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Keywords: asylum seekers and refugees, ethics in research, change, emancipation, EU research project.

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Abstract

In this proposal, we will reflect on some ethical implication of research involved in the co-construction of pilot experiences to support vulnerable persons – in particular asylum seekers and refugees – in their emancipating inclusion in the new countries of arrival. As researchers we have been members of research teams and partners in different EU projects; here we propose to draw on the experience of two European projects, which invested in building pilot experiences to support the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees at several levels. Both the two projects are still ongoing, and in their final temporal phase.

When being part of a projecting process as researchers we deal with our ethical positioning: when constructing the proposal, when interacting with the different target groups, when giving back what has been experienced and analysed, when facing limits and constrains of potential successful pilots' experiences. For this reason, in the design of multidisciplinary European research, a need to reflect upon and problematize several significant variables arises, and it involves both the resources, times, and vulnerabilities/criticalities of research, as well as the resources, times, and vulnerabilities/criticalities of the target subjects involved. Indeed, although these two planes should ideally align in terms of intentions and ethical considerations, sometimes they

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conflict. For instance, concerning the aspect of temporality, it is recognized that time represents a key issue in the experience of refugees. Simultaneously, it is acknowledged that time is a crucial factor for the success of the objectives that constitute the research project's framework. Despite this, the timing of research projects is not always a guarantee for the formation of a new – and better – conception of the temporality of projects aimed at this target group.

That being stated, we question how the research timeline is integrated with the migrants' projects' temporality and what ethical implications and questions arise from the convergence of these dimensions. Alongside the temporality notion, we also aim to reflect on how to foster the effective promotion of emancipatory change of migrants when research deals with the capitalization of project results. Overall, this contribution aims at investigating the deep interplay between the ethical principles of transformation, the social realities of refugees and migrants, and the actively involved subjectivities within the projects.

In questa proposta, rifletteremo su alcune implicazioni etiche della ricerca coinvolta nella co-costruzione di esperienze pilota per sostenere le persone vulnerabili – in particolare richiedenti asilo e rifugiati – nella loro inclusione ed emancipazione nei nuovi Paesi di arrivo.

Avendo collaborato in gruppi di ricerca partner di diversi progetti europei, qui proponiamo di attingere all'esperienza di due progetti europei che hanno investito nella costruzione di esperienze pilota per sostenere l'inclusione di richiedenti asilo e rifugiati a diversi livelli. Entrambi i progetti sono ancora in corso e nella loro fase finale.

Quando siamo parte di un processo progettuale in qualità di ricercatrici, si impone il confronto con il nostro posizionamento etico: nella costruzione della proposta, nell'interazione con i diversi gruppi target, nella restituzione di quanto sperimentato e analizzato, nell'affrontare i limiti e i vincoli delle esperienze dei potenziali piloti di successo. Per questo motivo, nella progettazione di una ricerca europea multidisciplinare, emerge la necessità di riflettere e problematizzare diverse variabili significative, che a loro volta coinvolgono sia le risorse, i tempi e le vulnerabilità/criticità della ricerca, sia le risorse, i tempi e le vulnerabilità/criticità dei soggetti target coinvolti. Infatti, sebbene questi due piani dovrebbero idealmente allinearsi in termini di intenzioni e considerazioni etiche, a volte entrano in conflitto.

In particolare, rifletteremo su come da un lato il concetto di tempo rap-

presenti una questione chiave nell'esperienza dei rifugiati e, al tempo stesso, esso sia un fattore cruciale per il successo degli obiettivi che costituiscono il quadro del progetto di ricerca. Nonostante ciò, il tempo dei progetti di ricerca non è sempre una garanzia per la formazione di una nuova – e migliore – concezione di tempo dei progetti rivolti a questo gruppo target. Ciò premesso, ci chiediamo come la temporalità della ricerca si integri con la temporalità dei progetti dei migranti e quali siano le implicazioni e le questioni etiche che derivano dalla convergenza di queste dimensioni. Accanto alla nozione di temporalità, ci proponiamo anche di riflettere su come promuovere efficacemente il cambiamento emancipatorio dei migranti quando la ricerca si occupa della capitalizzazione dei risultati dei progetti. Nel complesso, questo contributo mira a indagare la profonda interazione tra i principi etici della trasformazione, le realtà sociali di rifugiati e migranti e le soggettività attivamente coinvolte nei progetti.

