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Socially Engaged Older Adult Education on Refugees and Migrants: Documentaries on Role Model Refugees as an Innovative Strategy Leading towards an Inclusive Society

The research focuses on older adults' attitude to migration and the way their attitude is formed through making films, which is interpreted through the transformative learning theory. The research method consisted of a case study of the international project RefugeesIN. Data collection was conducted by means of interviews and participant observation in the period 2017–2019. The research findings revealed that project participants developed an innovative strategy for older adult education through filmmaking, which led to transformative learning. The following was highlighted by project participants as important elements of transformative learning: empathy and identification, holistic learning, critical thinking and critical distance.

Keywords: film, international project, social innovation, transformative learning, older adults.

Družbeno angažirano izobraževanje starejših o beguncih in migrantih: dokumentarni filmi o beguncih kot inovativna strategija za razvoj vključujoče družbe

Raziskava se osredotoča na odnos starejših do migracij in formiranje tega odnosa prek ustvarjanja filmov, kar je interpretirano s pomočjo teorije transformativnega učenja. Metoda raziskave je bila študija primera mednarodnega projekta RefugeesIn. Zbiranje podatkov je potekalo z intervjuji in opazovanjem z udeležbo v času od 2017 do 2019. Ugotovitve kažejo, da so udeleženi v projektu razvili inovativno strategijo za izobraževanje starejših s snemanjem filmov, kar je vodilo v transformativno učenje, pri čemer so sodelujoči izpostavili: empatijo in identifikacijo, holističnost učenja, kritično mišljenje in kritično distanco kot pomembne elemente transformativnega učenja.

Ključne besede: film, mednarodni projekt, socialna inovacija, transformativno učenje, starejši odrasli.

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1. Introduction

Migration and border life have been researched by various studies (e.g. Kožar Rosulnik et al. 2016; Vinciguerra 2017; Mezgec 2019; Brezigar & Zver 2019) which did not specifically deal with older adults. Older adults and international migration, have, however, often been the focus of research in the field of aged care (Baldassar et al. 2007). When society is faced with major changes such as migration, all population groups – including older adults – are responsible for the shared life. Older adults are the fastest growing population group. However, there are few programmes geared towards them which focus on understanding migration and the development of active citizenship in the light of migration. Educational programmes are intended for migrants, as well as young people and adults in the destination society (Guo & Wong 2015). Modern development is based on the ability of people to live with otherness and older adults need to adapt to it. Due to migration, communities – urban communities in particular – are becoming increasingly diversified, so it comes as no surprise that social initiatives are geared towards developing inclusive practices. This has been particularly noticeable since the 2015 refugee crisis (Mikulec 2017; Førde 2019). Various creative approaches to raising awareness of the importance of inclusion (Roy 2016) and the learning community have been observed in different communities and organisations. One of them is RefugeesIN, an international project that constituted the environment in the presented research, the focus of which is on the relationship between raising older adults' awareness of migration and the use of socially engaged art, such as filmmaking. The research examines film as a means of transformative learning and building an inclusive community characterised by a dialogic encounter. The research kept track of the course of a research and development project focused on raising awareness of migration-related issues, which was part of a research programme at Slovenian Third Age University. The theoretical framework for the interpretation is the transformative learning theory – the theory that was also selected as a theoretical framework by the authors of the RefugeesIN project.

1.1 Transformative Learning

Adult learning can be interpreted through different theories; for this particular research, the transformative learning theory based on the critical social theory was selected. In the beginning, the theory included the ideas of Freire, Habermas, and various feminist ideologies; later, however, various currents of thought developed, of which the one that highlights the significance of critical reflection and social justice is of particular importance for the discussion presented in this paper (Brookfield & Holst 2010; Brookfield 2012, 141). Transformative learning means the transformation of an individual in the environment. The

critical theory is based on three assumptions about the organisation of society: (a) Western democracies are societies characterised by inequality and discrimination; (b) it is generally accepted that such a system (i.e. inequality) is a matter of course and is inevitable; (c) the critical theory understands such a situation as the introduction to change. Transformative learning is thus not only about acquiring knowledge and developing skills and values, but it is also learning that aims to form democratic relationships and build a community that questions power relations. Mezirow (2018) defines transformative learning as learning that transforms individuals and society, which makes learning a social and political act that aims to reveal power games and promote agency and action. The strategies mentioned as those that are used to introduce and promote transformative learning are: teamwork, narrative methods, creating art, and film (Jarvis 2012, 487; Rivinen 2020, 196). The last of the listed strategies – film – is included as a method in this study.

