International Relations and Development:

Specification in Global Refugee Studies (GRS)

Master Thesis

From Theory to Practice: Challenges of implementing Meaningful Participation

in small NGOs in Attica Region, Greece

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Abstract

Meaningful participation moved in the focus of researchers, practitioners and People with lived experiences themselves who are fighting for "nothing about us, without us" (Network for Refugee Voices, 2024). Meaningful participation is an emerging norm (Milner et al., 2022) and at the same time one of the most poorly implemented standards (Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Janmyr, 2022; Kaga, 2021). Therefore, attention is shifted from "if" to "how" Meaningful Participation should be implemented. Small NGOs in Greece are working on implementing Meaningful Participation. Therefore, this master thesis focuses on the questions "How well do small organizations in the Attica region implement meaningful participation?" and "How are they navigating occurring challenges?" The thesis grounds on the conceptual framework of meaningful participation and aspects of Organizational Theory of Change. The inductive qualitative research is based on eight semi-structured interviews with both with and without People with lived experiences of displacement together with an in-depth literature and desk research. Additionally, I used existing participant observations from a previous fieldwork in Athens.

The research revealed that all organizations do not meet all aspects of meaningful participation. Accordingly, the implementation of meaningful participation partly lacks financial compensation, meaningful participation in decision-making processes and impact on strategies along with high-level inclusion. The organization delineate challenges such as financial constraints which intersect with challenges on the practical implementation of Meaningful Participation. Most organizations face challenges related to power imbalances, cultural differences and lack of time to reflect and implement change in the organization. However, time and resources are essential for change, which is a barrier to working towards better implementation of Meaningful Participation. Achieving Meaningful Participation requires a shift towards co-leadership, co-design and co-ownership, organizational changes at the level of the organization, which in turn requires a shift in the funding sector and a better allocation of resources to enable Meaningful Participation.

Keywords: Meaningful Participation, Non-governmental Organization (NGO), Organizational Theory of Change, Organizational Change Processes

Abbreviations

APRRN	Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
C.C.A.C	Closed Control Access Centers
DEI	Diversity Equity Inclusion
e-NGO	educational NGO
GRN	Global Refugee-led Network
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRV	Network for refugee voices
PWLEOD	People with lived experience of displacement
RLLI	Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
YSR	Yoga and Sport with Refugees

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1   Introduction

"Because the roots are sick. When the roots are sick as much as you get bigger, you are sick" (Appendix 6, 0:17, p.45)

The concept of meaningful participation has been an under increasing attention from researchers, practitioners and People with lived experiences of displacement[1] (PWLEOD) themselves. PWLEOD call for "Nothing About us without us" (Network for refugee voices, 2024). Accordingly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded 68 pledges with a focus on meaningful participation (UNHCR, 2024c) and meaningful participation has been delineated as an emerging norm in the global refugee regime (Milner et al., 2022). However, Meaningful Participation is also one of the most poorly implemented standards (Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Janmyr, 2022; Kaga, 2021). Therefore, Refugee-led organizations and activist formulated the urgent need to move from "if" to "how" meaningful participation should be implemented (Global Refugee-Led Network (GRN), 2019).

Therefore, this research is focusing on "how" meaningful participation is executed in small Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO). I will focus on Greece, Attica region, because NGOs in Greece form an interesting case due to the geopolitical location of Greece. I particularly focus on organizations rooted in the idea of solidarity as their work is mostly overlooked within research on meaningful participation. My research is driven by my two main research questions:

RQ 1: "How well do small organizations in the Attica region implement meaningful participation?"

RQ 2: "How are they navigating occurring challenges?"

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[1] In this thesis, I will employ the term "people with lived experiences of displacement". This term is started to be used by those affected and those engaged with meaningful participation. The term provides an extended dimension and encompasses "people who have encountered internal displacement, statelessness, trafficking, and/or displacement related to the impacts of disasters or climate change" (APNOR et. al 2023).

To answer those, I will first delineate the situation of NGOs in the Attica region of Greece to provide a foundation of the case. Next, I will outline my methodology and transparently delineate how I proceeded in the research, which methods I used and how I selected the examined organization. Thereafter, I will examine the concept of meaningful participation. Therefore, I will outline the shift from participation to meaningful participation as well as corresponding developments in the research and in the global refugee regime. Additional to the concept of meaningful participation, I will shortly examine organizational theories of change as they are helpful to unpack how organizations implement meaningful participation. Then I will present my findings. First, I will analyze how well the organizations implemented meaningful participation due to the factors of accessible positions, inclusion in decision-making and hiring structures to set a foundation. Second, I will examine the challenges organizations perceive during the process of implementing meaningful participation especially the financial constraints and challenges on the practical level. Third, I will portray how organizations tried to navigate those challenges and which strategies and changes they applied. Afterwards, I will discuss my findings and delineate requirements to move forward in meaningful participation. Lastly, I will conclude my research and end with future research recommendations.

1.1 Case

Situation in Greece

Greece forms a first-entry country in the European Union, because of its geopolitical position at the external border of the European Union (Tsitselikis, 2019). Most of the arrivals were determined on the islands (UNHCR, 2024e) from where refugees get transfer to the mainland (European Commission, 2022).

Because of its geopolitical position, Greece has been used as a transition state to move further to other countries within the EU. In the beginning of the so called "refugee crisis" in 2015, Greece delineated the highest number of refugee arrivals in the European Union (UNHCR, 2016). At the same time, the country dealt with the aftermath of the economic crisis, austerity measures and high unemployment rates (Turam, 2021) and was overwhelmed by the added "refugee crisis" (Bagavos, Kourachanis, 2022). Due to the closure of the Balkan Routes, refugees "stranded" in Greece (Tošić, 2017). Therefore, Greece mainly changed into a refugee hosting state and refugees remained in the country. A "refugee reception crisis" emerged which

"contains all those reception and settlement issues for asylum seekers" (Tsitselikis, 2019 p. 165) and encompasses the exacerbate situation of refugees in Greece.

In regard of the massive influx in 2015 and the occurring "refugee crisis", citizen-led humanitarian organizations addressed the gaps of humanitarian aid and perceived absence of established NGOs (Mogstad, 2021, p.30). NGOs covered various services inside and outside of camps as well as in urban areas (Tsitselikis, 2019, p. 166). The involvement of different non-governmental actors caused a conflict with the Greek government and blurred "responsibilities and boundaries" (Moschopoulos, 2023). Consequently, the Greek government only played a minor role in the emergency support measures towards refugees and asylum seekers (Bagavos, Kourachanis, 2022, p.887).

The work and accessibility of NGOs changed with the development of Closed Control Access Centers. In the aftermath of the fire in Moria, the European Commission developed a taskforce to tackle the emergency situations for refugees in Greece (European Commission, 2020). Two follow-up grants with a volume of € 121 million and €155 million were set up to new "Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres" (European Commission, 2021) which ended up being "Closed Control Access Centers" (Ministry of Migration & Asylum, 2024). Hence, small solidarity NGOs had restricted access to the camps and needed to have an official invitation to the Closed Control Access Centers (C.C.A.C) which led to an expulsion of small solidarity NGOs from the Camp. Currently, NGOs struggle to get a Greek registration and a lot of the NGOs working in Greece are legally registered in other European countries. Accordingly, Amnesty International states "Greek authorities have tightened up the requirements imposed on organisations and individuals to be able to operate in Greece" (Amnesty International, 2020; Greek Council for Refugees, 2024). The new guidelines from 2020 have been criticized by various actors as posing an obstacle on the work of NGOs (Asylum Information Database & European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2023). Furthermore, NGOs faced an increase of criminalization in the past years and an exacerbated situation which led to closures of NGOs (Yoga and Sport with Refugees [YSR], 2024c).

Situation in Attica Region

According to the data of UNHCR from September 2023, Greece is currently hosting around 169,407 refugees, 17,828 asylum seekers, 4,488 stateless people and 3,638

others of concern (UNHCR, 2023). The implemented accommodation program accounted for 58% of the accommodation places for asylum seekers and recognized refugees were based in Athens with a total of 16,302 persons (UNHCR, 2020). As a response, NGOs shifted their work from the islands to the capital city to tackle the precarious situation of Refugees in Athens. Refugees live under the bare minimum of social rights and support in Greece and "in practice, after receiving a positive decision on an asylum application, refugees lose all support without having the language courses, vocational training or financial support to live independently" (Moschopoulos, 2023, p.129). Turam argues that Athens is a "city of refuge" "developed through the sum of numerous politically responsible and humane choices and practices made by local actors and officials on a daily basis between the municipality, NGOs, activists, and migrant communities" (Turam, 2021, p.775). The different actors unite to fight against the securitization of migration. Athens portrays a progressive urban city at the border of Europe and showcases the resilience against the anti-immigrant regimes (Turam, 2021). This bottom-up movement is especially defined by the NGOs and activists. In the beginning of 2024, a few organizations announced their closure such as "One Happy Family" who ran the "Victoria Community Center", the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services provided by the Boat Refugee Foundation (BRF) and the International Refugee Committee (IRC) (YSR, 2024c). "These closures indicate a shifting landscape in the support services available to refugees and migrants in the city" (YSR, 2024c, p.5). Consequently, these developments manifest the political situation for NGOs in Athens and Greece at the moment.

1.2   Research aim and problem statement

Meaningful participation is an emerging norm (Milner et al., 2022) and some research has already been done on the various levels and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The international dimension and importance of Meaningful Participation has been outlined by diverse researchers and there is an ongoing call for understanding the impact of meaningful participation (Bahram, 2020; Drozdowski, 2019; Global Refugee-led Network, 2021; Harley, 2022; Harley et al., 2022; Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Kuntzelman, Christa Charbonneau & Noor, Anila, 2022). On the local level, some research has been done regarding meaningful participation (Duale, 2020; Janmyr, 2022; Kaga, 2021; Khan, 2024; Olivius, 2014), however, there is a distinct

lack of research on urban areas and outside of camps (Kaga, 2021). Furthermore, small NGOs have been under-researched, as has a holistic approach to understand meaningful participation in organizations that goes beyond an exclusive focus on decision-making processes. In Greece, NGOs try to fill the gap in the responses left by the government (Mogstad, 2021; Moschopoulos, 2023; Tsitselikis, 2019). NGOs on the ground form a first contact and entry point for refugees towards the humanitarian field. Providing pathways for meaningful participation in those NGO's can pave the way for a humanitarian career of PWLEOD and prepare them for a higher policy level (Ramazani, 2023). However, those NGOs have not been in the focus of research yet and there is a lack of literature that explores how meaningful participation is implemented in these organizations. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how well NGOs implement meaningful participation and what challenges they encounter and how they navigate those. Furthermore, understanding those dynamics can help other organizations and provide a more distinct analysis on how meaningful participation is on the ground and what is needed to move forward to overcome the tendency of failure of meaningful participation (Cohere, 2022; Kaga, 2021). Additionally, "States and policymakers could learn from emerging efforts at the local level to co-design responses and integrate some of these principles into policymaking processes" (Ramazani, 2023, p.8). Furthermore, my research seeks to portray and compare both perceptions of meaningful participation, from the PWLEOD themselves and those who are in the position of enabling meaningful participation and strive for change.