Parole chiave: richiedenti asilo e rifugiati, etica della ricerca, cambiamento, emancipazione, progetto di ricerca dell'UE.

Introduction

In this article we propose to reflect in a theoretical way on the ethical implications of research when it is designed at supporting vulnerable people, such as asylum seekers and refugees. Specifically, we focus on the experience gathered by researchers when involved in European projects dealing with vulnerabilities; to do so, we consider EU projects – a Horizon 2020 and an AMIF – whose pilots are both oriented towards the emancipatory inclusion of migrants in new arrival countries.

When we are part of a design process a need to reflect upon and problematize several significant variables arises, and it involves resources, times, and vulnerabilities/criticalities of research, as well as resources, times, and vulnerabilities/criticalities of the target subjects involved. Indeed, although these two planes should ideally align in terms of intentions and ethical considerations, sometimes they may conflict.

Recent studies (Clark-Kazak, 2017, 2019, 2021; Deps *et al.*, 2022) have highlighted that research – especially when dealing with the multiple dimensions of forced migratory experience – poses crucial ethical challenges for academics and researchers. These challenges

arise from various factors, including the precarious legal status of migrants (Bailey, Williams, 2018; Clark-Kazak, 2021), the temporal nature of the issue (Pinelli, 2014; Clark-Kazak, 2021), power imbalances between researchers and their numerous interlocutors (Lammers, 2007; Clark-Kazak, 2021), as well as the active involvement of diverse civil society groups in conducting emancipatory research related to this phenomenon (Zapata-Barrero, 2018). These challenges prompt critical reflections on the researcher's role in addressing these issues, emphasizing the need to recognize and incorporate different approaches to knowledge acquisition and research methods, as well as interpersonal interactions.

That being stated, in this contribution, we would like to address two primary issues that question the ethics of research in the field of migration studies, which we have observed as fundamental dimensions within the two European projects we chose as case-studies, which are time and emancipation. Specifically, in the first paragraph, we will provide a brief description of the projects under examination highlighting their reciprocal common aspects and aims. Following this, we will inquire how the timing of research aligns with the temporality of migrant-related projects and what ethical implications and questions arise from the convergence of these dimensions. Alongside the notion of temporality, in the second paragraph, we aim to reflect on some points concerning the debate on the emancipatory change of those being involved in research. This consideration includes the desirability of change among the interlocutors, the role of empowerment, as well as one's own research position/awareness regarding the project's goals and procedural methods when research involves the capitalization of project outcomes.

Finally, we will try to explore how to integrate procedural ethics (data collection methods, definition of the project process) with relational ethics (Bilotta, 2019; Glanville, 2022; Hugman *et al*., 2011). To do so, it will be crucial to consider the contradictions and open questions generated by the mandate of external clients – in this case European funding subjects – who define terms and timeframes of intervention, as well as correlated asymmetries of power and priorities. At the same time, we will note how the emancipatory role of research is precisely not only to reflect on the vulnerabilities of research

subjects, but above all the vulnerabilities of systems of reference and the dimensions of power present where we all act and relate, and thus aspire to promote solutions for change that affect not only the marginalized subject, but also the social world.

Without pretending to exhaustively cover the subject matter, this contribution aims to stimulate a reflection concerning the intricate interplay between certain ethical principles of research, the social dynamics of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the actively involved entities in the research projects – researchers, migrants, and civil society collectively.

Two case-studies

As University of Bologna researchers, we have been partners in different EU projects; here we propose to draw on the experience of two European projects, which invested in building pilot experiences to support the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees at several levels. Both the two projects are still ongoing, and in their final temporal phase.

