwe
September 2019 - DCU campus	DCU (2)	1 male (Daniel)	Daniel: Ireland

		1 female (Sinead)	Sinead: Ireland
August 2020 - Online	IPA (8)	4 males (Ahmed, Rafael, Abdul, Firas) 4 females (Anna, Wendy, Theresa, Hala)	Ahmed: Pakistan Rafael: Syria Abdul: Egypt Firas: Nigeria Anna: Nigeria Wendy: Malawi Theresa: Zimbabwe Hala: Nigeria
August 2020- Online	DCU (6)	1 male (John) 5 female (Fia, Tessa, Lea, Brenda, Edith)	John: Ireland Fia: Ireland Tessa: Romania Lea: Ireland Brenda: USA Edith: Australia

Liamputtong (2011) warns that focus groups in multicultural settings may be more challenging for the quieter participants, or for those with a lesser level in the language in which the session is conducted. To avoid unnecessary stress and a possible over domination in the conversation from people representing the DCU community, I chose to separate the group and to conduct two distinct sessions. In multilingual settings, it is recommended that other participatory activities are introduced (Liamputtong 2011). With that in mind I chose to use the cards of a board game (Dixit), which consist of oneiric drawings, as an ice breaker (see appendix). The use of visual prompts, and the use of Dixit cards in particular, have

been previously used in the fields of education or nursing to assist group discussion (Choi 2018; Piccolo and Guerra 2016). For this inquiry, the idea was to mirror both the storytelling aspect of the project and the visual element and to trigger participants' collective reaction as well as to stimulate the conversation by asking them to choose an image that symbolically represented Mellie. They were then asked to explain their choice to the rest of the group who could in turn interact with each other's view on the image. Examples of cards chosen by participants can be found in Appendix G. For the sake of reciprocity I used the same approach with research participants representing the DCU side. Following the ice breaker, I asked participants a set of open-ended questions (see sample in Appendix) to further the discussion with a focus on their experience. All four interviews were audio recorded.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis was conducted for this study. Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (Braun and Clarke 2006 p.79). It is worth mentioning that this study's methods are different from grounded theory as the focus groups were conducted using a form of semi-structured interviews so that some of the emerging themes as well as some of the research outcomes were anticipated (Liamputtong 2011; Crosbie 2013). The following steps were followed: 1) transcription of all the recordings 2) intensive reading of the transcripts and immersion into the audio recording 3) notes of initial observation and emerging themes 4) Coding of the dataset, organised in themes and subthemes; 5) themes

were analysed in terms of research outcomes and supported by quotes from the participants.

6.1 TRANSCRIPTION

In order to enable the data analysis, the audio recorded focus group interviews needed to be transcribed. In fact, transcription is considered the initial act of data analysis (Liamputtong 2011) as it provides “a permanent written record of the interviews’ which the researchers can share with others who are interested in the research” (Stewart et al. 2007 p.109). It has been suggested that the researchers themselves transcribe their own group discussions (Liamputtong 2011; Kvale 2007) as

they will have the social and emotional aspects of the interview situation present or reawakened during transcription, and will already have started the analysis of the meaning of what was said (Kvale 2007 p.95).

which will further their understanding and the analysis of the data as they will be better acquainted with it (Liamputtong 2011). Therefore, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and indicated other information when relevant such as laughter or emphasis. I also noted words or sentences which I was not able to understand due to a background noise or participants’ unclear pronunciation. It was important for me to preserve the participants’ voices including hesitation, unfinished sentences and ‘odd’ phrasing as they were part of the natural flow of the conversation (Stewart et al. 2007). With that in mind, I made no edits to any of the quotes used in this thesis except for minor changes for the sake of

grammatical coherence and readability (Liamputtong 201; Stewart et al. 2007), which I clearly indicated using square brackets [].

6.2 CODING AND ANALYSIS

The preliminary phase of the data analysis consisted of my intense listening to the audio recording of the focus group interview and a substantial reading of the transcriptions. This allowed me to become very familiar with the data and to start to identify items that were relevant to the aims of this research study. Across the dataset, I was looking for “repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun and Clarke 2006 p.86) in order to make sense of what was being said by the participants as a group but also paying attention to the individual voices. Although I oriented my set of focus group questions around the general direction of hospitality and learning experiences, which are the main research areas of this study, the thematic analysis allowed me to also identify themes which I had not previously anticipated, such as the participants’ relationship to time or difficult relationships among residents within the DP centres. In order to initiate the coding Liamputtong (2011) referring to Flick (2006) suggests that the researcher regularly approach the data with basics sets of questions:

Table 3: Coding essential questions (Adapted from Liamputtong 2011)

What?	What is the concern here?
Who?	Who are the persons involved? What roles do they have? How do they interact?
How?	Which aspects of the event are mentioned (or omitted)?
When? How long? Where?	Referring to time, course and location.
Why? What for?	Which reasons are provided or can be constructed? What is the intention here? What is the purpose?
How much? How strong?	Referring to intensity: how often is the issue emphasised?

The figure below is an example of how I analysed the data and presented the different themes and sub-themes linked to the participants' quotes. The themes included 'time', 'space', 'learning', 'social capital', 'friendship', 'acts of reciprocity' and 'democratic praxis' and were used to present findings accordingly (see Chapter 5).

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotes
Time	<p>Past:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Memories ● Different story ● trust <p>Present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Waiting ● A new sense of motivation <p>Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being able to envisage the future ● Making plans ● opportunities 	<p>Things you can share only with your special friends, some things you have in your heart. Only with them, you can share. I felt that with my partners when we discussed the wars, and why there were wars and everything.</p> <p>There was a lot of trust [...] I actually shared things and memories with [my partner] that I wouldn't often share, you know. [...]It was one of the things I liked a lot about Mellie.</p> <p>[T]he waiting, I hate waiting, really, and in my life, I am waiting, I am waiting for this thing...</p> <p>Yes, something to wake up to, you know, in that period, when we were asleep all the time but when you have something to do, like Mellie, it's different, you have to wake up and go for a job, or school, something you're going to look up to, and meeting with your friends today. Just that feeling of having somewhere to go.</p> <p>[H]ere we [finally] talk about the future. Mellie gave me this opportunity!</p> <p>After the Mellie project, it helped us get a course that we could never get. Now we can go and work again. I work 3 days a week. Mellie was a door open for us, then we started going to school, working, and now sometimes we say no to some courses because we are too busy!</p>
Space	Unexpected green space in the grey	[H]ow this project was a safe neutral place which people saw as an unexpected breath of fresh air. I think for me, I found it interesting that looking at the surroundings of the tree, you wouldn't expect such a big tree to be in the middle of such an hostile environment, it's all beauty, it's so green and big, when you expect it to be pavements all the way and dark and grey but you have this big tree which is sprouting out in the middle of nothing, the middle of

nowhere and I think, it gives you a pause and asks you questions and I think for us Mellie was that pause, to say, that in spite of everything else that is happening to us out there, there is that room for warmth, to take a seat back, to take time to reflect, you know, and I believe that a tree is just.... [It] generally represents life, it represents hope, it gives fruits, it gives shade in the heat, it gives shelter to the birds, it's such a major reflection of the things that Mellie offers and to find it in the midst is extraordinary....

[It] represents some sort of heavens, a sort of natural heaven, I guess, a sort of the safe space idea. The city one, in particular, seems relevant to me, just you know, we spend our day in DCU, feeling kinda chaotic, lots of things to do and then there were these 2 hours on the Wednesday afternoon where all of that can be shut off. [...] We were growing this relationship, so yeah, that was it.

CHAPTER 5. PRACTISING HOSPITALITY: TOWARDS A SHARED SENSE OF BELONGING

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter, divided into two parts, explores the physical and symbolic spaces created by the Mellie project. Organised around the themes which emerged from the data, the first part will look at the concepts of ‘time’, ‘space’ and ‘learning’, then, the second part will analyse how intercultural storytelling projects, such as Mellie may support the notions of integration and social cohesion with a focus on the notions of ‘social capital’, ‘friendship’, ‘acts of reciprocity’ and ‘democratic praxis’.

2. PART 1. CREATING A RECIPROCAL LEARNING SPACE: STORIES OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MUTUAL GROWTH

“It's a good place to feel safe and included and to restart your life with more confidence... and to have a nice coffee!”

Mellie participant

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section examines the nature and the workings of the space which was created both physically and symbolically by the Mellie project. It analyses how participants understood the space as an embodiment of the concept of hospitality to allow for reciprocal learning and personal growth.

2.2 AN UNEXPECTED SPACE IN A SEA OF IN-BETWEENNESS

This section looks at the concepts of place and time and at the manner in which participants, through the storytelling process and reciprocal exchange, built bridges across liminality. Bonding over shared human experiences, participants created for themselves a special space for them to belong, thus reviving the notion of integration.

2.2.1 From liminality to a sense of place

“It was a space for many to many and that was very enriching”

Mellie participant

A growing number of scholars are using the term *liminality* to speak about the lives of IPA (Mountz 2011; O'Reilly 2018; Doukmak 2019). This term derives from the Latin 'limen' meaning 'threshold' or 'in between'. It was used by anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) to refer to the state of in-betweenness, or limbo, between the old and the new which people experience when they move from one 'state', or 'condition', to another (Wels et al. 2011; Doukmak 2019). Whether it is related to space (Mountz 2011) or time (O'Reilly 2018), this state of transition also accounts well for the situations in which people seeking international protection often find themselves, whether it is on their journey to their new lives or as they are waiting for a decision regarding their status to be made by relevant authorities. In fact, systems such as Direct Provision have often been described as limbos (Day 2020; Murphy 2021; Ní Raghallaigh et al. 2016; O'Reilly 2018) and have been criticised for maintaining people in a state of marginalisation (Lentin 2003). Mellie participant, Celia, relates:

[W]e were new to the system, so we were not allowed to work, we were not allowed to study, we're not allowed to do anything (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019).

At the other end of the spectrum, places such as Universities can also be seen as places of liminality. While, unlike DP centres, they are sites of opportunities, they are also places of

in-betweenness, filled with rites of passage and possibilities for transformation (Rutherford and Pickup 2015). Individuals confronted with liminality can find it stressful, chaotic and disorientating, as it often brings, at a minimum, a partial loss of one's sense of identity and familiar landmarks (Rutherford and Pickup 2015; Doukmak 2019). Yet, having a sense of place, that is, "being attached to a place, knowing your way around the place, and feeling at home" (De Shalit 2017 p.269), is a key pillar of well-being. Nussbaum insists on the social dimension of the space in which it is possible for an individual to (re)build one's identity. She writes:

Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction, having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation. Not being discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, and the like. (Nussbaum 2000, as quoted in De Shalit 2017 p.269)

It has been documented that, in such phases of transition, it is very difficult for forcibly displaced persons to develop a sense of belonging as they are physically in one place but often mentally still in their place of origin (Huizinga and van Hoven 2018). This frequently translates into a feeling of extreme loneliness. This is the experience of the Mellie participants who have been forcibly displaced.

I'm going back to [name of DP centre] and it's gonna be so stressful and boring and yeah I'm gonna be all alone (Fadi, Mellie participant, July 2019)

[...] it reminds me of being broken and upset. I have spent too many nights like that and I felt isolated (Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019).

Participants residing in Direct Provision also report that it is complicated for them to get to know the surrounding area and to develop contacts with the local population due to the fact that centres are often situated in remote places and that transport costs are prohibitive.

Ahmed comments :

[Y]ou had organised all the transport for us, that was very important, because that is a big issue for us here (Ahmed, Mellie participant, August 2020).

The fact that transport was organised for participants to attend the project on campus proved indeed critical in order to build bridges between DCU as a third level institution and the DP centre. Importantly, within the university, the project was held in a special room (The LanguaCulture Space, originally designed for students and run by students to learn a foreign language and share cultural knowledge), with bright furniture and plenty of colourful decorations on the walls. This room, which contrasts with the more traditional classroom university setting and which is never used for formal teaching, represented a somewhat neutral space within the campus as it was also unfamiliar to most of the DCU participants. Participants on both sides described the room as an important feature in developing an atmosphere of welcome. Rami, a participant residing in DP indicates, for example, how, in comparison with his living conditions, the room was uplifting:

I think it's very nice, because of the colours and the white walls, it does not let you feel sad and the colours of the furniture and the posters... (Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019).

When participants were asked to choose a picture, from the set of cards displayed as visual prompts (see also Chapter 4), that would represent the project, the image of a bright green tree in the middle of a grey urban area frequently arose, expressing how, for both sets of participants, the project represented an unexpected and welcome parenthesis in their somewhat chaotic, and for some, disheartening, everyday lives. They insisted on the fact that on a symbolic level, this was a space of trust. Here are two short extracts from focus groups interviews, the first one is from Ana, residing in DP and the second one by John, full time academic staff in DCU:

[H]ow this project was a safe neutral place which people saw as an unexpected breath of fresh air. I think for me, I found it interesting that looking at the surroundings of the tree, you wouldn't expect such a big tree to be in the middle of such an hostile environment, it's all beauty, it's so green and big, when you expect it to be pavements all the way and dark and grey but you have this big tree which is sprouting out in the middle of nothing, the middle of nowhere and I think, it gives you a pause and asks you questions and I think for us Mellie was that pause, to say, that in spite of everything else that is happening to us out there, there is that room for warmth, to take a seat back, to take time to reflect, you know, and I believe that a tree is just.... [It] generally represents life, it represents hope, it gives fruits, it gives shade in the heat, it gives shelter to the birds, it's such a major reflection of the things that Mellie offers and to find it in the midst is extraordinary....

Julie: Mellie to you was that tree in the middle of the grey..?

A: Yes, yes...

Extract from focus group, August
2020

[It] represents some sort of heaven, a sort of natural heaven, I guess, a sort of the safe space idea. The city one, in particular, seems relevant to me, just you know, we spend our day in DCU, feeling kinda chaotic, lots of things to do and then there were these 2 hours on the Wednesday afternoon where all of that can be shut off. [...] We were growing this relationship, so yeah, that was it.

Extract from focus group, August
2020

Interestingly, both participants chose to link the idea of a safe space to the image of a flamboyant and fertile nature. They understood the project as a fertile ecosystem which allowed them to nurture and grow their relationships with one another as well as to gain a sense of enhanced well-being for themselves. In their views, this welcoming space contrasted with their everyday environment which they felt, respectively, 'stressful' for John or even 'hostile' for Ana. The word 'warmth' was also used on occasions to describe the atmosphere in the room as opposed to more unsympathetic contexts that characterise IPAs everyday lives. Wendy says:

Mellie is the best way to feel a sense of belonging, and warmth [...]

(Wendy, Mellie participant, August 2020)

In that symbolic space, participants were committed to nurturing these relationships with each other, as Tessa remembers:

T: I think everybody was trying to do their best to make everyone feel welcome and make them at ease. And that is one of the things I have taken away from the whole experience.

J: And did it work?

T: Yeah, it did.

Extract from focus group, August
2020

It becomes apparent that through the project, participants developed a sense of belonging. They created for themselves a place in which they felt happy to come and to come back to and, in doing so, contributed to the restoration of a certain sense of place among IPA participants. Rami concludes:

‘[i]t was a nice feeling to have somewhere to go’

(Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019)

2.3 FROM LIMINALITY TO A SENSE OF TIME

“ I will get things I want, but it will take time...”

Mellie participant

This section looks at how people’s participation in the project, through the process of storytelling and exchange with their partners, affected their understanding and perception of time. Within the symbolic space created by the project, participants collaboratively journeyed from a liminal position to a different outlook on their past, present and future. The findings of this section are particularly relevant to the participants residing in DP, but interestingly, parallel conclusions, based on shared human emotions, can be drawn from both sides.

2.3.1 Time and forced migration

Although an under-researched area, several studies (Griffiths 2014; Ghorashi and Pozini 2014; Ghorashi et al. 2018; O’Reilly 2018) have drawn attention to the particularly complex relationship between time and people in a situation of forced migration. Time is a challenging concept. Griffiths (2014) notes that it can be understood in various ways: linear or circular, absolute or relative, discrete or continuous. As a social phenomenon, it can vary between different individuals and contexts and different time conceptions can co-exist within one society (Griffiths 2014). Yet, studies based on narratives from people in the

process of seeking international protection, tend to come to the conclusions (see Griffiths 2014; Ghorashi and Pozini 2014; Ghorashi et al. 2018; O'Reilly 2018) that time is a recurrent theme in people's stories and that it is commonly perceived as being disjunct, suspended, uncertain and outside of "the 'normal' time of mainstream society" (Griffiths 2014 p.192).

2.3.2 The present

Reading through the transcripts of the focus groups, it was striking how often the word 'time' arose. Participants on both sides share a sense of cumbersome routine and material constraints which, they feel, is straining their everyday lives. DCU partners describe their lives as 'stressful' and 'chaotic', with very little spare time, including Fia and John, who explains how they were constantly rushing from one class to another. At the other end, partners residing in DP see their lives as standing still and boring although stressful too. The word 'wait' is one often used, such as Rami who feels tired of waiting:

[T]he waiting, I hate waiting, really, and in my life, I am waiting, I am waiting for this thing... (Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Studies which have investigated the effect that time spent waiting for a decision regarding their status has on people who are seeking asylum have found that it impacts negatively on their mental health (Vitus 2010; O'Reilly 2018; Day 2020). O'Reilly who looks specifically at the repercussions of 'permanent temporariness' (O'Reilly 2018 p.827) felt by people in DP, describes the impossibility for people in such a position to reach a satisfactory level of

well-being as there is, for them, no present and no conceivable future in the absence of a decision. She further explains how people in the asylum process feel trapped in the time frame of the system and develop feelings of frustration, despair and sometimes anger (O'Reilly 2018). Participants of Mellie who were residing in DP found that taking part in the project helped them regain a certain grasp of time which they felt had been lost or dispensed with. Indeed, they describe their time spent in DP as 'being asleep'. In the midst of her everyday routine, Celia explains how participating in the project 'woke her up':

Yes, something to wake up to, you know, in that period, when we were asleep all the time but when you have something to do, like Mellie, it's different, you have to wake up and go for a job, or school, something you're going to look up to, and meeting with your friends today. Just that feeling of having somewhere to go. (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Celia also expresses here how, after a length of time spent in DP, she had lost her sense of motivation. Taking part in the project reignited that spark as she valued it on the one hand and knew that someone was waiting for her there on the other hand. Similarly, Rami explains how spending a certain amount of time waiting for the outcome of his application made him lose his notion of time. In fact, he expresses how taking part in the project gave him enough motivation to value time again.

I learned about the time, that I have to be on time. I remember that I had to take the bus, and that I had to be there. I had to learn how to be there on time. (Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019)

This renewed sense of motivation indicates a possibility to regain agency as some participants feel that they can act on their own time. Indeed, by choosing to attend the project they control the decision making process which contrasts from the rest of their timetable which is too often dictated by the system. The word ‘happy’ is used on many occasions by Fadi when he explains why he thinks the project benefited him. He says:

[W]hen you send us a message, I [am] very happy because I like coming here even if I am not strong at speaking English. When I see it, I come! (Fadi, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Therefore, a number of participants who attended the project once a week felt that it gave them a purpose and a structure, which they appreciated, and contributed to an enhanced feeling of well-being. According to DCU participant Daniel, his partner appreciated the fact the project allowed him to “focus on [the] now, without the focus on [the] current problems and [the] waiting.” Interestingly, participants also describe how fast the time passed when they took part in the project, a change of pace which contrasted with their life in DP and which they welcomed. In this following extract, they describe their time spent in the project as ‘fun’.

C: It also reminds me of how quickly the time went when we were here. We just got here and before you knew it, it was time to go home and we were still busy talking and trying to get our things done, so how quick the time can go if you are busy with the right people and [how] slow the time can go if you are bored and doing nothing.

S: Time flies when you're having fun.

Extract from focus group, July 2019

This feeling of an expected parenthesis of enjoyment and distraction from a routine everyday life is something that DCU participants experienced in a similar way. While Brenda remembers Mellie as “some sort of an unexpected thing happening in the middle of something you are used to[...]that was indeed very nice” (Brenda, Mellie participant, August 2020), Fia describes it as a ‘bubble’ that allowed her to metaphorically travel:

[I]t did feel like a nice bubble, especially those times when we were partnered off. It just felt that myself and my partner were in it together in a boat, taking that journey on a Wednesday afternoon (Fia, Mellie participant, August 2020).

