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Intercultural practices and support services: Refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and Italy

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Abstract

Providing support services for the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers is an increasing concern that is intensively debated at global level. The presence of international and national institutions is intended to support and provide assistance to these individuals through the use of specific planning — such as interculturality and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, societies are witnessing a pursuit of national populism, and governments are securing borders, building boundary walls and checkpoints. This present research aims to explore intercultural communication practices that contribute to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The project also aims to investigate the support provided by Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) which assist these individuals. Do they limit their activities to the provision of services, or do they also provide advocacy that may influence policies implemented in the field of reception and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers? These topics are explored from an intercultural perspective, considered by scholars as an appropriate approach to create and maintain constructive relationships between different levels of the cultural framework. The concept of interculturality is examined within the context of support services provided by organisations directly involved in the promotion of the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

The research considers NGO and CBO policies and their effective exercise of intercultural practices within their activities. Drawing on a comparison between issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and Italy, the role of intercultural communication is explored through an in-depth analysis of intercultural practices and their efficiency in supporting the process of resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Humanitarian organisations, nine in Italy and six in Australia, provided the basis for 15 case studies. From each association were selected two groups of participants: volunteers and paid staff because of their direct interaction with these kinds of immigrants, and members of each management, in order to examine the strategies adopted to effectively interact with them. The interviews were conducted with 42 participants with the aim of understanding the interaction and communication among individuals with different cultural backgrounds within these associations, and their contribution to the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, the observation of volunteers

and paid staff while providing support services to refugees and asylum seekers enabled the researcher to observe further elements of interaction and communication, highlighting their strength and weaknesses. Findings from both Australian and Italian cases confirmed that the interaction with these kinds of immigrants is constructed on intercultural elements that favour the understanding of the new society — such as active listening, empathy and mutual respect. These organisations supported the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers through services that focused on understanding the host communities, facilitating access to the labour market, and enhancing their education. Intercultural practices played a key role in explaining the new host societies and in providing communication elements, which allowed refugees and asylum seekers to better interact and resettle in the host community.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Abbreviations

CAS	Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria — <i>Extraordinary Reception Centres</i>
CBO	Community-Based Organisations
CIP	Commission for International Protection
CMM	Coordinated Management of Meaning
HSP	Humanitarian Settlement Program
IMA	Illegal Maritime Arrivals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCOA	Refugee Council of Australia
SHP	Special Humanitarian Program
SPRAR	Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati — <i>Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees</i>
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
VITS	Victoria Interpreting and Translating Services

Chapter One

Introduction

The interaction among different cultural groups plays a crucial role in the evolution of human cultures. Interaction allows the exchange of cultural elements of all the participants and consequently the creation of a collaborative and supportive environment. The exodus of human masses from one region of the planet to another, a dramatic human journey for those affected, has resulted in a mixture of traditions and different customs, with significant repercussions in the countries of origin and in those of arrival. The way the host countries welcome the migrants, as well as migrants' ability to integrate into the new environment are yardsticks to measure the quality of the dialogue between different cultures. This interaction is based on the recognition that all cultures have values in common, and reflects the extent to which institutions are willing to act to ensure a real and effective integration of several cultural groups. At the same time, it represents the strength of the wishes of migrant to be included in the new society. The interaction leads to the recognition of the richness resulting from diversity and opens cultural horizons to mutual acceptance. In doing so, dialogue first gives interactants the opportunity to mutually recognise the other, and then to establish a contact that will permit both sides to create effective communication.