Merging project (Horizon, 2020) – *Housing for Immigrants and community integration in Europe and Beyond: strategies, policies, dwellings and governance* – has analyzed different housing practices and solutions for migrants developed in four European countries (Spain, France, Sweden, Italy). The final objective of the project is to measure the feasibility and the long-term effects of three pilot participatory initiatives aimed at integration through housing in three EU countries: France (Lyon), Spain (Valencia) and Sweden (Gothenburg) and demonstrate the factors which favor or block pathways for migrant integration. The Unibo team, made up of the Department of Educational Sciences and the Department of Management, coordinated the work package which made it possible to detect – through a comparative study of the case studies conducted by each partner – the potentially innovative elements of the projects investigate. The team also created a "canvas" and two typologies for "Integration Operating Models" which oriented the feasibility studies and pilot projects carried out by MERGING partners in different European contexts.

INTEgreat is an Amif project with the aim of activating a stakeholder partnership capable of implementing a stronger integration

strategy for migrants and asylum seekers in five European countries (Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Spain and Ireland), through pilot projects in four thematic areas which are health, employment, capacity building and training, social cohesion. The Unibo team has leaded a work package in the first phase, for the construction of the Integration Strategy Framework and Guidelines, fundamental to build up the pilots' experiences in the mentioned four areas.

In both projects, the concept of integration has been considered as a two-way process (Ager, Strang, 2008), which is formed and transformed in a continuous dialogue and interaction between migrants and locals. There are specific domains "that shape understandings of the concept of integration" (ivi, p. 184) and which constitute a framework for a "successful" integration (*ibidem*). These domains refer to "employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups in the community [...]" (ivi, pp. 184-185).

Most of those key-elements have been at the core of the two case-studies, and while there has been constant contemplation of the meanings of integration both during the planning and implementation phases of these projects, the potential for negotiating these meanings with the participants remains a problematic issue. From this complexity raises fundamental questions: what are the complexities that arise from such specific experiences, and how can a research team reevaluate the project's assumptions by considering the extent of agency held by the participants, particularly asylum seekers and refugees, in the constant negotiation of meanings.

As before mentioned, in the following paragraphs, the objective is not to provide an exhaustive response to the specific questions but rather to initiate inquiry and cultivate collective reflection within the research community on these issues, starting from some critical dimensions of the ethical discourse intertwined with the examined project experiences.

To do so – referring to our role as researchers in direct participation in the two case studies mentioned here – we will focus on the concept of time as one of the most controversial aspects in the migratory experience, and for some aspects also affecting research programs; at

the same time, reflecting on emancipation will be fundamental to implement the role of research reflexivity in terms of promoting socially impactful panoramas, in the progressive overcome of barriers.

It's a matter of time

Human mobility deals not only with space, but strongly with time; and the in-between experience belongs to both. Over the last few years, forced migration studies and their multiple crossing disciplines, have seen an increased focus on those geographies that – in line with the shift of the refugee regime (Zetter, 2007) – concern becoming asylum seekers and refugees in the global North.

This movement also refers to the analysis from the pre-migratory to the more exquisitely post-migratory[2] experience, where border and reception policies often take central stage, and where the concepts of temporality, temporariness and liminality interweave (Dotsey, Lumley-Sapanski, 2021).

Without claiming to bring innovations to the themes, in this section we propose to return to the asylum-time nexus once the European border has been crossed, acknowledging the complexities of becoming asylum seekers and refugees once settling in a European country. In doing so, we'll reflect on the interconnections with the specific experience of doing research in European projects for refugees' integration, within a defined timeframe.

The way Europe welcomes forced migrants can have multiple natures and several scholars remind us that it is not enough to cross borders to end the sufferance coming from uncertain travelling and the border experience (Aradau, Canzutti, 2022; Khosravi, 2010/2019; Mellino, 2019), witnessing a blending of the pre and the post mobility dimensions.

The suspension described by the refugee camp experience is reflected in the alienating narratives on migrants' detention centers and on reception centers themselves: "the camp system as a political form of governing and controlling asylum migration is, in fact, increasingly

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[2] Term used here in a critical manner, recalling that not only does the category of migrant hardly leave the person and that mobility continues beyond the first country of arrival on European soil.