2 Methodology

In the following, I will focus on the study design and execution of the research. First, I will outline the research subject, then I will define why it is important to study it and finally I will outline how the study was conducted. Further, I will portray the interviewed organizations, how I selected those and the data collection process. An inductive approach allowed me to delve deeply into the topic of meaningful participation.

2.1 Research Design

The study focuses on small organizations in the Attica region that are working on implementing meaningful participation.

There is already some existing research on meaningful participation at the international level such as meaningful participation at the Global Refugee Forum (Drozdowski, 2019), and in international refugee policy (Bahram, 2020; Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Milner et al., 2022). However, there is only scarce literature on the implementation of meaningful participation in local and small NGOs (Cohere, 2022; Kaga, 2021). Studies, such as the one from Kaga (2021) and Khan (2024) highlight the importance of understanding the contextual factors in which meaningful participation is embedded. Furthermore, there is a deficit of research on urban areas in comparison to research on rural areas where refugee camps are likely to be placed (Kaga, 2021; Koizumi & Hoffstaedter, 2015; Turam, 2021). Previous research focused itself on refugee's encampment, but the life of refugees in urban areas and outside of refugee camps stayed shadowed. Athens formed an interesting case, because it is characterized by its geopolitical position and its uprise of civic support and solidarity responses towards the "refugee crisis" (Turam, 2021). This raised my interest in how well small organizations in Attica implement meaningful participation within their organizations and which strategies they employed to navigate challenges of meaningful participation. My research is exploratory, because there is not that much literature and research on the implementation of meaningful participation in small NGOs existing. The focus on Athens and NGOs provides the opportunity to deeply analyze explicit contextual factors and exemplify solutions of NGOs. The study seeks to contribute to understand the implementation of meaningful participation. Specifically, I followed my research questions "How well do small organizations in Attica Region implement meaningful participation?" and "How are they navigating occurring challenges?" Furthermore, the study is explanatory as it seeks to outline how those organizations implement meaningful participation and how they are trying to navigate encountered challenges.

The focus on Athens allowed me to utilize a case study design. A case study design is characterized by its explicit setting (Stake, 1995; Tight, 2022) . The research grounds on two and a half weeks of qualitative research in Athens in the end of March and beginning of April 2024. Hence, I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews to produce knowledge (Brinkmann, 2023). Additionally, I used existing data from my previous three and a half months of fieldwork and internship in Athens with the organization YSR from September to December 2023.

2.2 Data Collection Process

In the following, I will lay out the data collection process. I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with five different organizations. Three of the interlocutors had lived experiences of displacement, three were founders and two were coordinators and managers who try to embed and foster meaningful participation in their organizations. All interviews were conducted in English. Within the interviews, I tried to create a natural atmosphere in which the interlocutors could feel safe. I let the interlocutors decide in which environment they wanted to meet. Therefore, I conducted several of the interviews in public cafés, two in the organizations and one at the home of an interlocutor.

Talking about meaningful participation is very delicate. NGOs in Greece struggle with being criticized and therefore are also very careful about what information they are sharing and try to avoid making themselves assailable. As it is essential for this study to focus on feasible mistakes and to not only delineate a false picture of organizations which are performing well on implementing and pursuing meaningful participation, the interviews were semi-structured and well-focused on creating a safe space to speak. The interviews took around one hour to two hours with an actual recording time between half an hour and one and a half hours. Due to the nature of recording, relevant information were also shared after the end of the interview's recording or before the interview started. One interview was not recorded at all due to GDPR and ethical concerns along with the will to stay anonymous as an organization. Furthermore, one interview was only partly recorded due to a collapse of the recording device. The missing parts were immediately written down after the interview. I decided to ask the interviewees with lived experience just a few guiding questions and let them decide what kind of information they wanted to share.

2.2.1 Selection of the organizations

The research's intention was to focus on organizations which are currently working on implementing meaningful participation and organizations were selected due to this criterion. This is also why one of the examined organizations is not based in Athens, but in the broader Attica region inside the Malakasa camp.

I have been interning in Athens in one organization that was willing to be part of the master thesis research. Throughout this internship, I got to know of two organizations whose directors were also willing to participate in the research. Additionally, the

director of my previous internship organization proposed organizations to me that she knew were working on meaningful participation. I reached out to six additional organizations in Athens that are currently working on meaningful participation of refugees. One organization has never answered, and one organization discussed the matter and concluded that they are not willing to participate in the study. Another organization was not sure if they were able to participate due to time constraints and workloads. Three organizations directly agreed to participate.

2.2.2 Portray of the organizations and interviewees

Athens has a very good, connected NGO scene. They communicate to combine their forces and help each other. PWLEOD especially center around places of Victoria Square, Omonoia Square, Kypseli and Exarchia (Turam, 2021). This is where the majority of the NGOs located themselves.

Yoga and Sport with Refugees (YSR)

YSR is a grassroot nonprofit organization which was established in response to the precarious situation on Lesvos, Greece, in October 2017 (YSR, 2024a). Later the organization expanded to Athens, Ioannina, and Paris. YSR's goal is to "[build] a happier and healthier community through the power of sport and solidarity where our community, displaced people, are in the lead" (YSR, 2024a). Therefore, they work among five pillars "mental and physical wellbeing "community building", "Skills-building and Empowerment", "Integration" and "Advocacy" (YSR, 2024b). I carried out participant observation within the organization from September 2023 until December 2023. Furthermore, I interviewed one founder of the project (Appendix 4), one former director (Appendix 1), one former coordinator with lived experiences of displacement (Appendix 2) and one intern with lived experiences of displacement (Appendix 3).

REFUGYM

REFUGYM was established to tackle the physical and mental needs of people seeking asylum in Greece (REFUGYM, 2024). "REFUGYM's motto is to facilitate community-led exercise classes, enabling the release of the feel-good hormone endorphins, and providing escapism from daily camp stressors" (REFUGYM, 2024). I conducted one semi-structured interview with the director and founder of the organization (Appendix 7).

The Boat Collective

The Boat Collective has its foundations in Moria with open theatre classes and due to the dispersal of their members, they started an art center in Athens. "The boat is a refugee-led, anti-racist, non-nationalistic inclusive network of young artists and creatives who practice and perform various forms of art" (Boat Collective, 2024). Currently, they are in the registration procedure as an "official social cooperative enterprise in Greece" since late 2022 (Boat Collective, 2024). I had an interview with one member of the boat collective with lived experiences of displacement who had been with the collective for five years now. He stressed that he could only speak for himself and that his opinion might differ from that of other members of the collective (Appendix 6).

Love Without Borders

Love Without Borders is a non-profit organization which started in respect of the refugee crisis in 2015. Love without Borders mission is "to help support refugees in Greece regain stability and autonomy over their lives" (Love Without Borders, 2024). through the power of art. Moreover, they distribute various basic goods to the community. I conducted an interview with the founder of the organization (Appendix 5).

Educational Organization (in the following e-Ngo)

The educational Organization is primarily delivering language courses and functions as a community space. Furthermore, they provide computer courses and support PWLEODs with application processes.

2.2.3 Research methods

I decided to adopt an inductive research approach to explore in depth the various pathways of implementing meaningful participation. I examined qualitative interviews and participant observations as well as a literature and desk research to triangulate my data and reduce research biases. The literature and desk research encompasses various sources such as law and policy sources, academic texts, international and non-governmental organization publications among others.

Furthermore, I gathered qualitative data through participant observations and interviews. Within the participant observation, I filled the role of a "complete participant" (Tracy, 2013). I was engaged with the restructuring processes of meaningful participation in the organization. Therefore, I learnt how change processes exemplary can be rolled out. That enabled me to understand and explore the team and organizational dynamics. I wrote down memos as fieldnotes during my fieldwork (Tracy, 2013).

Furthermore, I conducted semi-structured interviews between 25th March and 11th of April. I interviewed coordinators and directors of the organizations with and without lived experiences of displacement. Conducting interviews with both groups was crucial to compare both perceptions and to get a holistic picture of how well meaningful participation in those organization is implemented. Furthermore, including both voices was rather important to understand if there were any asymmetries and especially in the senses of power and access to decision making processes.

I analyzed my data sets with codes and categories and compared the data with each other (Flick, 2018). Therefore, I used Nvivo to analyze and code the data. Codes in Nvivo are called nodes. Further, I employed three steps of coding: Open/Initial Coding, Axial Coding, and a Core Category (Charmaz, 2006). First, I did line by line coding. By that, I was able to generate various categories. Then, I compared them with each other to "discover underlying uniformities" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.110) and reduce the data. Lastly, I generated main themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I built my analysis on those themes.

2.3 Positionality

First, I want to define my own positionality and be transparent about the possible biases. Personally, I worked on creating pathways for meaningful participation during my internship with one of the organizations, YSR. Consequently, I was personally involved with one of the organizations and worked together with part of the interlocutors. This experience shaped my standing, and I would perceive myself as an ally for enabling refugee leadership which is influencing my positionality in the research. I perceive my research position as fluid between insider and outsider (Dwyer, Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, I worked together with some of the interlocutors which has an impact on the results as well. I believe that this is not hampering the results of

the research but allowed me to get an honest insight into the perception of the interlocutors.

Besides, I acknowledge that I solely wrote the research paper without any participatory approach and as a non-refugee white western woman. Being who I am implies privileges in comparison to parts of my interlocutors with lived experiences of displacement. Within my research I tried to constantly reflect my position and be very mindful and aware of it. The research aims to present current challenges and navigation strategies of the organizations implementing meaningful participation Further, it aims to portray those challenges to learn from them and avoid harmful behaviors and structures. However, I acknowledge that the research is only a small scale and therefore has a limited representativeness.

2.4 Limitations

This research has potential limitations. I was only able to speak to one person of each organization except of YSR. This led to very one-sided views on the situation. More time in Athens would have also allowed me to speak to more organizations and given me the opportunity to conduct follow-up interviews. Additionally, I was not able to speak to PWLEOD at every organization which impacts the findings. The example of YSR shows the complexity of meaningful participation showcased by the different perspectives of the interlocutors of YSR.

Only one of the interlocutors was a native English speaker, everyone else including the researcher were non-native speakers. The interviews showed that sometimes interlocutors were facing language barriers. Interviews in the mother tongue could have led to more precise outcomes.

In addition, I only approached organizations that I knew were working with meaningful participation. This resulted in a diverse set of NGOs, varying in size and structure which impact how they are implementing meaningful participation. This made it difficult to compare the organizations but also mirrors the complexity of meaningful participation. Additionally, I only focused on organizations founded by foreign Europeans, focusing on Greek organizations might have provided different insights in terms of integration, sustainability and challenges regarding financial constraints.

Lastly, I did research on meaningful participation without a participatory research approach which can be identified as problematic especially in the context of Meaningful Participation. Particularly in regard of meaningful participation it is important to shed

light on the perspectives of PWLEODs themselves and their priorities of research in the field.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting interviews and research with PWLEOD comes along with the need to carefully check the ethical considerations. Henceforth, I was transparent with the aim of my research and created a safe space as well as being clear on what the data is used for and that they do not need to answer. The research followed the core principle of do-no harm. Nothing was done without confirmed consent and I re-checked the well-being of my interlocutors.

