

**« I like it but that's not what we need ».**

**A critical analysis of participatory music projects in refugee reception centres.**

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The 2015-18 refugee reception crisis featured strong humanitarian engagement and political mobilization of the European civil society. Organizations and engaged citizens played a key role in integrating the field practices of the state-mandated actors in charge of the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers. In many instances, the civil society represented the sole provider of services oriented towards the sociocultural integration and the physical and psychological wellbeing of newcomers asylum seekers.

Artistic practices were often employed by civil society actors to establish ties and relationships with newcomers. Practitioners, artists and culture professionals, indeed, designed and carried out participatory projects based on performing arts involving asylum seekers. The principles that motivated such activity revolved around the idea that being involved in the arts would help participants to relieve from post-traumatic stress, cope with gruelling wait and uncertainty for their asylum application, and ultimately get back to a normal life.

I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the refugee reception crisis to critically discuss the impact of music-based participatory projects involving the residents of collective reception centres in Belgium. I argue that the principles motivating these projects, as well as the initial and final outcomes intended by practitioners (non-migrants), are often not shared by participants (migrants) who have different priorities, motivations and objectives. Although often positive, the impact of such projects is thus unrelated to the nature of the proposed activities, and springs from random contextual factors. I conclude by providing some recommendations to be adopted in the design and implementation of art-based projects in the specific context of collective reception centres.