1.2 The Basic Transformative Learning Model

Transformative learning involves the formation of people in their entirety, a process during the course of which individuals use their (existing) interpretations, their formed meaning schemes so as to transform them or to construct a new meaning. The process consists of ten stages (Mezirow 2018, 118; Taylor 2017, 18). Transformative learning takes place when cognitive dissonance occurs after one perspective is confronted by another. When this dissonance is felt, a generally accepted belief (a set of values, myths, views) that an individual or a group believes to be true is shaken. The stages of transformative learning are as follows: (1) A disorientating dilemma. (2) Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame. (3) A critical assessment of assumptions. (4) Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation is shared. (5) Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions. (6) Planning a course of action. (7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans. (8) Provisional trying of new roles. (9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships. (10) Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

1.3 Transformative Learning and Films

Transformative learning can occur as a product of experiences in everyday life, however, it can also take place with the help of selected strategies. Creating art is one of the well-known transformative learning strategies (Roy 2016; Lawrence 2012). In critical pedagogy, films are used in three ways, i.e. as part of other didactic approaches, as people selecting and watching films on their own – which can also be understood as popular pedagogy, and as the creation/production of films

for the purposes of critical learning and awareness-raising. For the most part, studies deal with the education of older adults as film viewers (Rivinen 2020) or focus on analysing how older adults are represented in film (McCleary 2014). There are, however, very few examples of research into filmmaking in older adult groups. Film is an inspiration and narration that enters into a relationship with human beliefs and emotions and can lead to cognitive or emotional dissonance, which is the first stage of transformative learning. People are not passive receivers and there is not merely a “consumption of fiction”, as noted by the Canadian author Jubas (2015). In fact, viewers repeatedly reconstruct their meanings as they accept, resist or transform cultural representations. Films are a tool (a method) that helps older adults see, hear and experience the world.

The aim of the presented research is to improve the knowledge of socially engaged older adult education and to find out how new educational strategies leading towards an inclusive society can be developed.

The analysis of relevant literature revealed no similar cases of socially engaged older adult education, thus no deductive hypotheses have been made – the aim was for the phenomenon to speak for itself. To this end, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen. As the research was focused on learning about the opinions and experiences of the actors involved in the project (older adult learners and project organisers), the principles of participatory research were followed.

The research was structured based on the following three research questions.

- (a) What was the course of the project focused on a new social practice of socially engaged older adult education aimed at the development of an inclusive community by means of film?
- (b) What dimensions of transformative learning did project participants exhibit?
- (c) How has transformative learning been reflected in the development of socially engaged older adult education?

2. Research Method

A case study was used because the research was focused on a phenomenon that is topical and embedded in a cultural environment, and as the boundary between the phenomenon and the environment is unclear (Yin 2018). Hence, the research devoted particular attention to the cultural environment in which the practice takes place. The research followed the principle of participatory and contextually sensitive research.

The case study was not designed in a way that allowed merely observation and interpretation of what was going on, but was rather designed in accordance with the so-called post-qualitative methodology (St. Pierre 2018, 3), which emphasises that one learns by encouraging development (e.g. becoming a subject) and the collective creation of knowledge. The so-called non-representative research

agenda (Thrift 2008) influences the research structure by considering the actor-network theory and new materialism.¹ Research is anchored in the practice of life, action and performance. Post-qualitative research not only focuses on acquiring knowledge, but also includes ethics and ontology, which Barad (2007, 409) refers to as “ethico-onto-epistemology”. Post-qualitative research is close to the field that Ingold (2015) calls non-representational research and dialogue with phenomena. This means that researchers respond to the researched phenomena through interventions rather than merely creating representations.

2.1 Course of Research and Case Description

The research was conducted between 2017 and 2019 as part of the European project RefugeesIN,² in which the Slovenian Third Age University³ cooperated with other European organisations. The project took place from November 2016 to December 2018.