3 Conceptual Framework

In the beginning, I will define meaningful participation. Afterwards, I will portray the development of meaningful participation within the global refugee regime. Furthermore, I will delineate its barriers and how meaningful participation is discussed. Finally, I will outline Organizational Theory of Changes as they are keen to unwrap change processes in the organizations.

From Participation to Meaningful Participation

Meaningful participation is defined by its vagueness as it implies a variety of forms and shapes (Kaga, 2021; Olivius, 2014; Ramazani, 2023). This is reflected in the concept of participation as well. Accordingly, Cornwall states „an infinitely malleable concept, 'participation' can be used to evoke - and to signify - almost anything that involves people. As such, it can easily be reframed to meet almost any demand made of it" (Cornwall, 2008, p.269). Consequently, this shows the various applications of participation and its diverse opportunities of implementation.

Accordingly, scholars such as Arnstein and Hart classified the various forms of participation (Hart, 1992; Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein divides her ladder of participation into three themes, non-participation, degrees of tokenism and degrees of participation. Therefore, Arnstein only describes "Partnership, Delegated Power, and Citizen Control" as forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969, p.217, figure 2). Besides Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, scholars and practitioners such as GRN et. al (2022) draw upon Hart's ladder of participation for children. Hart's ladder was developed in collaboration with UNESCO. In comparison to Arnstein, Hart only divides between

participation and non-participation. Step 1-3 were seen as non-participative and from Step 4 to 8 onwards were defined as participation. The highest steps are "child-initiated and shared decisions with adults" (Hart, 1992, p.8). Those are comparable to Arnstein's highest achievable steps. In conclusion, the ladders of participation illustrate which forms of participation are merely seen as harmful and non-participatory and which form is the highest to reach to achieve full participation which is seen as the self-initiated and control/power over something. The ladders of participation portray how participation can be rather non-participatory and the range of participation.

Besides, Cornwall also argues that although those ladders of participation or typologies of participation exist, participation in practice is ultimately defined by the individual's perception of what participation includes (Cornwall, 2008, p.274). Furthermore, the ladders of participation and typologies of participation leave out the question of whom has access to participate and who is excluded (Cornwall, 2008, p.275). Therefore, Cornwall is mostly referring to "invited participation" which comes along with the idea that participation is not coming as an "internal" matter but wants to be achieved from the external. This is why she proposes to ask "what exactly people are being enjoined to participate in, for what purpose, who is involved and who is absent" (Cornwall, 2008, p.281). This helps to understand the circumstances under which participation shall happen and sheds light on its impact, because it holistically tries to unpack participation.

Meaningful Participation

Due to previous failures, tokenistic aspects and the vagueness of participation, the term meaningful participation was implemented to further define what participation makes meaningful. A broadly used definition was developed by GRN (Cohere, 2022; Milner et al., 2022). GRN defined meaningful participation in their Guidelines on meaningful participation as follows:

> "When refugees — regardless of location, legal recognition, gender, identity and demographics — **are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made** (including at local, national, regional, and global levels, and especially when they facilitate interactions with host states, donors, or other influential bodies), in a manner that is **ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially**" (GRN 2019, p.7).

Similarly, R-SEAT argues "'Meaningful refugee participation' is achieved when refugees have substantial and sustained influence in fora where decisions and policies that affect them are taken" (R-Seat, 2022, p.2). Likewise, the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) states in their pledge, that meaningful participation is achieved if participation is safe, inclusive, sustainable and impactful (UNHCR, 2024d). Kaga (2021) claims that „meaningful participation is fundamentally about agency and empowerment, particularly the power to speak, be heard, and make decisions that are then acted upon or implemented" (Kaga, 2021, p.113). Comparably, in children's participation research, Bouma et al. (2018) referred to three main dimensions of meaningful participation – informing, hearing, involving (Bouma et al., 2018). The three-dimensional model of Bouma et. al seeks relevance in the meaningful participation of refugees as it calls the system to listen and actively scrutinize the opinion of children before the decision-making (Bouma et al., 2018). It underlines the importance of listening to the voices of refugees.

GRN et. al (2022) adapted Hart's ladder of participation and shaped it in accordance with refugee participation (GRN et al., 2022, p.7 f., Figure 1). Therefore, they outlined these eight steps of meaningful participation. "Step 8. Refugee-initiated, shared decision making with nonrefugee policy makers Step 7. Refugee-initiated and directed Step 6. Non-refugee-initiated, shared decision making with refugee leader Step 5. Refugee leaders consulted and informed Step 4. Assigned but not informed Step 3. Tokenism Step 2. Decoration Step 1. Manipulation (GRN et al., 2022, p.7 f., Figure 1). This outlaid division between participatory and non-participatory degrees of participation is also represented in the work of Ramazani who defines three models of current refugee participation in policy processes, consultative, advisory and professional (Ramazani, 2023, p.9) and analyzed their level of meaningful participation. He concludes that only the professional level allows total meaningful participation (Ramazani, 2023). Ramazani declares the need to "move beyond refugee participation in processes led by others to co-design and co-ownership of policy making and programming (Ramazani, 2023, p.27). Comparably, Studies on indigenous people also highlight the importance of being informed and integrated in processes as early as possible (Ruwhiu & Carter, 2016) and underline the call for "transformative participation" (Ruwhiu & Carter, 2016). Additionally, Kuntzelman and Noor (2022) divided meaningful participation in research in three concepts, "doing-to" where PWLEOD are "passive recipients of an intervention", "doing for, where there is

limited participation but no real agency and power" and "doing with" which formulates the goal of meaningful participation (Kuntzelman & Noor, 2022). Adding to that, Pincock and Bakunzi (2021) highlight the need to integrate PWLEOD from the very beginning to avoid an instrumentalization of PWLEOD (Pincock & Bakunzi, 2021). Also the collective developed guidelines on co-produced research formulate a necessity for co-design meaning meaningful participation from the very beginning (Asia Pacific Network of Refugees et al., 2023). It is essential that PWLEOD are meaningfully participating throughout the whole process. Otherwise, it cannot be framed as "real" meaningful participation as their impact is then limited due to the stages of proposed involvement.

Meaningful Participation within the global refugee regime

After defining what meaningful participation encompasses, I will shortly portray the development of meaningful participation within the global refugee regime. The role of people with lived experiences of displacement within the development of international refugee law and policy has been overlooked by researchers and the global refugee regime for a long time (Harley, 2022). Harley argues that persons with lived experiences of displacement as individuals "exercised significant influence and thought leadership in the development of international refugee law and policy making" (Harley, 2022, p.84) between 1921 and 1955. Therefore, meaningful participation itself is not as a current development as often portrayed but has been there already earlier, lost its significance over a period and finds its revival and focus nowadays.

Within the global dimension, refugees were framed as a "problem" (Malkki, 1995) disrupting the national order of things and consequently in a liminal position (Malkki, 1992). Discourses on refugees were characterized by portraying refugees as "vulnerable" and pathologized (Harley, 2022; Malkki, 1992; Sigona, 2014). Consequently, refugees were seen as "agency-less objects of humanitarian intervention" (Sigona, 2014, p.370). These discourses legitimized Western humanitarian interventions and speaking for refugees (Sigona, 2014). A reductive narrative was set among the humanitarian aid sector (Hor, 2022).

The 1990es formulated a shift towards recognizing refugees as actors and the application of a people-centered approach (Kaga, 2021). As well as a way of trying to avoid dependencies. Research evolved discovering the agency of refugees and

formulate a shift in the perception of refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Sigona, 2014).

Moreover, refugees started to call for their inclusion and participation in any matters that affect them under the slogan "Nothing about us without us" (Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Network for refugee voices, 2024). This demonstrates the agency of refugees and the active role they want to achieve within the current system. The shift towards meaningful participation is also reflected in the current developments in the legal and policy sphere. The 2016 New York Declaration delineates a "multi-stakeholder approach" (United Nations [UN] , 2016a) and the Global Compact on Refugees declares refugees as "relevant stakeholders" (UN, 2018, p.2, A3). Additionally, the Global Compact on Refugees states in article 34 "Responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist" (UN, 2018). Therefore, the value of refugee participation has been recognized because of the effectiveness of responses which were created by meaningful refugee participation (Ramazani 2023, UN 2018). The assumption that measures are more effective with participation are also reflected in the drive for localization and the effort of the UN to engage as local as possible and the global shift towards participatory and community-based approaches. On the local level, "refugee participation and expressions of agency result in more immediate, everyday impacts that are consequential for the safety of refugees" (Khan, 2024, p.21). The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's declared at the World Humanitarian Summit 2016 "the United Nations commits to making humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary" (UN, 2016b). Furthermore, the UNHCR set out in their strategy for 2024 that "Programmes and activities that respond to forced displacement and statelessness and address their impact must be inclusive, effective and informed by the voices and capacities of affected individuals and communities" (UNHCR, 2024b, p. 76). Due to the protracted nature of refugee crisis leading to overlapping displacements (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016) and the covid-19 pandemic, the impact of refugees as the first responders has been more visible filling the gap of the humanitarian system (Alio et al., 2020; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Qasmiyeh, 2020).

Following this logic and the already given global importance on acting upon meaningful participation, meaningful participation can be seen as an emerging norm within the global refugee regime (Milner et al., 2022, p. 566). Since then, the focus shifted to

meaningful participation of refugees in decision making processes and the need for meaningful participation has been recognized (Harley & Hobbs 2020). Additionally, Betts and Milner argued for a new governance mechanism of the global refugee regime which „enable participation by refugees, NGOs, the private sector and other key stakeholders" (Betts & Milner, 2019, p.10). The outlined developments show the reached global agreement towards enhancing meaningful participation.

Current Critiques and Barriers of Meaningful Participation

Although discussions around meaningful participation shifted from "if" there shall be meaningful participation to "how" meaningful participation shall be practically executed (Milner et al. 2022 etc.), meaningful participation is seen as a one of the most poorly implemented standards (GRN et al., 2022) and criticized as becoming a buzzword (Kaga 2021; Harley 2022). Meaningful participation leaves space for discussions on what meaningful participation encompasses which led to a tendency of failure of meaningful participation and forms an obstacle (Kaga 2021; Cohere 2022). GRN identifies tokenistic patterns of meaningful participation, because of the unclarity of what *meaningful* participation embraces (GRN, 2019). GRN argues that meaningful participation is lacking in both quality and quantity. The representation of refugees in numbers is only very few and they can only have a limited impact. Therefore, refugees tend to have mostly advisory and consultative roles (GRN, 2021). As an example, efforts of the UNHCR were criticized to "fell between step 3 (tokenism), step 4 (refugees are assigned but not informed) and step 5 (refugee leaders consulted and informed) on the eight steps of refugee participation" (Cohere 2022, p.41). Consequently, meaningful participation can be "harmful" and "re-traumatizing" because it is placing refugees in a position where power was taken away from them again (GRN et al., 2022). Janmyr argues that "wrong meaningful participation" can cause feelings of distress among refugees (Janmyr, 2022, p.1302). This amplifies that the misuse of the concept can lead to destructive outcomes instead of achieving the goal of *meaningful* participation. This is why refugee-led organizations formulate the urgent need to focus on the practical implementation of meaningful participation to overcome those struggles and enable refugee leadership (GRN 2019, p.6).