The enthusiasm felt throughout the project is further increased by the fact that it represented for many a number of new experiences. For instance, some participants living in DP explained that it was the first time they had been in a University:

And the other thing was actually to be inside the university, some of us never got the time or chance to even be in a university itself (Mellie participant, July 2019).

Similarly, for many, including DCU participants, it was the first time they visited a museum of modern art and, in addition, none of them had ever taken part in a public photographic exhibition. Kharum explains:

It was new for us and so nice, that's something we would not normally do!

(Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019)

For a number of participants, this was the first opportunity to meet so many other people from different cultures and backgrounds. A participant remembers:

the different variety of people that were involved in the project, the variety of personalities [...] that you can make no assumptions about anybody and I just felt there was a lot to be gained for us from being there (Mellie participant, August 2020)

Finally, the methodology used, such as the storytelling complemented by the photographic element, was a novelty for most

J: and have you ever written anything before?

K: No! It's the first time in English [or] even in my native language, Urdu, I did not write [...].It was a nice experience actually.

Extract from focus group, July 2019

The shared new experience acted as a leveller as it triggered a feeling of equal partnership.

Daniel comments :

To share [...] experiences is a real leveller. I think it removes fears on both sides, all that talking. It's an activity. I think this model could work in maybe other settings because it does bring all that learning and sharing and it's the same for all participants. (Daniel, Mellie participant, August 2019)

2.3.3 The past

It is well documented that people with refugee-like backgrounds suffer a complex, often traumatic relationship with their past (Burnett and Peel 2001; Schock et al. 2015; Käkälä 2020). As a matter of fact, most leave their homelands in harrowing circumstances to undertake a journey that can be paved with difficulties. Coley et al. (2019) note that people in refugee-like situations are ten times more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than age-matched general populations. As feelings of pain, sorrow, stress, grief and loss are often reported among international protection applicants and refugees (Griffiths 2014), work on mental health and PTSD recovery has been given great attention among both practitioners and scholars. In that regard, storytelling has been recognised as a method that contributes towards recovery (De Fina et al. 2020). Similarly, although for very different reasons, international protection applicants' 'stories' are also given critical attention in the legal context. As a matter of fact, a key feature of the process of seeking international protection is the interview with the authorities. Based on the applicant's testimony, relevant officials examine whether a person qualifies for refugee or subsidiary protection status (INIS 2017). The interview is often experienced by applicants as a violence, and the physiological stress it causes has been criticised by mental health practitioners and scholars as traumatising (see for example Schock et al. 2015). Mellie participants also reported unpleasant experiences, such as Kharum, who explains how he was discouraged from getting a translator for himself and his wife. Here is how he remembers the encounter:

Yes, very stressed, it happened to me also when I went to the IPO for my interview and I told them that I needed a translator, they said, it's ok you can speak, I said ok,

I can speak, how to explain, I need to explain things to you, they said no. it will be a short interview, I said ok, I maybe I can manage but my wife, she cannot manage, they said no she can. Ask her to try otherwise, to arrange a translator, you have to go back and we have to call you again. [...] They wanted to see if my wife's answers were matching mine. In the end, they said ok, it's fine, but I told him, I understand what you are asking but my words when I try to explain are not exactly what I wanted to say, I would have needed a translator. (Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Outside of the medical or legal contexts, Mellie participants also report feeling uncomfortable, even fearful of telling their stories to other members of their communities or fellow residents of their DP centre. Celia explains:

Everyone is scared or there is a fear factor that, if we talk to someone, maybe he discloses things to other people (Celia. Mellie participant, July 2019)

It was never the intention of the Mellie storytelling project to ask people about their past experiences of forced displacement. As indicated earlier, this was made extremely clear to both sides during the training. In fact, the agreement was that only what people were comfortable disclosing would be part of the discussion. With that in mind, the themes chosen to guide the conversation were oriented towards people's aspirations and cultures. Yet, without taking a central position in the discussion, more difficult aspects of people's past were sometimes alluded to. Some IPA participants explained that they felt comfortable doing so as they felt supported by an atmosphere of trust which developed over the course of the sessions. Daniel remembers how he felt he could go in that direction with his partner:

We had through our previous exchanges built that relation of trust and we could go there (Daniel, Mellie participant, August 2019)

In a reciprocal manner, Kharum says:

What happened to us, this, here is different, I know I can talk (Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Being able to speak and to be listened to, after a relationship of trust had been established, was a very much welcome surprise for the participants. Rami remembers:

I started to talk even more about me, and what happened, but you only say that to someone you trust [...] I felt safe, and the trust yes [...] It was really lovely (Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019)

On this point, Kharum, also agrees:

Things you can share only with your special friends, some things you have in your heart. Only with them, you can share. I felt that with my partners when we discussed the wars, and why there were wars and everything (Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019)

The storytelling process allowed participants to make sense of their past experiences from a new angle as they were explaining things fresh to their partners, without any pressure or stress. Making sense of past experiences is something that DCU partners also enjoyed and

found beneficial for themselves. One participant explains how she felt, remembering personal and, tucked away, past events:

There was a lot of trust [...] I actually shared things and memories with [my partner] that I wouldn't often share, you know. [...] It was one of the things I liked a lot about Mellie (Mellie participant, August 2020)

Daniel explains how his conversations with his partner also brought him to a renewed sense of introspection:

[...] when I put up a photograph of me as an 8 years old [...] it's very odd, I started doing some family history from that point [...] and there is a connection with Mellie and the conversations we had with my partner. [...] When I wrote about my photo it was a real act of self privilege but I learned something about myself and we all did that by going into the public sphere and the less familiar the audience the more you are explaining something and that reciprocal sharing is so important (Daniel, Mellie participant, August 2019)

Daniel also communicates here how the storytelling process, especially with an unfamiliar audience, enables new perspectives to talk about the past and make sense of it. Participants bonded over personal recollections and tender nostalgia as the past experiences of both partners were valued equally. The sharing of these memories shed light on how each individual could relate to his/her partner's past on the basis of a common human lived experience. Such a process has been described by similar studies as contributing to the recovery of agency for participants with a refugee-like background (see for example Brownlie 2021). As a matter of fact, it creates an empowering shift of focus in people's

narratives by giving evidence of how valuable to wider society one's past experiences can be. De Fina et al. see storytelling as a facilitator of integration and highlight the necessity of a reciprocal process as migration and the stories it unfolds deeply affect not only the migrants but all the people in their contact.

A proper consideration of reciprocity shows [...] how the way experiences are communicated is deeply influenced by how they are received and how this process of contact between migrants and members of local communities generates new dynamics that are capable of shifting and modifying relations and semiotic practices on both sides (De Fina et al. 2020 p.355).

2.3.4 The future

The following section is particularly relevant to participants in the process of seeking international protection. One of the most impacting consequences of having to wait for a statutory decision to be made is the difficulty applicants experience of projecting themselves into the future. This lack of agency fundamentally affects people's well-being, identity and ultimately humanity. To Heidegger, the essence of human existence is to be necessarily and universally temporal and future-oriented (Heidegger 1997 as cited in Virtus 2010). Likewise, for Bourdieu a fundamental framework for our present being is the anticipated future. He writes:

Uncertainty about the future is simply another form of uncertainty about what [one] is, [one's] social being, [one's] 'identity' . . . [At stake] is the question of the legitimacy of an existence, an individual's right to feel justified in existing as he or she exists. (Bourdieu 2000 as quoted in Vitus 2010 p.26)

Bourdieu posits that experiences of temporality are ultimately tied to power relations and speaks of the relationship between those waiting and those making others wait:

Absolute power is the power to make oneself unpredictable and deny other people any reasonable anticipation, to place them in total uncertainty by offering no scope to their capacity to predict. . . . The all-powerful is he who does not wait but makes others wait. . . . Waiting implies submission: the interested aiming at something greatly desired durable – that is to say, for the whole duration of the expectancy modifies the behaviour of the person who ‘hangs’, as we say, on the awaited decision (Bourdieu 2000 as quoted in Vitus 2010 p.39)

O'Reilly (2018) argues that the Irish DP system is the systemic representation of political mechanisms to exclude people seen as ‘other’ by forcing them to remain in a liminal position where the consideration of a possible future is at least uncertain. Some of the Mellie participants residing in DP explain that they strategically chose to participate in the project in order to plan for their future, or their children’s, including educational opportunities. The fact that the project was taking place on a university campus motivated their choice. Here are some examples:

[T]o be inside the university. Some of us never got the time or chance to even be in the university itself, so I just thought...why not? (Celia, Mellie participant, August 2019)

[T]o be inside DCU campus made me think, maybe who knows when I get permission to go to school or to work or to study, maybe, maybe I would end up

there, you know, I thought, you know, just go and introduce myself and say hey. (Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Maybe I might not get the chance to be at the university but I'm hoping for my son to be at least, to get to a university. (Sophia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

As they value education, participants see in the project a chance to gain knowledge about the system as well as contacts which would allow them to widen their opportunities and further fulfil their aspirations. In fact, they identify the project as the starting point of their engagement in other endeavours. Celia explains how she finds herself busy again:

After the Mellie project, it helped us get a course that we could never get. Now we can go and work again. I work 3 days a week. Mellie was a door open for us, then we started going to school, working, and now sometimes we say no to some courses because we are too busy! (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Some participants also identify the set of skills they gain during the project, such as linguistics and intercultural as a valuable 'tool kit' to further their integration in the wider society. Ahmed points out:

You learn a lot, and it feels very good. It helps us when, hopefully, we have our status and we go out and it is very helpful because we make friends and that makes it easier to integrate in the society. (Ahmed, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Moreover, the sole fact of being able to speak about the future was welcomed: “[H]ere we [finally] talk about the future. Mellie gave me this opportunity!” (Mellie participant, August 2020). Participants also valued that they could do so in a constructive way. Rafael explains how he took the time to reflect on his current situation as well as his long-term future:

[I]t made me think more about the problems I would face in the future because talking about such [things] when you are starting a new life in a new society, it helps you to fix it better, or not, but at least you are happy that you tried your best (Rafael, Mellie participant, August 2020).

Rafael shared how he thought of the process as empowering as he felt he had some role to play for his own future. He further described the project as “[The] place where you can start things you will need in life ” (Rafael, Mellie participant, August 2020).

DCU partners also mention the future although from a different, and presumably a more privileged position. Yet, similarly to their IPA partners they regard what they learned throughout the course of the project as valuable life skills which will serve them in the future. Lea, for instance, explained how this was an opportunity to develop relationships in the field in which she is intended to work on later:

[...] never having been in this field before, it's the relationships that I have built which I hope I'll be keeping with people who have vastly different experiences than I did (Lea, Mellie participant, August 2020).

The themes chosen to guide the storytelling process such as ‘Hope’ enabled participants on both sides to consider the future through a positive prism with a focus on dreams and aspirations. Ghorashi et al. discuss how international protection applicants living in asylum seeker centres in the Netherlands used imagination and creativity to “think beyond the limitations of ‘normal’ structures” (Ghorashi et al. 2018 p.385) in order to project themselves in the future, thus retaining some control over their lives. The respondents' narratives in the above mentioned study demonstrate how resourceful they can be in dealing with the impossibilities they face. Similarly, Mellie participants use the words ‘hope’ and ‘dream’ on numerous occasions. Using their participation in the project as a stepping stone, they dream of achieving higher goals such as Celia, who sees herself in politics and as a public speaker: “I could be a good public speaker now!” or Theresa who wants to become a writer “If it wasn't for Mellie I would have never, now I want to be a writer.” (Quotes from Mellie participants, July 2019 and August 2020). By sharing their aspirations with their partners and by being taken seriously, Mellie participants residing in DP demonstrated to their pairs that they were not only victims of their situation but full agents, capable of building a new and meaningful life for themselves. Ghorashi et al. (2018) argue that it is vital for all stakeholders involved in the process of integration to keep focusing on IPA and refugees’ possibilities and dreams as a possible source of agency.

To conclude, the space shaped by the project, which participants actively nurtured, symbolically contributed, in part, to fill the gaps left by liminality. All participants created together and for themselves a hospitable place in which they felt they equally belonged.

Through their exchanges they reconnected with a more positive sense of time and bonded over shared human experiences.

2.4 A SPACE FOR LEARNING

*“I thought that maybe it would be a good place to
start”*

Mellie participant

This section focuses on the learning(s) which took place for many of the Mellie project participants, from DP and DCU backgrounds alike. Although all were volunteers and the project was a non-credited extracurricular activity, it is worth noting that the very fact that the project was held on university campus orientated expectations towards learning. This section explores these expectations and the epistemological journey.

2.4.1 Liminality of the non-formal learning space

As the project was designed with an ethical mindset which focused on promoting hospitality, it was emphasised that all willing participants who shared this ethos would be

welcome to join in, regardless of their cultural or educational background. This resulted in an extremely heterogeneous group of participants (see methodology, Chapter 4) with very different sets of expectations and experiences in regards to former, or current, education. The non formal approach adopted in the project allowed all to creatively respond to liminality and to create learning experiences for all.

2.4.2 Various learning styles and expectations

When questioned about their motivations for attending the project nearly all participants indicated that they were curious and that they wanted to ‘learn’. Yet, when it came to specify what they wanted to learn, there were nearly as many different answers as there were participants. However, learning expectations can be grouped into two main categories for both sets of participants: ‘to learn about the Irish culture’ and ‘to improve English Language skills’ for IPA participants and ‘to learn what it means to be seeking asylum’ followed by ‘to learn about other cultures’ for DCU participants. Here are some examples extracted from the focus groups:

I wanted to get exposed to Irish culture. I wanted to know more, yeah, when I heard people would come from different countries and that I would see a lot of different cultures, so I wanted to learn. (Rami, Mellie participant July 2019)

I really wanted to be part of this, I really wanted to improve my writing skills. So I was attracted by the advert. (Theresa, Mellie participant August 2020)

I was just thinking, this is the time I need to go and integrate. (Celia, Mellie participant July 2019)

I really wanted to meet people and this happened to me. And understand them, not just as a number (Ahmed, Mellie participant August 2020)

When speaking about their educational expectations, what transpired is that many participants, especially on the IPA side but not exclusively, had initially anticipated a very traditional and formal type of learning. Celia explains how she imagined the course and how she was anxious and lacked confidence regarding her ability to meet the requirements.

I was afraid because, you know, I finished school in 1991. To sit again... and I just thought maybe the teacher is going to give us loads of homework and research and maybe they will ask us to write 10 pages essays... Am I going to manage? I haven't been in school for a long time and maybe the teacher is going to be mean and grumpy. (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Lea gives another example and explains how her partner was, initially, afraid to 'fail' and not to give 'the good' or expected answer to the questions she asked her.

L: At the start, some of the questions were out of reach for my partner and she wanted a lot of directions to what she should say and was trying to give me the good answer. At times, I found it hard to try to get her to open up. But we got through with time, getting to know each other.

Julie: Do you think it comes from different cultural learning styles?

L: Yeah, it could be, maybe she was just expecting more of a traditional instructor teacher rather than an equal sharing storytelling. I think it was a mixture of a cultural difference in terms of learning but also maybe a language barrier as her level of English was quite low.

Extract from focus group, August 2020

The role of ‘the teacher’, which participants instinctively conceived as a figure of authority, deserves further analysis. IPA participants had intuitively projected that they would be taught by someone who necessarily knew more than them. Kharum relates and shares his initial concerns: “I thought maybe the teacher will think I am not good enough”. At the other end, some DCU participants had for their part, first thought of their involvement in the project as ‘the teacher’ one. Tessa confesses:

I thought it more at the start of my role as older sister where I would help somebody with their problems, for example their language problems. (Tessa, Mellie participant, August 2020)

DCU participant John shares how he consciously adjusted to negotiate over time a power relation, which he felt was too much in his favour. Here is a short extract of a focus group recorded in August 2020:

J:There is a disparity in power that is interesting and sometimes difficult to negotiate.

Julie: How did you negotiate that disparity?

J: Just by letting it dissipate, over time, and trying to behave normally. I mean I found at the start that, and I don't know if it's like that because I am older, or that I have a staff position at the university, you know, my partner has been through loads of education and is stuck in direct provision, and she would address me in this very formal manner, especially by WhatsApp or email. But you know, we are past that now.

(Extract from Focus group, August 2020)

The non-formal nature of the project allowed for the initial teacher/student position to be challenged. Inherently flexible, non-formal education supports creativity and can accommodate various expectations and participants' profiles while ensuring that each individual's past experiences are equally valued (Shlomo and Schima 2009). This flexibility in the structure, although unexpected by the participants and unfamiliar to some, was recognised and appreciated. Ahmed relates:

It was new, something was happening. The Mellie project did not follow the same procedure to learn, it was a different way to learn English, not through the books and not through formal lessons. There is no wrong or right (Ahmed, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Non-formal education creates an environment for active social involvement through which learning occurs (Shlomo and Schima 2009). In the Mellie project, this aspect was facilitated, for one thing, by the set of guided questions which framed each of the discussion

themes and that participants could ask each other. For John, this format contributed to developing his relationship with his partner in a meaningful way.

Your structure of having these questions and having themes gave us something to dig in, quite quickly, and it meant that our conversation ended up being quite deep, far more quickly than it would otherwise.

(John, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Moreover, as the project followed its course, participants further developed relationships by exchanging experiences as they were collaborating on common tasks such as the sharing of their photographs. DCU participant Fia comments on how the collaborative approach used in the project also contributed to balance the power relations.

It made it so much equal, when you had to present your photo to the whole group, we had to do it the same as everybody else. I liked that, I felt that it was very different from other programs I worked on [...] I often have been in a teacher/student relationship with refugees and I really like it wasn't that in Mellie. It was respect and equality. This really came through (Fia, Mellie participant, August 2020).

Similarly, another participant compares his participation in the project as sharing the same shelter under a shaded tree. Rafael says:

If I had to represent Mellie in a photo, I would like a tree because it is about learning and in Mellie, like a tree, we don't care who you are and where you are from, you are here to share knowledge and other things with new people, and with respect and you feel it grow (Rafael, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Finally, participants identified a holistic approach to learning, which they welcomed and valued. Ahmed reflects on how he appreciated being given the time to learn which contrasted from his previous learning experiences:

Every step we learn in life and you know, especially in Mellie DCU, we are given time to learn in different ways (Ahmed, Mellie participant, August 2020)

He further points to the long time learning benefits of the project “I think Mellie is a process, you learn how to live in the community, it is more than just a project for three months” (Ibid).

2.4.3 Something to learn for everybody, something to learn from everybody

The non-formal format adopted by the project allowed participants to learn from each other on their own terms and in their own time. This holistic stance resulted in the fact that people saw Mellie as a learning platform for them to seize opportunities to match their needs. This section will look at the parallel epistemological journey participants took as they gained knowledge at the personal and collective level.

2.4.3.1 From the self to a new self: a space of personal growth

In contrast with formal education, non formal education does not require a set of prior requirements and neither does it offer a fixed curriculum. Consequently, the learning outcomes stemming from it hugely depends on the participants, their own expectations and implication. The Mellie project offered a series of artefacts and educational opportunities (i.e. linguistic, cultural, digital, visual skills etc.) for people to benefit from, yet without any obligations on anybody's part to take them on. Participants on both sides report having 'learnt something' during the course of the project. Yet, similarly to their various sets of expectations, when asked about the nature of the learning, answers differed from one individual to another. Among practical skills mentioned by IPA participants, English language skills were prominent. This is reflected in the response to the anonymous Google form circulated among all IPA participants at the end of the project in 2018. To the question relating to language skills, 66.7% of participants agreed that their language skills improved and 16.7% strongly agreed.