RefugeesIN was a project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, coordinated by AidLearn, Portugal, and partnered by:

- Hamburger Volkshochschule, Hamburg, Germany
- Centro Studi Città di Foligno, Foligno, Italy
- Slovenian Third Age University, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dublin, Ireland
- Greek Council for Refugees, Athens, Greece.⁴

As part of the project, various tools and practices aimed at social inclusion by means of film were developed (Findeisen 2018). The project was a continuation of the international project CINAGE – European Cinema for Active Ageing (2014–2015). The project also included the development of new methods for older adult education through the use of socially engaged art, in this particular case film. The employed method included collecting and analysing existing films and making new films. The purpose of education through filmmaking was to challenge the widely held beliefs about migration and refugees. The aim was to use imagination and art (films, stories) to explore the existing mental maps and create new ones, as well as unmask social power games with the aim of forming an inclusive community. Education within the project was emancipatory and its focus was not merely on individuals but on societal changes. Project activities included the following: films were analysed and a catalogue was prepared (e.g. Antunes et al. 2018a), a collection of 26 real-life stories titled From Escape to Belonging was compiled (see Antunes et al. 2017), guidelines for filmmaking education aimed at social inclusion and a filmmaking guide were developed (e.g. Antunes et al. 2018b, 2018c), filmmaking training was organised. The work conducted as part of the project can be understood as older adults’ film education aimed at influencing the development of an inclusive society. Other

project results included six film festivals organised across the project countries, a conference and a film festival in Slovenia (12–13 November 2018) and a number of radio programmes.

Both the research and the project were based on the socially critical theory. For this reason, as part of the case study, data were collected through fieldwork (during the 2017–2018 academic year) using the method of critical ethnography. This is an ethnography also referred to as critical theory in practice as it does not only stick to describing (the power dynamics, for instance) but also encourages collective action. In this particular case, action relates to film and narrational activities of older adults. Two of the research authors were directly involved in the development of the project, which means that the researchers are connected to the research phenomenon and are not remote from it as merely observers (Madison 2019, Price 2013).

2.2 Data Collection

The data were collected during the 2017–2018 academic year. Participant observation and critical ethnography that took place at the Third Age University in Ljubljana were used. Non-directive interviews were conducted in 2019. In addition to participant observation and interviews, documentary analysis was also used. As part of the project, a large amount of material was collected by participants in all partner countries (approximately 2,500 pages of material in their mother tongues: Portuguese, German, Greek, Italian, English and Slovenian; some of the material was translated into English). In the research presented in this paper, most of the material used for analysis was in Slovenian (available to researchers at the Slovenian Third Age University in Ljubljana). Film stories published on the project's website and the following YouTube link were also used: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzV1TFUqO67vG0diQ7mk3QA>.

The listed data collection methods resulted in written materials (interview transcripts, field notes) that were analysed according to the textual analysis procedures.

Table 1: Interview participants

Interview Participants	Number	Educational Attainment
University of the Third Age student	5	Bachelor's degree
Mentor (older adult education expert)	1	Bachelor's degree
Activity organiser (older adult education expert)	1	Bachelor's degree
Planner and project leader (older adult education expert)	1	PhD

Source: empirical data.

Non-directive interviews were conducted with Slovenian learners who participated in the project and with older adult education experts (Table 1). All the interviewees were female and all of them had either a Bachelor's degree or a higher level of completed education. Interview transcripts are available at the Slovenian Third Age University.

2.3 Data Processing

The data were processed by means of inductive category formation. The data obtained were examined, a preliminary thematic analysis was performed with the content analysis method, codes were attributed and the basic thematic sets were first formed and then used as categories in the presented research. Categories that show the dimensions of transformative learning are listed as subcategories. An excerpt from the table is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Overview of how the material was organised in terms of codes, subcategories, and categories

Categories (Transformative Learning Dimensions)	Subcategories	Selected codes	Statement examples
Inclusivity and connectivity	An inclusive community Compassionate relationships/solidarity Redistribution of power Integration/acceptance pathways	Networking through film/culture contacts Shared experience Social contacts Sharing information Art/film Atrocities of war/trauma Flexibility Selflessness	Films must tell the stories of successfully integrated refugees. When you see a film, it has to make you want to change something. Integration doesn't happen overnight. It's a gradual process that takes decades.
Identification and empathy	Emotions Belonging Relational precarity Engagement Identification with humanistic values	Personal resonance Personal narratives Suffering, grief, depression, pain, guilt Exile	Refugees have names. My parents were refugees.
Critical thinking and critical distance	A disorientating dilemma Liminal space The discourse of power Others/different Critical consciousness	Watch a film/look for injustice Write a script Write a story/consider from another angle Innovation	Our films are different. We don't want to just go with the flow and do what everyone else does.
Holistic learning	Strong emotions Fears/desires Aware/unaware Activity (practice)	Process Points of view Practical wisdom	I was shaken up by the films. I felt like crying. Is this really what we are like?! I look at the world differently now. For a long time, I couldn't accept that this was really happening.

