Generating self-esteem and fostering social recognition: co-creating innovative practices for newcomers' integration in Brussels[1]

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Introduction

Despite naturalisation processes and access to political participation, the maintenance of cultural practices of origin and the affirmation of religious identity, especially from Muslims, among some ethnic minorities are rekindling debates on the effectiveness of integration policies. Since the early 2000s, assimilation discourses have returned (Brubaker, 2001) to all European countries to justify the enforcement of civic integration programmes. These programmes have acquired an increasingly assimilationist approach to integration (Joppke, 2007; Goodman, 2010; Michalowski, 2011). The objective of an assimilationist policy is for new migrants to adopt the dominant norms and values of the host country. However, there is no clear European convergence of this policy (Jacobs & Rea, 2007; Goodman, 2015). The integration objectives (social dimension versus cultural dimension) and programme implementation (obligation or incentive) differ greatly between countries. Integration programs serve as a selection process for immigration (Denmark, the Netherlands), a condition for access to social rights (Germany, Austria) or residence permits (France, the United Kingdom) and a process of social and cultural integration (Belgium, Italy).

In 2016, the Brussels-Capital Region implemented a French-speaking integration programme with the goal of the social and cultural integration of migrants. This chapter presents the main results of a research project aimed

at improving the Brussels integration services by co-creating activities with newcomers, reception office social workers and academics.

This contribution pursues a twofold objective. First, it describes the co-creative practices mobilised in this participatory action research project and the applied activities based upon these. Second, it examines the possible impacts such activities can have on newcomers. By considering the heterogeneity and singularity of migrants' life paths, this approach focuses on the subjective dimension of the integration programme (Martiniello & Rea, 2014) rather than on the inculcation of dominant norms and values.

Institutional context and research objectives

Integration programmes in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels
The federalisation of the Belgian state has had a profound impact on the public management of immigration (Rea, 2007). For example, while the laws regulating immigration (residence and citizenship) are a federal responsibility, jurisdiction over integration policy has been transferred to regional entities. Furthermore, the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking political parties have historically often adopted diverging positions on the migration topic. During the 1990s, a distinct integration policy framework was implemented (Adam et al., 2018) in each of the three Belgian regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels).

Flanders adopted the Law on Flemish Civic Integration Policy in 2003, which makes it compulsory for newcomers to participate in the integration programme in Flanders (Adam, 2013). This programme includes three courses comprising the Dutch language, social orientation and career coaching. The social orientation course aims to increase the autonomy of newcomers, while explicitly offering "a knowledge of current rights and duties, a knowledge of the functioning of society and of its fundamental values", as mentioned in the Flemish law. In the early 2000s, the governments of Wallonia and Brussels sought to distance themselves from the new direction of immigrant integration policy in Flanders, which was perceived as assimilationist and driven by political pressure from the extreme right. However, the arrival of many new migrants during the 2000s (family reunification, refugees, regularised foreigners, etc.) forced the governments of Wallonia and Brussels to revise their integration policy. In the Walloon Region, the law creating a voluntary reception programme for new migrants was passed on 27 March

2014. In April 2016, the Walloon government decided to rename the policy from the "reception" programme to the "integration" programme and, more importantly, made it mandatory for newcomers. This change was justified by the necessity of improving integration, social cohesion and especially labour market integration.

On 5 July 2013, the Brussels Francophone Parliament adopted a Law on the Reception Programme for New Migrants in the Brussels Capital Region (which we refer to hereafter as the integration programme). The responsibility for implementing this programme lies with the reception offices for newcomers (*Bureaux d'Accueil pour les Primo-Arrivants* [BAPA]. Newcomers are considered eligible for this programme if they are adult (above 18) foreigners who have been legally resident in Belgium for less than three years and have held a valid residence permit for more than three months. The reception office (BAPA) organises the integration programme in two stages. During the first stage, the new migrants receive information relating to their rights and responsibilities. In addition, the BAPA assesses the needs and the social, economic and language assets of the new migrants. The second stage of the programme depends on the need for an individualised programme, which is determined by the social and language assessment. This includes, for example, support in dealing with official administrative procedures, advice on opportunities for vocational training and language classes and/or a citizenship course. If necessary, the BAPA refers newcomers to other specialised organisations. The Brussels French-speaking integration programme is voluntary and free of charge because the unilingual Francophone authority (*Commission Communautaire Française* [COCOF]) is not allowed to make the programme compulsory. The Flemish Civic Integration Policy is voluntary in Brussels for the same reason. However, as in the other two regions, it is likely that the Brussels integration programmes will become compulsory in the near future.

A co-creative research project with newcomers in Brussels

Shortly after the implementation of the integration programme in 2016, one of the BAPA reception offices, named Via, made two observations with the help of an academic researcher from the Université libre de Bruxelles. First, the content of the programme was very standardised, despite the fact that the newcomers did not have the same needs nor resources (human capital, social capital, level of ambition, entrepreneurial spirit, etc.). Second, the assistance offered to newcomers was decisive during their settlement process but was not adequate

to support their long-term integration. To explore programme activities taking into account newcomers' life experiences, the two involved actors developed the co-creation research project, titled CAMIM (*Co-créons un Meilleur Accueil et une Meilleure Intégration des Migrants à Bruxelles*), which is funded by Innoviris, the regional institute for research and innovation.

