

## INTRODUCTION

The refugee phenomenon is linked with various themes, but those of change and trauma dominate, resulting in pathologizing the refugee experience. The majority of mental health professionals adjust psychological and psychopathological aspects in the refugee phenomenon, imputing to the notion of "event" a traumatizing general quality and failing to acknowledge the process of subjective "experience" as the basic source of meaning (Papadopoulos, 2007).

However, adversity-activated development, post-traumatic growth and resilience can be seen as important parts of refugees' transition (Papadopoulos, 2007; Hussain & Bhushan, 2013). Current literature points out that almost 30-90% of persons surviving stressful events report at least one change they consider positive to their well-being (Hussain & Bhushan, 2013). Based on these findings, apart from the ability to withstand hardship and preserve a sufficient functioning level, the process of adversity activated development emerges (Papadopoulos, 2007; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Through this process the change underlying "traumatic" events becomes a motivating factor of empowerment and growth leading to the construction of new meaningful aspects of the self. The different quality of the above processes does not indicate a mutually exclusive nature. On the contrary, in the refugee experience they coexist in a circular interaction pointing out the uniqueness of each case and the one-dimensional core of the refugee identity (Papadopoulos, 2007).

The complexity of adversity activated development and post traumatic growth can be better understood in the context of autopoietic, self-productive process, as Systemic Approach theorizes. Based on the autopoiesis theory as formed by Varela and Maturana, each living system tries to preserve a thread of continuity and stability through the recursive self-production of the components of its organization (1974). This means that maintenance of organization is possible despite structural changes and through open communication routes with the environment (Arnoldi, 2006). In the case of refugee experience this process is reflected through the constant endeavor of re-creation of identity as an adaptive mechanism. The construction of new meaning, sense of unity and enrichment of self in relation to adversity and trauma can be seen as an indication of emergence and, thus, development. A process/perspective through which a new understanding of the phenomenon appears proposing new therapeutic perspectives.

## RESULTS : Table presenting Data Analysis

Codes and subcodes	Definition of code and subcode	Examples of qualitative data
<b>The migration decision</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulties in the country of origin</li> <li>Expectations for the receiving country/society</li> <li>Role of important others</li> </ul>	This code refers to all parts of qualitative data regarding factors that effected the decision making of migration. This factors are represented by mutual subcodes about difficulties that lead to migration, expectations of this decision and the role of important others in this process.	"My health problem and all I've been through, because of what it means to be sick in this way in Congo, motivated me to leave my country, my belief in a better future and a better medical care system for me in Europe...I didn't come here to be a tourist. I have come to Europe so I can survive. I believe that in Europe, people have more respect for human rights than in other countries..." A*
<b>The journey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Travel companions</li> <li>Difficulties faced</li> </ul>	This code refers to all parts of qualitative data regarding the experience of the journey. Two subcodes emerged about this thematic unit describing the adversities faced throughout the journey and the role of travel companions in the process.	"Yes, we were all together (c.c. his family). We were at the borders between Iran and Turkey for 10 days. We had food and water for only three days. The rest of the days, one week, we had no food, no help. We couldn't move forward, we couldn't move back. Behind us was Iran, the police." D*
<b>Living in Greece</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulties faced</li> <li>Emerging perspectives</li> </ul>	This code refers to all parts of qualitative data regarding the experience of living in different regions of Greece. The references on this experience focused on the difficulties faced and the new opportunities and perspectives that emerged for the participants, which are organized in two subcodes.	"From the minute I entered Chios I told them I was gay, because I didn't want to put me in a camp...I stayed in the camp and first time they harassed me, verbally, comment or make fun, sometimes sexually harass and I got beat up one time, two times, three, seven until they finally decided to move me... Through my life at the camp I came in contact with a LGBTQI group in Athens. When I went to their meeting for the first time in my life I felt I belong somewhere...They don't look at you as a refugee, they don't look at you as gay, they look at you as a person...I hate the war. I hate what it did. The thing that I like, because it's like an opportunity for us to break free." F*
<b>Coping mechanisms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personality traits</li> <li>Supporting system</li> <li>Integration</li> </ul>	This code refers to all parts of qualitative data regarding different coping mechanisms which the participants developed in the face of the adversities described. These mechanisms are linked throughout the collected data with personal characteristics, existence of supporting system and the process of integration in Greece, which can be organized in three subcodes.	"During the journey, after all this fear I felt, I was thinking that my mother was always a very strong woman - yeah - who did very well in her life and I should not give up. I was thinking that I come from a very strong family...When I arrived here, in the begging, I was very scared, but then some people here gave me strength. My compatriots." C*
<b>Future goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education</li> <li>Important others</li> <li>Professional Occupation</li> </ul>	This code refers to all parts of qualitative data regarding the future goals and plans of the participants. The process of goal setting for all the participants develops around the field of education, their professional occupation and their relationship with important others and thus is organized into three subcodes.	"Now we have safety and it's better. On the other hand, I am always searching for a better life. But I still haven't built my future. I want to go to school, finish it and then get a job so we can live in a better way in the future. Also I want my brother, the one that has health problems, to find help and do better." G* *Coding of interviews

## DISCUSSION

The participants through their narrations report both traumatic events and new perspectives with positive outcomes. In particular, new aspects of self perception, relation to others and way of life are presented as a part of their experience indicating improvement. Based on the above study a different more holistic way of understanding the refugee experience can be proposed. Viewing each person as a complex adaptive system, under the umbrella of "becoming and not being", the refugee crisis can be seen as a transaction without predetermined content. The complex and multiple changes of migration experience mobilize the process of identity rebuilding and thus the creation of meaning, as parts of adversity activated development. The ability to produce a coherent and holistic narration, with different qualities and aspects, is a strong indication of the mentioned hypothesis. The presented data show the ability to create new perspectives and new meaningful links of past and present traits and capabilities sustaining a continuity of self. Henceforth, based on refugees' developed differentiated manner of functioning, they can experience various impacts, on various traits and functioning fields in different situations and time periods.