Source: empirical data.

3. Results and Discussion

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The research findings are presented in terms of the four key categories that were used to organise the material on transformative learning and socially engaged education. The categories were formed by means of inductive category formation based on an analysis of the textual materials and by taking into account the theoretical framework regarding transformative learning.

3.1 Inclusivity and Connectivity

Films provide viewers with an intense experience by giving them an opportunity to observe others, which leads to greater awareness of the structures of power and influence. Through their films, the research participants pointed to an unjust community and to the rules that are unfit for real life, eliminating groups with little social power, as pointed out by Giroux (2020) in his work *On Critical Pedagogy*. The films (e.g. *Marijana*⁵) highlighted the importance of people in the environment they are entering, which indicates the need to raise the awareness of migration among all population groups. In the eponymous film, the protagonist *Marijana* says that in the nursing home some residents did not want a foreigner cleaning their room. “Some ladies wouldn’t let me clean their rooms. They said, ‘I refuse to have a Bosnian woman come into my room.’” In this case, the aim is for the films to make nursing home residents aware of the issues of prejudice, as pointed out by one of the interviewees (Interview 7): “Films challenge the stereotypes about refugees. They invite us to understand others and ourselves in the face of change”.

Learning in the project was, for the most part, socially engaged learning related to the environment. The entire process of learning, teaching and research was focused on the development of a new practice (film education for older adults) that would motivate people to act and behave in a different (more inclusive) way.

The students participate in the project as amateur sociologists, activists and researchers in connection with external actors. They take turns playing different roles. During the making of two documentaries, they took on the roles of screenwriters, directors, camera operators, editors, etc. They took up a critical stance and were all equal as participants. This contributes to a broader problematisation and valorisation of the social context and the phenomenon of refugeeism. (Field Notes, D. F., March 2018)

All project partners (Slovenia, Portugal, Germany, Italy, Greece, Ireland) defined the project, the project contents, the results and the implementation together. The same goes for the project goals – they set them together, which influenced their mutual learning. Their aim was to materialise the processes and results for the local, national and international communities, while also preparing an

education programme for the future (a brochure with refugees' real-life stories, a textbook and guidelines for teachers, as well as twelve films for the public and other educators). Transnational meetings and the activities in the period between individual meetings, the response from older adults that participated in the education consisting of 120 45-minute lessons and immediate feedback from the public confirmed the meaningfulness of the planned activities in the development of an inclusive community. The films are geared towards local people, aiming for them to immerse themselves fully in the film and become invested in the refugees' stories, as well as for the stereotypes to be challenged and rejected. Film festivals – a total of six were organised – have positive effects, which is in line with the findings of Roy (2016). The films depict success stories of refugees that can serve as role models for refugees who will follow in their footsteps at a later time and transformative learning in film viewers.

The 2018 RefugeesIN Film Festival and Conference in Ljubljana attracted more than 90 participants. The Slovenian team presented twelve documentaries on refugee integration. For many participants, the festival was a source of reflection and learning. "I went to the festival with mixed feelings, but I realised how important freedom is to all of us!", wrote one of the festival visitors on the festival's Facebook page.

3.2 Identification and Empathy

The transformative learning segment called identification and empathy refers to two processes. The first of the two processes is the development of empathy in project participants (older adult learners) while the second is the planned process of promoting empathy in film viewers and story readers. Since the research presented here focuses on project participants, special attention has been devoted to their responses regarding their own learning.⁶

Films induce an emotional response in viewers. While films are the generators of emotions, emotions are the driving forces that drive a person to do something and encourage them to act. Therefore, the filmmakers wanted the story to stimulate reflection on others and elicit emotions, as confirmed by various other studies (e.g. Lünenborg & Maier 2019, 140). Socially formed emotions occur in a relationship. Filmmaking is a relational (emotional) practice and impacts the formation of filmmakers' emotions. The process is transformative because it touches upon the emotions and beliefs about the lives of other people (refugees, migrants) one is not aware of having. In this case, empathy is developed through getting to know others. Becoming immersed and invested in the story of another person, who is different (only) at first glance, creates personal resonance, and encourages a change of perspective and the development of new emotions.