3. My overall English skills improved
24 responses

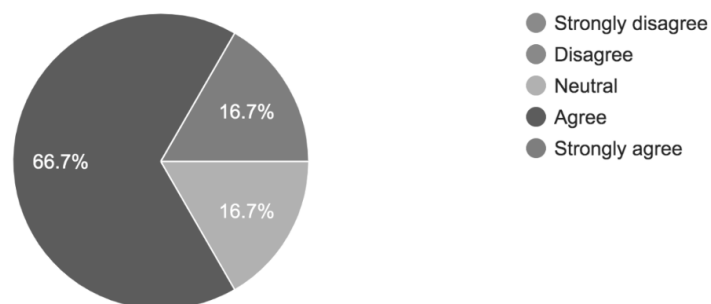


Figure 7: English skills in Mellie 2018

Similarly in the focus groups held with IPA participants in 2019 and 2020, respondents identify English language skills when asked about their learning during the Mellie project:

“[I learnt] definitively some vocabulary”

“The first thing [I learnt] is the English language”

(Quotes from Mellie participants. July 2019, August 2020)

Both sides of participants report having learnt facts about other cultures:

“I learned about [...]the country he came from. [...] all politics in Iraq.”

“I learn from the different backgrounds and cultures.”

“I learnt a lot about all the other countries.”

(Quotes from Mellie participants, August 2019, August 2020)

Many also say they expanded their intercultural skills such as explained by Abdul for whom the most important thing in the project was:

Seeing other cultures that all come in together on this new land for all of us. Everyone there is adding this flavour that they come with [...] (Abdul, Mellie participants, August 2020)

This is echoed by Edith who notes with enthusiasm that what benefited her the most was:

How much knowledge you got from other people with so many insights and wisdom that people have got through their experiences (Edith, Mellie participant, September 2020).

Notwithstanding the more traditionally tangible skills they may have learnt, participants in the focus groups state that their participation in the project significantly contributed to their personal growth. As a matter of fact, many report having “learnt something about themselves”. Narratives approaches, such as storytelling, have been seen by scholars as a “as a transparent act of self-disclosure” (De Fina et al. 2020 p.355) as they provide opportunities for the storytellers to meaningfully deconstruct and connect aspects of their evolving life stories (Abkhezr et al. 2018). It is the case that participants in the Mellie project report that the very fact of sharing their story with their partners contributed to help them process personal aspects of their lives and to “find a way to externalise what’s going on inside” (Mellie participant, September 2019). De Fina et al. (2020) posit that “storytelling is a central mechanism for apprehending the world” as the narrative process allows the storyteller to make sense of his/her experiences (Labov 1972). Mellie participant Fia shares a similar feeling and surprised herself about how much she was able to express during the reciprocal storytelling. She indicates how beneficial the experience had been in her case:

You know things that have been dormant for a while, up until it came up, so I felt I got so much out of it, you know, in terms of all these memories coming to the fore... (Fia, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Similarly, Sinead valued being able to share her experience as she realised they matched those of her partner. She observes she was heartened by her conversations with her partner:

It clearly coincides with things you experience in your own life and these conversations inspire you and sustain you (Sinead, Mellie participant, September 2019)

In fact, the storytelling activity provided participants with an opportunity to have a lengthy and meaningful conversation with another person which they found was lacking in their regular interactions, on the one hand, such as mentioned by Daniel, who comments:

I think there are benefits, I don't have any doubts about that, I think the first one is quite simply the human exchanges. The more of those we get... that is not the way dominant ideologies in our society is going (Daniel, Mellie participant, September 2019)

On the other hand, participants found those in depth conversations healthy, as John illustrates:

You can just have a proper conversation with someone and drink a lot of nice coffee and it felt... you know..! (John, Mellie participant, September 2019)

Lea further comments:

I also liked the opportunity to reflect on the questions of the theme of the project, at a personal level, because normally, you don't often get the opportunity to think

about certain things, and I like how it challenged my way of thinking (Lea, Mellie participant, August 2020)

This latter quote illustrates one of the most important aspects of the participants' epistemic journey on both sides. Nearly all of the respondents declare that taking part in the project and being in contact with the other participants, through their conversational exchange, contributed to the evolution of their way of thinking. For example, DCU participant, Sinead, uses the word "eye-opener" when she realises that the story of the people she met through the project did not match her previous conceptions of migration and the asylum process. She says:

And there was such a variety of people, it would be narrow minded to just see them as victims, they themselves, before could have come from privileged backgrounds as well. And it was the case of quite a few people I met so it was more of an eye opener not that I thought everyone had walked through the Sahara to get here, of course not, but people came on different journeys and some of them that journey was quite straight forward actually (Sinead, Mellie participant, September 2019)

The idea that people with a refugee-like background were 'victims' is something that was initially very present among the DCU participants. The Mellie project for a large part contributed to change this perception, which will be further discussed in section 3.2 of the second part of this chapter. At the other end, IPA participants seemed to have to some extent internalised a voiceless position. As previously mentioned in section 2.1.1, at the very least, most of them report that they were coming to the project with the expectation of being taught language and cultural skills unilaterally. However, through the reciprocal

storytelling process, a number of IPA participants discovered that they were being listened to in a meaningful way and that their experience and knowledge was of interest. For Ladegaard & Phipps (2020) giving the opportunity to the IPA to share hardships and joys and to be listened to by the host community is a genuine and effective way of empowerment. Mellie participant Rami relates:

The people in the project, they really listened to me, about my story, what happened and it was really helpful in my heart and I learned that I have to be strong and stay strong (Rami, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Moreover, by giving value to the cultural knowledge of the IPA participants, DCU participants performed an act of hospitality which allowed power dynamics to be redefined and discursively co-constructed (Brownlie 2021). In fact, the combination of the physical and symbolic space created by the participants among themselves during the project, as discussed previously, resulted in an enhanced possibility for IPA participants to recover a silenced or forgotten voice (Abkhezr et al. 2018; Brownlie 2021; De Fina et al. 2020). In the extract below, Celia comments on how she felt that her words were taken seriously for the first time since she arrived in Ireland. She analyses how empowered she felt as a result.

I felt so good because I think I managed to say something to someone. I just felt it was the only chance that I was given and I took it. To be heard, to be listened to. It was the first time that I talked and that someone gave me an ear, so the Mellie project was some sort of an ear. To be listened to. Since I came here no one ever listens to what I say, no one ever takes me seriously when I talk because, maybe they just think I am funny or something but when I actually talk I just realised that the Mellie project gave me the courage to talk and I realised that maybe I could be a good public speaker from the project and I also realised that I am very funny as

well because when I talk the people laughed and I saw the president was also laughing, standing there and others were also crying so I realised there was something in me that revealed through the Mellie project, that I did not know. I did not know this hidden talent (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

In Celia's case not only did she find a voice but she also realised that she was able to articulate things that had a meaningful impact on others, thus claiming back her agency. Brownlie shares a similar observation when she writes about working in a writing centre with Congolese women who, through a storytelling activity, reverse the power dynamics, in regard to the researcher, by actively taking on the role of knowledge experts (Brownlie 2021). Gaining confidence is one of the key outcomes of the Mellie project where IPA participants are concerned. In fact the word 'confidence' is one of the most used during the focus groups. For Kharum, it is the safe space enhanced by mutual respect and reciprocal active listening which boost his confidence. He explains:

For me, if anyone would like to boost his confidence I think they should come [to the Mellie project] and if they are very shy and they feel awkward to speak in front of people, they should come here.[...] now I can speak in front of people. Before, even only 4/ 5 people ...no, no! One to one was different but in front of people in a different language I was scared, maybe they would be laughing at me [...] you know? Here no one judged us. They listen to you! (Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Rafael goes further in his analysis, similarly to Celia, he grew aware of his own agency.

What I learned about myself is not to hide behind obstacles. You can always move on, if you have enough confidence and Mellie helps you with this confidence but

the person needs to help himself and make a step forward to integration and learning (Rafael, Mellie participant, August 2020)

To conclude, it can be said that the reciprocal storytelling approach in place in the project fostered a culture of meaningful mutual listening between the participants which contributed to create a hospitable safe space for transformative learning to happen. Most significantly, this fertile learning environment allowed participants on both sides to develop new skills and new ways of thinking and it contributed to the recovery of a lost sense of agency for IPA participants.

2.4.3.2 From the self to the Other: a space for collective growth

As well as symbolising a fertile space for personal growth, the Mellie project provided participants with a platform to meet each other and as such to learn from each other. This section will specifically look at the nature and operation of the reciprocal learning process which emerged from the project. In fact, as previously mentioned, the project's symbolic space was founded on trust, mutual respect and listening. This can be identified as one of the factors contributing to the recovery of agency by the IPA participants, thus allowing, as much as possible, to restore a balance in the power relations inherently present among participants. As an illustration of the Freirean position that teaching and learning are two reciprocal acts, resulting in the coproduction of knowledge between students and teachers (Freire 1985), when participants' previous experiences and prior knowledge were equally valued, it naturally resulted in both sides learning from each other. This reciprocity in being

able to both give and receive knowledge constitutes a step towards epistemic justice in fostering epistemic agency (Fricker 2007; Walker 2020) and democratic dialogue (Fricker 2015; Walker 2020).

The first things participants learned from each other were practical information and cultural facts. Gaining access to pieces of practical information was specifically reported among IPA participants as being an important gain. They often describe how their DCU partners would help them clarify certain practical aspects, regarding administrative or educational formalities. This was the case for example of Wendy, she says:

I would say that my partner or the staff and students of DCU helped me to integrate through the Mellie project. For example with some other information I did not know such as the sanctuary scholarships and other education things (Wendy, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Interestingly, the shared information did not solely concerned bridging the gap between the DP centres and the host society's institutions but it also contributed to inform participants who were residing in DP centres about what was happening or available to them within their own centres. Indeed, many respondents complained about the lack of organisation regarding information in their centres as well as the lack of solidarity among residents. Kharum complained that "some people keep the information and are not sharing!" (Kharum, Mellie participant, July 2019). Residents of DP centres felt that this lack of communication resulted in missed opportunities and compounded their isolation.

[you] have to know someone who has the information for you to call and do the course, because if you don't know anyone, no one is going to come to you with the information (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Secondly, participants exchanged cultural information thus providing valuable insights to other participants about their background and their places of origin. Celia recalls:

We were discussing what was happening in Ireland and in Irish society and with E., about what was happening in the US and I was telling them what was happening in Zimbabwe. The three of us used to sit together and discuss our countries, about our differences but mainly about what we were sharing (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Through engaging in meaningful and respectful exchanges with their partners, the participants were able to recognise that they had more in common than differences. In the process they developed what Martha Nussbaum calls narrative imagination, which she defines as:

The ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. (Nussbaum 2010 p. x)

Nussbaum identifies the ability to develop empathy for the other as a pillar of democratic citizenship which involves learning to live with and alongside other people (Nussbaum 2008). In her view, this goes beyond knowledge acquisition from multiple perspectives to make sense of the experience and compassion gained from being with others. Nussbaum notes that democratic dialogue is inevitably connected to the notion of vulnerability, which for her, must be taught to be recognised in others and as well as in oneself from an early age in order to understand common human hardships (Nussbaum 2008) and to debunk “the myth of total control” (Nussbaum 2008 p.39) and to acknowledge instead “mutual need and interdependency”(Ibid), which democracy and global citizenship both require. In the forward of *Not for Profit* (Nussbaum 2008), Ruth O’Brien writes:

A democracy filled with citizens who lack empathy will inevitably breed more types of marginalization and stigmatization, thus exacerbating rather than solving its problems (O’Brien 2008 in Nussbaum 2008 p. x)

Being open to vulnerability resonates with Derrida’s views on hospitality. In fact, he posits that being hospitable means being able to envisage and accommodate the risk of being open to the other, which inherently questions one’s legitimacy as a host and subsequently forces them to accept their own vulnerability (Derrida 2000). Derrida writes that hospitality is “to give place to the other” (Derrida 2000 p. 25). Symbolically, hospitality invites the outside in (Bulley 2015) and creates a space between the self and the other. This thesis aims to demonstrate that within this space it is vital for mutual learning and co-construction of knowledge to happen between the host society and the newcomers in order to reach a

satisfying sense of belonging for everyone involved in the process. Mellie participant Amhed relates:

[In the project] you learn and then you can share and solve your problems in a better way. [You] understand and [you] share. You learn step by step confronting different minds or cultures, you know our colleagues, they all have a different way of understanding things, and that is how you learn (Amhed, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Ahmed says here that he experienced first hand the concepts of hospitality and intercultural dialogue as he became open to other participants' ideas and values and took them into consideration to reflect on his own situation and increase his making sense of it. De Fina et al. (2020) comment on the importance of reciprocity (facilitated by narrative praxis) in such a process. They write:

[T]hat is a process through which people who get into contact with each other change in their manner of thinking, communicating, and or acting in ways that implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the influence of the other (De Fina et al. 2020).

In the words of Ahmed quoted above, he effectively acknowledges the influence of the other. Other participants mentioned having found in their partners a source of inspiration.

Wendy explains:

[Y]ou get inspired by a number of people who have achieved in life in terms of education but not only, you learn about people who have left their home countries but have lived here a long time and what they have achieved and you learn. [...] You

get the confidence that you too can achieve something (Wendy, Mellie participant, August 2020)

To be hospitable to the other's way of understanding the world and values, to acknowledge their possible influence on one's own way of thinking and to make place for their voices to be heard, represent an epistemic shift which may have occurred for some Mellie participants as they engaged with their partners. Fricker's (2007) conceptualisation of epistemic injustice which implies the wrong done to someone as a knower either as a systematic distortion or misrepresentation of one's meanings or contributions or as a undervaluing of one's status or standing in communicative practices (Kidd et al. 2017), sheds further light on the outcome of the project. Fricker recognises that societies are responsible for conditioning one's way of thinking and "train our sensibilities in ways which are flawed" (Walker 2020) and argues, similarly to Sen (2009), that to enhance human well-being, as well as political freedoms, it is necessary to engage in democratic reasoning which enables learning from each other.

Fricker posits that egalitarian epistemic contributions are made possible through various social interactions which involve 'epistemic reciprocity' (Fricker 2015 p.79), that is where all are acknowledged as knowers (Walker 2020). These encounters, where each participant is accountable for collective choices, help to develop common values (Walker 2020). She further explains that to restore epistemic justice requires that one engages in 'reflexive critical awareness' (Fricker 2007 p.91), identify their own bias and subsequently amend their behaviour (Fricker 2007; Walker 2020). Walker (2020) remarks that such repeated

engagements in critical reflection require spaces where people are put in a position to learn. She further adds that it is “then their responsibility to exercise the opportunity” (Walker 2020 p.273). Walker also notes that “ [i]t is extremely demanding as an ideal – but not impossible” (Walker 2020 p.2173). I believe that the Mellie project was this hospitable space for a plurality of identities where people could meet and co-construct a pool of common knowledge and values. It may have been imperfect or it may not have impacted all of the participants in such a positive manner. This refers, potentially, to those who did not wish to participate in the focus groups; as such I do not possess evidence; but Mellie has the potential for epistemic freedom for it values equally each participants’ words. For De Fina et al. the concept of reciprocity in migration should be given more attention as

This process of contact between migrants and members of local communities generates new dynamics that are capable of shifting and modifying relations and semiotic practices on both sides (De Fina et al. 2020 p.355).

2.5 CONCLUSION

I will conclude on this section with the words of Abdel, Mellie participant, who eloquently says:

Everyone gave you the opportunity to express yourself. The space was there for everyone and what I appreciated the most is that it was a space for many to many and that was very enriching (Abdel, Mellie participant, August 2020)

With their attentive consideration to the other and to the other's words and values, the research findings from this section are an indication that participants of the Mellie project may have succeeded in learning from one another which contributes to a collective sense of well being and belonging. They challenged their own bias and stereotypes and created a hospitable space where democratic dialogue was possible. In fact, within that space, which was not defined by abstract institutional and political goals of fostering multiculturalism but consisted in encountering actual persons in 'real' situations (Dervin 2016; Todd 2015), the Mellie participants engaged in conversation, as understood by Todd (2015). Accounts from the focus groups indicate that participants collectively manage their expectations and emotions which contributed to a shift in their perception of their own self and led them to meaningfully encounter and engage with the others.

3. PART 2. OPENING THE PUBLIC SPACE: LEARNING HOW TO LIVE WELL TOGETHER

“ I like that feeling that I could say absolutely anything, or not say anything and just have silence. That space was for us to talk or not talk but to exist together.”

Mellie participant

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous section looked at the workings within the symbolic space co-created by all participants involved in the Mellie project. It analysed its operation to illustrate how, on the basis of a culture of hospitality, a small intercultural project can potentially lead to transformative personal experiences. Drawing further on the notions of hospitality and reciprocity, this section will explore the possibilities that such a setting where individuals come to meet ‘the other’ may offer to support the notions of integration and social cohesion - *vivre ensemble*. It will look at how the development of friendships between participants may challenge power relations, enhance the agency of people in a refugee-like situation, and contribute to the pursuit and furtherance of democratic ideals.

3.2 FROM INTERACTION TO SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION

This section will look at the nature of the interactions between the participants of the Mellie project. It will explore how, by being in contact with one another in the space created by the project, participants developed meaningful personal relationships which served as a basis for intercultural dialogue, thus potentially contributing to paving the way for a more sustainable integration process of those newly arrived in Ireland as well as fostering a mutual sense of co-belonging.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, it is increasingly accepted that integration is a two-way process. The approach has since been utilised at policy level. In fact, this is how the 2016 EU Action plan for integration of Third Country Nationals (Council of Europe 2016) defines its understanding of the concept:

This dynamic two-way process of integration means not only expecting third-country nationals to embrace EU fundamental values and learn the host language but also offering them meaningful opportunities to participate in the economy and society of the Member State where they settle (Council of Europe 2016 p.5)

It is reiterated in 2021 for the EU Action plan 2021-2027 as such :

[...] if integration and inclusion are to be successful, it must also be a two-way process whereby migrants and EU citizens with migrant background are offered help to integrate and they in turn make an active effort to become integrated (Council of Europe 2021)

In both these documents, the process of integration is understood as a transaction where the newcomers can expect to be accommodated by the host society in exchange for their active willingness to reach milestones set by the host society and regarded as markers of integration. These include learning the host society's language, finding employment or pursuing education. Both action plans recognise the (economic) benefits of a successful integration in their wish to promote a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Ensuring effective integration and inclusion in the EU of migrants is a social and economic investment that makes European societies more cohesive, resilient and prosperous. Integration and inclusion can and should be a win-win process, benefiting the entire society (Council of Europe 2021 p.2)

When it comes to intercultural dialogue, in order to combat xenophobia, exclusion or radicalisation among European societies, interactions between newcomers and host societies are also seen as assets:

[T]he promotion of intercultural dialogue, [...], is essential. Supporting migrants' participation and interactions with the host society also requires providing opportunities for the local communities to learn more about people arriving in their communities and their backgrounds (Council of Europe 2021p.20)

Interestingly, the Council of Europe in 2021 also pledges to support initiatives that promote synergy between the two parties in areas such as sports or volunteering as it acknowledges that:

Grassroots participation in education, culture and sport brings people closer together. It helps combat xenophobia, exclusion, radicalisation and ‘us vs. them’ narratives while building mutual respect and fostering migrants’ sense of belonging (Ibid)

This can be seen as an encouraging sign as, in the 2020s, it seems that, in practice, when promoting intercultural dialogue as a fundamental praxis for integration, such policy makers tend to overlook the dual aspects of responsibilities, which include active participation of the host society members into the process of integration (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). In fact, in the Irish context, it has been observed that there are few contacts between IPA residing in DP and the wider society (O’Reilly 2018) and this can still be the case for longer-term migrants (Sheekey 2015). Here is an extract from the focus group conducted with DP residents after the 2019 Mellie project:

Julie: Did you find it difficult to have contacts with local people?

K: Yes.

S: It takes so much time...