To account for the subjectivity of migrants rather than merely analysing the integration programme, the CAMIM project focuses on the life paths of newcomers; i.e., by using the theoretical concept of migratory careers (Martiniello & Rea, 2014). The migratory career approach allows the inclusion of life experiences before and after migration, taking into consideration the fact that migrants' lives do not start when they arrive in the host country. Moreover, it offers the possibility to understand the subjective dimension of integration "based on the confrontation between initial expectations and real-life migration experiences" (Martiniello & Rea, 2014, p. 1084). Usually, integration failures are only described in terms of the insufficient incorporation of the norms and values of the host society. Analysing integration by making newcomers subjects of this process rather than objects presupposes an understanding of what they would perceive as a success or failure for their own lives. "It is necessary to examine migrants' perceptions of their situation concerning their goals and the criteria they use to define success and failure and that, over time, give the diachronic character to the migration process" (Martiniello & Rea, 2014, p. 1085). Considering newcomers as subjects also implies understanding the diversity of migrants' pathways and taking their different profiles into account (cultural, social and economic capital) (Bourdieu, 1979). Finally, the migratory career concept invites us to understand integration as a social learning process built through interactions and practices. The types of skills and the time required to acquire them differ with each migratory career. Hence, the life experiences of newcomers play a key role in a migratory career. This research aims to account for newcomers' subjectivity by identifying their resources, hopes, projects and definitions of success and failure.

The CAMIM project includes experimenting with new proposed activities as complements to the integration programme, within which the subjectivity of newcomers can be expressed. On this basis, the resources provided to newcomers can become capacities for action or capabilities (Sen, 1999), in harmony with their personal, social and professional futures. These new activities elaborated by the CAMIM project are called "the Life Programme" and are complementary

to the integration programme. These activities are optional and accessible to all newcomers registered with the Via reception office.

The CAMIM project intends to include newcomers as research actors (co-researchers) by using co-creative practices. The term "co-creative practices" has a different meaning depending on the research project context (Legris-Revel, 2017). We define them, in the context of this chapter, in line with the participatory action research approach (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). This approach consists of confronting scientific and extra-scientific stakeholders with the societal challenges with which they are directly concerned to collectively create new knowledge in a mutual learning process (Jahn et al., 2012; Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Popa et al., 2015). With this approach, the objects studied are considered not to be neutral. The particularity of the knowledge produced comes from the different perceptions of the actors involved, whose expertise is considered equally relevant, albeit specific. This collective knowledge production is created through an iterative problem-solving experiment rooted in a defined area, the scale of which depends on the project (Popa et al., 2015). This testing and reflexive process ultimately aims at societal and scientific progress (Jahn et al., 2012; Chevalier & Buckles, 2013).

In this research, the stakeholders consist of newcomers and project team members; i.e., an academic researcher and Via social workers. Effective participatory action research assumes that newcomers take on a reflexive posture decisive within the epistemic community (Popa et al., 2015). This implies that they take a distanced look at their experiences and feel secure to speak freely, that they are aware of and self-reappropriate the research question as well as the spaces and tools for research, but also that their expertise is not diluted by the academic or institutional perception of reality. Fully aware of the passive role newcomers are usually assigned and the fact that their ties to both Via social workers and university researchers are embedded in power relations, the project team created the posture conditions. To this end, newcomers' expertise on integration was considered central and the main decision factor for experimentation— which is why we will mainly refer to their words in the following sections. For instance, the research hypotheses were formulated at a later phase of the project, based on newcomers' decisions in the activities and expertise sharing in their experimentation. The team also ensured that newcomers were aware of the research project objectives as well as their contribution, the voluntary nature of their participation and the freedom to express their thoughts. Finally, to reach the desired conditions, the project team built relationships based on trust and

reciprocity with newcomers, as well as creating co-research spaces adapted to them and reducing asymmetries.

The Life Program

Initially, the project team and newcomers focused exclusively on identifying and co-creating the activities that would make up the Life Program. The project team started to work with newcomers involved in the "citizenship module" of Via's integration programme. During these 50-hour modules, participants have time to get to know each other and build a trusting relationship with the trainers. Participatory workshops were organised to co-create activities centred on their needs and life experiences. In total, eleven 1.5-hour workshops were held in French, English and Arabic, pursuing a twofold objective. The first objective consisted of identifying the Life Program activities, which were chosen according to their feasibility and relevance to newcomers' needs: a self-esteem module, an immersion house and a volunteering cell. The second objective was to design these activities. During the participatory workshop, participants defined the conditions for the implementation of these three activities: location (within or outside Via premises), frequency, schedule, presence of other actors (citizens, associations, families), etc.

