

Refugee children's wellbeing in Greece: methodological and ethical challenges

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Abstract

This paper brings to the fore the methodological and ethical issues we faced in the process of collecting qualitative data from refugee children in Greece in the context of the Children's Understandings of Well-Being study. The aim of this contribution is to expose the methodological and ethical challenges we encountered before and during the data collection. Through the case study of 4 children we critically reflect on the methodological tools used as a means of exploring refugee children's sense of wellbeing. These were individual interviews initially and more participatory methods. Contextual factors are discussed and our dilemmas as researchers are unpicked for further analysis.

Keywords: participatory research, refugee children, well-being

Das Well-Being von Flüchtlingskindern in Griechenland: methodische und ethische Herausforderungen

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel stellt die methodischen Herausforderungen und Probleme in den Mittelpunkt, mit denen wir bei der Erhebung qualitativer Daten von Flüchtlingskindern in Griechenland im Rahmen der Children's Understandings of Well-Being-Studie konfrontiert waren. Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, die methodischen und ethischen Probleme aufzudecken, denen wir vor und während der Datenerhebung begegnet sind. In der Fallstudie von vier Kindern reflektieren wir kritisch die methodischen Instrumente, die zur Erforschung des Wohlbefindens von Flüchtlingskindern eingesetzt werden. Es handelte sich um Einzelinterviews und partizipativere Methoden. Kontextfaktoren werden diskutiert und unsere Dilemmata als Forscherinnen sind ausgewählt.

Schlagwörter: Partizipationsforschung, Flüchtlingskinder, children's well-being

1 Introduction and research aims

In the context of the Children's Understandings of Well-Being study we explored refugee children's personal views on their wellbeing through qualitative data. The aim of this paper is to address the methodological and ethical challenges we confronted as researchers

before and during the data collection. We examine the theories and methodological tools we used to investigate refugee children's subjective well-being. Thus, the actual findings and children's actual responses on what matters in their lives are not part of the scope of this paper.

Our data collection took place during August 2018 and June 2019 in the mainland of Greece. Our sample consists of four refugee children aged 4, 6, 7 and 8 years who live in Northern Eastern Greece and engage with community activities. Refugee families in Greece are located in temporary camps, but families who have been assessed as most vulnerable by social workers and psychologists live in apartment buildings in urban contexts. Access to and knowledge of how these children live becomes much more difficult compared to children who live in camps where organizations coexist in space.

The children who participated in the study were initially interviewed with the aid of an interpreter. However, this method seemed not to be very efficient and at a second stage, the mosaic approach (Clark/Moss, 2011) was considered. In this second stage children were given a variety of ways to share their lived experiences and showed higher levels of active engagement by contributing with their thoughts and views.

The paper starts with an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the study and continues with a critical analysis of methodological and ethical aspects that emerged from the research. This paper aims to highlight the methodological and ethical challenges we faced as researchers when exploring refugee children's views on the quality of their lives. Using individual interviews (stage 1) and participatory methods (stage 2) are critically discussed.

2 Literature review: Child well-being in theory

Childhood is characterized by a wide diversity across cultural frames, space and time (Facer/Holmes/Lee 2012, p. 172); nevertheless, its importance, as a decisive life stage with a value in itself, is unquestionable. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has advanced the debate on childhood and altered the view on children from being merely recipients of freedom and services or beneficiaries of protective measures, to being subjects with rights and participants in the actions impacting on them. *The fundamental difference between present discussions about children's rights and those of previous years lies partly in a different picture of the child as deserving personal rights rather than simply protectionist rights* (Sünker/Swiderek 2007). As such, over the last decade children are viewed as agents who have views and opinions on what matters to them and what sets a good, healthy and happy life.

Early childhood forms a critical life period which may have long-term effects on later life. The impact of adversity or positive experiences on children's life quality can be approached through two ways: their entitlements to a good life in the here and now, as young children, and the impact these may have on the societal development and the potential for children's forthcoming adulthood. As such, the understanding and research of childhood wellbeing is approached through a developmental perspective and/or a children's rights perspective (Pollard/Lee 2003; Statham/Chase 2010). A developmentalist outlook is more likely to adopt measures associated with deficits, such as poverty, igno-

rance, and physical illness whereas a rights-based approach emphasises indicators and measures that provide opportunities and help children reach aspirations in the now rather than just in the future (*Morrow/Mayall* 2009).