This research explores the role that intercultural practices play in refugee and asylum seeker support organisations. It considers the ways in which these associations enact interaction and communication with refugees and asylum seekers, and their contribution in respect of the resettlement process of these individuals. After the end of the Second World War and the rise of new technologies that allowed faster communication and transport, the attention of scholars has focused on different cultural approaches such as *multiculturalism* and *interculturality*, insisting on cultural benefits. Part of them (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999) have identified the intercultural method as the most appropriate in order to reach peaceful and valuable cohabitation in *multicultural*¹ societies. Their assessment is based on the focus of

¹ In this context, the word multicultural intends to mean the presence of different cultural groups in the same territory.

the intercultural model on the interaction among different cultural groups, and that this interaction should lead to mutual recognition and respect. Consequently, this approach has been adopted by countries — such as Australia and Italy — receiving an elevated number of immigrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers who are some of the most vulnerable types of immigrants. The same approach is used by organisations that deal with refugees and asylum seekers during their initial reception in the host society (Fiske, 2006). Nevertheless, a drift of national populism is emerging in these countries, thus threatening refugees' and asylum seekers' rights. In doing so, these movements are questioning the rights emphasised by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Often, public opinion does not accept the presence of different cultural groups within a society, thus causing negative reflections on the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

This research focuses on the socio-cultural impacts of intercultural practices by analysing scholarly debates within two distinct contexts. First, it discusses existing research on the theories of intercultural practices and on Non-Governmental Organisations (hereafter NGOs) and Community-Based Organisations (hereafter CBOs) as responsible for the first contacts between a host society and refugees and asylum seekers (Fiske, 2006). Many studies (Ohanyan, 2009; Esty, 1998) highlight the interconnection between these organisations and their humanitarian and supportive functions delivered to refugee and asylum seeker communities. Second, the present study focuses on critical discussions surrounding intercultural communication and its role in supporting the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Researchers recognise intercultural communication as a process involving individuals and groups from different cultures (Gudykunst, 2005; Dodd, 1991; Kim and Gudykunst, 1988). This concept is useful in order to set the context of interpersonal interaction and the role of 'facilitator' as humanitarian operator (Pearce and Pearce, 2000).

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework and process by which this research was developed. The researcher's previous experiences as a police officer, mainly based on interaction with people from a different cultural background, led to this study's focus on communication and the ways in which interactants enact it. Indeed, as a consequence of his direct involvement, he struggled to recognise cultural patterns as the main level of interpreting message meanings (Pearce and Cronen, 1980). The interpretation was based on the relationship context in which the interaction was enacted, often underpinned by episodes of collaboration,

but also conflict, forgiveness, and acceptance, to cite a few, but the episodes were rarely driven by cultural elements.

The first section of this chapter explains the background of this research, highlighting and defining its key elements. It explains the conceptual framework in which concepts of culture, intercultural communication and resettlement are included in discourses regarding refugees and asylum seekers, their resettlement and NGOs and CBOs that support these processes. The second section gives an outline of the thesis, briefly noting every chapter's aims and key elements analysed. The thesis composes nine chapters comprising the introduction, the existing literature explored, the theoretical framework of the study, and the explanation of the research design. The following three chapters present the secondary and primary findings from the data collected, the former to identify the context in which refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement takes place, and the latter are the data collected within humanitarian organisations. The last two chapters focus on further analysis and discussion of the findings from the Australian and Italian research fieldworks, and the conclusion to which the research led.

Background

In order to set the context of analysis for intercultural practices and resettlement, it is important to firstly outline the international relevance during the last few decades. At the end of the 20th century, the world was characterised by both a rising economic crisis in Western countries, and an already developed international form of 'fundamentalist-led' terrorism that triggered civil war in several African and Middle-Eastern countries, sometimes with a contribution from foreign states. This situation led masses of people to flee their homes and countries in order to reach safe and stable destinations. Hence, developed areas — such as North America, Europe and Australia — have been facing consistent waves of asylum seekers and immigrants who plan to start a better life in the host society.

This massive human exodus from one region to another has resulted in a social mixture of traditions and customs, with significant demographic changes and repercussions in both origin and host countries. Host countries need to frame a new support system in a society in which different cultural groups cohabit and interact, and to act to ensure efficient and effective inclusion in the community. The interaction between several cultures is an important issue that

in some of its dimensions — such as politics, scientific research and mass media — are increasingly significant for social changes including migration, ascending internal and external threats, as well as new forms of participation and globalisation.