(Extract from focus group, July 2019)

3.2.1 Of building social capital

The concept of social capital was first coined by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) to describe resources gained by social networks within a community as well as the norms that

govern such social interactions (Pittway et al. 2015). It gained further attraction following the work of Putnam (2000) where the concept was understood as a collective resource that has the potential to back a community in addressing its societal issues, thus enhancing community well-being (Putnam, 2000). While social capital has been critiqued both because it is difficult to measure and because its benefits are not clearly evidenced, it is an interesting concept to take into account in the context of experiences of people with refugee-like background as the refugee journey has a particular impact on social connections, networks and social norms (Pittway et al. 2015). In fact, a growing body of literature in the field of migration studies is establishing correlations between the concept of social capital - in terms of its building, presence or lack thereof- and sustainable integration of newcomers in host societies (Ager and Strang 2008; Phillimore and Cheung 2014) and, subsequently, increased social cohesion (Putnam 2000). In their influential model of what represents successful integration, Ager and Strang (2008; 2010) note that social bridges (links developed between newcomers and people outside of their community) are essential to access resources that would otherwise be out of reach by migrants, thus achieving essential markers of integration (see also Chapter 2). Mellie participant, Wendy, relates:

I made connections and friendships. Relationships, now, [...] I have some people that I can count on if I am in trouble or I need something. I can call Julie or [John] or write you an email, I know right away I will receive assistance. (Wendy, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Wendy identifies that one of the things she gained from her participation in the Mellie project is meaningful contacts with the wider society which represents to her a new

potential support system. This assessment is recurrent among Mellie participants of refugee-like background who took part in the focus groups. According to Anna the project “was dropping all these opportunities” (Anna, Mellie participant, August 2020), echoing Sophia’s words when she explains “we can make friends, by coming here in the project and mix up with the society, otherwise you're all alone.” (Sophia, Mellie participant, July 2019). It is interesting to note that, although the building of social capital is acknowledged as a necessity to achieve successful integration and the concept of integration as a ‘two way street’ are now ‘buzzwords’ in European policies, the reality on the ground seems rather different. The very fact that, in an Irish context, most IPA reside in DP for periods of time that can in some cases, extend to years, excludes them, nearly de facto, from establishing meaningful connections. John shares how he was both saddened and surprised when his partner, Wendy, revealed to him that he was the first European friend she had ever had. He says:

I remember Wendy told me that I was the first European friend she'd had and that was after having been in Ireland for six years, so that means in six years she's met people and they've had relationships but not one that she would really consider as friends. So the importance of reaching out far overrides any fear that you can have [...] as it's worth it. And it works (John, Mellie participant, August 2020)

What John is also stressing is that this prolonged lack of contact between people leads to a natural fear of the other. In addition, respondents who participated in the project living in Direct Provision reported expanding in a similar way their network within their centres by creating friendships with other residents who also took part in Mellie. The following extract

from the focus group conducted with Mellie participants in July 2019 reveals how much residents of DP struggle to build social bridges:

C: Actually, without the project, I would have never known [names of other participants] but now, even in [DP centre], I meet them, I know [their] kids, I know [their] wife[s].

K: Yeah, we know each other.

C: We are now our own small family in [DP centre], through the Mellie project, because before that I never used to talk to others, only my brothers and sisters from my community, but now I can meet F. and K. and we start talking about other things. [...]

K: I know now whenever I see C. we would say 'hi' because now we know each other.

C: Yes, now we start talking.[...] [taking part in the project] shows that you can... because when I arrived I just thought the only friends that I can have [were] my sisters from the same country but it's actually when coming here I realised I can make more friends, even in [name of the DP centre] you understand?

(Extract from focus group, July 2019)

According to Oosterlynck et al. (2017) Putnam's understanding of social capital is limited by his failure to identify its political dimension. In fact, he assumes that social capital is the automatic outcome of any social structure and that social solidarities emerge through the fostering of shared goals through civic engagement, as social connections will generate mutual obligations and norms (Oosterlynck et al. 2017). Yet, O'Reilly (2018) remarks that structures such as DP, which she considers the most prominent evidence of a system that discourages integration and belonging by imposing liminality and marginalisation onto

residents in its care, purposely deprives people of objectives, not to mention shared goals. However, she notes that solidarities, as an act of resilience and resistance, can be built through involvement in outside-of-the system activities, such as going to various classes (from language to gardening), attending religious services or being involved in some sort of volunteer activity (O'Reilly 2018).

Furthermore, according to Oosterlynck et al. (2017) Putnam also neglected the necessity to think of social capital as being spatially situated. Indeed, a growing number of scholars are working on the specificity of the places where people with different backgrounds engage with each other. Without dismissing the fact that under certain circumstances (see for example Schuermans 2016) encounters across cultures may confirm stereotypes and reproduce practices of exclusion or disengagement (Oosterlynck et al. 2017) it is also interesting to look at more nuanced praxis situated between “building positive relations and keeping a distance” (Ibid p.8) and between commonalities and differences. Substantially, in order for meetings to have the potential to trigger changes in intercultural practices and values, an argument is made in favour of prolonged and meaningful engagement, as opposed to incidental casual encounters in places such as trains, buses, shops or parks. Amin (2002) posits that only recurring interactions can ‘[disrupt] easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiate new attachments’ as they ‘[offer] individuals the chance to break out of fixed relations and fixed notions’ (Amin 2002 p.970) .

This resonates with the Derridean concept of *vivre ensemble* which argues that there is no such thing as solely living *next* to the other, there is only just living *with* each other. In this view, without understating that living with the other comes with an array of struggles, we ought to constantly negotiate our co-living space as the very fact of living, in itself, the essence of a shared humanity to which there is no alternative (Derrida 2013). Scholars in the field of migration studies have identified the importance of recognising and creating those spaces where newcomers and host societies come together, thus fostering integration and social cohesion (Amin 2002; Allan and Catts 2014; Kindler et al. 2015; Almohamed et al. 2017). The present thesis aims to illustrate that the Mellie project has been in many respects such a place. This quote from Anna illustrates the fact that the project was heading in the right direction:

I have seen quite a lot of people look at one on one interaction. I don't know if it was there before and I wasn't aware of it prior to the Mellie project but I think that since I have seen more. But what I appreciate with the Mellie is that it does more, it brings people together. (Anna, Mellie participant August 2020)

3.2.2 Making friendships

“We got new friends with certitude!” exclaimed Celia when reflecting back on her experience in the Mellie project. The quotes from the previous section give an indication of the importance of the concepts of friendship and friendship making. In fact, from the early stages of the project, the befriending aspect and potential of the project were prominent. The following two sets of figures were collected following the project's

iteration respectively in 2017 and 2018, participants were asked to indicate on a scale from ‘not really’ to ‘definitely’ whether the project was an opportunity for them to make friends:

The MELLIE project gave me the opportunity to make friends

35 responses

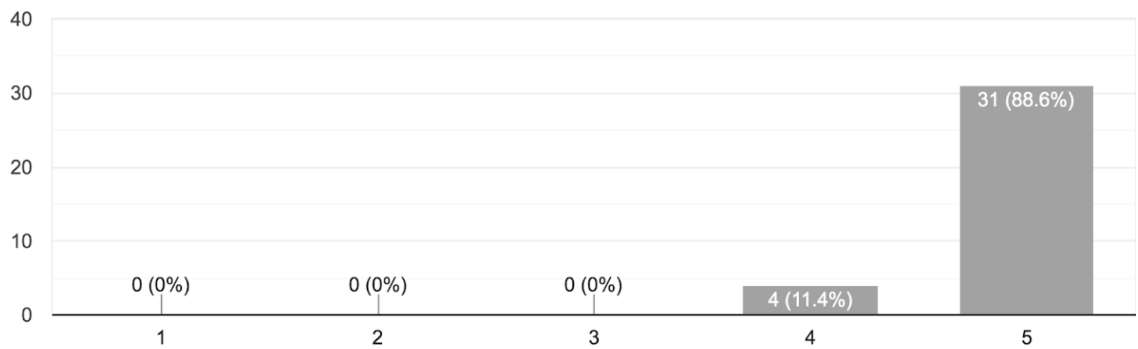


Figure 8: Befriending opportunity in Mellie 2017

8. The MELLIE project gave me the opportunity to make friends

22 responses

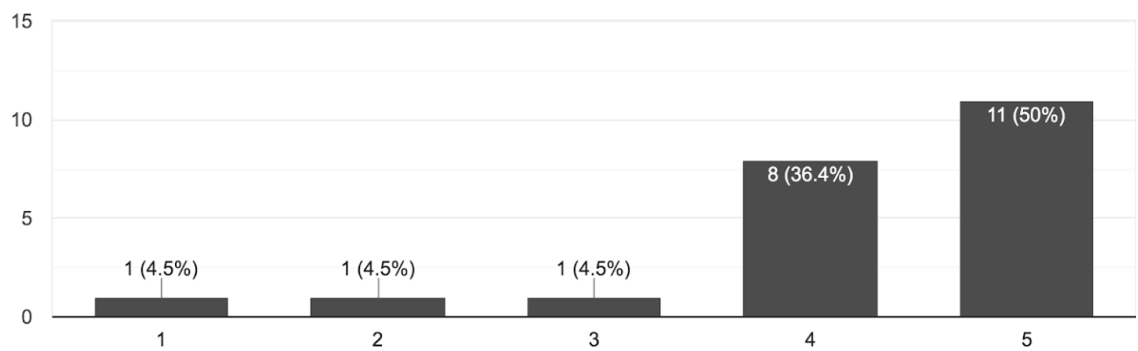


Figure 9: Befriending opportunity in Mellie 2018

For the following two iterations in 2019 and 2020, focus groups were conducted and the question about the nature of the partners' relationship was discussed. Interestingly, during the conversations, nearly all the respondents used the word 'friend' (or a related term) at least once. The word 'friend' is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "a person with whom one has developed a close and informal relationship of mutual trust and intimacy" (Oxford English Dictionary 2021). The concept of friendship, therefore, implies voluntary, non-formal ties formed between people which produce positive feelings, as concern and care are shown mutually (Rawlins 2017). Recent studies in the field of critical geography, which look at the concept of 'co-existence', highlight the importance of the mutual involvement or collaboration between individuals bound by friendship as it contributes to constructing a shared social reality (Bunnell et al. 2012; Capistrano and Weaver 2018; Cronin 2015). In this view, friendships connect people with an affective and emotive dimension of support which can play a significant role in social transformation and further our understanding of places and co-existence (Wilson 2017). Evidence points to the presence of an affective dimension in this project. The fact that participants used words relating to the lexical field of feelings and emotion (see for example quotes from Rami and Karhum in sections 2.2.3 and 3.2.1 of this chapter) is an indication that the nature of the relationship they were building far exceeded the expansion of their social capital. During the focus group, which used visual prompts, Anna chose to illustrate her experience in the Mellie project with a picture of two people kissing at the top of a staircase (see Appendix). When asked the reason behind this choice, she says:

A: I saw, the 2 figures at the top of the stairs,

Julie: Yes, there are 2 people meeting there.

A: Yes, and I suppose they are kissing, I thought it was the love staircase.

Julie: Do you think there is love in Mellie?

A: Not that kind of love, but yes

(Extract from focus group. August
2020)

When Theresa picked a picture, she chose one which featured a treasure box. She echoed Anna's words and explained:

I think it's a box, a treasure box, and, to me, I found relationships and it did not end when the project ended. We are still in touch. That light on the picture represents these relationships, it is also shaped in a heart. So without love, there is no way you can form relationships. For me what I found is a treasure and I treasure the relationships that I have formed through the project (Anna, Mellie participant, August 2020)

These quotes revive what can be understood behind the concept of friendship when looking at inter-group relationships. For one thing, friendship building is not limited by homophily (Cronin 2014; Wilson 2017) which implies that “our friendship groups tend to be composed of individuals who closely resemble ourselves in terms of age, class and ethnicity” (Cronin 2014 p.72). Secondly, Mellie participants' quotes also challenge the notions of ‘care’ and ‘care giving’ that are often implied by charities when befriending programmes are developed to create links between two communities, one supposedly more in need than the other (Askins 2015). In the following extract, Fia analyses her relationship with her partner and reflects on how they became friends.

F: [...some of the] pictures hinted at some sort of guidance and protection which was one of the thing I really liked about Mellie was that that wasn't there, I expected that maybe it would, I did not know anything about Mellie but it was one of the most positive thing that I took away. Yes, security like B. said but I thought of it more as respect or equality, I really liked that the conversations were as hard for me as they were for R. in a way because they were real and they were meaningful.

Julie: You felt [the two of you were communicating] on the basis of equality?

F: I really did.[...] I certainly take the point of safety that B. made, it did feel like a place of safety for me as well because I was revealing things and I felt that atmosphere of trust that was very present.[...] R. and I, really, I think, became friends and I love Mellie for that.

(Extract from Focus group, August 2020)

Fia evokes an atmosphere of trust which, according to her, allowed her and her partner to become friends. In her view, this was created by having meaningful conversations that subsequently helped this relationship to develop deeper because it was based on respect and equality. On this point, the use of the reciprocal storytelling methodology may be acknowledged as a means to quickly build significant interpersonal relationships. In this regard, Wilson's work (2017) looks at spaces where friendships and solidarities across language, race, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality are built. Drawing on a case study of a community leadership network (CLN) she describes how emotional ties and affective attachments can be formed efficiently through face to face interactions and workshops that "encourage participants to make connections with every other person in the room" (Wilson 2017 p.59)

As sociological studies have highlighted, friendships can be forged and strengthened through the exploration of emotions and personal issues, and provide a space where it is easier to reveal vulnerabilities [...]. With CLN, I suggest that it is the rapidity with which these spaces are created that intensifies the felt attachment to others. Exercises encourage participants to share information about [themselves] [and to explore] key life experiences that shape one's sense of self. These exercises are not only a quick way of allowing participants to develop intimate knowledge about one another, but they also work to disrupt assumptions about sameness and difference, allowing participants to recognize the different ways in which they might connect with others in the room, whether through shared experiences of mental health, shared regional identity, a similar educational background, class-upbringing or religion. There are also opportunities for people to engage in 'culture shares' where they share something of personal significance with the rest of the group." (Wilson 2017 p.62)

In a similar manner, participants of the Mellie project were brought together to reciprocally share personal experiences, sometimes through an emotional lens which helped forge strong personal connections. John explains:

You need structure to build this relationship. And your structure of having these questions and having themes (?) gave us something to dig in, quite quickly, and it meant that our conversation ended up being quite deep far more quickly than it would otherwise (John, Mellie participant, August 2020)

It is probable that the exploration of this more personal dimension allowed participants to develop a relationship that went beyond the 'befriender/befriended' (Askins 2015) scope initially envisaged. As such not only may it have shaken the "assumptions of sameness and

difference” as worded by Wilson (2017 p.62), thus fostering epistemic reciprocity (see part 1 of this Chapter) but it may also have contributed to restoring a balance between partners who might have assumed a certain power position. Brenda acknowledges:

[My] two partners [...] surprised me very much.[...] They actually started to take charge of the conversation. Suddenly I realised the nature of the partnership had changed (Mellie participant, August 2020)

At this point, it is worth considering the more radical and counternormative possibilities (Wilson 2017) that friendships can encompass, as conceptualised in the work of Derrida (2005), Foucault (1997) or Ghandi (2005). Scholars, who have explored unlikely friendships (Ghandi 2005; Wilson 2017), have demonstrated that friendships may have the power to break away from regular social orders and “refuse exclusionary communities of belonging and to disrupt alignments along axes of affiliation” (Wilson 2017 p.54) and are, as such, radically political. Yet, Wilson (Ibid) makes a difference between friendships and solidarities, as formed, for example, through activism. In her view, if friendships have a strong potential to challenge inequalities, they are not, unlike solidarities, forged by struggles nor defined by them -neither do they proactively seek to be political (Wilson 2017). Askins puts forward the concept of ‘quiet politics’ to speak about the transformative potential at play in friendships built in contexts such as that of the Mellie project. She suggests that such mundane spaces, where ordinary people informally meet each other, allow for shifts in perceptions of the Self and the Other (Askin 2015). In fact, as people discover each other as multifaceted and interdependent, they develop relationships that recognise commonalities, thus altering pre-existing stereotypes as well as deconstructing

dominant discourses that conceptualise alterity (or, minorities) as only different (Ibid). Without being simplistically universalist, this view helps to understand how learning to recognise and respect difference, through the formation of emotional bonds with the other, can influence one's own identity construction as well as redefine societal conceptions of co-belonging.

3.2.3 Fostering intercultural dialogue

The relational dimension is also considered as fundamental to an intercultural approach to foster integration and social cohesion with a focus on coexistence (Elias and Mansouri 2020). It places a focal point on dialogic exchanges and interactions which are considered the philosophical nucleus of Interculturalism (Zapata-Barrero and Mansouri 2021; Elias and Mansouri 2020; Council of Europe 2008). In this view, cross-cultural relationships are seen as key to achieving equality and social inclusion in a culturally diverse society (Elias and Mansouri 2020). At policy level, the Council of Europe emphasises the need for contact:

[I]nterculturalism is about explicitly recognising the value of diversity while doing everything possible to increase interaction, mixing and hybridisation between cultural communities (Council of Europe 2011 as quoted in Elias and Mansouri 2020)

In academic discussion, establishing meaningful personal relationships, or at least acknowledging in the other similar human emotions to those experienced by oneself, has been put forward as one of the tenets to achieve democratic (Nussbaum 2008) and

intercultural dialogue (Wilson 2014). However, since the concept of intercultural dialogue was first introduced in 2008 by the Council of Europe at policy level, the term has since been widely debated by intercultural scholars (see for example Holmes 2014; Mansouri 2017; Phipps 2014; Wilson 2014). The Council of Europe understands intercultural dialogue as:

an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others (CoE 2008 p. 17)

This definition, still in use, presents intercultural dialogue as the preferred answer to challenges arising from co-living in a culturally diverse society (Wilson 2014). Yet, its conceptualisation, and in fact, its practical application, are not unproblematic (Crosbie 2018; Phipps 2014; Wilson 2014). For instance, Phipps argues that the words have been overused and therefore emptied of their content to become mere political slogans (Phipps 2014). Wilson, for her part, deplores the fact that whilst the Council of Europe accepts that dialogue can only ever be achieved under certain conditions and stresses the need for defining and negotiating objectives, it fails to spell out under which conditions or whose objectives should be negotiated (Wilson 2014). Others, such as Mansouri (2021), regret the lack of benchmarks to empirically test assumptions and hypotheses (such as its potential for social cohesion) attached to the concept itself. In a recent attempt to operationalise the concepts of interculturalism and intercultural dialogue, Elias and Mansouri (2020) have presented a systematic review of more than a thousand texts, giving a comprehensive

picture of the state of the current research on the topic. They note that intercultural dialogue is an approach that comprises “proactive exchange and bi-directional engagement involving both minority and majority groups.” (Ibid p.513). They have identified four core elements to intercultural dialogue: it is relational, normative, transformative and integrative. These four components will be used to explore how the Mellie project and its participants have experienced intercultural dialogue.

As previously discussed, there are indications that the Mellie project did in fact bring people together and facilitated their exchanges, when in other circumstances their paths may have never crossed. Lea confirms:

I also liked the opportunity to meet different people and how on the Wednesday we got that time. I liked how we were one group, volunteers and all. I liked how I met people from here and elsewhere (Lea, Mellie participant, August 2020)

The fact that participants worked together on a common goal, in this instance towards an exhibition in a national museum, undoubtedly helped promote their active participation and engagement as mentioned by Elias and Mansouri as will be discussed further in section 3.3 of the second part of this Chapter. Yet, if the project, as it was, brought people together, it did not always go ‘smoothly’ as illustrated by the following extract from my research diary relating one event which happened in the Mellie 2018 iteration.