In the initial stage of the project, the participants first collected previously made films, followed by real-life stories in the second stage, and during the

third stage they made their own films. There was a great deal of empathy for the refugees throughout all the stages, however, there was also dislike of their otherness, which in some cases led to a rejection of empathy. The filmmakers were also intentionally encouraged to explore their own feelings and look for literature on relationships, emotions and social learning via modelling. Various interviewees emphasised the importance of emotions when it comes to film exploration and filmmaking. Hence, it can be concluded that for the sake of the project participants' transformative learning it was important for them to deal with their own emotions and with the way their emotions were changing. The interviewees' statements reveal their views on the importance of relationships and emotions. Identification and empathy are revealed to be complex processes.

The focus was on **the experience of refugeeism**. And then the Brochure was created – it contained refugees' real-life stories collected by older adults. The refugees found it difficult to trust us. There was a lot of pretence. Out of fear, they first told us fictional stories, which were quite similar. According to the stories, they had come to Slovenia out of love for a girl. The stories were also primitively idealised. All Slovenians were supposedly good, wonderful people, etc. It wasn't until the next, more trusting phase, that we managed to get some snippets of truth. I was hurt by this distrust. It suggested that I might do them harm, that I'll exploit them. Their defence awakened my defence mechanism. It felt as if I'd been slapped and my compassion subsided. It was now easier for me to understand those who rejected refugees. I realised how difficult it is if values don't align and how it can end in the mutual erasure of identity foundations. (Interview 2)

The project partners selected mainly European feature films and short documentaries about the role model refugees and economic migrants. They chose films made after 2000 in the countries to which they had been assigned. In Slovenia, the project participants explored Romanian and Czech film productions – films intended to portray role model refugees and those who helped them, as in fact role models exist on both sides. The films were supposed to set an example for newly arriving refugees, those with a desire to integrate into European society and learn parts of the European culture code. Different behaviours and concepts needed to be recorded and understood, such as: refugees, economic migrants, asylum seekers, asylees; exile, change; social inclusion/exclusion at a time when these two phenomena are on a massive scale; material and **relational precarity, identity, fear and other emotions**. (Interview 8)

Any adult education begins by knowing who it is intended for and the topics it deals with. Therefore, it was first necessary to discover the phenomenon of refugeeism, i.e. to understand **the rational side** (the legal facts, policies, etc.) of the phenomenon and **understand the emotions** felt by the refugees, hosts, authorities, etc. Of course, the hosts' emotions, too. (Interview 7)

What does it mean to be in exile, to flee from the atrocities of war? Exile is not some kind of general concept; exile can be personal, individual, or volatile, depending on a number of exiles' attributes – age, gender, education, profession, political activity,

labour union activity, origin (from what country, area, city). It also depends on the political and other events in the host country as well as external circumstances, much to the same extent as the refugee's personality. **We can only speak about each refugee individually and not about refugees, about each exile individually and not about exiles plural.** Refugees can be viewed and understood in many ways, not just a single one. The government is trying to organise soldiers who treat refugees in refugee camps like prisoners. Local authorities can be cold in their attitude towards refugees. Locals can have different attitudes towards refugees: friendly, compassionate, hostile, scornful, fear-ridden /... / Some families show unhealthy curiosity by watching refugees through the metal fence of a refugee camp. (Interview 4)

Refugees exiled from their country ravaged by war are accustomed to a certain kind of light, certain sounds and certain foods that they are unable to find in a new country. **They have the feeling** they are **upsetting the locals.** They are fed up of being and looking different. They are, however, **unable to simply melt into a new culture.** **And neither can we melt into theirs.** In new places with new people, they look for similarities with themselves. They try to hear, because in the beginning a series of words, let alone individual words, don't exist to them; even the physical environment with shops and glaring signs **has an aggressive effect on them.** They can stay in touch with their families through new technology, which makes it easier for them to decide to become refugees. And another interesting thought, 'Refugeeism is handed down from generation to generation, from a grandfather to a father and a son ...'⁷ (Interview 3)

Identification and empathy do not develop without resistance. A metaphor for the emotionally exhausting process of transformative learning that takes place when one accepts something that is foreign is the story (and film) *L'Introus* (The Intruder). Philosopher Nancy underwent a heart transplant, accepting the heart of another person, the heart of a stranger. For his body to accept the foreign heart, medicine must lessen his defensive reactions. He wonders whose heart is now keeping him alive. Is it the heart of a thief, the heart of a liar, the heart of a young man? It is certainly a foreign object, yet one he could not live without. Transformative learning in the field of emotion formation leads to a broader frame of reference and to a diminished dislike of all things foreign and different.