According to Ioppolo (2014), more than 160 definitions have attempted to portray the significance of the term culture. For the purposes of this thesis, Ioppolo's definition (2014) is adopted because of its effort to connect it to the context of an intercultural perspective. He describes culture as:

an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns that are distinguishing characteristics of the members of any given society. It includes everything that a group thinks, says, does and makes — its customs, language, material artefacts, and shared system of attitudes and feelings. (p. 16)

The term interaction embodies several meanings. An interaction could lead to conflict, rather than to communication if it is based on empty verbal patterns. Therefore, attention must be paid to how this interaction is interpreted and implemented. Scholars (Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999) have identified two different perspectives in order to describe the approach of the host society towards foreign cultures. The two models are *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*. The core of a multicultural perspective is to encourage the recognition of different cultures, the affirmation of their values, and the possibility of their continuity in time (Bauman, 1999). Alternatively, the intercultural perspective aims to perceive differences as parts of an essential mechanism in the development of contacts and exchanges of values. In this context, culture is considered a mobile whole of resources used by individuals to develop self-knowledge and environment cognition (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002). More specifically, because of its focus on interactive communication, the intercultural perspective has been identified as the most suitable approach for individuals to create and maintain relationships with different group-level frames of reference. As a consequence, it appears to be the most appropriate tool to employ in delicate negotiations, including those affecting vulnerable refugee and asylum seeker contexts. According to the UN Refugee Agency (1951), a refugee is someone who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (p. 14)

In other words, a refugee is not able to return to his/her country of origin, which failed in protecting him/her, and he/she needs assistance from the host country. In order to have a clear picture of the whole, it is useful to make a distinction between the two categories involved in this study. Although refugees are already recognised as a particular social group, with specific rights, the status of asylum seekers is not so clear. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2005) defines them as ‘an individual who is seeking international protection [...] whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claim is submitted’ (p. 441). The focus is placed on these particular individuals because they are the most vulnerable in the complex landscape of mass immigration. According to the above definitions, refugees and asylum seekers are individuals who need international protection. Furthermore, UNHCR in 1997 declared that the term refugee incorporates persons with additional characteristics:

- (i) those recognised as such by states party to the Convention and/or Protocol; (ii) those recognised as such under the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration; (iii) those recognised by UNHCR as ‘mandate refugees’; (iv) those granted residence on humanitarian grounds; and (v) those granted temporary protection on a group basis (UNHCR, 1997, p. 1).

Although interaction and communication with refugees and asylum seekers are at the core of this present research, in developing the research design the focus was on humanitarian organisations and the persons who, volunteering or working, facilitated connections between these immigrants and host societies. Consequently, the focus made it possible to concentrate on the intercultural practices adopted and the role of these organisations in accompanying refugees and asylum seekers on their journey towards effective resettlement. Furthermore, participants involved in this research (13 out of 42) had previous experiences as refugees and asylum seekers, as well as in immigration. Hence, involving NGO and CBO personnel enabled the researcher to access the points of view of refugees and asylum seekers.

In theory, application of intercultural principles leads to a peaceful cohabitation and to a mutual respect and recognition. Yet, one of the most significant issues emerging in developed countries is whether or not the support services employed in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers are in practice aligned with theoretical expectations. In order to understand the benefits of an intercultural approach in practice — that is, the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers — this study analyses its application within the context of NGOs and CBOs.