Refugee children spend a part or often their entire childhood facing severe restrictions of basic rights and needs, guaranteed to them by international humanitarian law and in particular by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1979). In consequence, they experience childhoods that deviate a lot from the Western framework of an idealized “normal” childhood and, therefore, childhood as a secure stage of development is put into question. *Qvortrup* (1994) stressed the tendency to regard children as “human becomings” rather than “human beings” where the ultimate goal and end-point of individual development is adulthood. Our research focuses on refugee children as active social actors and as agents-individuals with capabilities [that] have a crucial role in society (*Comim* et al. 2011).

Danby and *Baker* (1998) have shown that children are competent social agents and have an active social world that is located beyond the audible and visual scrutiny. Yet, children are not seen naively as actors without any limits to their agency. Children are seen as actors with limited and unequal access to action (*Bühler-Niederberger/König* 2011). Children are citizens of contemporary societies and they are also key for the future of society from a dual perspective: as citizens who are relevant for the future of democracies and as constituents of the labour force of tomorrow's economy. The success of an economy and of a society cannot be separated from the lives that members of the society are able to lead (*Sen* 1999). *Sen* argues (1999, p. 5) that the capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children. *Biggeri, Ballet* and *Comim* (2004) argue that children are subjects of capabilities and that the capability approach can be very useful as a framework of thought and as a normative tool in analysing children's well-being, poverty and deprivation. According to them, deficiencies in important capabilities during childhood reduce the well-being of those suffering from the deficiencies and may well have larger societal implications (*Klasen* 2001; *Biggeri* 2007). *Sen* (1987) argues that it is plausible to identify someone as having a low standard of living on the grounds that he or she is deprived of decent housing, or adequate food, or basic medical care. However, the stock of commodity possession is not the only indicator of a good life. *Sen* stresses that the standard of living must be directly a matter of the life one leads rather than of the resources and means one has in order to lead her/his life. So, the focus has to be on what life children lead and what they can or cannot do, can or cannot be. *Nussbaum's* list of basic central capabilities for human flourishing provides a minimum account of social justice (2006, 2011).

Comim et al. (2011) refer to the impact of poverty on children's development by stressing children's disproportional representation among the poor, their suffering from irreversible forms of capability failure in terms of mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development, their vulnerability within the cycle of inter-generational transfer of poverty and the influence of their current well-being for their future. However, the discourse and conception that poor children are passive victims and face higher risks in many areas of their development is debatable. For example, *Cheang* and *Goh* (2018) found in their qualitative study in Singapore that children from low socio-economic backgrounds were resilient and agentic in school achievement and being aware of their family circumstances motivated them to work hard and enabled them to devise creative ways to manage their limited financial resources. Consequently, wellbeing is not only about the limitations, deficits and negative indicators but also about the possibilities and opportunities that given a situation might shape a person's life in a positive way.

Biggeri, Ballet and Comim (2011) highlighted the theoretical and practical issues regarding the use of the capability approach in socio-cultural research focusing on children. From a methodological point of view they distinguish between participatory and non-participatory methods on the application of the capability approach to children. Furthermore, *Statham and Chase* (2010) underline the multidimensional and complex notion of child wellbeing. They state that there is need for both objective and subjective measures, addressing a wide variety of wellbeing domains, focusing on difficulties and deficiencies as well as attributes and strengths, incorporating children's perspectives and feelings about their lives.