used in different European states" (Pinelli, 2014, p. 70, our translation). When the asylum-time nexus enters in relation with reception policies and practices, migrants might experience the suspension of their physical freedom, as well of their temporal control. Reception spaces are less and less home and more and more large-scale accommodation (Kreichauf, 2018) where the humanitarian crisis dictated by the incoming refugees must be governed; in these experiences "(w)aiting is the dimension that runs through life in the camps, and it is filled with a series of care, surveillance and control practices aimed at asylum seekers and acted out by the different social actors working in the camps" (Pinelli, 2014, p. 71, our translation). In this vein, the concept of temporality becomes "an indicator of temporariness, a restricted period of accommodation in temporary, assigned facilities, and employment services" (Dotsey, Lumley-Sapanski, 2021, p. 2). Temporality has also to do with the temporariness of bureaucratic systems, "characterized by uncertainty and immobility" (Aradau, Canzutti, 2022, p. 8), made of ambiguous times for an asylum application, papers' renewal, or appeal decision. This temporariness is involuntary (Kodeih *et al*., 2023, p. 177) and "rooted in diverse formal and informal institutions" (*ibidem*); migrants are exposed to continuous vulnerability, which does not stop with the asylum application, but is exacerbated in the reception experience where the non-existence "of a meaningful future can be profoundly debilitating" (*ibidem*).

At the same time, assuming – we ourselves – a non-victimizing positioning (Bauer-Amin, 2017), the post-migratory cannot be defined as a monolith. If on the one hand the time-asylum nexus promotes the reproduction of vulnerabilities (Signorini, 2021), it opens to the formation of counterstrategies of power (O'Byrne, 2022). Migrants live the liminal experience – of being neither citizen of the country of origin not yet of the country of asylum (Sayad, 1999/2002) – a life in-between which is characterized by ambiguity, but which also becomes a space – as Bhabha (1994) points out – of potential subversion and transformation. Being liminality a concept that refers to "experiencing change and dealing with its consequences" (Genova, Zontini, 2020, p. 51), it's telling us, "not only about the loss of frames of reference but also about the process of discovering new ones" (*ibidem*).

It's in those interstices of immobility and transformations where

asylum seekers and refugees – while waiting – also confront with the time to (get) integrate(d), and with the rise of receiving societies as co-protagonists. Within this framework integration keeps being considered a controversial concept, "both as a policy objective and as a theoretical construct" (Ager, Strang, 2008) and, at the same time, a guiding light in national and European policies, aiming to promote appropriate answers to the increasingly presence of migrants and refugees (Salinaro, Ilardo, 2022).

Our two case studies also confront with time-asylum nexus. Based on EU fundings of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, according to which all people arriving and residing in the EU should have "the opportunity to build a dignified life and to actively participate in society" (Picum, ECRE, 2020, p. 3), both are dedicated to actions in support to integration that, as defined by the European Commission, "does not stop after a defined period of time" (EU Commission, 2020, p. 7). More precisely, according to the Action plan, the concept of time,

> covers all the different stages and phases of the integration process: pre departure measures, reception and early integration, long-term integration, and the building of inclusive and cohesive societies. It takes into account the different situation of migrant populations in Member States and supports Member States and other relevant stakeholders in finding the adequate response in their integration and inclusion policies (ivi, 2020, p. 3).

It seems to us that the time of mobility – which also includes the asylum experience – cannot be vivisected, and that it concerns not only with the production of vulnerability but also with the promotion of practices and policies of inclusivity. The challenge, as researchers, is to keep these two dimensions in a constant dialogical interconnection.

In this sense, the specific experience of doing research within the defined framework of a European project bring to light several aspects to reflect on.

From the very beginning, we – as researchers and all other partners too – have to consider multiple types of time: the socio-political moment characterizing the geographical area we are planning to intervene; the migratory and bureaucratic lifetime of the migrants

involved in the experiences; the time of each work package; the time to disseminate the results.

In fact, planning time must consider pre-existing migration and integration policies, not only to perpetuate an intervention that will be then in line with the needs of the contexts of reference, but also to ensure the maintenance of the ethical mandate of research, which cannot disregard being aware of the complexities in which research subjects move, particularly if they confront with vulnerabilities.