The Executive Committee of Non-Governmental Organisations Associated (EXECOM, 2018) generally defined NGOs as ‘any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organised on a local, national or international level’. NGOs are involved in a variety of services and humanitarian functions. According to Esty (1998), these activities address the advocacy and support of cultural and vulnerable minority groups. For example, they promote public opinion, defend viewpoints that governments do not represent or under-represent, and encourage political participation through large scale dissemination of information. Similarly, CBOs represent the mobilisation of people at the community level and are defined by a local community membership (Fiske, 2006). In this way, they collaborate and participate in community change processes and recognise the need ‘to belong, to be a member of a community and to have certain rights and obligations as member of that community’ (Fiske, 2006, p. 226). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1993) defines human rights NGOs as ‘all those groups of private citizens who are actively involved in improving the quality of life of people in developing countries, or in raising awareness of development issues in their own society’ (p. 36). Therefore, NGOs and CBOs are well placed to answer questions about intercultural practices adopted by humanitarian organisations in order to improve the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. As their activities operate within the host society, humanitarian organisations are more involved in the interaction among different cultural groups, consequently increasing their opportunities to act from an intercultural perspective.

The purpose for these kinds of associations was to provide services and support to facilitate the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Resettlement within this study reflects the belonging and the participation on the ‘construction and reconstruction of the society’ (Haddad, 2003, p. 20) from several points of view such as social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. This view of belonging and participation in the community unavoidably triggers processes of change that lead to the evolution of that culture — from the simple introduction of new ethnic food to the construction of new meanings of society.

Intercultural competences establish an expected support mechanism of the activities of NGOs and CBOs in supporting refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement. The communication and the behaviour of the interactants (their desire for communication, mutual recognition and adaptation), as well as the effort to reach intercultural accordance and to establish a productive connection, are intrinsic to the characteristics of interculturality (Dai and Chen, 2015).

Intercultural communication takes the interaction to a level of interpersonal communication among human beings, as reflected in the culture-general perspective, which is interested in the identity of an individual, regardless of the cultural group of origin (Kim, 2005).

Intercultural communication is defined as a process that involves individuals and groups with a sufficiently different cultural background (Kim and Gudykunst, 1988). For this reason, it is an essential tool of activities within humanitarian organisations. Also, it is a critical element in the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, because it offers the opportunity to reach a full, mutual comprehension between migrants and host societies. In this context, volunteers and operators in humanitarian organisations play a dual role: on the one hand, they provide the connections among different cultures; on the other hand, they indirectly represent the host society. Therefore, the intercultural communication appears as a crucial element involved in the process of resettlement, which involves bringing together culture and communication.

Thesis outline

Providing support services for the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers is an increasing concern that is debated at an international level. Nonetheless, the provision of these support services is rarely investigated in terms of effectiveness. This topic is explored from an intercultural perspective, considered by scholars as an appropriate approach to create and maintain constructive relationships between different levels of the framework. Intercultural communication leads the interaction to interpersonal communication among individuals and groups. It is noted that the human condition forms part of the identity of any individual, regardless of the cultural group of origins (Kim, 2005). Consequently, it is a significant element to be considered in the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. This research focuses on the interaction during early resettlement, which offers the opportunity to eventually reach a full, mutual understanding between migrants and host societies. In this context, interactants avoid communication based on the cultural elements of a specific group as this is thought to create barriers rather than connections, thus enhancing the opportunities to achieve effective communication.

Drawing on a comparison between issues concerning refugees in Australia and Italy, the role of intercultural communication is explored through an in-depth analysis of intercultural

practices and their efficiency in supporting the process of resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. This research adopts a series of case studies of 15 NGOs and CBOs that were selected by using their activities in this field as criteria. For each organisation, several volunteers/operators and a representative of the management were interviewed, concentrating on the concerns and personal experiences of participants, and examining the everyday practices deployed by NGOs and CBOs to assist refugees and asylum seekers.

The study investigates three different positions acting within the organisational structure of these associations: volunteers, operators and coordinators. Volunteers and operators are those who provide material services and support to refugees and asylum seekers. Their role is essential in the communication process, being those who construct daily interaction with these immigrants. The role of coordinators within the organisations is to train, update and support volunteers and asylum seekers. Further, they plan the strategies to organise and deliver services targeting the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, the group of volunteers/operators displayed the first remarkable difference between the Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs. Indeed, the Australian participants were almost all volunteers who donated their time, effort and personal skills in order to provide support services to refugees and asylum seekers. Only one interviewee, excluding the group from management, was part of the paid staff. Conversely, in the Italian group, only one participant was a volunteer; the remainder received a salary from the associations. Australia and Italy are chosen because of the key role assigned by their reception systems to NGOs and CBOs in supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. It was acknowledged that they had different relationships between the associations and the governments.