The described hypothesis can be a source of proposed practices for the professionals working in the field:

The above proposed practices are branches of the development of a general therapeutic function, that revolves around the creation of an adaptive but definite professional role with clear boundaries. Bearing in mind, the constant change and movement defining the refugee field, the construction of a function with this quality might be the only possible intervention. The stability and coherence of the professionals' role can function as a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1999) supporting post trauma growth and bordering the parallel process of identity reforming in the refugee community. Isomorphically the autopoietic process of the refugee community affects and is affected by the above mentioned process occurring in the team of professionals. Consequently, the autopoietic function of the professionals is interdependent with the autopoietic function of the refugees, both creating a recurrent mobilization mechanism as presented in Shape 1. The interdependence of the two autopoietic processes as a part of the autopoietic process of the working field system are presented through mechanical cogs. The multiple attachment points and the openness of the field's system to environment (depicted through the double cog organization) reflects the complex network of links created. This process mobilizes (accelerates/decelerates) the process of the emergence of new identity/ meaning as a part of Adversity - Activated development.

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# REFUGEE EXPERIENCE AS AN AUTOPOIETIC PROCESS

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## METHOD

### • Procedure

The Erasmus+ (KA2) project "CHANGING YOUTH STORIES", aimed at promoting personal development of high-risk adolescents (drug-addicts, offenders, school drop-outs, migrants-refugees) and supporting their social/ professional inclusion, along with empowering professionals working in this difficult field. Social scientists from 4 partner-countries were involved - Greece, Romania, Cyprus, and Italy - and participated in an intensive 10-day training to form Systemic Expert Teams (SETs) and act as multipliers in each of their organizations/countries: each SET then coordinated the work of 10 Direct Intervention Teams (DITs) - professionals with daily interaction with specific youth at risk groups - and organized a transfer workshop for their organization's staff.

### • Participants

The sample of the study consists of six participants, two women and four men aged between 17 and 27 and the mean age is 21. All participants are refugees living in Greece and countries of origin vary between Bangladesh, Congo, Iran, Pakistan and Syria. Two of the interviewed persons were unaccompanied minors, two youth living in Greece without family members or relatives and two traveled with their family and were living in Athens with them. Regarding the legal status of the participants all of them were asylum seekers at the time.

### • Measures

Based on qualitative methodology and narrative systemic approach, the semi structured interview was used. A series of questions were flexibly administered, which arouse from basic thematic units. The novelty of the understudy subject, the complexity of the subjective experience, the hovering content of the refugee phenomenon and the importance of the narrative process led to the above choice of measurement. The six semi-structured interviews conducted by the members of the Greece's DIT team -with the support of the Athenian Institute of Anthropos (AIA)-who worked for Babel Day Center, Accommodation and services scheme for asylum seekers and the Society for the care of minor and youth. The refugees participating in the interviews were in cooperation with the mentioned organizations and NGOs. During all interviews the English and Greek language was used, except in two cases in which the interview person used her/his mother tongue and so the participation of a cultural mediator was needed. Lastly, all participants consented to the procedures of the "Changing Youth Stories" project and the conduction of the interviews after being informed about the aims the content of the above endeavour.

## Table of present & proposed practices

Coping with difficulties and symptoms and so reinforcing an identity of vulnerability

**Empowerment and goal setting** towards tracked potentials and capabilities

Focus on solving present problems, thus strengthening the feeling of dead-end

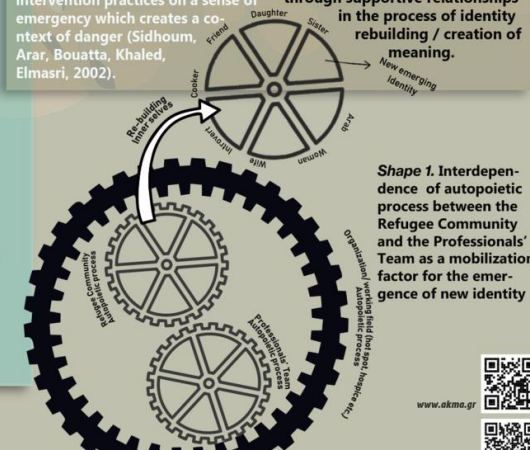
**Focus on the future** in order to give new perspectives and motivate the creating of meaning

Developing interventions focused on the singularity of the individual, thus promoting stigma and failing to create a network of support

**Empowerment of the community** links as a source of connection with past identity traits

Based on the pathologizing conceptual construction of refugee phenomenon - as observers of this experience- professionals working in the field tend to develop their role and intervention practices on a sense of emergency which creates a context of danger (Sidhoum, Arar, Bouatta, Khaled, Elmasri, 2002).

**Development of a functional therapeutic process** aimed at fostering personal growth, emotional awareness, the identification of different needs and regulation through supportive relationships in the process of identity rebuilding / creation of meaning.



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