

REFUGEES



CINEMA FOR REFUGEES
SOCIAL INCLUSION

***The path towards social inclusion:
a story of role models and transformative learning***

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ABSTRACT RefugeesIN promotes social inclusion through films and documentaries, presenting possible role models for refugees. The project was created based on a theoretical framework resulting from three main theories: Heckmann's theory on social integration, Price-Mitchell's theory on role models, and Mezirow's transformative learning theory. In this article we discuss these theories and the creation of the RefugeesIN rationale, as well as some excerpts from real-life stories of former refugees that were selected for the project and fulfill the requirements of said rationale.

KEYWORDS refugees, social inclusion, role modelling theory, transformative learning, filmmaking

“No art passes our conscience in the way film does and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls.” -Ingmar Bergman

Considering the current refugee crisis, it is imperative for Europe to have the necessary tools to promote the Social Inclusion of Refugees. The project RefugeesIN was created to aid in this endeavor and was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme as a part of Europe 2020 and the European Agenda of Adult Learning. RefugeesIN's objective is to offer an innovative cinema-based Pack to professional staff working with refugees use in their activity, to encourage intercultural dialogue, to combat discrimination against refugees and promote their social inclusion.

RefugeesIN stands for adult learning opportunities to social inclusion by critical analysis of European cinema and documentary filmmaking on inspiring refugees' life stories. Cinema is used as a tool for breaching stereotypes and portraying actual and inspiring life stories of well-included former refugees and having a role model for the newcomers' social inclusion.

This project uses films for they have been shown to allow us to place ourselves in another's shoes and be empathetic to their situation and struggles. Besides cognitive and emotional empathy, films also result in raised oxytocin levels that translate in people being more charitable and happier, and promote resilience in situations similar to what the character went through (Barraza & Zak, 2009; Ozele, 2008; Zak, 2015).

The theoretical model of the RefugeesIN project is based on three main theories: Heckmann's theory of Social Integration (1992; 2005; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006), Price-Mitchell's theory on role models (2010) and Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991; 2009; 2012). In particular, there is the focus in the dimensions of social integration operationalized by Heckmann, the qualities of role models presented by Price-Mitchell and the relation of transformative learning theory with films, discussed within the RefugeesIN project. In this article we present all the previously mentioned theories, as well as their relation with two of the outcomes of the project - the [Brochure](#) and the [short Documentaries films](#) and how these can be used towards the social inclusion of Refugees as per the [Course](#) and [Guide](#).

Heckmann's Social Integration

Migration is not only the physical journey- migration to a new country is also a moment of profound changes for the migrant that makes social integration an utmost necessity. Social integration refers to the process of inclusion of those with prospects for staying in the host country into the social structures of said country and, thus, reducing any differences in their positions and relation. Integration refers to stable and cooperative relations in a defined social system. It may also be conceptualized as a process correspondent to the strengthening of relationships in a shared social system, capable of opening its borders to new citizens and its groups (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005).

For Heckmann (1992; 2005; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006), social integration is a multidimensional construct consisting of four dimensions: structural, cultural, social, and personal/identificational. This was a determining factor for a former refugee to be considered a good role model candidate for the RefugeesIN project.

Heckmann (1992; 2005; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006) conceptualizes social integration as a learning and socialization process, which takes place when certain conditions are met. He suggested a social approach to the phenomenon of migration through the use of different sociological concepts, such as placement, acculturation, interaction, and identification. This is pertinent for the analysis of social integration into social systems or institutions of the host society for the integration of individuals into existing societies is also their integration into society's systems and institutions. The application of these concepts (i.e., placement, acculturation, interaction, and identification) leads to the distinction between structural integration, cultural

integration, social, and personal/identificational integration.

The structural dimension corresponds to the acquisition of rights and gaining access to core institutions of the host society such as the education system and job market (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005). Every society depends on these core structures: economic institutions assume a central position in societies, and systems like the educational are responsible for preparing individuals for them. Most immigrants are so for the improvement of their life opportunities and social status. And for them to get that they must enter these key institutions of the receiving society. This dimension of integration corresponds to becoming integrated into the national society, more precisely, into the local and regional contexts. Naturalization and citizenship are necessary for the membership in the political community, since as citizens, immigrants constitute a group of important electorates to the political force. Furthermore, obtaining citizenship is an extremely important aspect for remaining in the host country (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005).