Refugee children in Greece¹ face tremendous challenges and deprivations that impact their well-being in objective terms, that are becoming widely known through media coverage and reports. But well-being can be analyzed systematically only in the interplay of subjective and objective conditions (*Hunner-Kreisel/März* 2018, p. 426). Thus, this study aims to shed light to facets of refugee children's subjective understanding of their well-being. For the purpose of the current study we explored refugee children's views on what makes them happy and whether different methodological tools enable and facilitate this co-construction of understanding.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

Refugee children most of the times engage in misplacement and consequently experience a significant disruption in their lives. Refugee children may experience severe stressors during the pre-migratory, migratory, and post-migratory periods (*Fazel/Stein* 2002). In their home countries, war-exposed children may witness or experience war atrocities, be deprived of food and water, and be separated from family members. They can experience hardships such as significant disruption of their daily lives, separation from loved ones, and disruption of schooling. During the process of migration, they may become separated from caregivers and suffer from exposure to violence and harsh living conditions, poor nutrition, and uncertainty about the future. Physical safety may remain at risk, especially for children in refugee camps, who may be exposed to infectious disease, malnutrition, food insecurity, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. Upon arrival in a host country, children may experience stress related problems concerning their family's adaptation and acculturation, family conflict, difficulties with education in a new language, financial uncertainty and experiences of social exclusion and discrimination (*Kadir et al.* 2019). Traumatic experiences can be compounded by being displaced from one's home and community.

In recent times Greece evolved into a host country for a large number of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers without simultaneously adopting a clear and coordinated immigration policy. The scarce evidence available suggests that poor facilities for refugees are widespread, with little attention paid to child protection, sanitation, and safety or health services. Little is also known about the situation of children living in flats (family settlements) and there is great difficulty to reach and extract information from these families (*UNICEF* 2017).

The participants of the project were randomly recruited by the third researcher who works in Community Centres supported by an NGO. Children living in family settlements are encouraged to participate in community activities where they can learn Greek, play, socialize and meet others. These include four children aged 4, 6, 7 and 8 years old. The participant who was 4 years old left halfway through the study as his family's reunification was accepted and moved to another country. All children and their families were participating in the activities of the center and live in the urban area of the city. The majority of the families and therefore the children who participated in the study were of Afghan origin. All participants had spent long time in Greece in other camps in the islands and in mainland waiting for their asylum to be accepted. They were attending the Greek school and they were able to communicate in Greek.

3.2 Methodological tools

During our study we faced challenges in identifying the methods "fit for purpose" for this particular group of children. We do not underestimate children's abilities but we acknowledge our responsibility to develop methods that are suited to children's current or persistent interests and their perceived level of knowledge and understanding. Thus, this requires particular knowledge of particular children in a particular context – the "tactics" of research (*Christensen/Prout 2002*).

Our initial approach was to conduct individual interviews with the children with the presence of an interpreter (stage 1). After efforts of conducting interviews with the children, we easily realized that this method of data collection was awkward and stressful for the children and ourselves. We could clearly notice that the children were seeking verification that their responses are legitimate and approved. Their body language and gaze indicated they were feeling uncomfortable and out of their comfort zone. Children kept asking 'is that correct?' and were quite resistant to participate in that they would reply with single words or head nods. We felt that the power relations between us, the interpreter and the child were restricting the child to express genuinely her ideas, dreams and wishes. The traditional practice of interviewing children is a significant method in early childhood research (*Mukherji/Albon 2018*). However, refugee children are confronted very often, with social workers, psychologists, administrators and other authority professionals and they associate the experience of an interview to particular discussions or conversations. They might consider an interview as a threatening environment in which they need to provide answers many times on behalf of their families².

On reflection, we decided to employ a different methodological approach, a more child-friendly one that empowers the child and acknowledges the lived experiences of participants in particular sociocultural contexts (stage 2). We shifted to the use of the mosaic approach devised by *Clark and Moss (2011)*, which combines methods, strategies and tools that piece together to form a fuller picture of young children's perceptions. Generated from multiple sources of data, we encouraged refugee children to express their views not only verbally. Our aim was to form a comprehensive picture of refugee children's lives and well-being. Specifically, we focused on the case studies of four children. During this phase of data collection, children had the opportunity through a variety of ways to express their thoughts and experiences while the researchers were situated either behind or next to them. We followed four research phases.