Furthermore, Cohere discovered that the requirement for refugees' impartiality, representativeness, and confidentiality forms an obstacle (Cohere 2022). This goes further with the discussions around who is accountable as a refugee representative

and if they can fully represent the refugee experience (Ramazani 2023, Bahram 2020). The refugee experience is seen as being manifold and heterogenous (Sigona 2014). Accordingly, Bahram argues that the "question of representation is used to dismiss refugee voices when nobody can indeed represent all refugees worldwide" (Bahram, 2020, p.10). Correspondingly, Cohere states that "All humans have implicit and explicit biases, and because of the variety of cross-cutting identities (by race, nationality, gender, education, etc.) no person can be absolutely representative of any group they might belong to" (Cohere 2022, p.19). Further, it raises the question why there is the discussion of "legitimate representation" for people with lived experiences of displacement but less so for those without (Cohere 2022, p.19). This shows the ambivalence in the legitimacy critique as it implies that a person without experiences of displacement is more legitimate to represent the refugee voices than a person-with lived experiences of displacement. It correlates with the idea that humanitarian organization can speak on the "behalf" of refugees and portray the needs better than refugees themselves (Sigona 2014). Therefore, Ramazani argues "policymakers should also seriously consider who they view as legitimate to speak on behalf of other refugees, in what capacity, and who is left out and why" (Ramazani, 2020, p.21). Additionally, Cohere critiqued that the obstacle "impartiality, representativeness, and confidentiality" described by those NGO's can also "constitute an 'escape route' or excuse for NGOs to not adequately involve refugees in their work" (Cohere 2022, p. 18).

Next, Cohere discovered in their study the obstacles regarding skills and workplace culture (Cohere 2022), On the one hand, organizations do not provide enough skills training and learning opportunities for people with lived experiences of displacement to adapt to the job position. On the other hand, the requirements for vacancies are not easy to be met by people with lived experiences of displacement and the there is a corresponding mistrust in the capabilities of people with lived experiences of displacement (Cohere 2022).

Another obstacle is formed by the national legislation (Cohere 2022) and by the local context (Kaga, 2021). Countries have diverse perceptions on refugees, their integration within the country and access to (employment) rights (Cohere 2022). As an example, Kaga states in her study the problem of the Lebanese government towards the participation of refugees and their corresponding fear that refugees gain (political)

power (Kaga 2021). She states that it is not analyzed "how this [the local context] impacts the abilities of humanitarian organizations to implement their commitments to refugee participation" (Kaga 2021, p.244). Consequently, meaningful participation is also interlinked with the hosting states and its governance of refugees. The liminal position of refugees and the perception of refugees as harmful against the national order of things (Malkki, 1995) hinder meaningful participation. Additional to the national political limitations towards meaningful participation, GRN delineates the travel, visa and safety constraints of refugees which led to exclusion instead of participation. "In global and regional fora, travel and visa issues mean only refugees resettled in the Global North are participating. "At local levels, safety issues prevent many refugees, especially for girls and women and LGBTIQ+ persons, from participating" (GRN 2019, p.12). There is a tendency that people with lived experiences currently living in the Global North have more access towards meaningful refugee participation and local contexts and people with lived experiences of displacement in the global south encounter various obstacles towards refugee participation.

Lastly, Cohere argued that a major obstacle is "that the hierarchical structure embedded within the refugee response presents challenges to enact the anticipated long-lasting impact of their meaningful participation pledges" (Cohere 2022, p.35). This argument correlates with Kaga's aspect that the non-participatory nature of the humanitarian system forms barriers to meaningful participation (Kaga 2021). Power asymmetries in the humanitarian system led to a global regime which is still being criticized as "racial" and "colonizing" (Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiate (RRLI) impact report 2023).

Accordingly, Sigona (2014) draws upon the sit-in movement of refugees in Cairo which portrays the power asymmetries within the humanitarian system. The request of the refugees using humanitarian government vocabulary formulated a break in the order of the international refugee regime (Sigona, 2014). Similarities can be seen in the case of the Hutu Refugees whose participation and empowerment should not lead to changing power relations but rather contributing to a sense of community and sense a "feeling of empowerment" following the idea of vulnerability instead of agency (Turner 2010). "This ideal was constantly threatened by the refugees who did not act as real victims and who had their own agenda" (Turner, 2010, p.62). Likewise, Duale argues in his study on meaningful participation of refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp and

Nairobi, Kenya that refugee participation correlates with discourses on the political fear of making refugees political actors who could have the capability of changing the current system (Duale 2020). Furthermore, Duale's interlocutors stated that they did not have decision-making power and were only partially consulted (Duale 2020), hence they were not really participating.

Additionally, Olivius depicts in her study the meaningful participation of refugee women and how others set the agenda and scope of their participation and limit their participation by that. "In effect, refugees should participate when told to do so in ways defined by others, but not set the agenda for their participation or for processes of change within their communities" (Olivius, 2014, p. 58). This shows the power asymmetries in the system and correlates to the case of Turner (2010). The participation shall only take place in the scope set by the UNHCR and camp management. It poses a limit to the space of refugees and limits their own power.

Furthermore, although refugees might participate, a common problem is that others decide whose voices get heard (Hor 2022, p.362) and who is eligible to participate in meaningful participation structures (Bahram 2020, Janmyr 2022). Hor states that "it is common to visit the field without meaningfully listening to aid beneficiaries on their terms" (Hor, 2022, p. 372). Braham's research also shows that refugees must fight tokenistic and most favorable structures of meaningful participation. He highlights the misuse of the concept of meaningful participation and meaningful participation as a form of only "ticking the box" and symbolic instead of the emergence of "real" meaningful participation (Braham 2020; Janmyr 2022).

Emotional anxieties of humanitarian workers contribute towards power asymmetries and the maintenance of the current system. Therefore, the reductive narratives function as a coping mechanism which hinders meaningful refugee participation (Hor 2022). In regard of the struggles on the practical execution of meaningful participation, GRN defined Guidelines for the practical outlay of meaningful participation (GRN 2019).

> "Facilitate ongoing and sustained access to strategizing and decision-making processes at every level […] Facilitate refugee preparedness to engage in strategizing and decision-making moments […] Initiate institutional self-reflection and enact changes that dismantle power dynamics […] finance refugee participation and refugee-led initiatives […] address and prevent tokenizing refugees" (GRN 2019, p. 7f.).

These Guidelines should help organizations to achieve meaningful participation and break down barriers. "We challenge the response sector to enter into a period of self-reflection, to identify the concrete steps that will enable and break down barriers to meaningful participation, and to commit time and resources to enact plans" (GRN 2019, p. 27). Hor also came to the same conclusion in her research on reductive narratives of humanitarian workers and declares "meaningful participation must entail unlearning reductive narratives and relearning who the other is through dialog – not as an outcome, but an always ongoing, iterative, and perennially unfinished process" (Hor, 2022, p. 380). To understand how those new strategical steps shall be executed, theory of organizational change can provide an angle to unpack needed changes and their impact on organizations.

Theory of Organizational Change

Meaningful participation requires changes on the organizational level. There is a vast amount of literature on different theories and models of organizational changes. Diverging research perspectives unpack organizational change at the various levels – "micro (individuals) and meso (groups and organizations) and macro (organizational environment and populations of organizations)" (Jacobs et al., 2013, p.1). Other research argues for multilevel approach to understand organizational change (Jacobs et al., 2013; Pettigrew et al., 2001; Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Therefore, Jacob et al. argue that it is important to understand the multi-levels of change. This includes an internal and external perspective on change. It enables a holistic perspective on the diverse aspects of change. Jacobs et. al's framework incorporates cultural awareness because of the grounding understanding of different cultural expectations as well as environmental factors defined as "hard facts" (Jacobs et al., 2013).

Marshall Scott Poole and Andrew H. Van de Ven define organizational change "as a difference in form, quality, or state over time in an organizational entity" (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004, p.xi). Further, they argue that change revolves around "people, space, and time" (Poole, 2004, p.16). People refers to the human agency and people being agents for change whereas space forms the level of analysis in organizational change and time encompasses the temporal dimensions of change and the effect of time on change (Poole, 2004). Additionally, Pettigrew et al. outlined that change should be

understood as a "continuous process" and not "detached episodes" (Pettigrew et al., 2001, p.709).

Anderson and Anderson determine three types of change, development change, transitional change and transformational change (Anderson & Anderson, 2010, p. 9). Developmental change is based on improvements in the way organizations operate, while transitional change occurs when problems arise that require new ways of operating, and transformational change is characterized by radical shifts in the way organizations operate and the additional need to change their "culture and people's behavior and mindsets to implement the transformation successfully and sustain it over time" (Anderson & Anderson, 2010, p. 10). Those types show different levels of change for organizations. Different approaches show the complexity of organizational change and its various perspectives on it. Hence, I will focus on the identified essentials of organizational change throughout the vast literature to unpack how theories of organizational change can be helpful for understanding meaningful participation in organizations.

Achieving change requires "a mix of change drivers across the key steps of the organizational change process" (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.187). Further, they describe change drivers as "two recurring ways […] change drivers that facilitate the implementation *of* change throughout the organization […] [and] drivers of the necessity *for* a change" (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.177). Change is identified at different levels of the organization such as on the group and individual level (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Woodman and Dewett clarify the individual level in three dimensions "the changeability of individual characteristics and behaviors, the depth of the changes, and the time involved in the changes" (Dewett & Woodman, 2004, p.33). Key for successful change is starting with a vision which is compelling and accepted by the employees. The acceptance of the vision then becomes a change driver (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). The vision and its communicated urgency were identified as essential by Kotter as well (Kotter, 2007). Furthermore, the leader plays a central role in the change process and their interaction with employees (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Kotter strengthens in his research that "Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership" (Kotter, 2007, p.97). He emphasizes that it is needed to have agents of change in leadership positions as well to be able to achieve change (Kotter, 2007). This aspect

can be seen as crucial for meaningful participation as it emphasizes the need for change agents in leadership positions.

4 Analysis, Findings

In the following, I will unpack the implementation of meaningful participation in the various organizations and how they tried to navigate occurring challenges. First, I will outline how well organizations implement meaningful participation in their organization. Further, I will address the challenges organizations face and which strategies they are trying to apply to navigate those.

4.1 Meaningful Participation in the Organizations

In this chapter, I will analyze how well organizations implement meaningful participation. Consequently, I will examine what positions are accessible for PWLEOD in the organization, how they are included in decision-making processes and how the hiring structures include pathways for meaningful participation.

4.1.1 Implementation of Meaningful Participation in the Organization

As a start, it has become evident that all the examined NGOs are working on including voices of refugees, but they show different approaches on how to enable meaningful participation and differentiate in their capacities to financially compensate meaningful participation. In contrast to other research on meaningful participation, it is interesting to note that most of the organizations implemented meaningful participation in their organization (Appendix 4, Appendix 5, Appendix 6) from the very beginning. YSR and REFUGYM characterize the inclusion of PWLEOD's in leadership positions in their organization as a very natural process.