The cultural dimension refers to the acquisition of the core competencies of the culture and society by the newcomer, involving a change at the cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal levels (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005). Even though the cultural dimension mainly concerns migrants and their direct descendants, it is also an interactive and mutual process with the host society. In fact, the host society undergoes some changes and learns new ways to relate to immigrants, promoting a continuous adaptation to their needs. Social inclusion can be more effective if reinforced by a supportive environment, where one experiences the values and principles of the democratic and inclusive process in action (Bosswick

& Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005).

Becoming culturally integrated does not mean abandoning one's culture of origin. The combination between the cultural elements of their home country and the host country culminates in a group of bicultural competences, which can be an asset for the individual and for the receiving society (Scheunemann, 2011). However, the majority of migrants that arrive in Europe have low levels of education, which makes it difficult to achieve to the degree of bilingualism and, consequently, biculturalism required for adequate social mobility in the host country (Eurostat, 2018).

The social dimension is the acceptance and inclusion of migrants in primary relationships and social networks of the host country (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005). It can be measured through indicators such as social networks, friendships, partnerships and marriages (private relationships and primary group relationships). To achieve a successful interactive integration, core elements of cultural integration, especially communication competences, must be acquired. Social integration is especially important in the first phase of the integration process. For the support and solidarity of family members and members of the same ethnic group, through the share of personal experiences and information is very helpful initially but also might, in time, interfere in the establishing of new social relationships (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005).

Lastly, the personal or identificational dimension is a more subjective dimension, and by far the hardest one of all, and refers to one's sense of connection to the host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005). In detail, to participate in the host's society core institutions, it is necessary to acquire the required cultural competences. Despite this participation not requiring the

identification with the goals of these institutions or the feeling of belonging and inclusion to the host's society, the sense of belonging can be later developed as a result of acceptance and participation in these core institutions. Indicators of identificational integration are feelings of belonging to and identification with groups, especially in forms of ethnic, regional, local and/or national identification, or their respective combinations (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005).

Thus, integration is more than a succession of isolated events. Integration is a long-lasting process that occurs at an individual and collective level. It is fundamental to understand the temporal implication - for the integration process is a learning process that takes time from both immigrants and the host society. For first-generation migrants, integration is a second socialization, that requires intellectual and emotional effort. The second generation of migrants is exposed to challenges of a different nature, facing demanding forms of bicultural socialization and identity formation. The host country and its society must learn new ways of interacting with migrants and adapt its institutions to their needs, which can be more demanding for societies who have not experienced migration in recent history.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Price-Mitchell's characteristics of a Role Model

According to Bandura's social learning theory (1977), starting at a young age, we learn through copying others. That is, people learn through observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and the outcomes of said actions.

"Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information

serves as a guide for action” (Bandura, 1977). According to social learning theory, human behavior is explained by the continuous reciprocal interaction of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences.

Modelling means a person identifies with another, which acts as a model and then mimics/adopts the model’s behaviours, values, beliefs, and/or attitudes (Manichander, 2016).

According to Price-Mitchell (2010) a Role Model is someone whose behavior, example, and success are inspiring and can inspire others and be emulated. The author further describes five qualities of role models, passion and ability to inspire, clear set of values, commitment to community, selflessness and acceptance of others, and ability to overcome obstacles. Interviewees had to show these characteristics to be considered good candidates for the RefugeesIN project, after all they were meant to act as Role Models to other refugees and, consequently, inspire and encourage them in their personal path towards Social Inclusion.

Role models demonstrate passion and the ability to inspire others with their passion. They wish to share what they do with others for they love what they do. They are dedicated and have an ability to change things and make them better not only for themselves but for the future generations (Price-Mitchell, 2010).

Additionally, role models must also have a clear set of values, that is, they must be coherent in their beliefs and values and show that coherence in their daily actions. This reflects in the role models being perceived as advocates for innovation and social change (Price-Mitchell, 2010).

Role models must also show a commitment to their community. That is, they must be more concerned about others rather than being uniquely focused on themselves. They should be active within their communities and spend their

time and talents willingly providing aid to others (Price-Mitchell, 2010).

Showing selflessness and being accepting of others is another characteristic attributed to role models. This characteristic has a particularly strong relation to the one just previously discussed (i.e., commitment to community), as it relates to them not only putting others first, selflessness, but also being accepting of people different from themselves. Thus, role models serve their communities and the people that constitute them without being clouded by judgement (Price-Mitchell, 2010).