First Phase: group interviews and drawings

At the first phase we conducted group interviews with the children following the guideline framework of the Children's Understandings of Well-Being³ protocol. These interviews were conducted in an adjacent classroom in the presence of two or one researchers and an interpreter. According to the Children's Understandings of Well-Being protocol, children were asked to draw a map of their lives, while talking through what is important and meaningful to them. As much as possible the parameters of the map were determined by the participants and were child-led. According to Zartler (2014), integrating visual prompts in interviews is regarded as a useful tool. They enable children to verbalize memories and abstract ideas, they are able to increase children's engagement with the interview, they contribute to a pleasant atmosphere, and are assumed to support participative elements in research with children (Cappello 2005; Eldén 2012; Thomson 2008). After our experience with plain interviews (during stage 1), thus, we decided to introduce drawings and children's own visual representations in order to trigger further conversations and dialogue. Similarly to stage 1, we considered issues such as the balance of power, the importance of building a rapport, the voluntary nature of consent and the need for a flexible interview structure (Coad et al. 2015).

Second Phase: doll

At the second phase, we recruited a doll as a means to approach the children and find out about their ideas, wishes, and interests. The use of dolls as a research tool has been shown to raise "authentic voices of the children by engaging both their hearts and minds" (Jesuvadian/Wright 2011, p. 277). Without being personally involved, this tool allows children to explore themes and topics that can be sensitive or challenging. Through empathy and a safe and conducive context, children can participate in dialogue and exchange of ideas. In the following description the structure of this phase is provided:

We gathered the children and introduced the doll (The doll has just arrived and because she doesn't know anyone or anything she wants to know about life here).
 Hello, I'm Maria and I just got here ... I don't know anyone and I'm very sad ... I have no friends ... I don't know what to do ... Would you like to help me? Let's start with what's here;
 What are you doing here? (q1)
 What do you like when you are here? (q2) What do you dislike about being here? (q3)
 And at home when you go, what do you like to do? (q4) What do you not like at home? (q5) Do you have friends here? Who is your friend? (q6) What do you enjoy doing with your friends? (q7).
 So what is your favorite game? (q8) I like playing with the ball a lot!
 Thanks guys, I already feel like I know a lot. You helped me a lot. Will you do me a drawing? I really like the drawings. In the paper I will give you will you paint me what you like to do here and on the other side what you like to do at home? Like this I can keep a small gift from you!

In another session, the doll comes back, this time undressed and children are asked to draw clothing for the doll. Though this activity we aimed to discuss with the children the potential restrictions in material goods.

Third Phase: bug

Following *Bühler-Niederberger* and *Schwittek* (2014), a drawing of a bug was handed out to each child during phase 3. The researcher explained that the bug has six legs to help it move forward. While the children were coloring the drawing, they were asked to label each leg with the name of a person who helps them 'move forward'. For the analysis of the children's answers there were two sources of information that were recorded (1) the selection of people (family members, friends, kindergarten staff, etc.); (2) what kind of contribution the helper makes to the child's life.

Fourth Phase: photo camera

Phase four invited the children, with the help of the doll, to use photo cameras and take pictures of things, places and people that are important to them. *Gabhainn* and *Sixsmith* (2006) recognise that this method of data collection, analysis and interpretation facilitates the inclusion of children's perspectives through a fun and creative fashion.

Maria the doll comes back:

Hi everyone, I came back and I am so happy to see you again. How are you doing? I have a problem, I have been here so many days and I haven't found swings yet.

Are there any around here? Do you go elsewhere to play? (q 9)

Do you watch television? What do you usually watch (q10)? Do you ever play on a mobile or tablet? Do you have one of your own? (q 11).

Are you afraid of anything? (q 12). I am very afraid of spiders - so much so that when I see one I will shout very loudly...

When is someone happy what do you think? How do you feel? I am happy now because I have you and I talk to you and I do not feel alone. (q 13)

I have an idea, look what I have with me!

A camera! Shall we take pictures of things and people that make us happy! I'll start, I'll take a picture of the window! It makes me happy to open the window and see the sun outside. Who wants to be the next?

3.3 Appropriateness of methodological tools

During the individual interviews (stage 1), the children became indifferent, in some cases stressed, discomforted and tired. We felt that the power relations were evident and caused disruption and as children were feeling unease, we decided to continue with more child-friendly participatory methods (stage 2). Children felt under pressure of giving the 'expected' answers and would not express freely their views. They would provide answers that as adults they thought we would like to hear. This power inequality (*Punch* 2002) has been raised as a key matter when conducting research *on* children instead of research *with* children. Nevertheless, we tried to alienate this power imbalance as one researcher was familiar to the children and had already established a trustworthy and honest relationship with them. Also, before the interview, children would engage with the researchers in joyful activities to get to know each other and create a partnership (*Gibson* 2012). Thus, we concluded that the individual interviews were not adequate for the particular context of research.