M. brought a friend today, B.. He had told him that our project was “fun” and “interesting” and that it was a good way “to meet Irish people”. We were very busy and I did not have ‘a spare’ partner for our new participant. Just beside where we

were standing, was L. [an MA student] and A. [a Syrian refugee]. The pair was chatting away, lovely and bubbly, as usual. I asked them if they would welcome a new partner, which they agreed to and invited B. to sit at their table. I did not think more about this and went to carry on with other business. A few minutes later, as I was screening the room, I noticed that B. did not remove neither his coat nor his backpack and seemed tense, as actually were L. and A.. Before I could make my way to the table, B. stormed out of the room. I followed him and asked what was wrong. As he was agitated, I asked Veronica if she could join me. He told us he felt uncomfortable because he did not want to “ sit with an Arab” and that he was “here to meet an Irish student" but that the girl was “not Irish Irish” [I believe he actually meant to indicate that the girl was black]. I said I was sorry he was feeling uncomfortable but we were here to be friendly with each other and that we were not doing this kind of politics here. Veronica told him that she could understand if this was not for him and if he did not wish to stay but although we were very flexible on a lot of things we would not negotiate our value of respect. She also told him he was welcome to get a coffee and take some fresh air while he could think about it all as the bus back was not here for a good while. Half an hour later, B. came back to the room and sat with L. and A. (Extract from research diary, March 2018)

B. came back the following week, and every one after that. This story illustrates the role that may be played by facilitators as mediators of intercultural dialogue, triggering reflection and promoting mutual adaptation (Farini 2014). However, it is important to commend here the attitude of all three participants. B, for his intelligence and ability to rise above his own prejudice to pursue the adventure despite being initially surprised and cognitively conflicted and L.&A. for their openness and tolerance to choose not to take offence and to welcome him back. This illustrates aspects of intercultural dialogue discussed by Elias and Mansouri, such as the integrative dimension by which the approach engenders social cohesion “as individuals negotiate and adapt to the requirements of living

with difference” (Elias and Mansouri 2021 p.515). Elias and Mansouri also contend that intercultural dialogue bears transformative potential, as participants learn about the Self and the Other. Wilson (2017) notes how, through scaffolded exercises, such as the sets of guided questions used in the Mellie project, people share their personal experiences as well as being encouraged to reflect on their own prejudices. This is how Ahmed reflects on his experience in the project:

It was quite a unique experience, especially when we used pictures because for me it is a different angle to see a picture because you see different parts, maybe positive, maybe negative, and we say something and hear others point of view and you start to think differently. Through the picture I discovered people. Maybe I thought something about you and then we discussed the picture and maybe I have a different idea about you after (Ahmed, Mellie participant August 2020)

What Ahmed’s quote conveys is that with interactions with Others changes can happen, through learning and understanding. Stereotypes about one’s own culture and identity and the other’s are deconstructed (Formenti and Luraschi 2020) as the individual’s knowledge is expanding (Elias and Mansouri 2020). Yet, Elias and Mansouri warn how “such change should not be associated solely with minority groups adopting the majority culture” (Ibid p.515). Mellie participant Lea speaks about how she too grew as a learner as she was able to test her academic knowledge to a sometimes dissonant voice coming from people who were experiencing first-hand what she was studying.

I really liked being engaged and meeting different people and again getting more of a perspective from what it’s like to live in the Centre from somebody who lives there instead of just reading about it from reports or in academic readings because

it's not just facts speaking, it's people who live there, you get a different experience (Lea, Mellie participant, August 2020)

However, it is important to note that if intercultural dialogue has the potential for both sides to emerge transformed, it requires that people from both minority and majority groups are willing to engage which in practice can prove challenging (Elias and Mansouri 2020; Wilson 2014).

Finally, Elias and Mansouri (2020) put forward the normative potential of intercultural dialogue. It is understood as a framework for contact and peaceful coexistence which demands that participants are open to the other's perspective (Formenti and Luraschi 2021) in order to allow them to communicate "under conditions which they mutually can accept as fair" (Elias and Mansouri p.516) According to Wilson (2014), meaningful intercultural dialogue should trigger knowledge acquisition which allows people to consider "other human possibilities [...] that they recognise that theirs is not the only way of proceeding" (Ibid p.860). This extract from my field observations illustrates the complexity of such intercultural encounters.

There were tears in Mellie today. I felt terrible. D. came up rather distressed to Veronica and I because she made her partner cry (and, now, she was crying too) because she told her partner about her choice of photo to represent herself. A photo of her demonstrating in favour of Repeal the 8th. Her partner, a fervent religious, just had a miscarriage and was deeply affected by it. D. felt she opened "Pandora's box" [her words] and regretted that she ever said anything and asked to change her photo for something less political. I asked her if she felt she should not have gone

to demonstrate. She said no, that it was something important to her. Veronica asked her if she had said anything disrespectful to her partner. She said no, again, but that she felt her partner thought she was “selfish” and “cruel” for potentially “preventing a baby from being born when others could not have them”. She felt sorry she upset her partner and did not know what to do. Veronica made a point saying that although she understood it was an uneasy situation, D.’s convictions had nothing to do with her partner’s personal tragedy. I asked her if she felt good enough to go back to her partner and respectfully discuss this all with her again. She agreed. (Extract from research diary, February 2019)

D. and her partner stayed together until the end of the project. D. later told me that although she could not say they became true friends, they did come to understand and respect each other’s points of view, at least sufficiently to carry on with the project. These experiences from the Mellie project may illustrate how intercultural dialogue is probably not the panacea which European institutions think it is (Phipps 2014), rather it is a challenging and chaotic process. Yet, it allows us to hope that with the right conditions it can achieve its goal of transformation and social justice by allowing participants to discuss points of difference and, more importantly, of sameness (Wilson 2014; 2017) in order to make sense of the Self and the Other and to discuss the terms of a sustainable coexistence. These discussions were an important feature for Anna, as she felt she was able to speak about what she valued. She says: “In Mellie, it was very intercultural. That was a change and the opportunity to discuss [...] It was great and there is nothing that we never talked about” (Anna, Mellie participant, August 2020). However, it is important not to shy away from risk-taking, which is an inevitable part of meaningful intercultural dialogue (Wilson 2014; Holmes 2014; Phipps 2014). In fact, if scholars such as Wilson (2014; 2017) and Butler

(2005) acknowledge the need to build spaces for intercultural encounters and subsequent dialogue to happen, they also highlight how this constantly needs to be renegotiated and remodelled to match the context (Phipps 2014) and be meaningful (Holmes 2014). The Derridean exploration of the concept of hospitality also associates the notions of negotiation and risk (Dufourmantel 2000). According to Derrida, the encounter with the other is necessarily a limitation of the self (Derrida 2000). Wilson (2014) explains that “to permit another to voice their prejudiced remarks about you is to abdicate self-interest [...] and to allow them to get close enough”, which goes against our natural tendency to want to keep the other at a distance in order to be able to self protect (Ibid). Yet, in both these approaches of hospitality and intercultural dialogue, which are at the core of all encounters with otherness, it is only by taking the risk to welcome the other and to recognise them as an equal that negotiating the terms of co-belonging can happen and be significant (Derrida 2000; 2013; Wilson 2014). In fact, it is, according to Derrida, because our human relations are constantly in the making that those terms of co-belonging need to be continuously renegotiated (Derrida 2000; 2013).

Despite the messiness and the frustrations at times, the evidence suggests that the Mellie participants managed to negotiate their own co-living terms within the symbolic space of the project. In fact there is evidence that in many cases they engaged in mutual learning, recognising the validity of the other’s values and ways of being which contributed to identified points of difference, sameness and agreement among themselves (Wilson 2014).

Anna relates:

I think for me, what I really liked was the relationship with the people we were working with. [It] was really just a gift because you walked away with someone new, from a different culture and background. It was so important. (Anna, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Anna's reflection indicates that this process led one step closer to developing positive lasting relationships and, subsequently, sustainable integration, which is understood as the result of a process towards a common shared sense of belonging and a harmonious coexistence (Formenti and Luraschi 2021).

3.3 FROM A SHARED SENSE OF CO-BELONGING TOWARD FURTHERING DEMOCRATIC PRAXIS?

The previous section discussed how people, within a certain space and under certain conditions, in this instance an intercultural storytelling project, may manage to engage in dialogue to negotiate, in their own terms, a peaceful coexistence. This section will explore whether such a project may serve objectives of social justice, hospitality and democracy.

3.3.1 Boarding the 'boat of the impossible': from everyday hospitality to a democracy to come

Dialogue and negotiation are prominent in the Derridean understanding of hospitality as ethical practice (see Chapter 3) and consequently also underpin the associated concept of democracy. Nussbaum understands democracy as a political construct which requires

[...] cooperation, it requires reciprocity, and it requires trust in things that are not totally certain. You have to be willing to reach out to your fellow citizens, no matter what you actually think of them, and form common projects [...] that doesn't mean you have to like the people. But that means you have to have a kind of goodwill toward them. And you have to want to work with them (Nussbaum in Reese 2018)

Derrida's political works are considered to be fundamental tools for the theorisation of the ethical question of how to welcome the Other, whether it be the non-citizen, the migrant or the stranger (Bulley 2015; Zembylas 2020). He develops and analyses ethico-political concepts such as hospitality, friendship and democracy which, according to him, all bear the same self-deconstructive tensions. As such, he explains how democracy, in an attempt to protect itself, hinders the multiplicity of views, cultures or identities that enabled the formation of democracy in the first place (Derrida 2005). In this view, the constant tensions at play in the notions of democracy, as well as hospitality, prevent, on the one hand, a full understanding of the concepts -"we do not know what hospitality is", Derrida warns (Derrida 2000 p. 24)- and on the other hand, demand continual reinvention of their practice, thus creating infinite movement and possibilities for action (Derrida 2000; Fritsch 2002; Bulley 2015). In his later work, Derrida (2005) conceptualises what he named 'democracy to come' as not just an ideal, but as a performative sentence that is meant to be a demand for more democracy and which plays an immediate and active role in the present (Patton 2007). Derrida links the concepts of democracy and hospitality to anticipation as they are ways to be open to risk-taking and to manage the unexpected (Derrida 2000, 2005) He says:

In general, I try to distinguish between what one calls the future and '*l'avenir*.' The future is that which—tomorrow, later, next century—will be. There's a future that is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, *l'avenir* (to come), which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future beyond the other known future, it's *l'avenir* in that it's the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival (Derrida in Dick 2005)

Thinking and acting democratically requires negotiating and renegotiating hospitality (Derrida 2000; 2005). We can use here to the concept of 'hospitable democracy' (Derrida 2005; Czajka 2020; Fritsch 2011) which implies striving for the ideal of unconditional hospitality at all times, while finding a balance to preserve the self and "avoid[ing] the perverse effects" of an unlimited hospitality and democracy by "calculat[ing] the risks...but without closing the door on the incalculable, that is, on the future and the foreigner" (Derrida 2005 p.6).

However, Derrida's work has also been critiqued because it is seen to remain at the periphery of theory (Czajka 2020) and to lack clear guidelines regarding the manner in which to deal with everyday acts of hospitality in specific given spaces (such as for example educational spaces) (Bulley 2015; Zembylas 2020; Imperiale et al. 2021). The work of Ghorashi (2014) explores routes that bring people to meet at points of contact where they can negotiate a future which could meet social justice ideals of equal "citizens belonging" (Ghorashi 2014 p.49), thus counteracting a modern ambient feeling of insecurity and fear

of the Other, as previously analysed in Chapter 2, and ‘democratising democracy’ (Giddens 1999 in Ghorashi 2014). In fact, Giddens sees democracy as a principle which should be applicable starting from the intimate interpersonal relations, thus highlighting the need for dialogue between people (Ibid). According to Ghorashi (2014), what is at stake is bringing people to dialogue in safe spaces in order to break down modern increased individualism, and to delay quick judgement. As a matter of fact, dialogue makes people listen to the Other’s story and invites them on a shared journey:

One gets invited to start a journey [...]to different times and places, to a variety of experiences which are shared by all humans in spite of the particularities of those moments. These stories give individuals the chance to free themselves from their taken for granted (culturalist) positioning within the dominant discourses. This provides the possibility to break through the walls of judgements which are fed by dichotomies of self and other, creating space for the unexpected (Ghorashi 2014 p.60)

When Mellie participant Daniel thinks about his engagement in dialogue during the project, he relates to the point of breaking ‘the walls of judgments’. He explains how, despite thinking of himself as a ‘qualified interculturalist’, his involvement in the Mellie project brought to the fore some biases which he did not think he had. He indicates that the storytelling allowed going in more depth in the dialogue, thus breaking stereotypes.

Being able [...]to talk about the particularity of one's experience is exactly the opposite of stereotyping because it digs, you know, and that's why it's valuable and as you can see, I find it moving. It shook everything. (Daniel, Mellie participant, September 2019)

Finally, it is interesting to reflect on the idea that people who engage in dialogue and practise hospitable democracy take a metaphorical journey, as suggested by Ghorashi (see above). Yuval-Davis (2011) also points out the constant dynamism of dialogical praxis as it brings people to a “perpetual state of becoming” (Yuval-Davis 2012 p.16). This echoes the Derridean conceptions of hospitality and democracy for they are never static and must always be experimented with. They represent an ethical direction to go forward, ‘to come’. Interestingly, some Mellie participants chose the image of a boat to describe their experience in the project. Here is an extract from a focus group in which they analyse this choice of image:

F: It just felt that myself and my partner were in it together in a boat, taking that journey on a Wednesday afternoon. I can't really articulate why this image of the boat resonated with me.[...] There could have been so many issues but I found the whole thing so meaningful really, in that, you know, I teach EFL, a lot, and you have these conversations which aren't really .. you know, meaningful in a way, and this really was, so I suppose I thought the idea of us on a boat

Julie: Does the idea of the boat resonate with anyone else?

T: yes, for me it was more the flying boat which was kind of a seemingly impossible thing. [...]

J: For me it reminded me of how the project was scaffolded to achieve the flight of this unlikely contraption until the point where it was actually able to fly under its own steam.

Julie: Did you feel the chaos, or some of the difficulties? Would you have done some things differently?

J: The chaos all existed outside of us [...].

F: I think I agree with that and that's why I like the boat idea. The chaos was outside, yeah.

Julie: So once you were in your boats it worked.

J: Yeah.

Just like F. in the extract above, who compares the Mellie project to a ‘flying boat’ (See Appendix), which she defines as something ‘seemingly impossible’, yet she is amazed that ‘it worked’, the concept of democratic hospitality in its unconditionality as a ground for social cohesion may seem like a leap of faith. However, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that however idealistic, it may not be completely unrealistic (Imperiale et al. 2021). The following two sections will explore how two fundamental pillars of democracy, reciprocity on the one hand and participation and representation on the other, were put in practice in the Mellie project .

3.3.2 Acts of reciprocity: to contribute and to give back

Recent seminal works on migration looking at integration (Grzymala and Phillimore 2018; Phillimore et al. 2018; Strang et al. 2018) and health (Wang and Gruenewald 2019) have highlighted the role of reciprocity at play in the relationship between migrants and host societies as a way to access resources which can contribute to alleviating post-migration bereavement and acculturative stress (Berry 2005; Phillimore 2011). Phillimore et al. (2018) claim that considering reciprocity as a means to access fundamental resources for integration such as social connections and emotional support (affective, psychological or

even spiritual) revive integration theories in favour of agency rather than identity (Berry 2005) or functional markers (Ager and Strang 2008). Applying a reciprocity lens to the guest-host relationship also echoes the reciprocal relationship that binds both parties in the *xenia*, the ancient Greek term for hospitality, that Derrida foregrounds as the first aporia of unconditional hospitality (Derrida 2000). For Derrida, hosts and guests are necessarily in a reciprocal relationship as they are inseparable so that the very existence of the former is implied in the existence of the latter (Ibid; Westmoreland 2008). Yet, at the same time, their relationship is from the outset based on an exchange, which Derrida identifies as the limit of hospitality itself as the gift or, in this case, the gift of hospitality, should not be intended by the donor nor received as such by the ‘donnee’ in order to be unconditional (Derrida 1992; 2000; Caputo1997).

Hospitality really starts to happen when I push against this limit, this threshold, this paralysis, inviting hospitality to cross its own threshold and self-limitation, to become a gift beyond hospitality. Thus, for hospitality to occur, it is necessary for hospitality to go beyond hospitality. That requires that the host must ... make an absolute gift of his property, which is of course impossible (Caputo 1997 p.111)

Derrida also notes the impossibility of such an absolute gift and in fact, hospitality has been regarded as largely codified by a practice of exchange across cultures (Mauss 1990; Imperiale et al. 2021). Indeed, ethnographer Marcel Mauss posits the exchange of gifts as a fundamental act of humanity while underlining their ambiguity which are, in his view, never free as they irreversibly tie the giver and the receiver in a dual inseparable act of indebtedness and enjoyment (Mauss 1990).

In migration studies, scholars have similarly explored the complexity of the situation in which IPAs find themselves, between feeling grateful toward the host society for receiving its assistance and at the same time possibly being disempowered by it (Heins and Unrau 2018; Phillimore et al. 2018; Wang and Gruenewald 2019). Phillimore et al. (2018 p.220) speak about *informal reciprocity* which they describe as the “exchange of resources given freely by individuals to other individuals, particularly to strangers[...]. It is not known if repayment will occur, or even if the same person will be repaid” as being an important step toward a recovery of agency for individuals in situations of seeking international protection. They further explain:

[I]nformal reciprocity offers those without much power an opportunity to enjoy some agency, affect local social relations and ‘fulfils the need for sociability, information and social support’ especially amongst strangers. Thus informal reciprocity offers considerable potential for migrant integration as a means to gain support when short of resources, to develop social connections, to attain some aspects of identity through re-establishing agency when offering resources and thus operate as a mechanism for the development of self-esteem potentially substituting pre-migration psychological resources (Phillimore et al. 2018 p.220)

There is evidence that Mellie participants engaged in informal reciprocity in many ways. There were gifts of food and small objects throughout the duration of the project. Symbolically, they generously acknowledged each other’s emotions and reciprocated through their practice of storytelling (Wilson 2017) and photovoice. They practised epistemic reciprocity in recognising in the other the value of their knowledge and past experiences. Yu et al. (2021) also explore the role of reciprocity with an agentic lens, and find benefits to being forcibly displaced in the US. They explain how being in situations

of genuine exchange, where they are able to ‘pass it on’, “provides migrants with an opportunity to become actors of reciprocity in response to the aid and support they received” (Yu et al. 2021 p.7). This is also the sentiment of Celia, in the Mellie project, who mentions how she valued being able to take part in a real exchange:

I remember [E. was] asking me many things, and she told me that she never heard that, she has never been out of Europe, she never saw how it was working in the rest of the world. I told her how you do things in Africa. As much as she had the knowledge of English, as much as she was in the University and everything, but she did not know. It's not like the project is just like teaching us, do this, do that, we also had to give to the project so that is an actual exchange. Giving and getting something so that we got English and we gave what we have from our culture. (Celia, Mellie participant, July 2019)

Furthermore, Yu et al. (2021) comment on how, for people in refugee-like situations, being able to claim some agency through reciprocating the help they may have received, furthers their sense of belonging and integration as they are able to demonstrate their ability to contribute to the wider society. This is also a finding emerging from this research with some of the participants reporting being sustained by the project to reclaim agency and may similarly help others on that journey. Wendy explains:

[With my neighbours who also participated in the project], we can talk about different things, which before Mellie never happened, so really I saw a sense of hospitality, generosity and friendship. I treated people well and I was treated well too and that did not end when Mellie finished it's still going and it also helped me to say " I shouldn't wait for somebody to come to me but also I can give that friendly welcome to anybody especially with people I

was living beside, I shouldn't just wait for people to talk to me, I can approach as well.” (Wendy, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Likewise, Rafael states how he saw the project as an opportunity to further his contribution to the society into which he recently arrived:

I think Mellie is a process, you learn how to live in the community, it is more than just a project for three months. I would say first that it depends on you, what you see in the project and how you want this project to help you and how [in turn] you can help other people if they need (Rafael, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Such a practice of exchange between the ‘migrant’ group and the host society, through reciprocal acts of hospitality, went beyond the scope of the project itself. Evidence suggests that it contributed to a shift in perception, among participants of both sides, of what it means to seek asylum from a perceived passive form to a more active one (Heins and Unrau 2018; Wang and Gruenewald 2019). Anna explains how it brought her to realise that she, too, despite her feeling of frustration and despair at times, could give more of her time to better understand people from the host society:

For me, it made me more conscious of other people, their feelings, their thoughts, who they are and just wanting to give people time to actually listen and understand and reflect. (Anna, Mellie Participant, August 2020)

In this context, it can be assumed that such reciprocal praxis consolidated the steps towards mutual trust (Heins and Unrau 2018) (“[We] learnt to build that trust over time” says John),

and in turn fostered the integration of those in refugee-like situations as well as meaningful social interactions where members of society live with each other rather than next to each other. Abdel relates:

The platform [that is Mellie] really opened things up for us, if I had to say one word, I would say acceptance, everyone accepted everyone, everyone was open and when they accepted you, it was not just “you are welcome here” and that's it, no there was a genuine interest in trying to absorb what you are and trying to listen to you rather than just accepting you and that's it, that was the most positive thing about the project. (Abdel, Mellie participant , August 2020)

3.3.3 Practising democracy: representation, participation and the opening of the public sphere

This section will explore how reciprocal praxis and everyday gestures of hospitality at play in the Mellie project allowed for a fairer representation of the IPA group in the wider society by fostering their participation and by opening up the public sphere such as, in this instance, one educational (DCU) and one cultural institution (The Irish Museum of Modern Art).