Findings are analysed within three main themes: (1) the practices employed to interact with refugees and asylum seekers, (2) the communication strategy adopted and (3) the efforts made by the organisations involved to enhance the effective resettlement of these individuals in the host societies. Both in Australia and Italy the services provided to enhance the settlement process of refugees and asylum seekers were in three areas: the creation of interaction with the host communities, the support of refugees' and asylum seekers' access to the labour market and assistance for legal issues concerning their immigration processes.

This introductory chapter discusses the research topic and purpose, as well as the background that leads to the research questions addressed in the study. It aims to highlight the role of

intercultural communication in refugee and asylum seeker resettlement processes, through the exploration of NGO and CBO practices deployed in supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The chapter defines the main terms of the study, such as refugee and asylum seeker, resettlement, culture, humanitarian organisations and intercultural communication.

The second chapter provides a review of relevant classic and modern studies through a review of the literature and of the debates surrounding the concept of intercultural practices. Furthermore, the concepts of intercultural communication and resettlement are explored with reference to refugees and asylum seekers. Chapter two covers an assessment of the role of NGOs and CBOs in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers, and their strategies and practices involved to achieve their purposes. The literature review sets the context for the discussion of theoretical framework in chapter three, which is the role of intercultural communication as applied to refugees and asylum seekers and the way in which the selected organisations chose to develop and implement their role of ‘facilitator’.

Chapter three presents the theoretical framework of the research by investigating the significance of intercultural communication. Following Pearce and Pearce’s (2000) extended theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning, chapter three explains the features of communication within the context of this study, and the relationship between intercultural communication, the actual resettlement in the host society, and the role of ‘facilitator’ of NGOs and CBOs. It also examines communication as a strategy adopted by the humanitarian organisations to support refugees and asylum seekers.

Chapter four explains the qualitative research methods involved to address the research questions. In situating the project within the framework of intercultural communication and refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement process, this research employs case study method, in which 15 humanitarian organisations (six from Australia and nine from Italy), are analysed. For each organisation, volunteers, operators and a management representative were interviewed, totalling 42 participants. Volunteers and operators were selected and interviewed because of their direct employment in the research field, and the interview with a member of the management board of each association was to determine the planning of their strategies. Furthermore, to refine the analysis of humanitarian organisations’ action plans and of the criteria for their elaboration, the researcher participated in meetings they organised in Italy and Australia, which included different formats.

Then, the fifth chapter presents existing statistical data concerning the context surrounding refugees and asylum seekers. Quantitative data referring to refugees, number of asylum requests, number of their requests presented and accepted, are systematically organised and reviewed. It also provides descriptions of the systems adopted by the two countries involved in this study, Australia and Italy, to regulate the immigrant flows. In doing so, it highlights similarities and differences within the two reception systems, and the different approaches applied to refugees and people seeking asylum. The same process is adopted to outline the associations' contexts and the different types of organisations that participated in this research, especially pointing out structural differences between the Australian and the Italian associations. Here, the thesis points out how the reception systems of these two countries affect the organisational structures of NGOs and CBOs, comparing independent but collaborative associations to those financially dependent on the government but contradictor associations.

Outcomes of interviews and observations of interactions within Australian associations were organised, divided and analysed by themes in chapter six. The themes include the three main topics addressed in the interviews. The first theme is the interaction created between the volunteers/operators of the humanitarian associations and refugees and asylum seekers. This section explores the interculturality of this interaction, revealing the significance of the term 'culture' for the participants and its role in building the relationship with refugees and asylum seekers. The second theme focuses on the communication that occurs between these immigrants and operators, and its knowledge and affective characteristics and components. Australian participants identified communication with intercultural characteristics, underlining its focus on the individual background of interactants, rather than their cultures of origin. Finally, the third theme addresses the strategies adopted by the Australian organisations to promote effective resettlement. The organisations involved in this study were mainly providing support services to give refugees and asylum seekers access to the host community, the education system and the labour market. Furthermore, some actively sought to advocate for legislative change relating to immigrants.