The final characteristic of a role model is the ability to overcome obstacles. This refers to role models not being discouraged by the obstacles they face, but rather rising to the occasion and surpassing any and all obstacles in their way. By overcoming obstacles they show others that success might appear unlikely at times, but is, nevertheless, possible. And by doing that, others will be inspired and won’t give up easily when faced with obstacles themselves (Price-Mitchell, 2010).

Mezirow’s Transformative Learning

Mezirow describes transformative learning as the process of how people change their dysfunctional worldviews through the development and use of critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1991; 2009). Explicitly, the author states that transformative learning is “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 1991; 2009). This means that, despite people’s propensity towards maintaining the same thought processes and habits, due to their ease and being perceived as safer, when they are faced with a significant or dramatic event, it may lead them to question their beliefs and the respective underlying assumptions. Thus,

they engage in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; 2012).

For Mezirow (1991; 2009; 2012), this transformation was the result of disorienting dilemmas, which are experiences incompatible with the person's current beliefs. When confronted with a disorienting dilemma, individuals are compelled to reconsider and reassess their beliefs, so that they can fit this new point of view into the rest of their worldview. This process occurs through critical reflection when engaging in dialogue with other people (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Explicitly, critical reflection is how people transform their beliefs and assumptions by assessing their validity in the light of new experiences and/or knowledge (Mezirow, 1991).

Critical reflection can be facilitated with the creation of reflective groups. These groups promote the exchange of different opinions and ideas, allow receipt of social support and encouragement, and require engaging in dialogue where alternatives are explored, evidences critically examined, and knowledge constructed by consensus (Baldwin, 2016).

According to Mezirow (1991; 2009) there are ten phases of transformative learning. The first concerns the disorienting dilemma; the second concerns the self-examination, distinguished by feelings of guilt or shame; the third refers to the critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions; the fourth is the recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change; the fifth corresponds to the exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; the sixth denotes planning a course of action; the seventh is the acquisition of knowledge and skills to implement one's plans; eight is about the trying of new roles; the ninth phase corresponds to the building of competences and self-confidence in new

roles and relationships and finally, the tenth is the reintegrating back into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective.

To be transformative learning we must change our frames of reference making them more inclusive and reflective, so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove truer or more justified to guide action (Mezirow, 1991; 2009). Transformative learning requires us to be actively engaging in constructive discourse and using the experiences of other people to examine our personal beliefs and assumptions. This should result in an insight-based action and/or decision (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; 2012).

The RefugeesIN rationale

The RefugeesIN rationale used the previously mentioned theories as its foundation.

First of all, when picking the former refugees to be interviewed for both the [Brochure](#) and the [short Documentaries films](#) they consistently showed the same characteristics. They showed great wish to learn the host country's language and achieve goals, they claimed the right to be a part of the host country society, they got in contact with members of the host country and accepted help but also gave back, they fought to stay active and set aims for themselves, and, finally, they showed resilience and perseverance. These characteristics filled the requirements of the dimensions of social integration at the individual level as per Heckmann (1992; 2005; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006) and Price-Mitchell's (2010) characteristics of a role model.

In fact, the former refugees have clearly shown interest in learning the host country's language and achieve goals which falls both within passion and ability to inspire (Price-Mitchell, 2010) and the structural dimension (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005). To exemplify this, here is an

amazing quote from [Sondus Al-Kadri](#): “As soon as I arrived I asked to take Portuguese classes. (...) I tell all the refugees I know. The first thing to do is to learn Portuguese. Everyone says it’s difficult, but I say - You have to learn! If you want, you can do it!” She does not only speak of herself and her story of accessing the right to get education and to learn Portuguese so she could be able to integrate into the Portuguese society but she was speaking to other refugees, she was giving them advice, she shows that she wishes to make things better, not for herself, but for others.