As previously discussed, studies have shown that being in the process of seeking international protection as well as possibly being placed in temporary accommodation systems hinder participation and contribution of IPAs to the wider society, leaving them dispossessed of a sense of agency (O'Reilly 2018; Day 2020) and, for some, of hurt in their self-esteem as they feel they are a burden to society against their own will (Strang et al.

2018; Wang and Gruenewald 2019). According to Balibar (2009) borders are no longer at the borders, materialised on the ground, rather they are enacted by a set of practices which regulate and govern bodies in and across territories, often denying equal access to existing structures of the host society to those in refugee-like situations. Researchers in the field argue that such bordering practices are exacerbated by the portrayal of migration in the dominant public discourse (Ghorashi and Ponzoni 2014) especially in the media, including social media (De Fina et al. 2020; Formenti and Luraschi 2020; Threadgold and Court 2005). Threadgold and Court state:

The media play a key role in the construction of public perception of refugees in their community, often generating stereotypes which can create artificial barriers between refugees and host populations (Threadgold and Court 2005 p.27)

In a more recent work, Formenti and Luraschi (2020) reaffirm that:

Reciprocal diffidence is nurtured by the lack of interaction and knowledge [...]. The possibility to develop reciprocal trust, meaning, and hope for the future is reduced in the absence of good enough relational spaces. Media also play a role in boosting the scary effects of public discourse (Formenti and Luraschi 2020 p.357)

In this context, the relational space is foregrounded as a fertile place to foster education among members of the community and to deconstruct stereotypes. Integration, they write,

[...] can be re-imagined by drawing attention to real lives, namely to the daily effects of informal embodied learning hidden in the relationship with space, with others, and with the public discourse itself (Formenti and Luraschi 2020 p. 351).

In regard to education, Formenti and Luraschi (2020) further comment on the fundamental transformative role it should play in ensuring that values of coexistence and social justice are transmitted to all, in a reciprocal manner.

The task demands a circular imagination, i.e. shifting attention from the individual to the system, as a complex situation where everybody is pushed to learn, reciprocally. [...] the integration discourse is one-way: newcomers are expected to comply with educational programs shaped for them to meet neoliberal goals and achieve 'full citizenship' in the long run (Fejes, 2019; Guo, 2015). There are apparently no goals of integration for natives, giving for granted that they already are integrated. What can be done to enhance, in the whole system, the kind of transformative learning that can ensure livable ways of coexistence? (Formenti and Luraschi 2020 p.352)

Mellie participants reported that they valued being able to have the space to voice their story, in their own terms, thus hopefully contributing to shifting the way they believe they are perceived among certain members of the society. Theresa explains how, in her opinion, the local population should take part in projects such as the Mellie project:

I would recommend the Irish society to take part in the project because a lot of people have assumptions especially as we come as refugees and it's good for them to realise that we are people, that we are educated that we have dreams and aspirations and people with what we are producing during the project will teach about this outside of the project (Theresa, Mellie participants, August 2020)

It is also Ahmed's view that he, and people in his situation, are unfairly described in the public discourse. He says: "What we hear in the news can be very negative, the way people are speaking about us" (Ahmed, Mellie participant, August 2020). He further comments on how he thinks he was able to contribute to making a change, through his participation in the project, and shift people's perception of what it means to be a person seeking asylum. However, he also acknowledges that he realised he, too, had been biased and had stereotyped 'the other side'.

If I hear a story in the news about asylum seekers and it's very negative [I] think they are all mean, but when I go here and meet with different people and I hear about their views [I] feel more confident. You feel like you can do something with this {inaudible} you feel like you can contribute in a better way (Ahmed, Mellie participant, August 2020)

Castle et al. (2002 p.138) write that the matter of integration should concern itself with a 'way of fair representation'. They understand representation in a dual way, first as *voice*, that is how immigrant and ethnic minority groups have the capacity to speak for themselves in and about the public sphere and secondly as *image*, where minority groups and newcomers are given the space for self-representation of images and meanings attributed to them in the public sphere (Ibid).

A considerable development of the Mellie project was to complement storytelling with visual elements, using a photovoice approach (see methodology Chapter 4). We were given the opportunity to display the work publicly in two different institutions, first, as part of a

community festival (Anam) on our own university campus, and a second time, in the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). Museums and galleries are institutions where society, politics and culture converge (Baur 2017; Boast 2011; Eckersley 2020). The artefacts they display as well as their institutional directions and mission provide insight into the society in which they are developed as they often reveal the political, cultural attitudes and expectations of the people and the places in which they find themselves (Eckersley 2020).

However, as an originally Western concept, museums have also been criticised for being places of persistent colonial legacy where representations and power of knowledge lie primarily with Western society (Clifford 1997; Boast 2011). Eckersley (2020) points to the asymmetry of power in the relationship between museums, both as institutions and as a group of professionals, as a consequence of failing to reach out to the diverse communities who may form their audience. In spite of this, in the past few decades, European museums have attempted to rectify their position of power to become a space of representation (Bennett 2017) while promoting social cohesion as reflected in European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (European Commission 2019). Clifford coined the phrase ‘museums as contact zones’ (1997) to describe them as places which people (and also, objects) coming from antagonistic places may traverse and in which they may encounter. The concept of museums as contact zones has since been used both in museums and in museum studies to promote the idea of change-making in collecting and exhibition policies, to include specific communities in consultation and co-curation (Eckersley 2020).

IMMA's invitation to exhibit the work of the Mellie participants on its walls can be seen as being in line with such a design, yet doing so was also a gesture of hospitality. Bulley (2015 p.188) writes that hospitality invites the outside inside, it is first and foremost spatial. However, moving beyond Derrida, he notes that being hospitable exceeds opening a place that one calls their own, it is *creating* a space and involves an active crossing of physical and symbolic thresholds, thus allowing diverse people and things to come in contact and coexist (Ibid). He further expands on this theme to say that hospitality "brings a particular space into being" (Ibid) where the values of that specific space are mutually agreed upon.

The outside constitutes the inside, but the practice of hospitality ensures that this inside is not constituted as an impregnable fortress but through a permeability that both welcomes and rejects. The work of hospitality then is in both maintaining and disrupting this inside, this delimited space, by allowing the outside in. It is both consolidating and transformative (Selwyn 2000 p.19). Hospitality requires a spatial relation that it also disrupts and upsets, but seeks to manage and contain, thereby constructing a highly particular, contingent and yet always contested space (Bulley 2015 p188)

Furthermore, Bulley adds that hospitality carries a necessary relational and affective dimension (Bulley 2015) because it requires that people, within the space created by hospitality, engage in meaningful relationships which have the potential to be transformative, thus being of a different nature than a charitable act (Imperiale et al. 2021). Bringing the Mellie artefacts into the public sphere for a wider audience to see and interact with may have contributed to giving a different representation of people in refugee-like situations. In fact, whereas most of the audience's feedback was highly positive, the exhibits also received, initially, reserved or surprised comments from some people who

seemed puzzled by the collaborative aspect of the project, which meant that artefacts from both the newcomers and host community were exhibited, and by the project's willingness to document commonality and points of sameness rather than difference thus choosing a non-sensationalist approach. The following incident which happened before the first public exhibition in April 2019 illustrates this point.

One day I went to the launch of the exhibition of the Anam festival and I am quite anxious to say the least. [Somebody from the university administration] came down to have a look at the display before the event tomorrow because the press and the president of the university are coming too. She was really cold and unhappy! She said, she was surprised, that it was nearly 'too pretty', like 'holiday photos', and that she thought it was about 'refugees' and there she saw 'D.' who she knows is a 'lecturer in DCU'. Veronica and I reaffirmed our choices and explained our intentions and values, again. I am not sure she was convinced (Extract from research diary, April 2019)

However the launch went well and the work was generally commended. Yet, this reaction from a DCU colleague made us aware of the fact that it was crucial to carefully contextualise the exhibition with an explanatory text, informing the public of what they were seeing. Our first 'visitor' later stated she had been moved by the event which showed the benefits of continuing to open the dialogue to an even wider audience. In fact, this first exhibition represented for participants a significant moment in their journey as IPAs and settling in their new life in Ireland. Indeed, it was a tangible manifestation of their achievement which they could claim in their own terms. This is reflected in the feedback the participants gave after the first exhibition. The following chart records their choice of

words to describe their feelings following the event, gathered through an end of programme survey questionnaire:

12. What did you feel when you saw your photo on the wall for the exhibition? (You can tick more than one box if you like)

25 responses

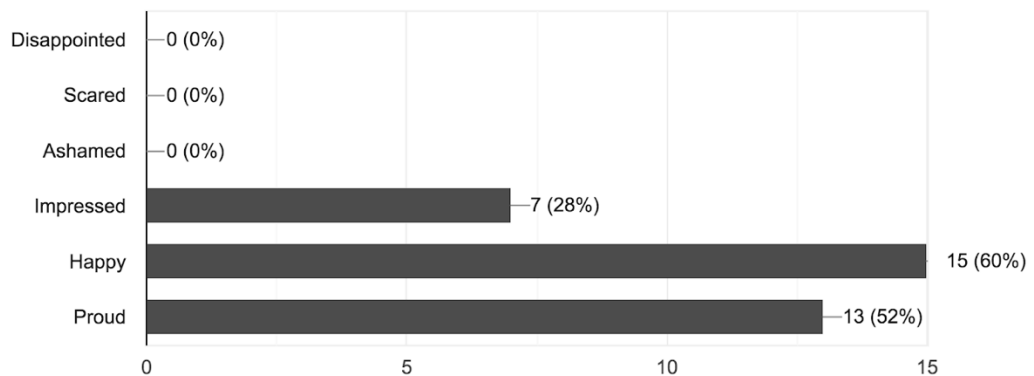


Figure 10: Feedback after exhibition, Mellie 2019

Participants report being proud of their accomplishment and were eager to share it with their family and friends in their centre as well as back home.

Julie : And what did you feel during the exhibition?

C: Oh wow....emotional!

K: It was such a nice experience!

All: Oh yes really.

K: It was new for us and so nice, that's something we would not normally do. We had something to display and people were coming in. It's nice.

S: Very nice!

Julie: Did you feel proud?

K: Yeah!

C: Very proud!

K: I even told people about it. You can see my picture on the video, I told my daughter! And I called my brother in Canada! Everywhere, I send WhatsApp like to everyone!

All (*laughters*)

K: I told everyone, look I am there! And they laughed and told me you are only for half a second, but I said whatever this one second is worth 1 million, I am there for the TV and actually for 3 second!

C: for me, it was something, I was talking and it was very very it was wow, it was a moment to keep. I still have the photograph, I still have the video, I felt wow, this is me, [...] then everyone was sending me messages and comments wow wow well done, well done. So that made me feel wow.

K: And who knows what is going to happen to our picture after 30 years?

(Extract from focus group, July 2019)

In the participants' opinion, their self-esteem was further boosted by the realisation that their contribution was acknowledged outside of the scope of the project itself and their voice could be heard in the public sphere; "My photo was there and people acknowledged it!" reports one participant. Celia expands:

We had something to contribute to. We could contribute to their lives[...]. It was very important that I was bringing something to this country, not just coming, I was

making an input. And I had things to tell, you understand? I actually thought I [had] an impact on them. Also with the photograph, bringing them in and having them exhibited, it made us feel like we brought something (Celia, Mellie participants, July 2019)

However, the data recorded is insufficient to analyse the outcomes of the second exhibition which was held in IMMA the following year as we were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, which was announced three days before the launch of the exhibition. Nonetheless, the exhibition was retained and opened to the public, although almost 18 months later, in July 2021. A ceremony with the, then available, participants was organised but the conditions did not allow for the formal organisation of focus groups after the event. Yet, judging by the public feedback coming from the museum, from the many photographs and reposts on social media from the participants themselves as well as from our WhatsApp conversations, it can be said that the impact of the work had a similar if not greater effect as it reached a larger audience.

However, it is important to state that, regardless of the positive feedback of this work, it remains relatively anecdotal and on a rather small scale. Indeed people in refugee-like situations report discrimination in institutionalised settings and public spaces (Coley et al. 2019). Recent research on migration demonstrates the importance of educating communities to reduce anti-migrant sentiment and fostering social cohesion as public perception of integration may affect the migrant experience (Ibid).

3.4 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Similar to hospitality, integration is also relational, as suggested in the literature (Phillimore et al. 2018; Wilson 2017; Strang et al. 2018). Formenti and Luraschi (2021) state that, more than finding employment or education, integration is about a collective effort which starts with opening spaces of dialogue where people are considered, respected and recognised. By exploring spaces of dialogue and hospitality, this research demonstrates that there are possibilities for creative forms of educational and social settings where conviviality and a shared sense of belonging are present among both the newcomers and the host society, thus helping us to imagine new ways of co-existence and a better practice of democracy.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents final reflections on how the research questions were answered in this thesis. It highlights the impact of the current research on refreshing the notion of integration by drawing on the concept of hospitality as understood by Derrida and presents the outcomes of a collaborative storytelling project between international protection applicants and more settled members of the society. It explores the impact which such collaboration may have on participants' lives on both sides as well as its potential to promote social cohesion. Additionally it reiterates the reciprocity of the nature of the host/guest relationship as framed within the practice of hospitality. Finally, the chapter states the limitations of this current research and gives some directions which future research might take.

2. SUMMARY

In the context of the reception of forcibly displaced persons arriving in Europe, and particularly in Ireland, as developed in Chapter 2, this study drew on the Derridean understanding of the concepts of hospitality and reciprocity to explore the host/guest relationship, which was presented in the third Chapter. Developed as an action research project (see also Chapter 4), the study followed four cycles of the Mellie project which

aimed to support language and cultural exchange between the students and staff of DCU and residents of a DP centre. Using participatory methods, including storytelling and photovoice, as presented in Chapter 4, the Mellie project was rooted in critical pedagogy (see also chapter 3). Findings presented in Chapter 5 indicate that university students and staff and people in situations of forced migration engaged in meaningful conversations with a focus on shared human experience which contributed to the mutual learning of both the sides involved. Both parts of the fifth chapter explored the workings of the physical and symbolic spaces created by the project to demonstrate that through participatory methods and democratic approaches, it is possible to develop mutual understanding and respect thus contributing to enhancing social cohesion.

3. ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This doctoral thesis aims to further the understanding of the concept of reciprocity between newcomers and members of the host society in the process of integration to benefit social cohesion. Using hospitality as its philosophical framework it answered the research question: *How can collaborative storytelling between forcibly displaced people and the host community facilitate hospitality?*

and the sub-questions:

- How can non-formal educational projects support sustainable integration?
- What learnings emerge when members of the host society and forcibly displaced persons participate in a common project?

- How does collaborative storytelling support dialogue between host communities and forcibly displaced persons?
- How can the principle of reciprocity between host societies and forcibly displaced persons contribute to social cohesion?

The complex and uncertain times in which these concluding remarks are being written highlight the relevance of such study. In fact, when the world has its eyes on the tense situation at the eastern borders of Europe, or following the devastating conclusions of the latest IPCC report, I believe that learning how to practise hospitality is of critical importance, as it can be predicted that increased migration flows around the world are yet to come (UNHCR 2022).

When exploring the salience of the study, I am suggesting that collaborative storytelling projects, such as the Mellie project, can have an impact on the lives of those who participate as well as the potential to foster social cohesion as participants practise hospitality and reciprocity to learn from each other, thus bridging sameness and difference. It is interesting to note that looking at the learning process across the project from a holistic standpoint, it resulted in outcomes differing from individual to individual. Yet participants in the study all report 'having learned something'. While some of the outcomes are more relevant to the participants from a refugee like background, and some more to the host community, others were also shared.

Where the participants from a refugee like background are concerned, it can be said that, at a personal level, their participation in the Mellie project contributed toward alleviating some of the upsets triggered by the inherent position of liminality they found themselves in, a common feeling among forcibly displaced people, yet aggravated by the direct provision system (Ní Raghallaigh et al. 2016; O'Reilly 2018; Murphy 2021). By providing participants with a safe space, people were able to share their stories and life experience in a manner which they valued. It resulted in them being able to apprehend time in a more positive way. In fact, they shared stories of their past bringing to the fore happy memories rather than with a focus on traumatic events. Many of them were able to regain agency of their own present as, on the one hand, they reported that it eased the feelings of boredom and routine which people residing in DP are often suffering from (Raghallaigh et al. 2016) and, on the other, they acknowledged being able to participate on their own terms in activities which they chose for themselves. Their participation in the project also allowed them to feel more hopeful and confident about the future as it provided them with a new network composed of more settled members of the community, thus supporting the growth of their social and cultural capital as well as concretely opening doors for them to consider new work or educational opportunities.

For participants already settled in society, in this instance DCU students and staff, they reported that it gave them a better understanding of what it means to seek international protection and being forcibly displaced. It also appeared to challenge notions of their own benevolence as well as the perceived vulnerability of their partners.

Lastly, the learnings which occurred during the project were also shared. There is some evidence that participants learned from one another and collectively explored and challenged notions such as otherness, difference and sameness. There is evidence to suggest that participants on both sides engaged in meaningful intercultural conversations (Todd 2015) which resulted in a reflection about themselves and their values and may have contributed to a shift in their perception of their own position within the world and their relations to others. In fact, participants commonly reported to have discovered something about themselves during the project such as a hidden sense of confidence or skills (i.e. public speaking, creative writing, photography, etc.). In addition, a number of Mellie participants report having started the project with a (often unconscious) bias which encouraged them to see themselves within a certain role (i.e. the helper, the teacher, the learner...etc.) and to envisage their participation in the project as such. The following figure represents the personal shift which occurred for the Mellie participants who after engaging in conversation with the other during the project reconsidered their own functioning and position, from an horizontal representation, where values and knowledge are transmitted from the top down, to a circular one, in which reciprocity is operating and where members are part of one ecosystem.

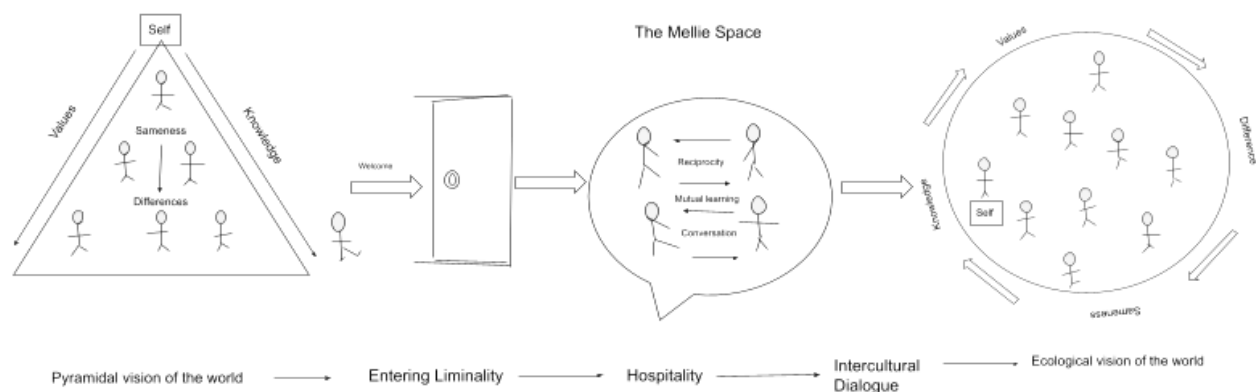


Figure 11: Personal learning process in Mellie

Moreover, exploring the functioning of the Mellie space reveals significant methodological implications. The implementation of both the philosophical (hospitality) and pedagogical (critical pedagogy) was rooted in a wish from the start to consider both the receiving population and the newcomers together as one community for this research and to invite them to work collaboratively toward a shared goal. It also meant that the role of the facilitator/researcher was understood not as the one of a leader in charge of leading people toward a targeted goal but as the one who opens the door and invites people in to practice hospitality. I believe that this, together careful scaffolding of the sessions and participatory methods such as storytelling and photovoice, encouraged as much as possible an egalitarian and horizontal contribution from participants during the Mellie project, which allowed members of the group to feel that they belonged equally to the space created by the project. The following figure draws a diagram of the workings within the Mellie space.