The final design of activities was the result of newcomers' reflections, while their implementation was the responsibility of the initial project team reinforced by three Via social workers specialised in each of the activities. No newcomers wished to participate in the implementation of these activities. Furthermore, due to a three-month lag between the end of the participatory workshops and the start of the activities, they did not take part in the activities they co-created. Besides, the three activities were not designed as three chronological steps of a global process starting with the self-esteem module and ending with the volunteering cell; rather, the Life Program activities were systematically presented as three alternative possibilities rather than a path to follow, the choice to participate in any of them being fully voluntary and personal.

Life Program activities
Self-esteem module
Taking newcomers' life paths and resources into consideration, the aim of this module is to strengthen their self-esteem and thereby increase their capacity to

act. It takes place at Via's premises, in seven half-days spread over a two-week period. The language used in the module is French, although only a basic level is required. A total of five sessions were organised and the attendees were both male and female, with the majority of participants coming from Morocco and Syria. Each module gathered between five and 10 newcomers and was co-facilitated by the Via trainer responsible for the specific activity and the academic researcher.

This module offers participants the time and space to think and talk about their life paths, dreams, projects, needs, choices and actions taken in the past in order to project themselves into the future. The applied methodology is that of life story (Depasse & Herman, 2012), which consists of participants "producing data on their life history. After the narration itself, the story is subject to a collective work through the echoes that the listeners send back to the narrator" (p. 24). In order to achieve this, newcomers are asked to depict their story on a timeline. With this tool, participants are then invited to write down, in chronological order their formal (studies, vocational training, etc.) and informal (practices or knowledge learning from relatives, friends, colleagues) learning moments that seemed the most important to them. The participants can start this timeline whenever they wish and must finish it at the point of taking the self-esteem module. After an allotted preparation phase, the participants narrate and explain their timeline to the group, who then share their emotions and questions about the story. Considering this public vulnerability, it appears that such a module is useful in helping newcomers identify the resources they have and need to carry out their projects.

Immersion House
The objective of this activity is to learn French in an informal setting and friendly meeting atmosphere, where exchanges are as close as possible to those of daily life situations. The sessions are held over two hours twice a week, and newcomers and citizens who wish to participate are welcomed to this activity. Between five and 15 newcomers are present during each session (with a total of 112 different participants), a large majority of whom are Syrian women. This activity is managed by the responsible Via social worker, volunteers and, on a regular basis, the academic researcher. To ensure the immersion house activity is accessible to all interested participants and maintain its "informal" dimension, this space is located outside Via premises. It consists of practising the French language while drinking tea or coffee and occasionally making use of activities proposed

by volunteers or newcomers. These sessions complement the language courses offered as part of the integration programme. Newcomers regularly express their wish to meet Belgians and have the opportunity to speak French in an everyday context rather than a classroom situation. The goal is to practice French while allowing mistakes since the main objective is to improve communication skills.

Volunteering Cell

The aim of this activity is to facilitate access to volunteering opportunities for newcomers by putting them in contact with NGOs looking for volunteers. The Via social worker responsible for this activity meets newcomers willing to participate and helps them define the type of volunteering work they wish to get involved in (sector, tasks, hours, etc.) as well as meeting partners who are enthusiastic to take part in the project. Finally, she matches volunteering requests and offers and ensures that the experience is enriching for all stakeholders. To ensure excellent follow-up quality, this activity is limited to about 15 simultaneous volunteers. Among the 36 newcomers that participated, most of whom were female, 22 different countries of origin were represented (with a slight over-representation of Morocco and Syria). The motivations of newcomers to undertake volunteering work are numerous and include meeting new people, testing their skills, practising French and discovering the Belgian professional environment.

Reflection on Life Program activities: co-research spaces

During the activities, relationships of trust between newcomers and the project team progressively emerged. On several occasions, participants asked to meet with the other participants and project team members again after the activities to share their experiences and assess the purpose, content and added value of the activities. This proposal matched the participatory research action process, namely the need for a reflexive and collective time for knowledge production going beyond the research action and experiment. Co-research spaces were then envisioned based on newcomers' expressed preferences. These reflection times provide an opportunity to analyse the content of the activities together with the participants, confront them with their life experiences and identify the possible advantages of such activities with regard to the integration programme.

These co-research spaces took two different forms: peer coaching (collective activity) and in-depth interviews (individual). The newcomers participating in the two co-research spaces are hereafter referred to as *co-researchers*. Peer

coaching, specific to each Life Program activity, is aimed at producing collective knowledge; the participants in this, therefore, share a willingness to answer the research question. Peer coaching is organised every three months with a total of 10 sessions (three for the self-esteem module, four for the immersion house and three for the volunteering cell) and gather between three and seven newcomers (in addition to the Via social worker and the academic researcher). The stability of the co-researchers enabled a relationship of trust and an attentive environment, which proved key in generating rich content.

Furthermore, in-depth individual interviews were organised in two different settings. First, interviews were conducted at the request of co-researchers when they were unable to attend peer coaching. In this case, interviews were based on the same content as the missed peer coaching. Second, interviews were used to monitor the volunteering cell activity. In this interview setting, the following people are systematically present: the co-researcher, the academic researcher and the responsible Via social worker. If deemed necessary, an interpreter is also invited since, unlike the peer coaching, it is not possible to rely on mutual self-help between newcomers to translate statements for which the level of French is insufficient. In total, 19 interviews were conducted.