Often, in the confrontation with local institutions, with national standards, with people's needs, unexpected twists emerge that require a constant reinterpretation of the actions envisaged by the projects. We think of the countless loopholes to obtain permits and build or open housing facilities for migrants; we think of the difficulties in offering qualifying training courses where most learners have not acquired adequate language skills; we think about when you have to fill a training or language course with a minimum of participants but people do not attend regularly because they have other priorities, such as looking for a job (even if irregular) or because constantly disturbed by intrusive thoughts (such as the distant family or expiring documents) that make it impossible to find "space in the head" (Signorini, 2021, p. 83), therefore to learn.

We can assume that the time of bureaucracy is unable to detach itself from the migratory experience, and temporariness is Janus-faced. One side refers to the past and concerns temporariness as a premise in the design phase of pilot interventions. The other side of the face tells us about the temporariness of future interventions which, as ascribed in pilots' experiences, have a limited experimentation time as well as unforeseen events to overcome. But when the time of integration is confronted with the time of vulnerability and care, project time is not always enough. From the moment of conception to the moment of dissemination, the ethics of critical research is faced with the challenge of, on the one hand, fulfilling its emancipatory mandate through the experience of co-design and co-presence (by the way not always practicable or practiced), and on the other hand, raising the complexities and contradictions that the time of asylum has on the lives of migrant people. To do this, research groups need to constantly renew and go back to what are their ethics and eventually reshape their

approaches, especially when confronting with the unexpected. With this purpose, in the following paragraph we'll reflect on the critical positioning of research and its emancipatory function.

Emancipation: between the positioning of researchers and the desirability of change

A prerogative of research projects involving a vulnerable target group – in this case refugees – concerns the possibilities of emancipation and transformation for individuals and society.

In a moment of a shortage of social justice movements, research projects can play an important role as they (also) represent a space where individuals can be supported in acquiring a critical consciousness and some tools for living in society. As Noel (2016) states, "emancipatory research is a form of participatory action research that recognizes the power imbalance in research and seeks to empower the subjects of social inquiry" (p. 456). This statement focusing on a first fundamental aspect regarding research as a space for emancipation, namely the intentional empowerment of disadvantaged people involved in the project. In a second way, its calls at the redefinition of a research action aimed to the end of the dominant oppressive hierarchies that could support some research paradigms involved in knowledge production. Therefore, following this perspective, an assumption of action research is that the development of practice based on knowledge generated through practical experience becomes possible as a result of emancipation through participation in research (Wilson, McCormack, 2006). Groat and Wang (2002) exemplify this assumption in the interaction between elite groups of researchers and the "peripheral' groups" – the marginalized society – that contribute to the definition of practices aiming to promote emancipatory interventions, amongst and with vulnerable groups. However, the Noel's assumption needs to be questioned from at least in two directions. On the one hand, it is necessary to reflect on the awareness of the "dominant" and elitist positioning of researchers – as producers of knowledge; on the other hand, it is necessary to consider the desirability of change on the part of the "peripheral" group (*ibidem*).

Concerning the initial point, Noel (2016) states how

for a design research intervention to be emancipatory, a designer/ design researcher would need to recognize how he or she may form part of a dominant group – whether by educational background, race, country of origin, language, etc. and consider how to ensure that the voice of the research collaborator is heard despite the researcher's privilege (p. 458).

This requires first an awareness of the nature of the theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools of the discipline, recognizing their reproductive power of culturally dominant assumptions. Moreover, researchers are required to demonstrate a profound comprehension of the socio-historical contexts within which they operate, with the objective of formulating interventions that exhibit sensitivity towards potential issues that might arise in these particular contexts. These conditions, integral to the cultivation of sensitive interventions, align closely with the core tenets of the emancipatory research paradigm, which underscores the participatory and politically engaged nature of collaborative action research. As elucidated by Guba and Lincoln (2005), this facet can be fostered through experiences of socialization and the exchange of ideas and perspectives between researchers and participants. This can be also accomplished by following the pedagogical framework proposed by Mortari (2007), which emphasizes the practice of self-understanding. In essence, it involves the researcher's adoption of the role of the

responsibility, ethical and political, to supervise the process of investigation by combining the search for transparency with that of profound awareness, taking on the commitment to subject the research culture in which he or she is involved to a radical critical analysis (ivi, p. 226).