Christensen and *Prout* (2005) propose four different approaches to childhood research, based on children's position and role. In the first, children appear as the objects of

research because of their dependent position and vulnerability. The second approach regards children as equal social actors and, consequently, as the subjects of research. The third approach does not differentiate between adults and children; it acknowledges children as real social actors and the fourth approach defines children as active participants, capable of participating in research design. Recently there is a growing interest in participatory research methods with children (Hill 1997; Fattore/Mason/Watson 2012) and the 'mosaic approach' (Clark/Moss 2011) is an example. Christensen and James (2008) agree that there is and should be a shift from regarding children as 'objects' within research to understanding them as social agents who contribute to the reproduction of childhood and society (Corsaro 2011).

The key characteristics of the mosaic approach can be summarized as being multi-methodic and recognizing the different languages or voices of children; participatory and treating children as experts and agents in their own lives; reflexive and including children, practitioners and parents in reflecting on meanings and interpretation; adaptable and can be applied to a variety of early childhood settings; focused on children's lived experiences and looking at lives rather than knowledge gained or care received (Clark and Moss 2011). The approach 'plays to children's strengths rather than to adults' (Clark/Kjorholt/Moss 2005 p. 47) by encouraging children to communicate their views through a combination of participatory methods alongside more traditional research tools of observation and interviewing. Through the group interviews and discussions, drawings, and photo cameras we found that children had more space and opportunity to participate, own and express their views. This participatory methodological approach enabled them to be listened to through different ways and languages. They shared their experiences and understandings of what they value in their current lives, by making references to the past and the future.

The language barrier was a major issue. The communication and messages from all sides during the individual interview would be mediated by the interpreter and thus information could be misleading or biased. But also during the group discussions with the doll, where the children would express themselves in Greek, we were wondering how far the use of the Greek language enables them to express their ideas, wishes, dreams and thoughts. Thus, after our unsuccessful experience with the individual interviews (stage 1) we decided we did not want children to 'just to talk' but to use different forms of communication such as stories and drawings (Thomas/O'Kane, 1998) while unpicking aspects of their lives (stage 2). Through this shift from 'traditional' interviews to more participatory approaches, we acknowledged that instead of considering children as victims or objects and us as experts who seek for answers, we had to develop methods which allowed them to express their capacities, needs and interests from their own perspective. As John (1996) underlines, this meant "*developing research methodologies on the basis of partnership, which in turn involves a new role in the power structure for the researcher- a move from the plunderer of information to facilitator which enables the child to be an active part of voicing their concerns*" (p. 21).

3.4 Ethics

The project was granted permission from the UN Refugee Agency in Greece and specifically from the UNHCR protection officer. In addition, permission was requested by the

NGO Terre des Hommes, which was responsible for the management of the site where the study took place. Parent consents were translated into Arabic, Farsi and Sorani and were distributed to parents, explaining the context and purpose of the research and asking their active consent for their child's participation. Ethical implications were addressed and anonymity, confidentiality and children's right to withdraw from the study were carefully considered and communicated. We were also aware that sensitive or traumatic topics could emerge, and we were prepared to handle these with caution and openness. We ensured that we cautiously addressed the issues that *Coad et al. (2015)* underlined in their work, the balance of power, the importance of building a rapport with the participants, the voluntary nature of consent and the need for flexibility during the research project.

In considering ethics in childhood research there are two dimensions: the 'procedural ethics' (*Guillemin/Gillam 2004*, p. 263) refer to the formal procedures adhering to the content of codes of ethics and approvals; the 'micro-ethics' (*Guillemin/Gillam 2004*, p. 265) refer to the practical application and everyday unpredictable dilemmas that might emerge. If research is to be carried out in an ethical manner, then a combination of the two dimensions and the continuous reflexivity of the researcher/s are required (*Christensen/Prout 2002*). This applied in our case, where despite us having the formal procedures in place, there were instances where personal responsibility and accountability were necessary.