Separating activities from research spaces proved essential in fostering a co-researcher posture among newcomers. Since newcomers are used to being assigned a passive role as service recipients, this was not at all obvious at the beginning. Having spaces dedicated to research proved to be helpful in clarifying the objectives and raison d'être of the research project. This ensured that participants attended the co-research meetings freely and consciously, as well as fostering reflexivity and distancing from their own experiences. In this way, research was conducted with the newcomers' knowledge and their analysis of their own experiences.

Integration through recognition

Self-fulfilment and recognition

The participants of the Life Program activities and the co-researchers highlighted the difficulties they experienced in their lives in Brussels. These difficulties illustrate the dichotomy of needs put forward by Bajoit (1999): the need for self-fulfilment and the need for social recognition. According to Bajoit (1999), every individual "needs to recognize himself in what he is (and has been), in what he

does (and has done)" (p. 70). In the case of newcomers, the first need relates to their knowledge of who they are in Belgium and what they have achieved in their country of origin. In this respect, migration triggers particular reflections on the past. If migration is considered to be a new beginning, newcomers' trajectories are inevitably rooted in their experiences before arriving in the host country. This proved true in our setting, as several co-researchers testified to their damaged lives and inability to find fulfilment in their country of origin due to the geopolitical, familial, community or socioeconomic situation. This was exemplified by a self-esteem module participant who explained how she had injured her leg as a child and, due to a lack of proper care, had to remain at home for five years and discontinue her education:

> I had an accident. I stopped studying because I couldn't continue. My foot was broken; I couldn't bend it anymore. But my parents kept believing I would recover until they [French doctors] did the operation [a few years later]. [...] We did the operation and then slowly, slowly I started to walk until I could even run. After that, I did some sewing. I wanted to go back to studying but I was ashamed because my cousins progressed and I didn't. [...] I have not been able to study like my mum wanted me to. It still affects me a lot. When people ask me about my level, I know why I don't have it [I am illiterate], but I just can't explain to them the reason why. (Linda, 21 February 2019)

For some newcomers, arriving in Belgium brings new opportunities and chances to achieve what they would have liked to accomplish in their country of origin or to rethink their life plan. In this case, settling in Belgium suddenly implies the need to make many choices in a complex system they are unfamiliar with, as one co-researcher noted: "this country offers a lot of choices, and we are lost" (Lamya, 17 February 2020). In addition to the administrative procedures and decisions concerning their settlement (place of residence, children's school, etc.), newcomers are confronted with new personal choices. Not knowing what would be wise to value and whether to continue or to start over, newcomers struggle to know who they are and what they want to achieve. A co-researcher holding a master's degree reluctantly exposed her ambivalence about and fear of being socially downgraded:

Now I would like to search by myself and seek the right path. I know that I am lost; I have done too many things at the same time. [...] I need to work because I am used to having things in my hands, not to holding them out [...]. I know I don't have a good level of French. I have not finished my request for the recognition of my diploma yet. I would like to finish my studies and I would like to find a job in the meantime. But without the equivalency, I am going to start very low and I am afraid of starting low and then being stuck down because it will be safe, I will have money, etc. That is why I am lost. I do not know where to start. (Lindaa, 18 November 2019)

In this new environment, newcomers do not always know how to find fulfilment. Stuck between past wounds that have not yet healed and the need to take long-term decisions to plan a future in a country that is not yet their own, newcomers often get bogged down in a state of uncertainty. One co-researcher expressed his frustration at not knowing where to start: "I have not found what I really want to do yet because I have ideas and things on my mind but everything is important" (Myriem, 12 June 2019).

The need for self-fulfilment is complemented by the need for social recognition for who they are and have been (Bajoit, 1999). The latter is often lacking and extremely difficult to gain. Newcomers are regularly assessed by the host society for who they are and what they have to offer (diplomas, skills, knowledge, habits or culture). One co-researcher explained that "in this country, we came, we are foreigners, we have a double job. There is a burden here. You have to prove that you are a good person, that you work well, that you are punctual... We are under a microscope" (Lamya, 22 November 2019).

The insistent gaze conveying denigration or even contempt from the host society (Honneth, 1995) hinders newcomers in their new lives and contributes to their withdrawal from society. One co-researcher explained:

My friends do not dare. They are afraid to talk, to meet people. I tell them 'my friends, you have to participate in the everyday life to get to know Belgium'. [...] They are perhaps afraid of prejudice. They have fixed ideas about the fact that people in this country do not like foreigners, do not want them. I am sure they are wrong but that is because they have never had any contact with them. They do not manage to crack the nut to get out of it. (Antoine, 18 September 2019)

Another participant noted:
When you become a foreigner, you see your own limitations because you do not know the language, etc. You put barriers in your head. All the time, other foreigners tell you negative stories about discrimination. Maybe it is not the whole picture, it is a small group of people, but you hear that, and you feel like it is everyone. (Felipe, 19 November 2019)

Co-researchers highlighted that newcomers incorporate negative and stigmatising attributes associated with migrants, a process that has already been studied extensively throughout the literature (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Martiniello et al., 2010).