3.3 Critical Thinking and Critical Distance

Transformative learning is characterised by critical reflection that was part of the project narratives and practices. Various methods were used to research the phenomenon (and plan the project): interviewing refugees, watching European films, listening to online lectures, examining the data of authors that participated in roundtable discussions, watching short documentary films and analysing them from different perspectives. The interviewees pointed out that their project included a critical attitude to the existing culture even during the planning stage and that it could be classified as belonging to the field of critical gerontology, which promotes active ageing, as well as social and personal empowerment of

older adults. Empowerment refers to the development of strategies leading to effective functioning in existing power structures. The strategies for the empowerment of older adults (as a group with less social power) are similar to those geared towards migrants. Both groups require critical reflection of the current power structure.

We need to be critical of the established culture. This culture is the 'ideological state apparatus' of the ruling groups. Adorno and Gramsci wrote about it, we used to study it. (The interviewee studied humanities in the 1960s, author's note). The films we are making don't serve the interests of these groups. On the contrary. More so, they serve our – i.e. filmmakers' – interests. Every single film we make is a film about ourselves /.../ and about those with whom we can compare as older adults. The situation of older adults is quite similar to that of refugees /.../, certainly those who are not at the heart of society, those who are pushed to the edge by social forces and burdened by many social stereotypes. We want to be critical! (Interview 1)

The interviewee's opinion shared above is corroborated by various studies into the prejudices about older adults and migrants, which need to be challenged through organised activity (Andrews 2017, 155). The project of socially engaged education through film created opportunities for changes in personal attitudes, outlook on life and emotion management. The project included a critical analysis of European films, which proved a source of transformative learning (the first stage of the project). The films (both those analysed and those produced) present multiple positions, the complexities of oppression, as relations between groups with more social power and less social power could be referred to with the words by Freire (2019) and Giroux (2002). These elements have also been highlighted by the project participants. Films are a new sort of textbook, allowing viewers to learn about different stories and thus face their own beliefs that have emerged as part of the cultural environment. Films allow a critical distance.

The refugees' real-life stories are filmed in a way that fosters a cognitive conflict or a dilemma that disorients viewers as the stories do not confirm the established dichotomous beliefs. The films shock viewers and make them question themselves and their culture. The process of raising awareness of the social construction of knowledge, beliefs, interpretations, values and attitudes leads, via the capacity for adopting different perspectives, to a particular phenomenon (e.g. a refugee's story). When group members analyse films with the help of a mentor, they pay attention to the discourse of power and develop the capacity for critical reflection. The project team's findings confirm Brookfield's (Brookfield 2011) theses about the importance of teaching for the development of critical thinking.

Critical thinking and critical distance adopted towards a phenomenon lead to the development of "critical consciousness" (Freire 2019). Learners develop

the ability to explore the matter-of-course reality and to develop activities that change the world (social, cultural, economic context) in which they live. Film analysis and filmmaking contributed to the development of critical awareness, which was exhibited as: the ability to engage in mutual critical dialogue and question dominant beliefs, psychosocial support, collaborative learning between different cultural groups and identity development.

3.4 Holistic Learning

Transformative learning takes place as a holistic process that deconstructs (personal and social) representations about refugees and their hosts. Based on the deconstruction, it then develops new constructions, new views and attitudes to phenomena. The deconstruction of meanings begins with a dilemma that occurs in relation to the existing practice, beliefs and emotions. Transformative learning involves the transformation of beliefs, practices and decision-making, which includes individuals' emotions and existing habits of mind.

