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Social Impact Assessment

Migration Experiences in Hungary: Reading Group

1- Scoping and Screening

The *Migration Experiences in Hungary: Reading Group* is part of the **Chapter: Global Passport**, a project co-funded by Erasmus+ from the European Union, in partnership with Anropolis Association, from Hungary, and Humanitas Association and the University of Sigmund Freud, from Slovenia. The Global Passport is centered on addressing mental health issues, trauma, and pain, considering its intersections with political and sociocultural structures. Its initial methodology consists of practicing “bibliotherapy”: a psychological tool where people read and reflect on literature to have cognitive shifts. With a focus on migration, its main public is sociopolitical and environmental refugees, and people who migrate primarily for work, and study purposes.

As an activity of the Global Passport in Hungary, Anropolis created the *Migration Experiences in Hungary: Reading Group*, a project based at the University of Miskolc, that aims to create a safe space for international students to socialize, reflect, and make active propositions based on their experiences in Hungary. The project started after the development of a case study — based on 20 interviews conducted between May and June of 2023, with international students and employees living in three cities of Hungary: Budapest, Miskolc, and Szeged; and in bibliographic data on migration and mental health in Hungary. Following the results of the case study, it was concluded that integration policies are needed. The interviews showed how international students struggle with the language barrier in Hungary, lack of information and institutional assistance, loneliness, and despair. It also showed that they find comfort in creating networks among themselves.

Considering the necessity, the *Reading Group* was developed. Besides the European Union, Humanitas Association, the University of Sigmund Freud, and, especially, Anropolis, the project had as its central stakeholders the Department of Cultural and Visual Anthropology

at the University of Miskolc — providing the space and support —, and international and Hungarian students — as the public and people who attended the meetings. The *Reading Group* had six sections, the last being the closure event, from November 2023 to March 2024. It welcomed students from Hungary, Mongolia, Colombia, Tunisia, Morocco, Thailand, Bangladesh, Philippines, Brazil, Indonesia and Pakistan. The framework of each meeting consisted of the reading of poems and short stories, and sometimes the screening of short films, all related to the theme of migration. After the appreciation of such materials, the participants would discuss what they read and watched, weaving their own experiences. This usually led to more personal discussions on migration, struggles, and a group debate reflection.

2- Baseline and Impact Analysis

The International Relations Office (IRO), at the University of Miskolc, is very active when it comes to taking action to address students' needs. Every faculty has a student coordinator who is responsible for organizing events that aim to integrate students with their faculties. Furthermore, there is a mentor system to help students find their way in the university, and in other Hungarian-language-based places, such as accompanying them to the bank, medical appointments, and so on. Lastly, the university has a psychologist that offers their service to international students.

But, as the case study and the *Reading Group* meetings pointed out, there are needs that the institution does not address. In this sense, the meetings were important to create a safe space in which students could share their experiences, reflect on them, and find solutions if needed, that either should be sent to the IRO or could be solved by themselves. The content of the readings and short movies exhibited in the *Reading Group* were all thought to raise questions and relatable discussions. The main bibliographic content comprised women's poems and short stories about migration. Two books were central to the discussions: *Ayiti* (2018), written by Roxane Gay; and *Somewhere: Stories of Migration by Women from Around the World* (2020), organized by Lorna Jane Harvey.

Throughout the discussions, a diversity of topics were brought up: current relations with family members while being abroad, such as their expectations about life in Hungary, or the experience of loss and grief; difficulties with integration, reflected both by international and Hungarian points of view; future perspectives; loneliness and winter depression; lack of reasonable financial support; cross-cultural differences; traditional foods, music, costumes, and

values. All of those themes were important to create a view of the life of international students in Hungary, more specifically in Miskolc, that is complex, diverse, and in need of integration.

3- Mitigation and Enhancement

The *Reading Group* was held primarily in the library of the Department of Cultural and Visual Anthropology at the University of Miskolc and later migrated to a study room in the Uni-Hotel at the same University. Its meetings started with a small community of students. The first, and second meetings had 6 people, the third had only 1 student besides the conductor, the fourth also had 6, the 5th had 13, and the last 17. The small number of people was due to a few conditions: the end of the academic term in November 2023 and the beginning of the term in February 2024, the lack of more substantial advertising, and a matter of fitting the schedule among other international students' duties. Another aspect of the *Reading Group* was that it did not follow the “bibliotherapy” tool because no one was professionally qualified to do so.

On the other hand, as there was always a space for feedback during the last part of the meetings, participants continually mentioned a therapeutic effect of the project. The safe and open space created with the group allowed people to share their feelings but also feedback on the improvement of the project. It was because of the feedback that the meetings were changing each time. The 5th section had the most people and its framework was suggested by a Moroccan participant who offered to cook traditional food for everyone. In this sense, an important feature of the meetings was the financial support so snacks, or the meal ingredients, could be bought.

4- Monitoring and Evaluation

Besides the feedback in each meeting, participant-observation data, and reports, a Google questionnaire was created after the end of *Reading Groups* to gather more opinions. Nine people answered. Ages range from 21 to 37 years old. The questions were related to how they felt in the meetings. On a scale from one to five — one referring to “do not agree at all” and five to “strongly agree” — 77,8% marked 5 and 22, 2% marked 4 on being satisfied, comfortable, had a sense of belonging in the project and were able to communicate with different people and points of view.

In the suggestions, people said that they wish they had known earlier about this kind of group, that they could grasp the idea of the group only after a few meetings, and one person said that they wish people were more friendly outside the group. Furthermore, three people mentioned they wanted more meetings.

In this sense, with all the data collected and feedback, a few points could be important as an evaluation:

- If the “bibliography” tool must be used, there must be a professional qualified involved in the project;
- A careful advertisement also is very important so the group can reach more people;
- Even though the group intended to put everyone in a symmetrical position, someone must be assigned to take care of the organization of the meeting’s structure, place, and arrangement of food;
- Financial support is a must, so people can have copies of the texts as well as some snacks, but also to explore other spaces and ways to have the meetings: besides the traditional meal, there were suggestions about exploring other spaces in the city, doing the meeting while having a picnic, and so on;
- Besides a small group of people, the project seemed to have had a good impact not only on those who attended the meetings but with the University. Since the project with Antrhopolis and the European Union is ending, the group will continue with the support of the International Relations Office from the University of Miskolc;
- As feedback, the group will have a more open theme of discussion, considering that migration will always be touched on since the audience comprises international students.