Amongst those that have identified what they would like to undertake, some feel that they lack the means to fulfil what they would like to do and doubt their own ability to carry out their projects. Every negative message they receive from the host society questions what they are ultimately supposed to become and what to keep from their past. A co-researcher explained:

I see that even though we have left the place where people have passed us down norms, knowledge and attitudes, we still keep that with us: it is a baggage. The question is: is this baggage going to serve us here and elsewhere? (Lamya, 15 November 2019)

Another co-researcher expressed the same idea with more frustration: "here we are like puppets; either we have to keep what we came with or we have to adopt local cultural patterns" (Nadia, 25 March 2019). Despite perceiving contempt from the majority group, newcomers look for signs of social recognition (Honneth, 1995).

Responding to this dual need for self-fulfilment and social recognition helps newcomers find their place and root themselves within the host society. Expressed in a co-researcher's words: "I am looking for my place here. To be honest, I feel good. I miss my family, but what I am looking for is a place in this country" (Lamya, 17 February 2020). The newcomers then go through a phase during which they 'develop their imagination regarding their place in the host society'. In this regard, Life Program activities have contributed to the identification of self-fulfilment and recognition.

Generating trust, fostering social inclusion

The three Life Program activities have proven to be opportunities for introspection and reflection in a reassuring setting where the negative perception of the host society is neutralised. Through their active participation, newcomers gain self-esteem as they restore value, meaning and coherence to their life paths. Furthermore, they learn about their limits and potential in an environment where the first learning condition is the removal of uncertainty (Bauman, 2002). Each activity contributes to this objective in its own way. The self-esteem module and immersion house mainly respond to the need for self-fulfilment, by valuing the participants' life paths and skills. Meanwhile, the volunteering cell participants come to seek social recognition from the dominant host society rather than their peers. By finding answers to one or more of their needs, newcomers gain confidence in who they are, identify their capabilities (Sen, 1999), broaden their social capital (Bourdieu, 1980) and reinforce their capacity for action.

Self-Esteem Module

The timeline tool aids newcomers in giving consistency to their accomplishments and putting them into perspective within their life story. This process is possible due to the double narrative phenomenon: participants address the group as they narrate their life stages but they also tell their life story back to themselves.

Sometimes, the newcomers wish to keep parts of their life stories secret or do not feel emotionally able to share them. It is not uncommon for participants to say, "I didn't tell everything; there are things I kept to myself" (Lamya, 22 November 2019). Choosing the narrated events and observing the linearity of their narratives invites newcomers to see the common theme of their story, of which migration is merely a passage rather than a rupture. They become aware that their past, present and future are parts of the same story, which belongs to them. One co-researcher said:

> When I did my timeline, I could really see my life and the stages I went through. Thanks to the dates, I saw that I went through a lot of things and things that I forgot. It was like I picked up all the pieces. (Nadia, 21 March 2020)

By justifying to the group what they have and have not achieved, the newcomers explain to themselves who they are today. They realise that they are not responsible for the shortcomings in their paths but that they are the consequences of the

difficulties they have endured. The narration, therefore, leads to a change in perception. The participants feel free of guilt and abandon an overly pessimistic interpretation of their trajectory. A co-researcher explained during the peer coaching that "there is something in the module that helped us understand ourselves" (Lamya, 17 February 2020), and another one stated:

> Each of us has a past that we try to forget. When we made the timeline, it is like we relived the past and saw the gaps we fell into. We try to come out of those holes. The timeline has helped us to discover and look at life differently. (Nadia, 17 February 2020)

Surprised by their own boldness, newcomers narrate their stories with pride and feel empowered. A co-researcher explained that:

> For me, telling my life story is like moving to the other side to see my life and see how it goes. Sometimes I have the feeling that I am not doing anything of my life, but by looking at my timeline I am like 'wow, I have done all this!'. It is like opening the door to see my life. (Ahmed, 21 March 2019)

While narrating one's personal story can be a self-empowering act in and of itself, the caring gaze and attentive listening of the other group members also play an essential role. This gaze is strengthened by the accompanying mirror effect: the depth of their life experiences is recognised by people who have gone through similar situations. A co-researcher explains emotionally, "N. cried when she heard my story and told me I was brave" (Lamya, 17 February 2019), while another added:

> C. told me I was a fairy [...]. We have been through a lot and we realise that we are strong women so much that we have been through terrible things [...]. At different moments I felt valued. It gives me a place around others. It has warmed up my heart. (Nadia, 17 February 2019)

All the narrated stories are singular yet similar in their struggles, tenacity and despair. Listening to the stories of others leads the participants to (re)consider their common destiny, one of strength rather than social injuries (Honneth, 1995): the strength to have defended themselves, and to have held on. "I listened to R.'s story. It is not similar to mine but there are similar things: strength,

energy" (Felipe, 14 February 2020). Another co-researcher shared, emotionally: "we are strong people, really strong" (Lamya, 17 February 2020). According to another co-researcher, it is the audience of her peers that is the most powerful: "the others live in the same situation as ours. It is different, you [trainers] have a role of encouragement but it is a different impact. It is more powerful when it comes from others" (Nadia, 17/02/2020).