> *"In Athens, we started with a team of three coordinators from the community, but not because we wanted to, or because we thought about the term like meaningful participation. But just because it was something we didn't think about, it was so natural that it worked"* (Appendix 4, 0:12, p.30).

This clearly shows that the meaningful participation of PWLEOD's was not a decision to be made, but deeply inherited in the approach of the organization as it also was co-

founded by a PWLEOD. Likewise, REFUGYM described the process as being naturally.

> *"I think always very naturally, because that was [...] always the idea from the start"* (Appendix 7, 15:46, p.60).

Hence, both organizations naturally worked with meaningful participation and show efforts to facilitate refugee leadership and co-ownership (Ramazani, 2023). However, key positions such as the coordinator and majority of the board in REFUGYM and the managers positions in YSR are currently filled by European humanitarian workers. To achieve full meaningful participation it is needed that "displaced people are involved in agenda setting, project design, implementation and evaluation" (Kuntzelman & Noor 2022) which is currently not the case in the majority of the organizations. Additionally, the financial compensation is defined as an essential factor for meaningful participation and identified as a "gateway to participation" (GRN 2019, p.8). The organizations differ in their financial capacity to financially compensate PWLEOD.

YSR is trying to include PWLEOD at all levels, but predominately works with coaches with lived experiences of displacement. They are trying to have a coordinator with lived experiences of displacement at all locations and are working on creating new pathways to leadership such as the internship opportunity for PWLEOD as an entry point in the organization (Appendix 1; Appendix 3; Appendix 4). YSR pays everyone except its community volunteers. However, the positions are on a very low-salary level.

> *"People can make more money by working in the fields than by working with yoga and sports"* (Appendix 1, 15:55, p.5).

This affects the accessibility of positions in the organization for PWLEOD. Consequently, the low salary forms an obstacle to meaningful participation in YSR and leads to the predicament of either working on a low salary basis or not being able to work in the sector at all.

In comparison to YSR, REFUGYM is solely based on voluntary work. No one in the organization is paid except for the founder who received a small support for her accommodation (Appendix 7). REFUGYM was designed to be "*run by refugees for refugee*" (Appendix 7) which centralizes around PWLEOD being teachers and leaders

in the organization, but the coordinator position is filled by the founder and the board currently consists of one PWLEOD out of five as one PWLEOD left the board (Appendix 7). Consequently, it could be discussed whether this could be seen as meaningful participation as the only coordination position is filled by the European founder and PWLEODs are underrepresented at the board. Nonetheless, REFUGYM is the only organization that is based within a camp and therefore dependent on different environmental factors than the other NGOs.

> *"And when I'm no longer allowed inside camp, unfortunately, of, like as much as I yet designed REFUGYM, or like having my mind this idea of REFUGYM of like, being completely self sustaining by the refugee community, because it is a transit community, you do kind of need that like one solid person. And so in terms of like, our leaders, when I'm not allowed in the camp, what's typically happened in the past is we've had one female leader and one male leader"* (Appendix 7, 0:52, p.56).

Further, the leaders are in charge of the organization and the coordination position of the founder could be identified as a supporting position for the PWLEOD and a consistency role to keep the organization running due to the transient nature of the camp. Nonetheless, the organization is not able to financially compensate PWLEOD which forms a major obstacle towards meaningful participation.

In comparison, the Boat collective and Love without Borders centralize around the needs of the PWLEOD and therefore placed them in the center of their organization.

> *"We don't consider ourself as organization. We are not here for the refugee. We are here for needs"* (Appendix 6, 19:19, p.46).

The Boat collective distinguish themselves from other organizations to strengthen a collective approach with no hierarchies. Everyone is encouraged to participate in the various groups. This shows a very low-threshold approach of the organization towards meaningful participation (Appendix 6). However, the Boat Collective is completely based on voluntary work and no one gets paid. Therefore, they are also not matching the definition of meaningful participation.

Love without Borders tries to create a voice for the people through art and to support them in their precarious situations (Appendix 5). Furthermore, two PWLEOD's are employed for running the housing project and the gallery (Appendix 5). Additionally, Love without borders pays all its artists and employees.

> "We give 100% back to the artist [..] We're always looking for sponsors in order to pay the two refugees that we have working for us, so that we don't have to take any money from the people […] So I know a lot of organizations feel okay because they need also money to run on. But for this organization, we're giving 100% back for them" (Appendix 5, 9:04, p.36).

Further, the founder emphasized the importance of the financial compensation of PWLEOD. Especially in this context it can be discussed if this can be considered as meaningful participation. Understanding meaningful participation in alliance with the definition of the GRN (GRN 2019, p.7.) a key aspect needs to be fulfilled "[PWLEOD's] are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made" (GRN 2019, p.7). This aspect is not given in Love without Borders due to the small size of the organization and its absence of decision-making processes. However, the organization itself is fostering the empowerment and independence of PWLEODs and provides a platform to give them back their voice.

> "So this is one small step, to giving them a voice and allowing them to share their story, and to release some of the emotions that they've been holding on to. So it's a very healing process as well" (Appendix 5, 0:14, p.34).

In this regard, Kaga also argues that this can be identified as a "empowering and alternative form of hearing refugees' voices" (Kaga, 2021, p. 265). This underlines the manifold opportunities of meaningful participation.

In contrast to the other organizations, e-NGO is the only organization that recently started implementing pathways for meaningful participation. They have PWLEOD working at the reception and recently started with including them in teacher positions. E-NGO predominately faced the issue of a scarcity in funding for teachers and stipends for positions for PWLEOD except for the receptionists who are paid. The unstable

funding situation influenced the founders fear-based resistance to implementing pathways for meaningful participation within their organization because of two main reasons. Firstly, the founders were afraid of creating dependencies with this unstable funding situation. Secondly, they were afraid of exploiting people with lived experiences of displacement. The organization is in the dilemma of either exploiting PWLEOD or precluding them (e-NGO). A preclusion causes the problem that PWLEOD tend to have no work experience in these fields. The founders were cautious with having people with lived experiences working within their organization and the creation of pathways for meaningful articipation caused internal conflicts and negotiation processes (e-NGO). Therefore, PWLEOD are included in the structure of the organization, but at a lower level (e-NGO).

In conclusion, the facilitation of meaningful participation at all levels is linked to the different stage, financial capacities and environmental factors of the organization. Consequently, none of the organization achieved "true" meaningful participation in alliance with the essential factors of the definition (GRN, 2019). Nevertheless, all organizations created positions for PWLEOD in their organizations. Thus, the inclusion of PWLEOD in hiring structures and Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) policies of organizations enables professional careers of people with lived experiences of displacement (Ramazani 2023). That shows the importance of integrating PWLEOD in the organization. All of the organizations integrating PWLEOD in their organizational structures.

4.1.2   Inclusion into Decision Making Processes

The inclusion into decision-making processes is key for meaningful participation. GRN defines those inclusions as the basis for *meaningful* participation. "When refugees […] are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made […] in a manner that is ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially" (GRN, 2019, p.7). To be able to meaningfully participate in decision making processes, PWLEOD must be informed, heard, and involved (Bourma et. al 2018). Furthermore, they shall "particularly [have] the power to speak, be heard, and make decisions that are then acted upon or implemented" (Kaga 2021, p. 113). Meaningful participation aims to include PWLEOD at all levels of decision-making processes (GRN 2019). Considering these integrations in decision-

making processes as essential for meaningful participation, the question is how well the organizations have enabled these aspects within their organization. Delineated feedback structures are not included in this analysis as they already have been identified as not being meaningful participation (Cohere, 2022).

The Boat Collective is completely based on collective decision-making processes with equal inclusion of everyone within the organization. In contrast, YSR, REFUGYM and e-NGO established different levels of decision-making processes.

YSR is working on preparing PWLEOD for decision-making processes. Therefore, their intern is not currently integrated in high-level decision-making processes, but the internship is preparing her for it.

> *When we come to the decision making base, we haven't really had a situation where we needed to be involved to like make up for the decision that doesn't come up that hasn't come up yet. But I can think in the future. I'm sure we'll get involved* (Appendix 3, 8.53, p.24).

It can be clearly seen that YSR engages in the interns preparedness to meaningfully participate in strategizing and decision-making moments (GRN, 2019). Moreover, YSR restructured their organizational decision-making processes lately and established further hierarchies. In this regard, the former Director criticized that this could lead towards excluding PWLEOD from higher decision-making processes.

> *"But then, of course, if refugees keep leaving, like the position of like refugee status for some of them stay for less long because they like the position change a little bit more, it means they will never reach manager level"* (Appendix 1, 27:11, p.9).

This clearly forms an obstacle towards meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making processes. Similarly, e-NGO faces the same issue with limited meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making processes. All employees are included in staff meetings where decisions are made on a low level. Higher level decision-making is limited to only to a few persons within the organization and PWLEOD are currently not participating in those. In contrast, REFUGYM works along the believe that

"refugees know best" (Appendix 7) and tries to actively engage everyone in their decision-making processes.

> *"So we've had meetings which are kind of like open to everybody but especially the teachers or like the leaders are encouraged to come because they are the leaders you know, they're more at the forefront of their community but everybody is encouraged to come to make like collective decision making"* (Appendix 7, 0:52, p.57).

Despite this collective decision-making process, some decisions in REFUGYM are made only in consultation with the Board of Trustees which also consists of one PWLEOD. PWLEOD are underrepresented in the Board of Trustees but meaningfully participating at all levels of decision-making processes.
Due to the small size of the organization, Love without Borders does not have decision-making processes. The founder aims to work in alliance with the needs of the community (Appendix 5).

Although the decision-making processes vary due to the structure and size of the organization, the majority of the organizations include people with lived experiences of displacement at some level of decision-making processes. However, meaningful participation requires to meaningfully participate in decision making processes at all levels (Global Refugee-Led Network (GRN), 2019). Meaningful participation exclusively at low levels reproduces hierarchies and power dynamics in an organization and fosters that refugee participation is only at a bottom-level (Duale 2020). As a result, only the boat collective reached meaningful participation. YSR, e-NGO and REFUGYM well include meaningful participation at low levels, but the majority fails to include PWLEODs in higher decision-making levels.

4.1.3 Pathways to Meaningful Participation in hiring structures

YSR, e-NGO and REFUGYM try to increase the number of employees with lived experiences of displacement which is seen as a central point for NGOs to foster meaningful participation (GRN 2019). Crucial for that is to build pathways for meaningful participation in hiring structures. However, this raises the questions of who has access to meaningful participation, who is participating and who is excluded

(Cornwall 2008). In this regard, most organizations tend to hire or involve PWLEOD in (leadership) positions who had been in touch with the organization before (Appendix 1, Appendix 5, Appendix 7, e-NGO).

> *"So the idea is that, okay, people know who I am, and they can, they can reach out to me, or indeed, I go like and do community outreach. Either way, people will come forward and be like, hey, I want to teach this class"* (Appendix 7, 0:52, p.56).