Chapter seven analyses qualitative data pertaining to the Italian associations. Data collected from these organisations are arranged, divided by themes and explored to identify the intercultural communication strategies they applied. As with the previous chapter, this chapter analyses the three themes addressed in the interviews. The interactions between refugees and asylum seekers, and Italian NGOs and CBOs were characterised by the individual aspect of the

interactants. Participants identified the everyday interaction as a crucial element in building mutual trust and in avoiding stereotypes related to interactants' countries of origin. Communication with refugees and asylum seekers was built on the basis of the intercultural perspective, utilising skills that led to an interaction among human beings, rather than cultural groups. The strategies were adopted to achieve refugees' and asylum seekers' independence and participation in the construction of the host society.

Chapter eight involves analysis and elaboration of findings to explore the relationship between intercultural communication and the process of resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. It points out how intercultural communication acts and plays a crucial role for the further inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the host society. The chapter also introduces the differences and similarities observed in the parallel examination of the two systems, especially relating to interaction and communication processes. The organisational structures, the services provided, and staff of the associations will be analysed to highlight differences and similarities of the two reception systems. For instance, the personnel involved in Australian associations volunteered to support the resettlement processes of refugees and asylum seekers. In the Italian associations, almost all the respondents received a stipend for carrying out their jobs, employed as professionals. Finally, the chapter will also point out the difference in the roles played by Australian and Italian associations in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers, focusing on the purposes of their activities and the strategies adopted.

The concluding chapter briefly reviews the research questions and their outcomes, making sense out of the findings and discussion. It analyses the practices that NGOs and CBOs provide to assist refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, it qualifies the role of intercultural communication and the effective contribution of intercultural practices to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. Finally, the concluding chapter provides the key purposes of the organisations by observing whether they seek to contribute to and/or change immigration policy, or whether they focus their services to provide assistance at a community level.

Chapter Two

The intercultural perspective within Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations

This chapter provides a critical review of the selected literature, contextualising the study within the frame of inter-relationships crucial to the resettlement processes of refugees and asylum seekers. The interrelations are explored from an intercultural perspective, considering relevant practices and elements included within the process of building communication. They are developed by Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations in order to provide essential services aimed at achieving an effective resettlement. The chapter identifies key questions and concepts considered in immigration studies, debates around asylum seeker and refugee status and settlement, and discusses theories on multicultural and intercultural approaches. It introduces arguments germane to exploring the role of intercultural practices within NGOs and CBOs to support the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers.

The first section of the chapter explains the interaction among different cultural groups as a complex relationship, which involves a multilevel perspective that takes into account several elements such as observation, listening, mutual recognition and knowledge (Deardorff, 2009). Scholars (e.g., Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999) have identified the intercultural approach as the main model of communication among several cultural groups. Then, the section recognises refugees and asylum seekers as prime immigrant subjects in interactions requiring intercultural interventions. Indeed, because of their situational characteristics, such as the need of protection and — principally — their fear of persecution (Zolberg et al., 1989), they represent an ideal interlocutor within intercultural communication, characterised by mutuality and reciprocal respect.