You think about your own life. And all of a sudden you don't take everything for granted any more. When we were picking the films, I was shaken up by some of them I couldn't believe it. And this stayed with me. Even after that, I no longer saw things in the same way. (Interview 2)

The interviews with the project participants revealed learning to be a holistic process involving personal memories, judgement and practical wisdom in decision-making. It contains cognitive and emotional dimensions, as well as ethical and practical dimensions that work as a whole. The interviewees believe that by learning during the project they are constantly becoming different. Learning means creating new perspectives (views) but at the same time is also a process of becoming (existential development). Films helped the participants develop new ways of perceiving problems and the world, which can be understood as the development of multiple perspectives that allow different judgements of migration – a phenomenon that is anything but one-dimensional. If positive stereotypes are created naively, this can lead to reckless decision-making in much the same way as creating negative stereotypes. The project participants developed an intersubjective epistemology, knowledge acquired through mutual relations. Transformative learning, as described by the participants, is a process that involves a whole person-in-relationships; it does not happen in a single moment; in fact, it takes a while for a perspective, a view, the way a problem is felt to change, as illustrated by the statement below.

It seemed to me that our films didn't even need to be presented to the public to encourage reflection and understand how each of us responds. I was watching our team. We were like a miniature society. Some were empathetic, some all-knowing,

some rude, some others full of stereotypical thinking, and some were quick to condemn. It's amazing how we changed in front of one another's eyes, but of course our opinions didn't become the same, they were merely softened and relativized. (Interview 3)

3.5 Socially Engaged Education

The interviews with the project organisers revealed that the education that was organised and promoted intentionally was education that creates a strategy for socially engaged older adult education. This is the sort of education that impacts wider social groups in a way that is beneficial to both older adults and the project organisers.

The project was of great importance for Slovenian Third Age University in terms of several things. It was in line with the theses and concepts supported by this NGO: **socially engaged education and socially engaged art**. When it comes to their education and work, older adult learners are supposed to be visible and connected to the environment, i.e. to 'go out' and be part of the public. The connectivity of the organisation and the students is also important. It is necessary for older adult learners to work in areas that are beneficial to the whole society (including the European society) and in a way that is interesting to everyone else. (Interview 8)

The aim of looking for films was to become familiar with refugee issues, the refugees' feelings, dilemmas and their search for ways to integrate, as well as discovering the agents of integration with the culture of the host country. The project partners prepared the material for all interested parties. **A textbook was prepared for older adult educators, social workers, refugees and others.** (Interview 7)

In the professional and scientific literature, the concept of socially engaged older adult education is almost non-existent. Theoretically, it can be illuminated only interdisciplinarily, i.e. if it is considered in relation to lived practice, socially engaged art, socially engaged religion and urbanism. Socially engaged education means acquiring community knowledge aimed at improving all types of environment, solving environment-related issues, learning deliberative democracy, tolerance, taking into account divergent opinions and public communication. It is related to the community and to the environment it is changing. Older adult learners use strategies that are in line with this, e.g. exploratory learning, they create projects as part of which project learning is linked to the creation of new practices.

Collaborative project planning, the conception of two documentaries, and gaining knowledge of documentary filmmaking, visual literacy, film editing and directing gave the project participants a sense of achievement and strengthened their motivation for further research and exploration. (Interview 8)

The entire filmmaking process (from analysis to screenwriting, filming, editing, etc.) can also be called expressive learning, which the participants find rewarding, as is evident from the above statement. They are satisfied with the process, as well as their newly acquired knowledge and skills and, even more so, with their active involvement in the cultural environment. An analysis of the project participants' learning reveals that expressive learning connects with socially engaged education to form a whole and the role of older adults evolves from that of learners into that of activists/advocates. A similar observation was made by Lee (2016) in his research conducted in Taiwan. He noted that older adults evolve from "learners" into volunteers through appropriate education based on transformative experiences. A member of the Slovenian team said: "Our intention is to create a new practice that will prove transformative. Creating has transformative power". Thus, the research presented here is not just about older adults becoming volunteers, as pointed out by Lee (2016), but about developing the attitude of socially critical activists. Developing a new role is the final stage of transformative learning. In the case studied, this means the development of a social role that pushes an older adult learner into interacting with the lives of others.

4. Conclusion

The case study provides information on socially engaged older adult education about migration – an innovative practice developed as part of the international project RefugeesIN. Social innovation, experimentation, collective creation (production) of knowledge and attitudes towards migration through transformative learning are the key features of the development of socially engaged education in the researched project.