In a similar vein, but highlighting a problematic issue, Borg *et al*. (2012) have deliberated on the hazards associated with participatory processes that fall short of disentangling from underlying interests, thereby failing to ensure the advancement of democratic principles and the equitable distribution of power between researchers and participants. Consequently, it becomes evident that a meticulous and systematic reflection on the prerequisites of research collaboration as a democratic undertaking is indispensable.

In the context of the European projects discussed in this contribution, participation has been integrated as a crucial element in promoting the role of the dialogical researcher, thereby remaining open to redefining their initial assumptions. Typically, these assumptions are established during the project's inception phase, often as part of the project's background research. Revaluation of these assumptions occurs, for example, when the foundational premises – in this case linked to the variables supporting integration – are reconsidered in light of the empirical data collected.

To foster this procedural methodology, which entails a seamless transition from theory to practice and vice versa, the project actions co-designed and co-participated in during the pilot projects have a crucial role. This approach enables the critical reassessment of the initial premises aligning with the principles of Action Research, a methodology recognized as a "catalyst for change" (Pourtois, 1981), with its primary objective being the identification and improvement of problematic situations through the active involvement of each individual participant.

One of the dimensions where the research's emancipatory potential was most at stake, and where dilemmas and problematic issues emerged most profoundly, was the interaction with the diverse set of actors engaged in the processes. In fact, while establishing the interview frameworks and initiating interactions with interviewees, our experience frequently prompted us to reconsider our perspective. At times, our focus leaned more towards identifying "sociological problems" in the analytical dimension, rather than addressing "social problems" in the practical dimension (Sciarrone, 2011, p. 645). The opportunity to give voice to the research participants did not always manifest through a critical investigation capable of comprehending how social life, and not just sociological phenomena, shapes experiences and understanding of the world (Patton, 1990).

Therefore, if it is towards the act of "giving voice" that we can glimpse an emancipatory potential in research – especially when it is oriented towards promoting and supporting the capacities of social actors – it is important to problematize the issue recovering the theme of the "desirability of change" mentioned above as the second central point of emancipatory research. Representing these actors can indeed

entail the risk of not safeguarding the individuals sensitive and autonomy. Central to these complexities is the fundamental issue of the desirability of change, which underscores the ethical considerations inherent in the research process and compels us to engage in thoughtful introspection on how we can grant a voice to the multitude of subjectivities that collectively shape our social reality without resorting to paternalism or coercion. This reflection calls for the cultivation of relationships founded on respect, equity, and the recognition of the inherent agency of every individual who at certain junctures may not desire the change going through the paths proposed. The discourse also places a spotlight on the dynamics of power within the researcher-interlocutor relationship, with a focus on the interactions between peripheral groups and elite groups of researchers (Groat, Wang, 2002) already mentioned. Particularly, it highlights the multifaceted nature of empowerment, where the act of "giving voice" should not be a mere echo of the researchers' perspectives but a genuine representation of the voices and perspectives of those being involved on research.

In both of our action research experiences, we saw how the desires for change that were planned (and financed) could not always match those of the target groups, asylum seekers and refugees. Going down to the dynamics of everyday life and remaining in the description of only a few hypothetical situations – though inspired to our case studies – it would be the case that accessibility to a social housing project would not be adequate for those who are perhaps in reception or have serious vulnerabilities that cannot foresee living independently. Similarly, a person holding a permit of stay as asylum seeker and living in reception structures will perhaps have more time to devote to training than someone who has been in the territory for several years and no longer has a place in the reception system but urgently needs to find work.

Danieli and Woodhams (2005) are exploring the possibility that the perspectives of marginalized individuals may, in turn, perpetuate marginalization. This raises an important question regarding the aim of emancipatory research: should it strive to provide an accurate representation of reality, or should it generate research that supports the existing social model, primarily reflecting the researchers' viewpoint rather than that of marginalized individuals? In other words,

they are questioning whether research should be neutral and objective or guided by a more socially transformative perspective.