The second section focuses on questions referring to strategies of NGOs and CBOs to achieve an effective resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers. NGOs and CBOs provide the first practical assistance and a pivotal element in the resettlement process: the first connection with

the host society (Fiske, 2006). Hence, the section outlines the concepts that constitute the basis of these associations, highlighting the essential role played by intercultural communication in the resettlement, and connecting it to understanding the host society. The last section explores the strategies adopted by the humanitarian organisations for the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

Intercultural practices and the support for refugees and asylum seekers

This section engages with concepts of immigration, dialogue, culture, refugees and asylum seekers as they relate to the study of interculturality² and its practices. It includes a range of academic fields and disciplines, identifying key questions and concepts considered in studies of immigration, refugee and asylum seeker issues and theories of intercultural communication. It will also introduce germane arguments to explore intercultural practices connected to refugees and asylum seekers through NGOs and CBOs. Refugees and asylum seekers represent a specific case of intercultural practices. In particular, refugees need an effective program of integration because their status prevents them being returned to their original country. NGOs and CBOs represent the point of first contact among these groups of individuals and the host society. The section delineates elements of the conceptual and theoretical framework that informed the approach of the study, and introduces ideas drawn from cultural and social theory, which are important to the analyses of case studies to follow. Further, it clarifies the published literature relevant to the conceptual framework of this research, namely the role of intercultural practices in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers through the actions of NGOs and CBOs.

The section is divided into three subsections that move the discussion from dialogue between cultural groups to the application as ‘intercultural interaction’ in the refugee and asylum seeker sphere. The first subsection, *Immigrants and culture*, explains the interaction among different cultural groups as a complex relationship, which involves a multilevel perspective that takes into account several elements, such as observation, listening, mutual recognition and knowledge (see Deardorff, 2009). The first contact among different cultural groups, such as

²At times, this thesis refers to ‘intercultural perspective’, at other times to ‘interculturality’. Both the terms refer to the same approach to explain the interaction between ethnic and cultural groups.

immigrants and a host society, presents an opportunity to highlight the significance of dialogue. Communication becomes an opportunity to improve knowledge and learn about traditions and habits that come from other cultures. If communication is focused on differences rather than exploration of what generates the development of cultural traditions and practices, the new immigrant will be perceived as a threat to the host society's values. Open and two-way communication is the main factor that facilitates the interactions of different ethnic groups.

After providing the notion of culture and a context that allows an in-depth analysis of different cultural groups — refugees, asylum seekers and the host society — and their barriers to effective communication, the second subsection, *The intercultural perspective*, focuses on the interactions among different cultural groups in terms of differences of ethnicity, religion, social sphere of belonging, values or gender, and the several existing approaches to direct this effective communication. As established so far in the field (Pasqualotto, 2009; Rhazzali, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999), the main model of communication among several cultural groups is the intercultural approach and thus intercultural communication. This approach generally interprets the differences as essential mechanisms in the development of sharing and exchanging of values.

The third and final subsection, *Refugees and asylum seekers*, identifies them as immigrants more involved in interactions that require intercultural processes. Because of their characteristics, such as the need of protection and their fear of being persecuted (Zolberg et al., 1989), these individuals reflect the essential element of 'mutuality' required by intercultural communication. With a need to adapt to their new environment, they will interact with an intercultural perspective in order to achieve mutual respect. This subsection explains the United Nations' definition of refugee and asylum seeker and its several interpretations (Haddad, 2008; Zolberg et al., 1989; Connolly, 1983). Thus, the vital notions of refugee and asylum seeker are identified and detailed, so as to be understood in the following chapters.

The section concludes by connecting intercultural practices to refugee and asylum seeker organisations such as NGOs and CBOs that are essential in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, because they facilitate the first connections between these individuals and the host society. Intercultural practices provide a natural way to achieve communication and adaptation purposes.

Immigrants and culture

The ways in which host countries welcome immigrants, as well as immigrants' own ability to integrate into the new environment, are critical reference points indicating the effectiveness of the intercultural dialogue. Laszlo (1973, p. 256) claims this interaction represents the recognition that all cultures belong to a cultural universality and share absolute common values, thus expressing humanity's most authentic and distinctive features such as freedom, mutual respect, family, solidarity, dignity, identity (the acknowledgment that every culture has different traditions), and the need to be a member of a community. The present study argues the structure of the dialogue established between the host society and refugees reflects the extent to which institutions are willing to act to ensure a real/demonstrate evidence and effective integration of several incoming cultural groups; at the same time, it represents the measure of migrants' wishes to be included in the new society. Hence, dialogue leads to the recognition that diversity enriches society and opens cultural horizons to mutual acceptance.