The organization consists of PWLEOD who want to engage themselves in the organization. Therefore, there is already a level of attachment to the organization. Likewise, YSR tends to hire PWLEOD with a previous engagement in the organization.

> *"Like people who are at Lesvos for a long time working with the project, and then at some point having a position when there was enough money to pay them"* (Appendix 1, 2:47, p.2).

Besides prior attachments to the projects and NGOs, this statement leads to the assumption that previous voluntary engagement is rewarded with a vacancy as soon as the monetary capacity is given. Similarities can be identified in the e-NGO. The NGO foremost hire community members as well (e-NGO).
Moreover, hiring community members can also have a positive impact and lead to an easy adaption of the PWLEOD in the organization such as described by one interlocutor.

> *"It didn't took, like, a long time to adjust, because I already knew the people from before. And I already knew how the organization works, before entering into the position. And it also helped that my supervisor was on ground and she was not like in another location she was with me* (Appendix 3, 5:51, p.23).

The implementation of pathways in hiring structures is corresponding to the fact whether organizations achieved a size which allowed them to professionalize their hiring structures. Therefore, only YSR and e-NGO have a clear hiring structure.

In their vacancy, e-NGO directly declares how much time is needed for the position and communicates the financial compensation to create transparency. Furthermore, they provide various channels for applying such as e-mail, whatsapp, video or voice note. Interestingly, they mostly received emails (e-NGO).

Similarities can be identified in the hiring processes of YSR.

"If we want someone on the move, so changing a little bit the channels of diffusion of the posts and stuff like that communicating more on WhatsApp and social media, and then of course communicating with the community in the gyms" (Appendix 1, 2:47, p.2).

Furthermore, they

"don't necessarily ask for a very formal cover letter and CV, which is like too, we ask people to give background information about their background and motivation. And then interviews" (Appendix 1, 4:27, p.2).

Besides those channels of diffusion, the organizations try to only ask for essential skills such as IT skills for the receptionist position to be as open as possible (e-NGO). Those factors can be seen as positive in regard of meaningful participation (Cohere, 2022).

Both of these hiring processes are explicitly designed for positions for people with lived experiences of displacement. In reverse, this means that organizations create positions for PWLEOD, but do not especially integrated inclusive hiring processes in general. Although the idea is to favor PWLEOD, it solidifies the exceptional position of PWLEOD in hiring processes. Further, hiring predominately community members limits the accessibility of meaningful participation.

4.1.4 Interim Conclusion

The various forms and pathways of meaningful participation portray and strengthen the unclarity of the scope of meaningful participation (Kaga, 2021; Olivius, 2014; Ramazani, 2023). Furthermore, the analysis showed that the majority of the organizations lack crucial aspects of meaningful participation such as the financial

compensation and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making processes which is corresponding with the lack of available positions for PWLEOD at higher levels. Especially the aspect of impact on the organization is limited in the majority of the organizations. The highest levels of participation (GRN et al., 2022; Hart, 1992; Arnstein, 1969) are not reached by the majority of the organizations. All in all, none of the organizations are able to meet all elements of the definition of meaningful participation.

4.2   Challenges

The previous chapter showed that organizations fail on implementing meaningful participation well. Consequently, there are various factors that impede meaningful participation and challenges organizations face while trying to implement meaningful participation. In the following, I will analyze challenges regarding the financial constraints and unstable funding situation of the organizations as well as challenges on the practical level of meaningful participation.

4.2.1   Financial constraints and unstable funding

The NGO sector is defined by its financial constraints. Most of the NGOs rely on voluntary work (Stavinoha & Ramakrishnan, 2020). The lack of funding causes multiple problems for NGOs on the ground and hinders their ability to provide a solid financial compensation of PWLEOD. In fact, the financial compensation is defined as an essential factor for meaningful participation and identified as a "gateway to participation" (GRN 2019, p.8). The organizations contrast in their financial capacity to financially compensate PWLEOD as already portrayed above. Accordingly, some of the organizations face ideological issues regarding the application for specific fundings.

> *"we're still very much like a small, grassroots NGO, very specific with where we apply for and accept funding from out of principle, you know, like we want to apply for except for funding from basically anywhere that perpetuates systems of oppression. So that includes the EU, that includes the British government, the Greek government, etc. So obviously, our funding pool is very, very small. So that's also Yeah, I think many NGOs are facing this, this pinch as well"* (Appendix 7, 18:10, p.61).

Funding scarcity is not only a problem of allocation, but also of a system which is built on diverging values and a system of oppression. Nonetheless, it is crucial to financially compensate PWLEOD (GRN, 2019) and avoid that PWLEOD are further exposed to forms of exploitation (GRN et al., 2022, p. 12).

The lack of money does not only mitigate the ability of NGOs to create pathways for meaningful participation and provide essential financial compensation, but also set an obstacle to the reflective processes in the organization that are needed to enhance meaningful participation. GRN et. al (2022) have already determined the crucial aspect of funding and its impact on meaningful participation among others (Harley, 2022; Kaga, 2021). Furthermore, the interlocutors made clear that money constraints are intertwined with a corresponding lack of (time) capacity (e-NGO, Appendix 1, Appendix 4, Appendix 6). The Boat collective argues that money is their core challenge. A change in funding would enable them to solve all their problems.

> *"And then all the problem of the art center gonna be solved, like, all these problems that we have, because we don't have a lot of time to spend together and work with the things you know, so the things are not going on time. So always there with delay. And it's coming because the people they have to work in the other places, they have the other activities, all those things are happening. So with the money automatically, all of them became to the right play. But the thing is […] that we are not here for money, but we need money"* (Appendix 6, 1:01:26, p. 51).

Accordingly, the lack of money negatively influences the quality of the art center and their capacities. Similarly, YSR perceived time constraints due to the scarce funding situation which mitigates their ability to review embedded methods of the organization (Appendix 1). This hampers the possibility of in-depth reflection which on reverse forms a barrier towards enhancing meaningful participation. The organization already acknowledge that they need to rethink and restructure some processes in the organization to better facilitate meaningful participation.

> *"I think, of course, like, very concretely is like, we have methods. Like it, you just look at meetings, like, we try to speak slowly, after five minutes, we'll just be super fast. Like, there's a lot of things that are not accessible. But again, it takes so much time, and so much capacity to change methods to study methods, review methods, etc."* (Appendix 1, 23:38, p.7).

Correspondingly, Whelan-Berry&Sommerville (2010) pointed out the importance of focus, time and money for change (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.188). All of those are lacking in YSR which leads to a failure of the implementation of change. Additionally, the founder of YSR perceived the same challenges as the director and further highlights the conflicts on the individual and organization level.

> *"And the main obstacle for that, I think it's time and resources. Because reshaping a coordination position and reshaping the way that you deal with people that have a different idea on how to do things in your organization, requires so much time and attention. And we, we are in, we are working in an environment where we are only looking at what's going to happen the next hour, basically, and so always busy, and people always feel busy"* (Appendix 4, 0:12, p.30).

In this regard, Schein underlines the importance of "culture" in organization for change. „Many organizational change programs that failed probably did so because they ignored cultural forces in the organizations in which they were to be installed" (Schein, 1990, p.118). Nevertheless, implementing change in organization requires time and resources. Processes of implementing change have a tendency of failure due to the lack of time and money (Kotter, 2007)Therefore, it is not surprising that organizations are unable to implement changes related to meaningful participation due to their lack of time and resources.

As a result, it can also be seen that money is an external factor that hinders the facilitation of meaningful participation and can function as a tool to reflect internal structures and be able to change internally to enable meaningful participation.

4.2.2 Challenges on the practical level of Meaningful Participation

The majority of the organizations face challenges at the practical level of meaningful participation. These challenges revolve around the problem that meaningful participation does not only mean to merely create pathways for PWLEOD in the organizational structures, but also requires a constant organizational reflection on inherent power dynamics (GRN 2019, Ramazani 2023). Accordingly, there is a need for organizations to engage in in-depth self-reflection and work on their DEI strategies

in the organization (GRN 2019). Thus, it can be identified that the organizations perceive various challenges in the implementation of meaningful participation and the dismantling of power dynamics.

In this regard, I will highlight the perceived challenges of the interlocutors with lived experiences of displacement from their perspective. Understanding their perspective is crucial as participation in practice is defined by the perception of the individual (Cornwall, 2008). Furthermore, their perception is central to overcome challenges and understand requirements for change. The interlocutors emphasized different aspects that they perceived as challenges to meaningful participation.

One interlocutor mentioned that his meaningful participation was limited by the perceived differences in mentalities and struggles with the co-workers in the coordination team.

> *"The coordination team was too tough for me, because they were speaking same language together. They, I mean, they had same mentality with each other. But I had different mentality […] For example, if I'm not there, they're speaking the same language together. And this is make them more closer to each other, then me how shall I say? Yeah, I was so far mentality with their French. I'm Iranian. So it's maybe different.* (Appendix 2, 1:57; 3:10, p.11 f.).

At the time, he was the only person in the team with lived experiences of displacement. He found himself in a marginalized position and felt disconnected from the others. Asylum Access therefore pointed out the need for organizations to "Recognize and adapt to cultural differences" (Asylum Access, 2021, p. 17) and highlighted the need for cultural intelligence (Asylum Access 2021). Consequently, meaningful participation is not only about creating positions, but also finding ways to avoid being in a marginalized position in the organization again and react towards cultural difference in a culture intelligent way. The challenges regarding different cultures and perspectives were also perceived by the intern in the organization.

> *"yeah it is also a clash of religion, because yoga and sports are very international. So we have different religions coming in the door every day. Different perspectives, people said different things, either from like, a standpoint of life, or this is what I was taught from a young age, this is my religion, or whatever"* (Appendix 3, 17:37, p.26)

Additionally, a challenge lies in the "'white dominant culture', which we define as ways that the norms, preferences and fears of white European descended people" (Mustafa et al., 2022, p. 2) and its impact on the work environment. It is manifested in aspects of how organizations are run as outlined above and the expectations placed on employees including PWLEOD. These work expectations can be perceived as too demanding as in the case of one interlocutor.

> *"How should I say, using Windows, I didn't work for this. So I wasn't very good at this one. So I would like to make more simple like reading. Stuff like about, there was 10, 20 documents to read. And my boss was everywhere every day asked me, Did you read this document? I read it nearly. But I didn't see anything in my mind, because I couldn't really save them"* (Appendix 2, 10:34, p.14).

Furthermore, it highlights the need for trauma-sensitive working environments (asylum access 2021). Besides a possibility of a marginalized position and different mentalities, inherited racism and the perceived European superiority hampers the equity in decision-making processes and portrays the "white dominant culture" (Mustafa et al., 2022).

> *"When we are going to making decisions, when we are going to make some I don't know, a solution for something. They [European co-workers] don't care about what others are saying. They have this feeling that unfortunately, in Europe is existing that we know better. We have privilege we have the better, I don't know, education, whatever, which is from since they were kids, they were hearing that so much. So they are come with this way, too. And they have Okay, now we'll see some uncivilized people. And we have to work with it, which is, this is the wrong way of thinking from the beginning, you know, when you start, so it's happening a lot. So some European are coming to make decision for the refuge, which is not possible"* (Appendix 6, 0:17, p.42).