Precisely, this involved situations when children felt uncomfortable or when a sensitive topic, like domestic abuse, was revealed. In such instances, as researchers we had to face ethical dilemmas and make decisions on the spot. When a participant implied domestic abuse while describing her life at home, we needed to decide quickly how to take this forward given our responsibility and care of duty while working with young children. We needed to make decisions based on how to protect and safeguard her, how to keep her details confidential and respect her personal information and how to process the situation according to contextual regulations and provision. Soon after this issue occurred, we decided to share the information with the social workers of the community center who would investigate this further.

Ethical challenges identified in this study were reflected in building trust with the participants given their life stories and particular circumstances, responding to difficult life situations of children, like was the case of participant X, listening attentively, being open and addressing power distribution (*Lastikka/Kangas 2017*). When considering a child as an active agent who co-produces research with the researcher/s, ethics play a vital role. As *Lastikka and Kangas (2017)* emphasise, there must be strong ethical values behind research methodologies and aims and children should be approached as unique, competent research partners who trusted, respected and supported.

3.5. Difficulties faced during the data collection

The space

The site is a community center for engaging refugee populations in activities. Courses are running and sometimes it is difficult to find a spare class. There were times when the research activities were interrupted because the space needed to be used for other reasons. In the afternoon hours, when the research tasks took place, the center was very crowded and bustling.

The non-compulsory attendance

The space provided for children offered activities that were not mandatory, nor was the daily attendance or the attendance to all the daily activities (11-7 pm a child could come at 1 pm and leave at 3 pm for example). This means that the children could spend several days away from the community center. In particular, this could make the attendance of the four children difficult and challenging at the same days and hours, in order for the group interviews and tasks to take place.

The unstable frame

The refugee context is characterized by instability and change. For many refugee families the city where we conducted the research is a transit-station and not a destination. While we started interviewing four children, one of them left during the study because his family reunited in another country. As a result, this participant did not continue with the remaining phases of the research and had to be substituted by another child.

Interpretation – Language

Terre des Hommes kindly agreed to provide us with interpreters who were already working in the field. Nevertheless, this was often impossible because of the scarce number of interpreters needed to serve the social workers' and lawyers' needs. While individual interviews with children were supported by interpreters, the group interviews were conducted mainly without interpretation. Some of the children had very good language skills, but some had a lower level. There were times when children needed to translate some concepts for the other children. It should also be noted that even with the support of the interpreter, children had a difficulty to understand key research concepts (e.g. what is important for you?) and we had to reconsider the severe limitation of stimuli and the poor vocabulary of the refugee children.

4 Discussion

The new sociology of childhood highlights the diversity of childhood but also its universal nature (Corsaro 2011). On the one hand, the conception of childhood as a social construct has allowed the recognition of childhood diversity. On the other hand, this has resulted in children being defined as a unified social group, with specific similarities (Christensen/Prout 2005). Therefore, in designing and conducting research with children it is highly important to find a balance between these viewpoints (diversity and commonality). The researchers' preconceptions about children and childhood significantly determine the research method (Punch 2002) and underpinning ethics (Lastikka/Kangas 2017); thus, it is important to remain reflexive about possible preconceptions at the stage of research design and even during the research, as was the case in this study.

The fundamental shift in the discourse from child survival to child well-being does not apply to refugee children who strive to adapt to a new reality and way of living. Refugee children encounter aspects of physical survival and basics needs as core parts of their well-being. For them both discourses of well-being and well-becoming are equally important, and their quality of life matters for the here and now as well as for their long-term growth

and flourishing. Many of their rights have been violated in the past and are possibly violated in the present. Their wellbeing experiences capture both a developmental and rights-based consideration (Pollard/Lee 2003; Statham/Chase 2010). Thus, refugee children have (maybe more than other children) deficits to face as well as aspirations.