The results cannot be compared to any other similar studies since socially engaged older adult film education aimed at dealing with migration is a new practice. One of the project participants said, "This has been an exciting undertaking for us older students". For the most part, this referred to the fact that the project involved the development of new strategies, as well as the participants learning about themselves through their dealings with both other participants and encounters with migrants. The participants said that they did not immediately expand their horizons. They first got to know them, which is a key feature of transformative learning. Transformative learning means that mental maps are open to change. Connectivity indicates that both individual elements and relationships between elements are fluid and unstable. Therefore, developing the capacity to accept unstable relationships is part of modern knowledge.

Statements about cognitive conflicts/dissonance and emotions related to migration issues reveal how individuals change and how, through their personal transformation, they also affect the environment. Transformative learning in

the case study refers to the change in habits of mind and activities. The project participants changed their attitudes towards migrants, for the most part, however, they expressed this in their relationship with individuals. It can be argued that living with migrants would require a great deal of intercultural education that avoids naive idealisation. An initial analysis of this field revealed that there is no socially engaged older adult education in the field of migration, which suggests the need for further development of such education.

The project participants in various countries developed an educational practice through the use of socially engaged art, i.e. by analysing and making (producing) films, by preparing verbal narrations and, on the basis of these, a guide for teachers. The participants confirm that transformative learning has taken place at all stages of project development: while they were collecting and analysing European films about migration, learning about the characteristics of portrait and other documentaries, the documentary film theory, during filming and various film presentation events. Thus, it can be argued that film (film analysis and filmmaking) as an exploratory learning strategy has the potential to transform older adults, which has been suggested by youth research too (cf. Huerta 2015; Perry 2018, 219).

Transformative learning took place at different levels. In the analysis of transformative learning, these levels were presented in four categories created during empirical data compilation. The four categories in question are: inclusivity and connectivity, empathy and identification, critical thinking and critical distance, holistic transformative learning. The case study findings are in line with those of some other studies (Jubas 2015; Førde 2019; Rivinen 2020), however, the focus of these studies is on adult education, not on older adult education. The so-called popular culture and popular pedagogy are a source of older adults' socially engaged and critical activities in terms of the construction of attitudes towards migration. A particular value of the case under study is the development of socially engaged education that is based on learning through engagement, which could be the subject of further research.

The presented research has certain limitations mainly because of the environment in which it was conducted, i.e. an urban environment. Another limitation concerns the individuals involved in the research, as they were all highly educated, which is not surprising for a case that developed an innovative practice; for this reason, however, the research findings cannot be generalised further. Despite its limitations, the research has revealed what kind of new programmes would be needed to educate older adults on migration, i.e. innovative strategies that impact the development of attitudes, emotions, and actions. Older adults represent a large population group that plays an important role in the creation of an inclusive society.

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Notes

- ¹ New materialism is an interdisciplinary field developed by feminist studies, which are based on the work by Deleuze (1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). According to this theory, all matter has agential capacities. It is emphasised that ontology, epistemology and ethics are inseparable and form an ethico-onto-epistemology. The same is true of post-qualitative research, which promotes practical experimentation and the creation of something that has previously not existed instead of recreating something that already exists.
- ² Project materials are available on the following links: <https://www.refugeesinproject.eu/> and <http://www.utzo.si/en/projekti/refugeesin>. Further project-related information is included in the following newsletters: E-newsletter No. 1; E-newsletter No. 2; E-newsletter No. 3; E-newsletter No. 4.
- ³ The Slovenian Third Age University is an older adult education organisation, which has been operating since 1984. It consists of 53 units across Slovenia and includes more than 12,000 students.
- ⁴ Links to the partner institutions: AidLearn, Portugal; Centro Studi Citta di Foligno, Italy; Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Ireland; Greek Council for Refugees, Greece; Hamburger Volkshochschule, Germany; Slovenian Third Age University, Slovenia.
- ⁵ The film titled *Marijana*, which tells the story of Marijana Češnovar – a retired university graduate in economics – won the Best Screenplay Award at the Lisbon Film Festival. It is available on the following links: <https://www.refugeesinproject.eu/sl/pack/catalogue/documentaries/marijana.html>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DAgv-3_4LA (accessed 13 March 2020).
- ⁶ During the 2019/2020 academic year, the films were used in the study courses that are part of the Andragogy study programme at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Students reported having developed empathy with the characters portrayed in the films. Similar responses have been shared by visitors to the website of the RefugeesIN project.
- ⁷ The significance of this narrative was not explored in more detail, this would, however, be an option for including contemporary theories about intergenerational trauma transmission.