In alignment with these considerations, the invitation extended by Danieli and Woodhams (2005) to empower participants towards emancipation, even when they may not fully recognize their own power and strength, serves as a testament to our commitment to fostering inclusivity and equity in research. In this direction, both the European projects have contemplated the construction of new "extended scientific communities" (Oddone *et al.*, 2008) in which the role of marginal actors seeks to be included in policy-making and decision-making processes, fundamental to building up the pilots' experiences in the direction of social change and implementation of innovative practices and solutions. However, it is essential to reiterate that this fundamental topic elicits a spectrum of viewpoints within this controversial academic discourse, prompting ongoing ethical reflection and a continuous pursuit of research practices that can support – and preserve – the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and "authentic" empowerment.

Conclusions

Multiple disciplines and perspectives agree on the centrality of the ethical and emancipatory mandate of social research (Freire, 2017; Pellegrino, Massari, 2021; Wright, 2010).

In these pages, we have attempted to problematize the limits and resources that working as researchers within pre-established containers and contents brings out in dealing with vulnerabilities – not only of migrants and refugees – but the vulnerabilities of the European protection and reception systems (Signorini, 2021).

We can identify three main actors that have accompanied our reflection, intersecting the same issues from multiple angles: firstly, the role of research and those who – like us – act on its behalf through positionings and productions; secondly, and at the heart of the ever-balanced question of ethics and mandate, there are the subjects/objects of the research, in this case people who have experienced becoming asylum seekers and refugees in Europe; last but not least, there is the European project, which defines the conceptual and financial contours of each intervention. Acknowledging an analogy with the "three

complex social spaces with specific constraints and opportunities" mentioned by Busso *et al.* (2019, p. 87), that were precisely "the university, the policies and the social reality under investigation" (*ibidem*, our translation), we explored the contradictions emerging when interrogating the field and ourselves, on the assumptions of emancipatory social research such as the recognition of the interlocutors, the centrality of their actions and choices, the legitimacy of multiple perspectives and knowledge (ivi, pp. 95-96).

Having reflected on the intersections among the concepts of time and ethics, in these last lines we propose to share some elicitations by relating the time of research to that of writing. In fact, when dealing with the moment of dissemination, multiple challenges arise. On the one hand, researchers are confronted with the intrinsic complexity and ambiguity occurring in the relationship between research and politics (Busso *et al.*, 2019, p. 95; Girotti, 2020, p. 145). In fact, we need to consider the pressure and the mandate of the commissioning subjects (Busso *et al.*, 2019), and the limits related to external financing. Research projects financed by the European Commission, such as our examples on Horizon and Amif, despite having quite different funding and intervention times, have a clear and shared definition of the concept of integration, a term which, however debated and slippery, also remains strongly rooted in the production of results and in its final analyses.

On the other hand, the role of research deals with the responsibility to express and maintain its ethics through all the stages of research, such as the preparation, the activation, and the restitution (Girotti, 2020, p. 140); and this has to do with how researchers position themselves. When dealing with social problems, the research role is to analyze them and re-define the research questions based on the socio-pedagogical problems intercepted, with the aim to promote transformative theorizations.

Keeping alive the reflection on how we consider initial assumptions can also help to promote skills and tools for monitoring the social impact of research. In this sense, carefully assessing the ethical effect of proposed research through ethical evaluation means exercising in-depth analysis on issues such as human dignity, equity, and social justice. This additional challenge asks the scientific community to

conceive the social impact of European research through a holistic approach that "requires an understanding of its core concepts such as culture, community, power, human rights, gender, justice, place, resilience, sustainable livelihoods and the capitals, as well as of the theoretical bases for participatory approaches" (Esteves *et al*., 2012, p. 40).

The challenge, then, is not only to re-define research questions, but to do it directly from the marginal voices and "to promote their recognition in decision-making and policy-making processes" (Busso *et al.*, 2019, p. 97, our translation); social research thus becomes emancipatory research, "not so much by reducing uncertainty with respect to the possible outcomes of political decisions as by revealing their inherent ambiguity" (ivi, p. 95, our translation). Therefore, researchers, while remaining strongly faithful to the ethics of research, are invited to read the reality through the dominant-marginalized lens and operating within containers where there are contradictory limits and directions.

Despite the countless open questions, we read in these challenges the invitation to intercept the empowering and emancipatory purpose of research precisely in the deconstructive process of those contradictions, errors, inconsistencies, and power relations, to strengthen the co-construction of emancipating and decolonizing (Burgio, 2022) research spaces and times.

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