In terms of capabilities, the children of this study were able to use their senses, imagine, think, and reason despite of the language barriers and the limited educational opportunities necessary to realize these capacities; were able to laugh, play and enjoy recreational activities; almost all of the children (apart from one child in the study) were able to have attachments to persons outside themselves and to show concern for them; furthermore, those children were able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life (Nussbaum, 2006; 2011). These capabilities are hindered by the restrictions those children experience to have good health, adequate nutrition, adequate shelter and mobility. In addition, in our study it became evident that child X experienced a form/or more than one form of abuse and was not able to avoid unnecessary and non-beneficial pain. It is a matter of question how far refugee children live their own life and enjoy freedom of association and freedom from unwarranted search and seizure.

The shift in listening to children's voices and taking into account their subjective views on their wellbeing is not straightforward. Even though participatory research methods in early childhood have raised a lot of interest over last years (Christensen/Prout 2004; Christensen/James 2008), the contextual factors of each research paradigm need to be carefully addressed. In our case, these contextual factors were the background of our participants, the space where the study took place, the linguistic implications of children being non-native speakers, the sensitive matters that emerged and the power relations embedded throughout the research. These factors had an impact on the decisions we made as researchers in terms of methodology and ethics. The contextual framework of this case study provided us with barriers and opportunities that we addressed upon and on reflection. We started with individual interviews (stage 1) and moved on to using the more participatory mosaic approach through 4 phases (stage 2).

The mosaic approach (Clark/Kjorholt/Moss 2005) in our case was more efficient, compared to individual interviews, in enabling children to express their views on the quality of different aspects of their lives through a variety of ways, verbal and non-verbal. Initially, we introduced the traditional tool of interviews based on drawings (Zartler 2014; Cappello 2005; Eldén 2012; Thomson 2008), where children had the opportunity to engage with non-verbal communication and ownership in choosing what to talk about. Then, we considered the doll, the bug and the photos (Gabhainn/Sixsmith 2006), where children were given the chance to express themselves through a variety of ways.

Through the neutral doll, children could explore and consider aspects of their life in Greece, without being directly asked about these. They could empathize with the doll and give her hints and advice on free time, possessions, clothing, friendships, sensitive matters based on their own experiences and preferences. This methodological tool alienates any personal explicit involvement with the themes or topics explored through a non-threatening approach (Jesuvadian/Wright 2011).

Similarly, the bug drawing offered children the experience of visually representing the most important others in their lives (Bühler-Niederberger/Schwitek 2014). The visual input encouraged them to think, reflect and share who they felt plays a basic part in their current lives and why. The visual methodology of asking children to take pictures of fa-

favorite places, spaces and people also aligned to the idea of inviting children to be co-researchers (Thompson 2008). Children were given ownership to select, pick and decide what things or people make them happy or unhappy. Therefore, through these tools linguistic barriers and the power inequality (that were very evident in age 1) were addressed more creatively. Through the mosaic approach refugee children engaged in more multi-modal and varied ways of sharing feelings and views.

A concluding remark has to do with the next steps. This study explored how the context, the refugee children participants and co-researchers, their stories and the methods used raise questions about research *with* children under methodological and ethical implications. Participatory research methods, in our case the mosaic approach, can afford subjective data on wellbeing that is much needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of children's wellbeing (Statham/Chase 2010). Nevertheless, as researchers we reach findings and conclusions, but how do these inform, in turn, practice and policy? How are children's voices heard and being acted upon? Who is responsible for transforming these voices into actions?

Notes

- 1 Greece for many years, mainly after World War II, was a country of export of economic immigrants, but the situation changed in the 1980s and became a country of host immigration. In recent years, Greece has experienced unprecedented arrivals of refugees and immigrants off its coast. According to UNICEF, Greece was hosting in 2017 more than 90.800 refugee and migrant children. UNICEF provides information on the demography on those arriving, including accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children (January-December 2018). Trapped in a political and bureaucratic limbo, these children are left most of the times in refugee camps with very limited resources for an indefinite period of time. Although news and information on the refugee issue are declining in the foreign media, the influx has never stopped.
- 2 According to the Geneva Convention, the New York Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Greece, and the Greek Constitution, the protection of refugee children means that all decisions concerning them are taken by a public or private body, authority, body or legislative body, their interests are primarily taken into account, and that measures are taken to ensure that children receive adequate protection and humanitarian assistance.
- 3 Children's Understandings of Well-being – global and local Contexts, Multinational Qualitative Study (2015)

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