This clarifies the need for organizations working with meaningful participation and humanitarian workers to shift "from a paternalistic 'we know best' attitude, to an attitude of partnership, solidarity, and allyship with refugees" (Kaga, 2021, p. 270). A focal point is to "verse ourselves in the historical and ongoing power dynamics present in our

sector" (Asylum Access, 2021, p. 15). Specifically it means to reflect „the prominence of white dominant professional culture, the history of colonization, as well as white supremacy and white saviorism in our sector, and decolonial thought and practice" (Asylum Access, 2021, p. 15). Furthermore, those challenges underline that organizational change can only be done with individual change as well (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.176). Implementing meaningful participation requires the employees to self-reflect themselves and change their behaviors.

Besides those power imbalances, the lack of decision-making power was also perceived by a former coordinator with lived experiences of YSR. Accordingly, lacks in decision-making power can be "harmful", "re-traumatizing" and cause feelings of distress (GRN et al., 2022; Janmyr, 2022).

> *Yeah, I hadn't had this power to change or to, to re like to throw out something, not someone, never somewhat, but throw out something. And bring the new* (Appendix 2, 6:59, p.13).

Although the interlocutor was in a position of coordination, his decision-making power was limited. Therefore, the interlocutors meaningful participation was limited as the interlocutor had no real agency or power (Kuntzelmann, Noor 2022). To achieve full meaningful participation "organizations should reassess who sits at the locus of power" (Cohere, 2022, p. 36) which requires organizational reflection. Those in-depth organizational reflections are currently missing, also because of limitations due to money and time constraints as outlined above. Further, it shows the intersection of different challenges on the ground and how those hamper meaningful participation.

Another challenge on the practical implementation of meaningful participation is the gender dimension perceived by two organizations. Both determine that diverging gender values pose challenges regarding meaningful participation for different reasons. Thus, controversially discussed already, this section does not seek to manifest a picture of gender disparities and strengthen the already circling image of conservative gender images across PWLEOD but tries to portray issues faced in organizations. The majority of the female interlocutors primarily stress the distinction in gender and progressive values. A lot of small NGOs are predominantly run by

women (Appendix 4). YSR juxtaposes strong values regarding women's rights and flinta rights with a foremost men-based community with a likelihood of different values. This led to clashes with a former male coordinator with lived experiences of displacement.

> *"So like, I think that was the thing that happened with the last coordinator was from his religion men are like the providers. [...] And then we have the woman and the most European. Like they don't have the same mindset that the man has to be more superior than the women. So like, I think that crossed a bit"* (Appendix 3, 14:57, p. 25).

Similarities can be observed in REFUGYM which is dealing with misogyny and the harassment of some female leaders (Appendix 7, 24:43, p.62).

> *"A lot of men feeling disgruntled or upset with a woman having a role that might not have been typical in their home country"* (Appendix 7, 18:10, p.60).

This creates a hostile work environment for female leaders in REFUGYM. In this regard, the meaningful participation cannot be identified as safe which is necessary for meaningful participation (GRN, 2019). Other studies around female leaders with lived experiences of displacement or immigrants identified a challenge of patriarchy and cultural gender. According to them, female leaders need to "navigate both cultural gender norms and patriarchal expectations on the part of those in their community" (Kirsch et al., 2023, p. 187). Meaningful participation is challenged by diverging gender values. Especially women with lived experiences of displacement can face intersectional discrimination.

In conclusion, there are various challenges around the practical implementation of meaningful participation that call for reflective processes in organizations and the need to understand underlying power dynamics and cultural differences to overcome those challenges. Further, to change those dynamics it requires radical shifts in the culture and people's behavior and mindset (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Changes on the individual level are deeply required.

4.2.3 Interim Conclusion

Various challenges occur on the practical implementation and intersect with the challenge of the financial capacity of the organizations. Therefore, most of the organizations face challenges regarding power dynamics within the organizations. Those challenges can be caused either by cultural differences, perceived power imbalances as well as gender disparities. Meaningful participation is hampered by the marginal position of PWLEOD within team structures as well as by challenges regarding "the white dominant culture" and its corresponding work expectations. Furthermore, ruptures in decision-making power can cause destructive results for PWLEOD. Those challenges require in-depth reflection of the organization and change processes which in reverse require time and resources to be achieved. Those factors are currently lacking in most organizations.

4.3 Navigating Challenges

The challenges showed that organization face various issues when implementing meaningful participation. GRN highlights that change towards full meaningful participation requires a commitment to "systemic transformation, and accordingly allocate the time and financial resources necessary to instigate change" (GRN, 2019, p. 9). Vice versa this means to invest time and resources (GRN 2019). The organizations identified different strategies to navigate those challenges.

4.3.1 Strategies for navigating challenges

Because of the various challenges described, the organization employed different strategies for navigating those challenges to better facilitate meaningful participation. Accordingly, YSR, Boat and Love organization are in organizational change processes to enable meaningful participation.

Both, Love without borders and the Boat Collective perceived lacks in their quality of the organization due to different reasons which led to different changes.
Love without borders faced an overwhelming caseload and its psychological impact on the staff. Therefore, they decided to step down to be able to continue working with a high quality and inclusion of PWLEOD.

> *"So I think that we just trying to step back a little bit, we're not stepping back from the housing project. But we're taking on less cases now. […] So we're trying to do the best we can and helping the most vulnerable people. But we also are taking less cases than the few previous years for sure"* (Appendix 5, 26:15, p.40).

In comparison, the boat collective takes a break to rethink and restructure how they are going to work in the organization.

> *"To keep the space open, it's a lot of energy, you know, for us, so let's keep this energy for three weeks to work on the stuff. and again, start strongly from the May, with the new project with the things that you want to do"* (Appendix 6, 45:01, p.49)

For them, it is also to develop a "new" system which differentiates from the existing organizations. Therefore, they are working on transformational changes in the organization (Anderson & Anderson, 2010).

> *"So we are not going to find only the new structure of one organization, how it works, because we disagree with it. So we are in the process of the new system. We don't know what is it. Because for us, we appreciate the mistake"* (Appendix 6, p.46).

First and foremost, they are thereby also focusing on the financial stability of the project and considering how to open up their structures to refugees and asylum seekers who are still in encampment and harder to reach.
REFUGYM faces the challenges of the environmental surrounding in camps. Accordingly, the founder is thinking of moving outside the camp to create a community center and be more independent of environmental decisions (Appendix 7).

> *"But yeah, we'd love to start a community center outside of the capital, we're not beholden to the randomly changing laws and systems"* (Appendix 7, 18:10, p.60).

The organization is reacting towards problems on the macro level to sustain the organization (Jacobs et al., 2013). The liminal position of NGOs in Greece exacerbates their ability to create pathways for meaningful participation. Nevertheless, the organization is still in the process of figuring out how to put the vision into practice.

YSR and e-NGO both sought for external help, focusing on DEI measures and experts to implement and deliver changes. Therefore, they are working in alliance with GRN`s proposed strategies to facilitate internal change and addressing internal practices by reaching out to experts in equity, diversity, and inclusion (GRN 2019, p.8). YSR reached out to the organization "Better.org" who reflect the structures of the organization to improve the DEI and Cohere which helped them to better engage with meaningful participation. Similarly, the e-NGO had one training with a DEI consultant to enhance their structures. Implementing change within organizations successfully needs training for employees (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Accordingly, implementing change through DEI also means to provide specific training for employees. This has been done in e-NGO who trained their staff (e-NGO). A training has not been yet executed by YSR as they are still in the process of external revision, but some of the employees are involved in the reflection processes of the external organization.

As a result, the organizations applied different strategies to firstly tackle issues within their organizations.

4.3.2 New Structural Pathways for Meaningful Participation

Considering the various challenges, YSR and e-Ngo have tried to shape their pathways for meaningful participation and restructure some positions in their organization. Changes in the structure of human resources have been identified as crucial drivers for change (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). YSR and e-Ngo declared that they have not yet reached the full potential of meaningful participation. However, they are working with the understanding that it is needed to rethink structures and create new pathways for meaningful participation. Therefore, they are trying to enhance their work on meaningful participation. "Organizations should re-examine leadership, governance and staffing structures to ensure those with proximate knowledge and experience are part of our teams and increasingly dictating the direction of the organization" (Asylum Access, 2021, p. 15). Those then can function

as agents of change (Kotter, 2007; Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). This can be especially seen in the attempts of YSR and e-NGO.

The change leader of e-NGO strives for meaningful participation at all levels as well as having PWLEOD at the board. Therefore, the leader engages in communication with the various key persons in the organization which is seen as crucial for change (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). In regard of the founder's resistance in the organization, the process is slow, but the success of meaningful participation has been already perceived in the organization. Essential for this process was also the understanding of this fear-based resistance. For implementing change, it is key to understand this resistance to further work on implementing effective change (Dewett & Woodman, 2004). This further shows the development of the change towards seeing the change as something positive for the organization (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). As a result, e-NGO has created community language teacher positions to give the opportunity to community members who really want to be engaged as teachers (e-NGO).

In comparison, YSR is working on creating leadership positions for PWLEOD in their organization. Accordingly, Kotter argues that it is essential for organizational change that leaders for change are promoted or hired in senior-level positions (Kotter, 2007, p.97). YSR has changed its entire organizational structure in order to better facilitate meaningful participation at all levels. Consequently, they started with implementing a paid half-time internship position with the ability to establish a learning curve at the end of 2023 and enhance skill building which is crucial for meaningful participation (GRN, 2019) . This was the foundation of the restructuring process. The internship made them realize that they had to restructure the positions in the organizations to enable a structure of growth for the employees and the ability to meaningfully participate at all stages. YSR moved to having junior coordinators, senior coordinators, managers and junior coaches and senior coaches (Appendix 4, 3:42, p.31).

> *"You start at a certain level, with less money, less responsibility, but a lot of training"* (Appendix 4, 3:42, p.31)*.*

The idea is to create more clarity within the structure and to engender the possibility to grow. However, this change also established hierarchies. The change of the structure was positively recognized by the former intern of YSR.

"It wouldn't make sense to stay in like one position. It's better to move up to position that way you can learn more and become more involved with the organization" (Appendix 3, 7:20, p.24).

Therefore, she also positively reflected the ability of moving up levels and being able to learn more and then get further involved in the organization. The possibility to have in depth skill building and learning opportunity is essential for meaningful participation (Cohere, 2022). This internship opportunity fosters refugee preparedness. As a result, the change processes of the organization led to improvements of meaningful participation.

4.3.3 Interim Conclusion

The strategies of the organizations showed how organization specific the changes are. "What works in one organization, culture, or country, may well produce failure in another organization, culture, or country" (Jacobs et al., 2013, p.3). Therefore, Love without Borders decreased their caseload, the Boat Collective requires a structural break, REFUGYM strives for a new space outside the camp and YSR and e-NGO sought out for external help from a DEI expert. Further, e-NGO and YSR restructured their organization and position to open pathways for meaningful participation. Both differ from each other but exemplify how change can help to better instigate meaningful participation.