Listening to the stories of peers can be a source of inspiration. According to one co-researcher:

> You look for ideas between you and yourself, and you don't find them. Exchanging problems with others helps. All the people coming here share their problems and, with that, I look for what is hidden in me to read the sentences in my brain. (Fatiha, 8 November 2019)

During this exchanging process, a collective perception of their condition is constructed by placing the newcomers' narratives in a social, economic and historical context that transcends their situation (Martiniello et al., 2010). Considering their individual existence in terms of collective stakes makes it possible to exceed individual responsibility and guilt (Depasse & Herman, 2012). The shift from singularity to universality conditions their change in perception of their migrant status and life paths. Self-esteem is at the centre of this process, highlighting who they are and what they have achieved.

Indeed, self-esteem is structured (Mruck, 2013) around the perception of an ability to achieve tasks and life goals. It is linked to a positive evaluation that individuals make of themselves by measuring their success against what they aspire to accomplish. According to Honneth (1995), this very intimate and introspective feeling is the consequence of the gaze of others. Every person needs to be recognised in their fundamental characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, etc.), capacities and qualities, as well as in their life choices (Guégen & Malochet, 2014). This recognition, which conditions the person being considered as equal to all citizens in dignity and rights but also as a singular individual, is the foundation of the relationship with oneself, the self-esteem of an individual and the perception they will have of themselves. We need others to make us feel recognised, capable and valued. Thus, self-esteem, which is the intrinsic value that the individual grants themself, is built intersubjectively. The self-esteem module illustrates that far from being contradictory, the two perspectives of self-esteem complement each other. Ultimately, the value that a

person places in themselves leads to the confidence in their own ability to achieve what they want.

Immersion House

Usually, newcomers make use of French during everyday life activities (e.g., requesting information in the supermarket, asking for directions, explaining symptoms to a doctor). During each of these interactions, they wonder how their interlocutors will react and are afraid that their language lapses may negatively affect the exchange. This uncertainty presents an important stress factor. One co-researcher testified that she no longer asked for directions after someone abruptly left in the middle of the conversation without saying a word because she spoke too slowly. Another explained that "you [volunteers at the immersion house] have the patience to listen, but not everyone outside is like that. That is why we are afraid to talk with others" (Ryma, 13 June 2019).

Situations such as not understanding a doctor's diagnosis or risking administrative problems because they have not been able to express themselves properly make newcomers particularly nervous. Sometimes they feel like they are losing control: "when I had a problem with my visa, I was very stressed, and I could no longer speak French" (Fatiha, 24 September 2019).

Many newcomers express that the French courses they take as part of the integration programme do not prepare them for such exchanges. According to some, practising writing and grammar is essential but insufficient for their daily encounters. They lack the time for individual oral practice, as one participant pointed out: "I went to school; I said two sentences out of three hours because we are a group of 15 and we cannot all speak" (Antoine, 18 September 2019). For these newcomers, the immersion house complements the French courses. Teaching according to levels, found in the official French courses and which results in repetition in case of failure, sends a demotivating message, despite the fact that they have progressed. Discouraged, some drop out of class while others continue without conviction. For some, the learning conditions (i.e., sitting in a classroom for several hours) are unsuitable, which is particularly the case for people with low levels of education or concentration. For such profiles, the immersion house presents itself as an ideal alternative to the official integration programme French courses.

The co-researchers claim to find, within the immersion house, an environment where they dare to speak, communicate and ask questions in "real life" scenarios without feeling the usual pressure. Knowing the people they converse with makes

them feel secure and facilitates their language practice. The freedom to make the mistakes necessary for their learning is greatly appreciated by all participants. According to one co-researcher: "What is special here is that you can speak badly. At school, it is not possible. Now I speak well but before I spoke very badly. I improved my French because I made mistakes: I practised" (Fatima, 12 September 2019).

The immersion house thus creates a space of mutual trust where judgments are forbidden, thereby favouring free speech, even if grammatically or syntactically incorrect. The success of communicating in this benevolent setting gives them the necessary confidence to practise French in more insecure circumstances. One co-researcher recounts:

> I was very afraid to speak French. Now I have the courage to do so without fear. Today, I feel comfortable to be all by myself in the commune for my documents. Before, my husband always had to be there with me. (Ryma, 30/09/2019)

The rewarding practice obtained at the immersion house increases their self-esteem and empowers them to communicate.

Just like the self-esteem module, the immersion house allows participants to increase their self-confidence. For them, the goal is to enhance their ability to communicate in French by becoming aware, through practice, of their ability to express themselves and be understood. This change in perception is further reinforced by the group's encouragement, which recognises their learning and skills. What essentially differentiates the two activities is what Bajoit (1999) refers to as the nature of the means to work on those needs for self-fulfilment and social recognition or, in his own words, the type of "action logic" the person uses to respond to those needs. According to him, those action logics can be of two different types: narrative and social action. In the narrative case, the person will relate and self-explain their story or situation and thereby reinforce or modify their understanding of their reality. The self-esteem module contributes to that end through the life story activity, while the immersion house incorporates the social action as it allows the development of a secure space for skills to be put to the test. In the latter case, it is through the commitment to the activity and especially confrontation with others that the person is forced to work on their self-perception.