Secondly, as perfectly exemplified by [Hasan](#) “I came to Greece and acquired political asylum. I already had plans to come to Greece (...) If you want to enter, come in. If you want to offer something to society, come in.”, former refugees show a strong will and claim the right to be a part of the host society and what better way to show that they advocate social change than this? Indeed, it shows political conscience. Explicitly, by showing their will and claiming to be a part of the host society, former refugees show a clear set of values as per Price-Mitchell (2010) and show a good example of wanting to access the political aspect of the structural dimension of Heckmann (1992; 2005; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

“I have had really amazing support, facebook for example, so social media has really played a major part in asylum archive his main project work. So the help I get from academics, visual artists, activists... Is tremendous. And so we can share that support... (...) So that’s something I can give back to society.” These were the words of [Vukasin Nedeljkovic](#). And what better words to show that not only he was able to get in contact and allow himself to be helped by members of the host country but also showing that he gives and wishes to keep giving back to them and to society. Indeed, he shows active involvement in his community and shows concern about

others as per Price-Mitchell (2010) and being social and culturally integrated in Ireland as according to Heckmann (1992; 2005; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

Quoting [Bodian Diafarang](#) “Now I live in Italy, (...) I founded a small football team in Casenove (...) People living in Casenove organized a tournament and we won the cup! Many Italians congratulated us on our success. It was such a great day, because we were all together, everyone, Italian players and us. We had dinner together, it was so important because it was the first day in which I felt like I was part of something, here in Italy.” This was how Bodian created an aim in order to stay active and not only was able to improve his situation, indeed this later resulted in him being hired by Foligno International, but he helped fellow refugees and got more involved in the Italian community at the same time. His creation of a small football team in Casenove helped other refugees and also bridged the relationship with Italians, showing that he acknowledges and accepts those different from himself and over everything else, selflessness from his part (Price-Mitchell, 2010). Furthermore, the fact that he won the cup, got congratulated by Italians and they all, former refugees and locals, dined together shows his integration in the social dimension (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005).

Finally, resilience and perseverance. Resilience is defined by the American Psychological Association (2014) as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress.” This is clearly illustrated by this motto of [Sadat Sayedehgan](#) “If it gets tough, hold your head up high and pull through!” It may be a simple and short sentence but it clearly shows Sadat adapts to his environment no matter the obstacles. Undeniably, this shows that he can rise to the occasion and not be discouraged as per Price-Mitchell’s (2010) ability to overcome

obstacles, and, additionally, his ability to adapt and persevere also reflected on his personal/identificational integration dimension (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Heckmann, 1992; 2005). He was not only able to pass his middle school exam within 18 months of arriving to Germany, he managed to get a great grade and be placed in the regular class with German students. After he is done with this, he wishes to study economics at the university level. He has also considered working for the police force and passed a test, but decided, currently not to pursue it. All of this paints a portrait of a very motivated and resilient young man that was able to integrate himself and excel in Germany.

Additionally, the RefugeesIN project uses the previously mentioned transformative learning in its [Course](#) (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; 2012). The use of reflective groups serves to enhance its effects (Baldwin, 2016). One of the ways that transformative learning is used in the course is through the reading of the brochure or the visualization of the autobiographical documentaries. These narratives were created with the goal of being shared with others in similar situations so that the protagonist, a former refugee, acts as a role model for the newly arrived. By emphasizing with the protagonist and being able to perceive themselves in the place of the protagonist, they are thus able to reflect on their own situation and use the experiences of the role model as a vehicle to change and to find new solutions they might have otherwise overlooked (Barraza & Zak, 2009; Ozele, 2008; Zak, 2015).

The fact that the course is conducted in a safe social environment, allows for the examination of the disorienting dilemma, which is triggered by a life crises or major life transition such as migrating to a new country and gaining the refugee status (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; 2012), and for the participants to safely explore it, reflect on

it, and develop their new frames of reference.

If this self-examination and critical reflection is successful then they shall be able to recognize themselves and their story on the role model and use the role model's story as inspiration to design a plan of action with the other participants of the reflective group, gain confidence, and implement it (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; 2012). This will result in the development of new competences and a greater self-esteem which concludes the final phase of the transformative process in which they have fully incorporated the new beliefs and attitudes into their lives (Mezirow, 1991; 2009; 2012).

Conclusion

The media and cinema in particular is an incredibly useful tool for empathizing and developing competences and resilience in a controlled and safe social environment. If properly used it can result in transformative learning. Indeed, that was the intention and goal behind the RefugeesIN project: the use of film education, which is able to capture the interest of people in ways few other forms can, towards the social inclusion of refugees in Europe.

The use of real-life inspiring stories of former refugees fosters representation and serves to illustrate that it is possible to be successful, and become fully integrated into the host society, to the newly arrived.

On the other hand, those from the host society can also emphasize with refugees by watching their stories and understanding they are people just like themselves that were thrown into unthinkable situations and were, nevertheless, able to overcome them. This serves to reduce, if not eliminate, bias and prejudice against refugees in the host society members.

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