5 Discussion

This study delineated the complexity of meaningful participation and its various scopes depending on the size and contextual factors of an organization. The findings revealed that the NGOs currently fail on well implementing meaningful participation. However, they are in the process of trying to better implement meaningful participation and include PWLEOD in positions within the organizations. In the following, I will discuss possible requirements for the organization to overcome the challenges and move forward to "full" meaningful participation and beyond towards co-design and co-ownership.

5.1 Need to Move towards co-design and co-ownership

The findings clearly showed that all organizations fail to implement meaningful participation in accordance with the definition of GRN (2019). In many of the organizations, PWLEOD are included, but only at lower levels and therefore limited in their impact on strategy and decision-making power. That is why researchers and practitioners call to move beyond meaningful participation towards co-designing, co-leading and co-ownership (Kuntzelman & Noor, 2022; Pincock & Bakunzi, 2021; Ramazani, 2023). Furthermore, this shift towards strengthening co-leading, co-design and co-ownership could overcome the vagueness of meaningful participation (Kaga, 2021; Olivius, 2014; Ramazani, 2023) and emphasize the highest levels of participation (GRN et al., 2022; Hart, 1992; Arnstein, 1969). In this regard, GRN argues that "despite the best intentions, research, humanitarian and policy interventions in forced displacement that do not reach the highest possible level, i.e. 'transformative', cannot be considered conducive to the meaningful participation of refugees" (GRN et al., 2022, p.9). Keeping this in mind as an end-goal can help to frame meaningful participation in organizations.

Small organizations working on the ground can function as a first entry point for PWLEOD in the humanitarian field and pave the way for influences on policy levels. Ramazani highlights the importance of having various entry points for PWLEOD (Ramazani, 2023). First steps have been already done by the interviewed organizations as they are building structures to include PWLEOD in their organization. However, the inclusion of PWLEOD at higher levels within the organization is seen as a central factor to enhance meaningful participation and identified as a crucial aspect to focus on (Gidron & Carver, 2022, p.21). Organizations such as YSR and e-NGO are working on that and try to build pathways for meaningful participation at higher levels. Both organizations adapted hiring positions exclusively for PWLEOD. Thus, this distinction in the position vacancies further marginalizes PWLEOD and limits the shift towards the adaption of an inclusive hiring structure. There is a tendency for only limited availability of places for PWLEOD which is not aligned with meaningful participation (GRN, 2019). Rather organizations shall work on implementing whole inclusive hiring structures.

> "Limiting the number of refugees who can participate by targeting specific seats for refugee involvement in order to 'bring the refugee perspective,' or neglecting to ensure

perspectives across age and gender have equal access to opportunities. This often gives the impression there is only room for a single refugee to participate" (GRN, 2019, p.22).

Despite this, the integration of refugees in hiring structures enforces and strengthens the recognition of refugees as experts and has the potential to foster a global change through potential careers (Ramazani, 2023, p.28). Meaningful participation enables skill building, enhances well-being and has empowering qualities for PWLEOD (Harley, 2022). Besides the positive impact on the individual level, examples, such as the one of St. Andrew showcase how meaningful participation can positively impact the longterm sustainability of the organization by transitioning towards becoming a refugee-led organization through the commitment to increase the number refugee staff at all levels (Interview Christopher Eades in Harley, 2022). Therefore, meaningful participation can have an extensive positive impact. This emphasizes how important it is to work on implementing meaningful participation in the organizations. When meaningful participation is done well in organizations, it leads to co-design, co-leadership and co-ownership.

5.2 Need for reflexive organizations and change

The challenges on the practical implementation of meaningful participation showed that organizations especially struggle with intersecting aspects of money constraints, power dynamics, cultural differences and reflexivity. Meaningful participation is linked to the ability and willingness of organizations to change and be more inclusive. Enhancing change "from the inner context of firms arise questions about the role of history, structure, cultures, power, and politics in enabling and constraining change" (Pettigrew et al., 2001). This underlines the various factors which are seen as crucial to understand how to enable change and which factors might hamper those changes and lead to failures. Organizations such as YSR and e-NGO are working on implementing and restructuring their organizations. GRN states in their Guidelines on meaningful participation that it is key to "Initiate institutional self-reflection and enact changes that dismantle power dynamics" (GRN, 2019, p.8). The findings portrayed the challenges organization need to tackle.

Thus, organizational strives for changes are deeply intertwined with changes on the individual level (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). The results of the research showed

that it is necessary that organizations actively engage in reflecting themselves regarding "white supremacy, white saviourism, and white professional culture" (Mustafa et al., 2022, p.2). Accordingly, humanitarian workers are obliged to understand underlying power dynamics to actively prevent hierarchical work standards and down holding of refugees and simultaneously create pathways for meaningful participation without unconsciously blocking them through inherited power dynamics (Hor, 2022). Therefore, there is still a deeper need for reassessing "who sits at the locus of power" (Cohere, 2022, p.36). Meaningful Participation comes along with working on "how to step back and cede power" (Cohere, 2022, p.36). Hence, it becomes clear that those required changes on an individual level further refer to the changeability of the employees, depth of change and time required for those change processes (Dewett & Woodman, 2004). It highlights the personal dimension in organizational changes and the requirement for teams to be able and willing to reflect and change as well. Thus, it is essential to work on the individual level in order to implement meaningful participation well. Concretely, this means to work on the organizational socialization, training of the employees, managerial behavior and organizational change programs (Dewett & Woodman, 2004, figure 2.1. p.35). This goes hand in hand with the declaration of one member of the boat collective who argues that:

> *"To be open to open themselves and say yes, we did this mistake. We are not accepting that this situation is going to continue. And you should know in any place that the lie is coming. The cheating is coming. In my opinion, is spiritually there is no way no success for this project or whatever. Because the roots are sick. When the roots are sick as much as you get bigger, you are sick"* (Appendix 6, 0:17, p.45).

This portrays the need to analyze organizational processes from the very beginning and address root causes change processes might fail. However, those reflexive processes and corresponding changes need time and resources (GRN, 2019; Kotter, 2007; Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010).

The multiple challenges of the organizations and perceived challenges of PWLEOD undermine the need for a culture shift in organizations and them working on DEI and inherent power dynamics. Executing holistic DEI measures requires a culture shift in

organizations. Further this portrays a transformational change within the organization. It needs a change in YSRs culture, employee's behavior and mindset to implement this culture shift successfully (Anderson & Anderson, 2010).

> *"And making a hiring process truly inclusive is only possible by actually bringing people on the table that have a different perspective. And that's what we also need to do in yoga and sport. But that takes time, because it's basically a culture shift"* (Appendix 4, 9:37, p.32).

With the understanding that meaningful participation needs incorporated DEI measures, organizational change processes include an aligned change in human resource practices (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.186). Further, this is identified as essential to institutionalize change (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). In conclusion, it is necessary for organization to institutionalize self-reflection and incorporate DEI changes.

5.3 Need for new funding allocations

The identified challenges of the organizations showed that they all have struggles regarding funding constraints and their monetary capacity which also influences their time capacity. Nonetheless, change requires time and resources (GRN, 2019; Kotter, 2007; Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010) and intersects with the organizations ability to provide pathways for meaningful participation and combat challenges on the practical level.

Therefore, GRN et al. (2022) detect a necessity to restructure the allocations of the funding apparatus in order to achieve meaningful participation in a sustainable way (GRN et al., 2022). Also, RLLI reflected that it is not a problem of too few funding in the sector, but the allocation of the resources (Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative, 2023). Therefore, "Ultimately, the refugee response sector at large needs to reexamine funding flows so that refugee participation is fully financed" (GRN, 2019). If this shift is not happening, the situation on the ground will not change neiter and organizations will still struggle to facilitate meaningful participation. As has been already laid out, true meaningful participation comes along with processes of change which are "expensive and time consuming" (Mustafa et al., 2022, p.4). Organizational change needs "attention and resources, and does not fail due to the urgency of daily

operations or lack of attention" (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p.179). Under resourced change initiative have a tendency of failures (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Consequently, delivering those change processes needs to be funded by donors and a shift in the funding sector. This also means that the sector has to shift towards facilitating the implementation of meaningful participation which is lacking at the moment (GRN, 2019; Kaga, 2021; Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative, 2023). The funding sector has the ability to either foster or impede meaningful participation through funding allocations and provided resources (Kaga, 2021, p.160 f.). Consequently, implementing meaningful participation does not only need organizations which are working on it, but also a funding sector that is willing to allocate funding differently and by that enable meaningful participation.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, it could clearly be seen that meaningful participation is defined by its complexity (Harley, 2022; Janmyr, 2022; Kaga, 2021; Milner et al., 2022; Ramazani, 2023) and its tendency of failure (Harley & Hobbs, 2020; Janmyr, 2022; Kaga, 2021). This study has demonstrated that organizations fail to implement all aspects of meaningful participation well. Further, the research showed that it can be discussed whether practices of the organizations can be identified as meaningful participation. PWLEOD are still in low-level positions and have limited decision-making power. The organizations faced challenges regarding financial constraints and unstable funding which hamper their ability to reflect themselves and to implement meaningful participation well, especially in terms of providing monetary compensations. Furthermore, the majority of the organizations deal with challenges regarding power imbalances and cultural differences. Aspects of the organizational theories of change helped to unwrap how organizations can navigate those challenges and unpack difficulties regarding change processes in the organizations. Challenges related to power imbalances and cultural differences require change on the individual levels (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Additionally, the research revealed how financial constraints intersect with the ability of organizations to implement change, because of the lack of required time and resources (GRN, 2019; Kotter, 2007; Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010). Furthermore, the organizations applied various strategies to navigate their challenges. The research also demonstrated that organizational change processes can be very specific to the organization and might not be transferable to other organizations. This highlights the need to understand contextual factors for

meaningful participation. Changes on the structural level of e-NGO and YSR demonstrated how organizational changes can help to better facilitate meaningful participation. Achieving "full" meaningful participation requires a shift towards co-ownership, co-leadership and co-design (Kuntzelman & Noor, 2022; Pincock & Bakunzi, 2021; Ramazani, 2023). Further, this means that it is essential to provide vacancies for PWLEOD at higher levels. At a practical level, it has become evident that organizations need to engage in processes of reflection and change to foster meaningful articipation and address power asymmetries. For that, it is key to have a funding sector that supports organizations to enable better meaningful participation and allocates money for meaningful participation. This requires a shift in the funding apparatus (GRN, 2019; Kaga, 2021; Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative, 2023). All in all, the study portrayed how various factors for meaningful participation intersect and hamper meaningful participation. Further, the study revealed the need to understand organizational contextual factors which impede meaningful participation. This research focused on Greece, Europe and a specific type of organizations. Future research should focus on multi-level approaches that can help to reveal the intersecting levels of meaningful participation. Furthermore, future research should address how to enable co-design, co-leadership and co-ownership which are closely linked to practices of decolonization. As this is a case study, more research should be done on the practical barriers to meaningful participation in organizations to be able to compare findings. As this is a small case study, it is limited in its representativeness. However, it contributes to understanding the difficulties with implementing meaningful participation.

7 Literature

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