Volunteering Cell

Like the immersion house activity, the volunteering cell activity is a social action that allows participants to develop skills through practice and creating social relationships, thereby gaining confidence. However, it includes the mobilisation of broader skills than merely the French language and within a framework closer to "reality". Indeed, the skills that the volunteering cell participants wish to put into practice are more diversified and include their professional skills acquired before arrival in the host society such as teamwork, customer relations, problem-solving, etc. According to one co-researcher: "volunteers are either people who have some expertise and want to share it or people who want to practise and gain expertise/develop new skills. I see three main motivations, a more 'social', 'French' or 'work skills' aspect" (Shannon, 14 February 2020).

Co-researchers highlighted their wish to use their knowledge, know-how, and skills for community service, often for one of the following reasons. First, to honour the values they embody, like solidarity, mutual aid and sharing. Many co-researchers testified to this: "I am not interested in money; I am looking for something else. To be able to give a little of what I have in my heart" (Asuncion, 18 September 2019); "The work at the Red Cross fulfils the values that are in the soul; my soul is filled up with something positive. It is the values" (Antoine, 13 September 2019). Second, the co-researchers want to feel useful to the community and put aside the image of system cheaters that they are stigmatised with. This corresponds to the traditional situation of migrants who are only accepted if they are useful to the host society (Rea & Tripier, 2008). A co-researcher caring for her sick husband and children emotionally explained:

> [Volunteering] is good for me. I am happy to work, to do something good. My whole family receives social assistance. We want to be positive, not just to take the benefits but to give. Because everyone thinks we come to Belgium to get money. But it is not what it is all about. (Samira, 13 December 2019)

Finally, other co-researchers express the same phenomenon in terms of gift and counter-gift, (see Mauss, 1923–1924). Volunteering work, according to Mauss, would be a counter-gift to the financial and logistical resources newcomers receive from the Belgian state. In that respect, a co-researcher asserts that "[giving back] is important because we benefit a lot from Belgium. Belgium welcomes a lot of people; we need to help too" (Asuncion, 18 September 2019), and another states

that "volunteering, it is like giving your change out of what you have received" (Doudou, 03 December 2019).

Volunteering is also an opportunity for newcomers to learn new skills and get to know more about Belgium, its functioning and its customs. One co-researcher mentioned that "to me, volunteering means spending time with people, learning how things are being done, the rules. It is something other than a course on rules" (Ibrahimi, 8 July 2019). Another co-researcher said "it helps to understand the Belgian mentality, how we talk, how we discuss. Because we do not know anything. It is only through work that you understand. You become part of a small environment to understand globally" (Myriem, 2 October 2019).

The relationships that participants create while volunteering allow them to compare their resources with those of others. In contrast to the self-esteem module or the immersion house activity, they no longer expose their skills to peers but to third parties. They meet professionals from a certain field, clients, other volunteers and other citizens. The presence of these actors and the gaze with which they look at them is a fundamental source of social recognition. A co-researcher recounted:

> When I arrived there [at the association], I was told, 'It is like a family here'. And it is true, the people are very nice. It is a wonderful family. When you are there, you feel safe. When I make mistakes, people do not get angry, they give me the explanations and tell me that I am not used to it, so it is normal. (Asuncion, 18 September 2019)

The co-researchers share common fears they had before starting to volunteer. According to them, the most difficult thing is that they had to dare to try:

> Before I started, I had two fears: French and teamwork. I do not know the people, so I am afraid. Maybe people will not understand what is in my head. They come from different cultures [...], I'm afraid not to be up to it. (Myriem, 2 October 2019)

These fears disappeared over time, sometimes partially, other times entirely, facilitated by the logistical and moral support of the volunteering cell social worker. Although the newcomer is responsible for the outcome of their volunteering activity, the support from the volunteering cell offers them a sense of protection.

The newcomers' growth in social capital, which is understood as the set of social relationships that can be mobilised by an individual (Bourdieu, 1980), lies at the heart of this activity. The relationships they create there, although ephemeral in nature, play a crucial role in their process of understanding Belgium. In addition to strengthening ties, it is important, in the construction of a social network, to have weak ties; that is, social relations that go beyond the cohesive group to which one belongs (Granovetter, 1973). These relationships are both a vector of learning (Martiniello & Rea, 2014) used for the construction of a new social identity—being a legitimate foreigner living in Belgium—and of social recognition (Honneth, 1995), linked, in particular, to the social utility of foreigners and, more specifically, to their contribution to Belgium's social and economic development.