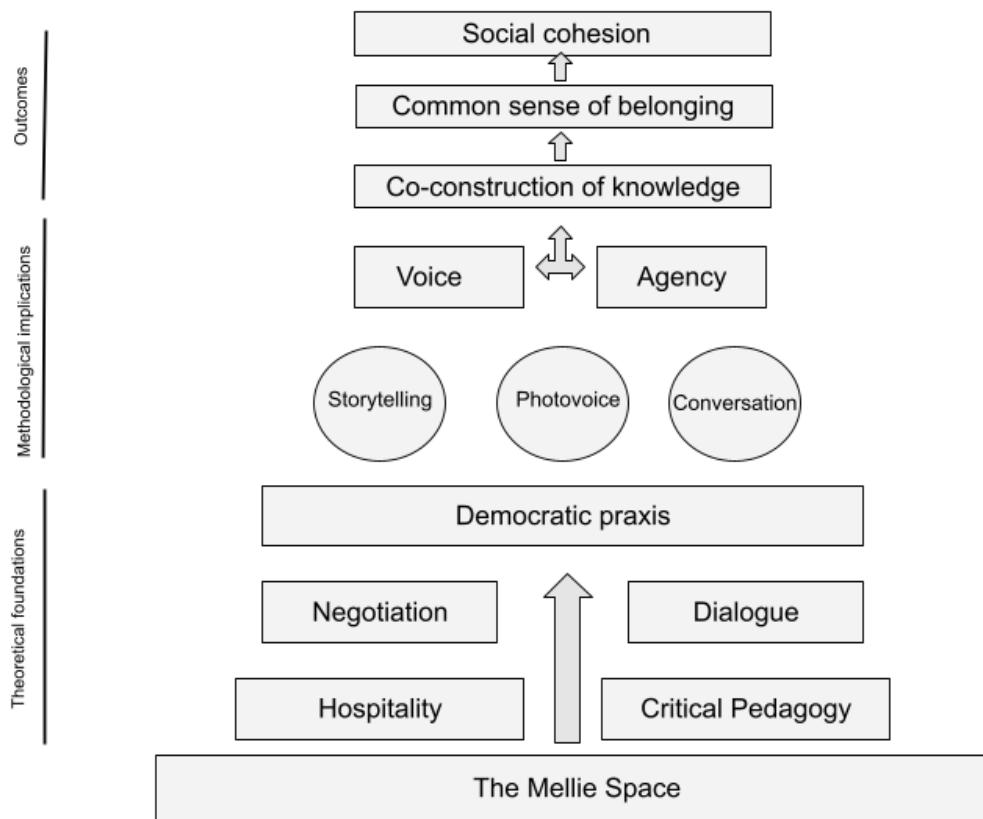


Figure 12: The Mellie Space

Finally, unconditional hospitality, understands Derrida, is impossible, yet, we owe a pledge to tend in that direction. Practicing genuine intercultural dialogue in order to foster social cohesion may seem like wishful thinking or a leap of faith, and yet, when analysing the mutual experience of the Mellie participants there are indications that, with the right methodological tools, it is possible to create a fertile learning space where democratic dialogue can happen and reciprocity practiced to support democracy. In fact, participants, although being a very heterogeneous group, through their conversations, collectively

learned how to manage their expectations and emotions to negotiate the space and find enough of a balance and mutual understanding to live well together, at first instance through this experience and hopefully beyond. Derrida posits that between the absence of hospitality and the impossible unconditional hospitality there can only be the practice of hospitality, guided by an ethical desire to bridge that gap. I believe the Mellie participants instinctively understood this concept when they chose to represent the project with the image of a floating boat (see Chapter 4 and 5). In their view, the Mellie project was the vessel that allowed them to take the unlikely journey towards meeting the Other. I have used their image again as a final conceptualisation of the workings of the Mellie project (Figure 13)

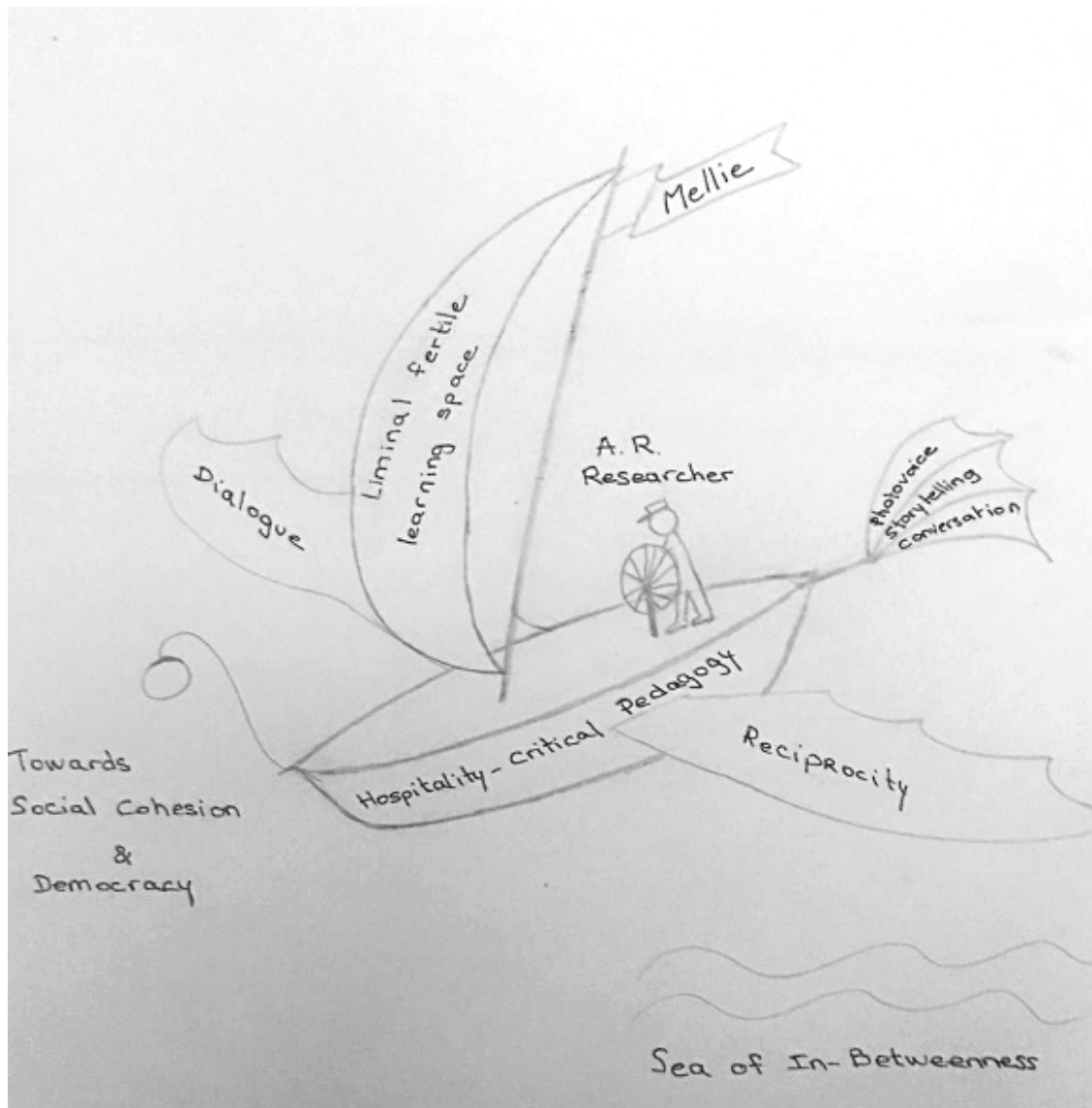


Figure 13: The boat of the impossible

4. CONTRIBUTIONS

With a double focus on the Irish society as a host community on the one hand and on International Protection Applicants (IPAs) on the other, this thesis documents a the period of time when the Irish Government practiced Direct Provision as its controversial approach

to provision of the bare minimum of standards set down by UNHCR for care of IPAs. This work offers a contribution to knowledge on a number of fronts:

- It offers an important archive of the ways in which Ireland has fitted into European narratives of migration and immigration, rather than through the traditional focus on Ireland as a majority sending country.
- It offers a critical appraisal of the practice of DP and also of immigration policies together with education policies more widely, as framed theoretically through concepts of ‘hospitality’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘intercultural dialogue’. By so doing it demonstrates the ways in which Ireland has been distinctive in its approach but also how Ireland fits with, for example the CEFR.
- It adds to the nascent scholarship being produced relating to the Universities of Sanctuary in Ireland and in the UK
- It demonstrates the opportunities for non-extractivist methodologies such as PAR in the context of work with IPAs in Ireland and within HE.
- It interrogates critically the limits of notions such as intercultural dialogue when framed within Derridean limits of hospitality/unconditional hospitality

- It provides clear intercultural qualitative data on the experiences of using creative and intercultural PAR methods in these contexts and the profound benefits, linked to psychosocial wellbeing, that such narrative participatory methods can develop
- It shifts the territory for academic debate relating to hospitality of IPAs into the domains of anthropology, critical pedagogy, intercultural studies and liminality and away from the dominant discursive framings in sociology and intercultural politics, law and geography.
- It demonstrates the importance of the informal educational spaces for those for whom much trust in formal structures in sending and arrival contexts has been shredded by adverse experiences.

5. LIMITATIONS

Although it achieved its overarching aims, sometimes going beyond my initial expectations, this doctoral study also comprises a certain number of limitations. Whereas it was carefully planned, it sometimes took directions which I did not completely anticipate. For instance, I first envisaged that this research would be more of a contribution to the field of applied linguistics, in part because of my previous professional experience as a language teacher, and in part because of my own biased understanding of the process of integration which I initially limited to the acquisition of language and culture of the host society, somewhat overlooking the ‘inter’ in intercultural.

The very nature of this project, which involved a number of participants from a diverse set of backgrounds as well as its non-formal educational design meant that it could be quite 'messy' at times. While I fully embraced this endearing chaos and truly believe it made the project all the more valuable, I acknowledge that it may appear to be less structured than other work. The methodology chosen for this project, PAR, also implied a number of limitations. In fact, when I called for research informants within the Mellie participants, I did so democratically and circulated the invitation among all participants who responded on a voluntary basis. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that those who responded eagerly were among the most satisfied participants which means that their voices are more represented. It may also be the case for those with a lesser proficiency in English who felt less confident in expressing their opinion and might not have been recorded to the same level than for those who were native or advanced speakers. As a result, it is difficult to analyse their disengagement which may have led them to drop out of the programme or feeling less satisfied with it.

I also accept that, as being the sole researcher, as well as the programme coordinator and facilitator of the project at the core of this study, my total involvement has certainly influenced the outcomes of the research. In fact, inevitably developing relationships with the participants was an asset, as they would trust me and confide in me personal anecdotes and feelings thus giving an interesting depth to the research but I am also aware that it might have influenced their reactions and answers during the focus groups.

Furthermore, when considering the impact of the study it has to be noted that it was limited in terms of scale. While I have no doubts it was a rich learning experience for many involved, contributing to a shift in perception of certain pre-conceived notions among participants, such as those of benevolence and vulnerability, sameness and differences, I am also conscious of the fact that both within the DCU community and IPA participants, those who volunteered to participate were mostly people who already had a flair for intercultural matters and genuine curiosity for the Other. It would be useful to replicate this pedagogical practice in different contexts, including with participants less motivated to learn from and about the Other.

It was also my intention to document further the outcomes of the second exhibition held in IMMA, originally planned to launch in early April 2020. However the sudden and unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, which subsequently led to a succession of national lockdowns, meant that the event had to be postponed for 18 months and that it was then impossible to properly gather data due to persistent restrictions still in place in July 2021. I regret not being able to measure the full impact of the exhibition as it could have furthered my understanding of the concept of representation and participation and opening of the Public Space.

Finally, like many other research projects, this research suffered resource constraints. Although running the project does not require a vast budget, it did require that I secure

small sources of funding on an annual basis which would mainly go towards transport, hospitality and, in the case of the latter two iterations of the project, material towards exhibitions. Having to rely on the success of funding applications generates a certain amount of stress and jeopardises the sustainability of the project unless a more secure and sustainable resource system is put in place.

6. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research about the Mellie project is my own understanding of a programme which I believe so rich that many more directions could be taken. In fact, the outcomes of both the project and the research may have been completely different if someone else had undertaken it. This supports the idea that such a model (itself inspired by others) could be used in various different settings and adapted to cater to other needs thus extending knowledge in other areas which have not been investigated for this particular project. Where the Mellie project is concerned, it would be interesting to conduct follow-up research and to contact and interview participants a few years after their participation in the Mellie project to measure what, if any, longer term impacts prevail. I would be particularly interested in exploring further possibilities looking at, for example, the building of social capital. While I have some indications of what happened to some of the participants I would like to document formally the aftermaths of the project. Informally, I do enjoy hearing from them. Celia currently lives in Limerick and rents her own house. Kharum now works in the statistics office in Dublin. Wendy welcomed her third child and she and her family received

their leave to remain in the country. Rafael is now part of a large engineering company. Theresa joined another similar program in her hometown. I often chat with R. over a cup of coffee, he now belongs to the DCU community. F. recently sent me a text

Hey Julie, it was lovely seeing you yesterday [...] I was actually thinking of you when I got home and would like to thank you a lot for the impact you had in my life with this course. I don't think I would want to come study in DCU if it wasn't for the Mellie Course. Thanks a lot to you and to Veronica. May God bless you all (Instagram message 23/03/2022)

Anna's beautiful face was painted on the gigantic water tank of an Irish midland town as part of an art initiative to celebrate diversity and acknowledge her work in the community as the voice for other international protection applicants. She, too, now has her papers. They owe their success to themselves, but it makes me feel proud when they say they value their participation in Mellie.

As for me, this PhD project has been a journey which I have enjoyed every day. It has sustained my own learning and I developed many skills, as a researcher, a project manager, and an educator in the process. More importantly, I believe I grew as a human being. I feel incredibly lucky, and more emotional than I am ready to admit, to have crossed the path of so many Others, who so generously shared with me their lives and their stories. You have opened up my world, I am unconditionally grateful.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (2019A)

Focus group guiding questions and tasks| July 2019 | Participants residing in Direct Provision

1. Introduction

I'm looking to capture your experience in participating in the Mellie project. I am particularly interested in exploring what you gained as a participant.

2. Ice Breaker (20mins)

Choose 3 dixit cards (without thinking too much about it) which make you think about the Mellie project.

- With your partners, explain why you chose them and how it relates to the project (15 mins)

Debrief (5 mins)

3. Questions (40 mins)

On your initial thoughts:

- What was in your mind when you signed up to the Mellie project in the first place? What did you think you were going to do during the project?
- What were your hopes, fears and expectations??

On your first day(s) on the program:

- How did you feel when you first entered the project room in DCU?
- How did you feel in the group? (too many people, comfortable, confused, intimidated, happy ..?)

- What did you think of this room? Did it make you feel welcome? Were you comfortable? Can you explain why?

On the project itself:

- During the project, what was your favourite activity?
- What was your least favourite?
- We talked about the themes 'The self' and 'The land': do you think they were relevant? What other themes would you have liked to have discussed?

On the relational/social aspect of the project:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your partner? Was it easy to talk to them? Could you relax in their company? Did you feel there were any subjects you could not talk about?
- Did you have any difficulties understanding them or to make yourself understood?
- Did you talk with other people in the group apart from your partner?

General conclusion about the project:

- Since you arrived in Ireland, have you had the opportunity to take part in other social or education project (s)?
- How would you compare the Mellie project to them?
- Would you say that the Mellie project was useful to you? If yes in which way?
- Did you notice any problems with the project or things that you would have done differently?

Personal conclusion about the project:

- What did you learn during the project? (Language, culture, digital technology, photography, etc. about others, about yourself...?)
- Would you say that you have made a 'friend' on the project?
- Would you recommend the programme to someone else? What would you tell them?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (2009B)

Focus group | September 2019 | DCU Participants

1. Introduction

I'm looking to capture your experience in participating in the Mellie project. I am particularly interested in exploring what you gained as a participant.

2. Ice Breaker (20mins)

Choose 3 Dixit cards (without thinking too much about it) which make you think about the Mellie project.

- With your partners, explain why you chose them and how it relates to the project (15 mins)

Debrief (5 mins)

1. Questions (40 mins)

On your initial thoughts:

- What was in your mind when you signed up to the Mellie project in the first place?
- What were your hopes, fears and expectations?

On your first day(s) on the program:

- How did you feel in the group? (too many people, comfortable, confused, intimidated, happy ..?)
- What did you think of this room? Did it make you feel welcome? Were you comfortable? Can you explain why?

On the project itself:

- During the project, what was your favourite activity?
- What was your least favourite?
- We talked about the themes 'The self' and 'The land': do you think they were relevant? What other themes would you have liked to have discussed?

On the relational/social aspect of the project:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your partner? Was it easy to talk to them? Could you relax in their company? Did you feel there were any subjects you could not talk about?
- Did you have any difficulties understanding them or to make yourself understood?
- Did you talk with other people in the group apart from your partner?

General conclusion about the project:

- Would you say that the Mellie project was useful? To you? To others? If yes in which way? If no, why?

Personal conclusion about the project:

- What did you learn during the project? (About others, about yourself...?)
- Would you say that you have made a 'friend' or a connection on the project?
- Would you recommend the programme to someone else? What would you tell them?

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (2020A)

Focus group | August 2020 | Participants: IPAs and refugees

1. Introduction

I'm looking to capture your experience in participating in the Mellie project. I am particularly interested in exploring what you gained as a participant.

2. Ice Breaker (20mins)

Choose 3 dixit cards (without thinking too much about it) which make you think about the Mellie project.

- With your partners, explain why you chose them and how it relates to the project (15 mins)

Debrief (5 mins)

3. Questions (40 mins)

On your initial thoughts:

- What was on your mind when you signed up to the Mellie project in the first place? What did you think you were going to do during the project?
- What were your hopes, fears and expectations??

On your first day(s) on the program:

- How did you feel when you first entered the project room in DCU?
- How did you feel in the group? (too many people, comfortable, confused, intimidated, happy ..?) Did this feeling change over time?
- What did you think of the room? Did it make you feel welcome? Were you comfortable? Can you explain why?

On the project itself:

- During the project, what was your favourite activity?
- What was your least favourite?
- We talked about the themes 'hospitality 'hope' 'change' and 'education': do you think they were relevant? What other themes would you have liked to have discussed?

On the relational/social aspect of the project:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your partner(s)? Was it easy to talk to them? Could you relax in their company? Did you feel there were any subjects you could not talk about? Did this relationship change over time?
- Did you have any difficulties understanding them or to make yourself understood?
- Did you talk with other people in the group apart from your partner(s)?
- We worked on the theme of hospitality: what have you learned about it? Give me 3 words you would associate with the notion.
- Do you think that a project like the Mellie project is a space where hospitality can/ has happened?

General conclusion about the project:

- Since you arrived in Ireland, have you had the opportunity to take part in other social or education project (s)?
- How would you compare the Mellie project to them?
- Would you say that the Mellie project was useful to you? If yes in which way?
- Did you notice any problems with the project or things that you would have done differently?
- What did you think of the move online (due to the pandemic)? Can you tell me how it has (if at all) modified your participation and your relationship with your partner(s)?

Personal conclusion about the project:

- What did you learn during the project? (Language, culture, digital technology, photography, etc. about others, about yourself...did it affect your ability to communicate in any way? Did it affect your ability to act in any way?
- Would you say that you have made a 'friend' on the project?
- Would you recommend the programme to someone else? What would you tell them?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (2020B)

Focus group | August 2020 | Participants from the DCU community

1. Introduction

I'm looking to capture your experience in participating in the Mellie project. I am particularly interested in exploring what you gained as a participant.

2. Ice Breaker (20mins)

Choose 3 dixit cards (without thinking too much about it) which make you think about the Mellie project.

- With your partners, explain why you chose them and how it relates to the project (15 mins)

Debrief (5 mins)

3. Questions (40 mins)

On your initial thoughts:

- What was in your mind when you signed up to the Mellie project in the first place? What did you think you were going to do during the project?
- What were your hopes, fears and expectations??

On your first day(s) on the program:

- How did you feel when you first entered the project room in DCU?
- How did you feel in the group? (too many people, comfortable, confused, intimidated, happy ..?) Has this feeling changed overtime?
- What did you think of this room? Did it make you feel welcome? Were you comfortable? Can you explain why?

On the project itself:

- During the project, what was your favourite activity?
- What was your least favourite?
- We talked about the themes 'hospitality 'hope' 'change' and 'education': do you think they were relevant? What other themes would you have liked to have discussed?

On the relational/social aspect of the project:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your partner(s)? Was it easy to talk to them? Could you relax in their company? Did you feel there were any subjects you could not talk about? Has this relationship changed over time?
- Did you have any difficulties understanding them or to make yourself understood?
- Did you talk with other people in the group apart from your partner(s)?
- We work on the theme of hospitality, what have you learned about it? Give me 3 words you would associate with the notion.
- Do you think that a project like the Mellie project is a space where hospitality can/ has happened?

General conclusion about the project:

- Have you had the opportunity to take part in other social or education project (s)?
- How would you compare the Mellie project to them?
- Would you say that the Mellie project was useful to you? If yes in which way?
- Did you notice any problems with the project or things that you would have done differently?
- What did you think of the move online (due to the pandemic)? Can you tell me how it has (if at all) modified your participation and you relationship with your partner(s)?

Personal conclusion about the project:

- What did you learn during the project? (Language, culture, digital technology, photography, etc. about others, about yourself...?)
- Would you say that you have made a 'friend' on the project?
- Would you recommend the programme to someone else? What would you tell them?

APPENDIX E: PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

MELLIE Project Plain Language Statement

I. Introduction to the MELLIE Project

This research focuses on the Mellie Project (*Migrant English Language and Intercultural Education*). The Mellie project is a collaborative storytelling project which pairs up residents of Direct Provision centres and DCU students and staff, promoting equality, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion as part of the DCU University of Sanctuary Programme. It is envisaged that through shared contact, the DP residents will improve their English, gain a better understanding of Irish culture, and potentially make new friends. For DCU volunteers, this is an opportunity to get to know individuals who have come to Ireland seeking sanctuary on a first-hand basis and thus learn about their lives and experiences in Direct Provision, as well as to develop intercultural knowledge and skills.

I am conducting this research as part of my Doctoral Study and I hope this will contribute towards a better understanding of some of the issues concerning migrants' lives and that the findings will assist with migrant policy and integration strategies.

Principal Investigator: Julie Daniel, PhD candidate.

Supervisors: Dr Veronica Crosbie and Dr Agnès Maillot.

School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin 9.

II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

If you participate in this research, you will be invited to take part in a focus group or/and an interview, which will last approximately one hour. This interview will be conducted online using Zoom and recorded. I will later transcribe the interview and you can read over the contents when it is typed up. The interview will take place in a location of your choosing, wherever you would feel most comfortable.

III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)

I do not anticipate that there will be any major risks by being involved; however, if you feel some aspect of the discussion too stressful, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point. You may also avail of counselling should the need arise.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

Other research has found that this type of interview allows the participants to reflect in a positive way about their experience, life, hopes and aspirations. It is also hoped that the stories you and the other informants tell will help gain better knowledge of the lives and challenges of those involved in the process of integration.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

All attempts will be made to ensure confidentiality of your identity, including giving you a different name (pseudonym) when referring to you. All data will be stored safely in DCU and electronic materials will be password protected, and will not be shown to others unless legally obliged to do so by a court of law. If the interview were to trigger danger of harm to yourself or to others, there would, in this case, also be an obligation on my part to inform a counsellor of potential risk.

VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

All data, both electronic and hard copy, will be destroyed in a secure manner after 5 years.

VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any point if you wish.

VIII. Any other relevant information

Every effort will be made to remove any identifying features in that case, e.g. place of origin, DP centre, etc. You will be kept up to date with the project as it progresses and will be invited to give feedback at various points before dissemination, which you are free to do if you like.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

APPENDIX F : INFORMED CONSENT FORM

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title

Narratives of Hospitality: Promoting Multiliteracies and Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees into Irish Society Through Collaborative Storytelling

Principal investigator: Julie Daniel, Phd candidate, School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University

Supervisors: Dr Veronica Crosbie, School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University

Dr Agnès Maillot, School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research

This research focuses on the Mellie Project (Migrant English Language and Intercultural Education), The Mellie project is a collaborative storytelling project which pairs up residents of Direct Provision centres and DCU students and staff, promoting equality, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion as part of the DCU University of Sanctuary Programme. It is envisaged that through shared contact, the DP residents will improve their English, gain a better understanding of Irish culture, and potentially make new friends. For DCU volunteers, this is an opportunity to get to know individuals who have come to Ireland seeking sanctuary on a first-hand basis and thus learn about their lives and experiences in Direct Provision, as well as to develop intercultural knowledge and skills. I am conducting this research as part of my Doctoral Study and I hope this will contribute towards a better understanding of some of the issues concerning migrants' lives and that the findings will assist with migrant policy and integration strategies.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) Yes/No

I understand the information provided Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped Yes/No

IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point.

My participation in the research is voluntary and I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point without penalty.

I can also skip a topic I am not willing to discuss or terminate the interview at any point.

My participation in the research is confidential and all data will be stored securely on password-protected devices.

My personal data will be stored separately from interview transcripts to avoid identification of interview participants.

Any information in the interviews which could lead to identification of the research participants will not be published.

I understand there are legal limits to confidentiality and the researcher will have to disclose information in certain situations when obliged by law.

I have read and understood the information in this form.

My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form.

Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

VII. Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

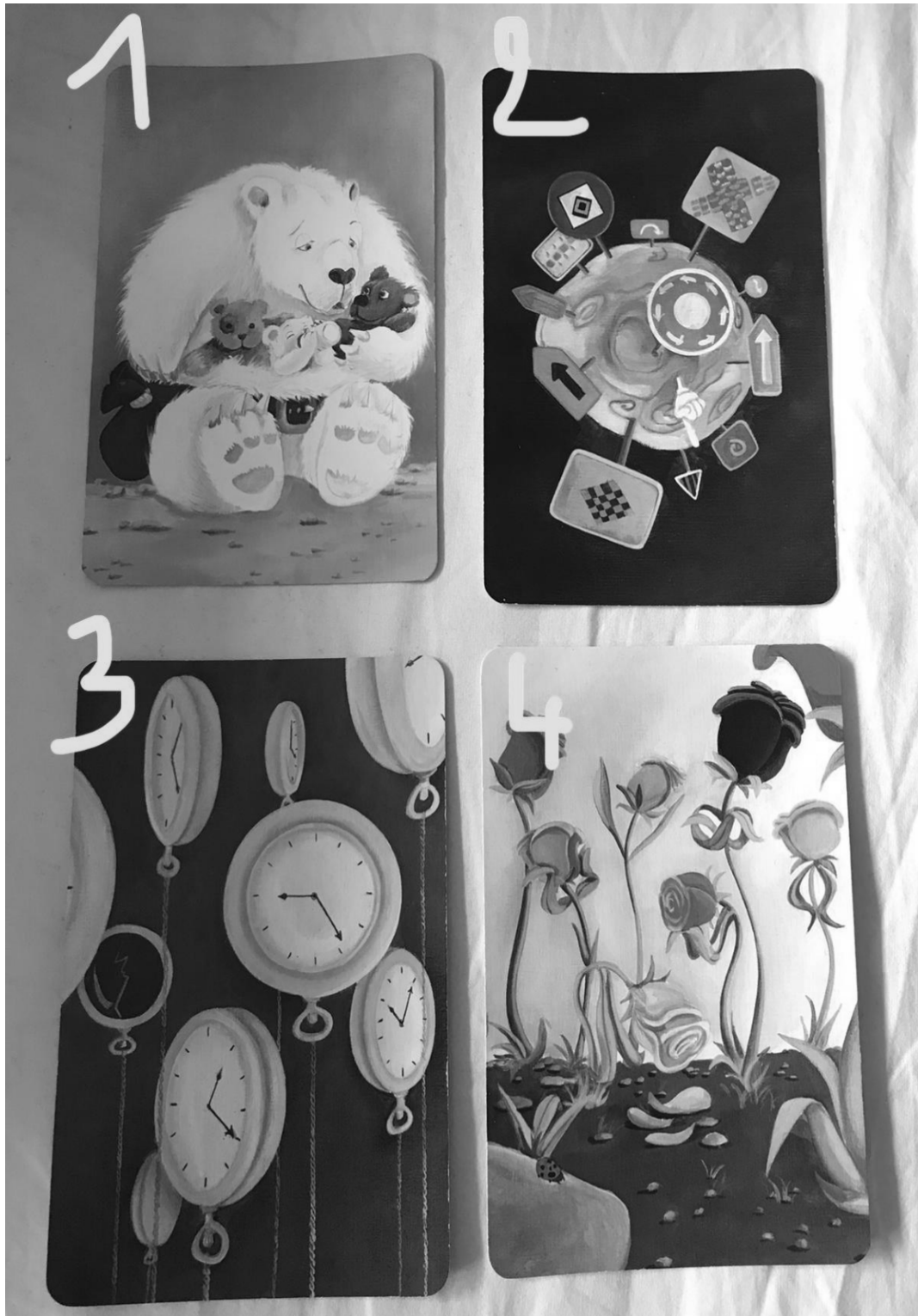
Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Witness:

Date:

APPENDIX G: VISUAL PROMPT SAMPLES



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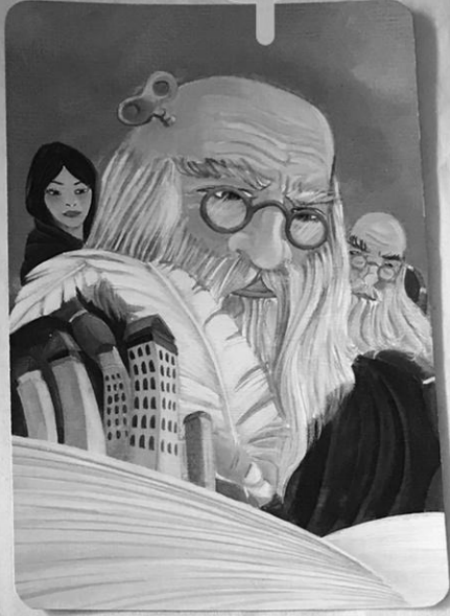
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APPENDIX H: GUIDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE MELLIE SESSIONS (SAMPLE)

The Mellie Project
Our stories of Hospitality

1) The Welcoming

- a) In how many languages can you say 'welcome'?
- b) If you were to associate the word 'welcome' with 5 other terms, what would they be?

-
-
-
-

2) Our home(s) and our places

- a) Where do you call 'home'?
- b) Do you think one can have more than one home? Is that your case? If yes, how many 'homes' do you have and can you tell me where they are?
- c) If you have to tell me about 3 objects/things that represent 'home' for you, what would they be?
- d) Can you give me 3 concepts that you would associate with the word 'home'?

- e) For you, what is essential to make a 'home a 'home'?
- f) When you are not home, do you miss it? What do you miss most? What do you least miss?
- g) Can you tell me about a place you like?
 - Can you describe it to me?
 - What is special about this place?
 - Can you explain to me why you feel comfortable there?

3) Out and about

- a) In your culture what do people generally do to socialise?
 - Where does it take place (in people's home? Outside?)
 - When does it happen (day time, evening, weekend...)?
 - How do you socialise (e.g. what do you generally do)?
- b) And what about yourself? Do you feel that you tend to do things the same or differently?
 - Who do you like spending your time with?
 - What do you like doing together?
 - What do you enjoy the most about the time spent together?

In general, would you say that you are the one who initiates the contact with others/ who invite people to do things with you or would you say that you tend to wait to be invited first?

4) On Hosts and Guests and vice versa

- a) How often are you invited to other people's house?
 - What do you expect people to do when you are at their house to make you feel comfortable? What would you say makes a 'good' host? Can you give me examples?

- What would you say make a 'bad' host?
- What should you do to be a 'good' guest?
- Do you think there are things that people should never do when invited to someone else's house? Can you give examples of what you would consider rude?
- b) Can you tell me about a particular/ special time you were invited to someone's house?
 - Where was it?
 - What happened?
 - Why did you choose this particular story?
- c) How often do you invite people to your house?
 - Do you consider yourself a good host?
 - Let's imagine you would invite somebody to your place, who would it be (it can be an imaginary character/someone you admire/someone you know)?
 - How would you spend your time together? Would you serve them food? Drinks? Play games? Would you cook?
 - If yes, what would you cook or what type of food would you serve them?

Do you think one can be a good 'host' even outside of their own house? When and where do you think hospitality can happen? (a gesture? An act of kindness??)

- Have you ever been the recipient of such hospitality?
- Have you witnessed it happening for someone else?

5) Our stories of hospitality

Can you tell me about a time you felt particularly welcome?

- A special place? A special person? Why are they special?

Can you tell me about a time you felt particularly not welcomed?

What do you think about the English idioms ‘ make yourself at home’? What do you think it means?

Is there a similar expression in another language you may know?

“Our favourites”

1. The things we do, the things we see

Think of your map and previous conversations, picture yourself walking along and pick up 3 objects (i.e.things that are significant to you) describe them to me and tell me why they are standing out?

Tell me about 3 activities you like to do and why; how does it make you feel? How often do you do them?

Tell me about something unusual you did recently? Why and how was it different?

Growing up, what was your favourite thing to do? Why? If it is relevant, with whom did you do it?

What do you do when you feel overwhelmed?

Tell me about a landscape you enjoy looking at. Describe it to me. What’s your favourite thing about this view? How does it make you feel?

What’s your favourite type of sky? How do you think Irish skies look different from other places?

What’s your favourite weather? Season? Why?

2. It's our material world

Do you have a favourite object? Can you describe it to me? What do you like about it?

When you think of your childhood, what object comes to mind first? Tell me more about that.

Social fabric - Did you visit that exhibition in the museum? What did you think of it?

Are clothes important to you? Do you think it represents who you are ? Your culture?

What is your favourite type of cloth to feel comfortable at home?

What feels cosy to you? As a place, a fabric, an atmosphere?

Can you sew/stitch/knit?

Are you a manual person?

3. Our social fabric

How do you greet people in your culture?

- Is it context dependent? How so?
- Has the recent Covid-19 crisis changed anything in that regard?

If you were magically granted with an enhanced sense (smell, touch, sight, taste, hearing) which one would you choose? Why?

Tell me about somebody that inspires you? What is she/he like?

Who is a good role model for you and why?

Have you met anybody recently that you think is interesting? Can you explain why?

Do you have a favourite character? From mythology, legend, a book/ story, film etc.? Can you describe it and tell me why you like it?

Next week is international women's day (8th of March)

Tell me about a woman/girl you know that inspires you. Why? How? Describe.

Do you think it's important to have an International Women's day?

What does gender equality mean to you?

What do you think is the biggest issue faced by women in society today? What are the issues that still need greater awareness in your opinion?

How would you say the situation of women throughout the world has evolved over the years?

How do you feel about how women are represented in the media, film and pop culture?

What do you think of #metoo?

Should feminism only be women's fight? Should men be involved?

What advice would you give to a little girl for the future?

What message would you like to leave for women on International Women's Day?

What message would you like to leave for men on International Women's Day?

APPENDIX I: PHOTOVOICE PANELS (SAMPLES)

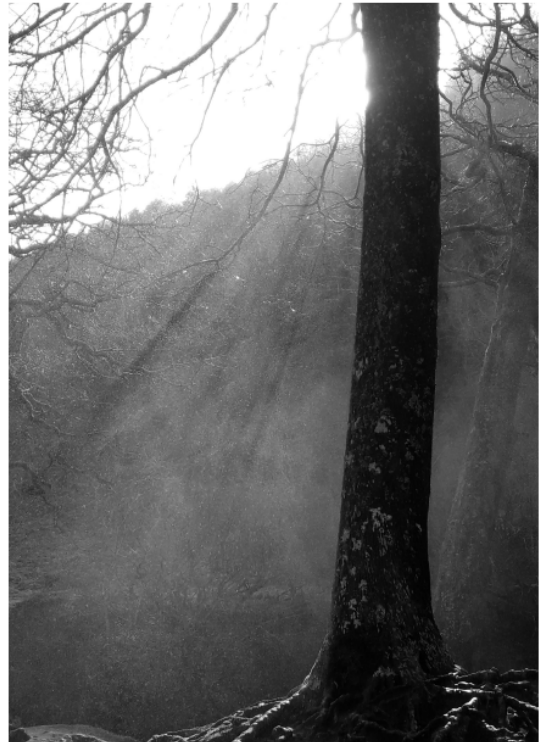
Winter Hope

Rafea does not have big projects or plans and that is fine with him. He will wait and see what comes his way. For now, he enjoys the smell of the soil after rain in winter or the feeling of water spray on his face in the soft rain of spring. "Life is short", he says. "You have to be hopeful, there is no other way." He finds hope in small things. If hope had a colour Rafea thinks it would be 'white', the universal colour of peace. For him, hope is a feeling inside, not something tangible that happens or might happen.

That is why he chose the photo of the tree with the white light behind it. The photo is almost black and white and he liked the contrast between the dark and the white and the feeling it gave him. He likes the faint colour of dark green moss on the bark of the second tree in the background of the photo. Despite the moss, the roots keep the tree upright, they do not allow it to fall down.

When he thinks about the past, he remembers that he has survived. "Everything changes, we just have to accept it. Everything that happened has made me who I am now".

Collaborators:
Text by **Fiona Gallagher**
Photo by **Rafea Marouf**



Spring Flowers

"Spring means that life begins again with many coloured flowers, energy and movement, and being outside." This is what Fiona said when I asked her why she chose primroses for her photo about hope.

Fiona lost her younger brother who was diagnosed with cancer six years ago. It was a big shock that he wouldn't live for many more years, so he was depressed and couldn't enjoy his life.

One day in the spring, Fiona and her brother were walking in a park, surrounded by primroses, and she asked him if the flowers made him feel that the world was against him. After three weeks he made the decision that he wouldn't go back to feeling black again. He was going to embrace life from now on. And he really enjoyed it for two and a half years.

If hope had a colour, Fiona would like it to be pale yellow, exactly like the colour of primrose petals, which are struggling with weeds to rise up towards the light in Fiona's photo.

Collaborators:
Text by **Rafea Marouf**
Photo by **Fiona Gallagher**



An In-between Home

Thembe took this photo of the vibrant green grass that surrounds the patio at Baleskin Reception Centre.

She sees reception centres like this as welcoming places which host vulnerable people fleeing a myriad of circumstances and she thinks of hospitality as a feeling of warmth brought on by helping others.

While she is not yet where she wants to be, she feels welcomed in this temporary home.

Collaborators:
Text by **Briana Sicaud**
Photo by **Thembe Mallsa**



To Hospitality, to Herself

The person in the picture is called Aliza. She is from Lahore, Pakistan. Aliza's story about hospitality almost goes hand-in-hand with her experience as a transgendered person.

Born biologically male, Aliza always feels that she is a female inside. As far as she can remember, she liked to play with dolls when she was a child. She also liked to put on her mom's dresses and makeup when her mom was not at home. However, she felt she had to hide almost everything she enjoyed doing. In Pakistan, transgendered people, among other sexual minorities, live very difficult lives as they are situated in a society that is quite hostile to them.

Aliza's story has changed since she came to Dublin, to her immense relief. She understands Ireland is a much more friendly place for transgender people. She even found welcoming communities in various organizations and groups, such as Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI), that support transgender rights, where she feels very much at home. The hospitality she feels here in Ireland from society, particularly from her own communities, makes her feel the unprecedented freedom of being able to be and express herself.

Things are getting even better for Aliza. She now has obtained medical support from a local hospital to start her transgender process. For Aliza, the 'hospitalization' she receives now is like a dream coming true for her.

Collaborators:
Text by Boyi Huang
Photo by Hammad (Aliza) Husan