Opportunities for agency

The self and social recognition and, through them, self-esteem that are at the heart of the Life Program activities through the increase in social capital with peers and third parties operate as a central mechanism for further capacity for action in newcomers. The co-researchers stated that the self-confidence gained during the activities regarding their resources (knowledge, skills, competencies, qualities) encouraged them to undertake new projects. In their own words, the activities allowed them to "fly out of their cage" (Fatiha, 17 February 2019) and "come out of their shell" (Nadia, 17 February 2019). These stark metaphors symbolise the freedom of action and self-fulfilment that they discovered through their participation. This feeling of freedom of action guaranteed when being recognised as equals (Guégen & Malochet, 2014) is closely related to the definition of freedom suggested by Sen (1999) in his theory of capabilities. Sen links capability to freedom by assigning a crucial role to a person's actual ability to use their resources to carry out the various activities they value. The analysis shows that many of the skills mobilised by the co-researchers during the Life Program activities pre-existed their participation, but they were not able to use them. In other words, the feeling of self-fulfilment and social recognition practices activate newcomers' available resources and facilitate the development of new resources. The confidence gained in their own resources offers a feeling of freedom which, in turn, encourages them to start new projects in society and ultimately allows them to find their place in the host society: a place they consider as fitting them.

Specifically, following their participation in those activities, several co-researchers proudly explained that they had started new projects or had taken initiatives in their daily lives that they had never considered before. These initiatives included, for example, management of administrative procedures without requesting support or translation from a family member, registration for a new training or French course or starting a new job. For instance, a co-researcher recounted, "I enrolled in an administration training. If it was not for the volunteering cell, I would not have done it. It gave me the courage" (Géraldine, 2 October 2019), while another said:

> During this period of looking for an apartment, I am the one who makes the phone calls, the visits, etc. I always used to give the phone to my husband; now I do not anymore. We talked about this yesterday with my husband, and he said, 'You have changed a lot', because I make all the calls, I talk to the tenants, I make the appointments for the visits, etc. I am very happy with the way things are going [...]. Sometimes we forget, I forget I am a nurse, I am capable; I forget that. Now I tell myself, 'It is all right. I am here. I can stop being locked up. I can get out of my house'. (Myriem, 28 November 2019)

Conclusion

By using the migratory careers theoretical framework, the CAMIM project focused on newcomers' life experiences and paths rather than on the knowledge they obtain during the civic integration programme. This approach directs attention towards the subjectivity of migratory experiences and the adaptation to a new environment. Analysing the processes of subjectivation reveals the practices that allow the increase in self-esteem necessary for agency, namely self-recognition and social recognition. Moreover, focusing the data collection on "life paths" implies taking into account the rise in newcomers' social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1980), which became evident in the volunteering cell activity. Indeed, increasing and diversifying social capital is a necessary condition for accessing new resources (employment, housing, education, etc.). Therefore, whereas integration requires newcomers to actively participate in the host society, it presupposes social recognition of newcomers as fully-fledged citizens.

While the integration programme offers formal learning (language, laws, norms and values), the Life Program offers tools (self-esteem, social utility and recognition) useful for vulnerable individuals to learn about the host country, find their place and acquire new resources. The former aims at recognising the conformity of newcomers; the latter at recognising their individuality (Honneth, 1995). The three Life Programme activities provide newcomers with essential capital prior to any other form of learning: getting to know themselves and improving self-esteem. The Life Programme is, therefore, presented as the missing link between the integration programme and the opportunities offered by society (activities, training, jobs). The activities that have been tested within the scope of the CAMIM project are certainly not the only ones that foster agency, others could reach the same objectives, but their voluntary and subjective nature is key to enhancing capacity for action.

The increase in autonomy and agency is the result of newcomers' participation in the Life Program activities, further strengthened by the reflective work induced through the participatory action research approach. Co-researchers value the change in dynamic: the fact that they are no longer beneficiaries of information but its source. Through this approach, the team members constantly questioned their posture and reversed their relationship with newcomers, considering the newcomers to be owners of information they themselves do not have, rather than the contrary. During the project, participatory action research turned out to be not only a research approach but also a social worker posture. This change of attitude from the team members (i.e., valuing newcomers' expertise) induced a change in self-perception and self-esteem. This approach not only helps to consider newcomers' points of view while making decisions but also increases their agency. While co-creative practices are mainly used in sustainable development research, our results show that this method is particularly valid and opportune when studying with subjects "without voices".

With this approach, the research within the CAMIM participatory action study no longer consists of an analysis of the actors' agency but produces activities, analyses and postures that become the instruments of this agency. The production of knowledge is no longer intended solely to feed into possible measures to be taken by decision-makers but is the result of a change at work, developed by the persons most affected to be as beneficial as possible to their reality and expertise: the newcomers.

Appendix: Authors of quotes (real names have not been used to protect newcomers' privacy)

Ahmed: M, Morocco, 28
Fatima: F, Syria, age unknown
Asuncion: F, Colombia, 61
Ibrahimi: F, Nigeria, 41
Doudou: M, Guinea, 42
Felipe: M, Chile, 43
Nadia: F, Morocco, 42
Lamya: F, Morocco, 51
Fatiha: F, Morocco, 50
Linda: F, Guinea, 39
Lindaa: F, Morocco, 35
Antoine: M, Syria, 61
Géraldine: F, Burkina Faso, 45
Samira: F, Syria, 48
Myriem: F, Tunisia, 30
Shannon: F, USA, 39
Ryma: F, Syria, 58

Note

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