A solid understanding of what is meant by the term culture is necessary in order to analyse interaction among different ethnic groups. Culture reflects the complexity of interactions among different cultural groups. Through culture people see and evaluate the 'others'. According to Ioppolo (2014), culture serves as a lens that 'distorts how we see the world and how the world sees us' (p. 17).

According to Ioppolo (2014), there are over 160 definitions of the term culture in the literature. The anthropological definition accepts the concept of culture as the only behavioural model within a determined society (Taylor, 1999). Society and culture become a single element without the recognition of the presence of several cultures in a society. In this context, an individual is taken into account as a member of the society. The definition of culture in the social sciences, however, through the distinction between society and culture allows the analysis of the interaction of different cultural groups within the same territory (Sciolla, 2002). This concept frames the existence of a private culture. All individuals own a private culture that represents their own ways of understanding the contents of culture. Intercultural practices are involved mainly in the area where individuals contribute to the creation of the society, but they are not representative of the whole society. They know that they are part of a society, but they also know that they can change that society through culture.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of culture adopted in the context of intercultural perspective is the one illustrated by Ioppolo (2014) as:

an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns that are distinguishing characteristics of the members of any given society. It includes everything that a group thinks, says, does and makes — its customs, language, material artefacts, and shared system of attitudes and feelings. (p. 16)

Significantly, the definition of culture developed by Ioppolo (2014) includes the perspective of the public drawing on the concept of society as a set of behaviour patterns that characterise it. Furthermore, in the second sentence of the definition, Ioppolo (2014) shifts the focus onto ‘everything that a group thinks, says, does, and makes’ (p. 16). The group has to be interpreted as a different entity compared to the society, since it reflects the existence of a private sphere in contrast to the public sphere, as explained above. Furthermore, Sciolla (2002, p. 63), identifies four elements — values, norms, concepts, and symbols — that are useful for analysing and understanding how and in which ways culture affects existing dialogue among several ethnic groups. Values are guides in the identification of priority targets. For example, honour, justice, honesty, and others shape a system of principles that drive the right behaviour within a society. Norms constitute a system of requirements and prohibitions that translate values into guidelines over individuals’ behaviour. They are fundamental to a group’s existence. Concepts are a set of tools that form the cognitive experience. They are worthwhile in order to understand how a group or an individual describes reality. Finally, symbols gather knowledge systems and beliefs through images, artefacts, use of time and words that do not need explanations. They play a social and communicative function characterising the processes of identification and interpretation of experience (Sciolla, 2002).

These four elements help this research to investigate the dialogue between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society from the point of view of the individual in a way that reflects the private culture. History, religion, and ethnicity act as elements of identity, where the induction of mutual distrust and aversion should be avoided. Nonetheless, mutual distrust and aversions are often the first reactions when faced with the ‘unknown’. The differences within cultures, values, and religions must be considered as resources to further enrich interactants’ culture by expanding knowledge of the different, ‘the other’. Moreover, it must be ensured that differences are not acting as ‘identity frontiers’ that inhibit communication and cultural exchanges among ethnic groups. Dialogue seems the most effective instrument for an active and open communication, allowing two people of different cultural origins to interact and to

gain a mutual recognition, and build a respectful coexistence. Dialogue also allows the establishment of the first steps towards the inclusion of people with different backgrounds into the host society.

The intercultural perspective

The interaction among different cultures represents the natural evolution of humankind in its sociality (Deardorff, 2009). Since the times when first civilisations developed their cities in strategic positions (with access to water that granted the opportunity to cultivate the land and to use the fastest way of transportation and communication), interaction with other cultures affected the relationships between individuals both in positive and negative ways. The development of new and faster means of transportation and communication links strategic locations of the cities, while further developing the relevance of interactions in order to meet the needs of the new societies, such as different cultural groups within the same territory. The term interaction embodies several meanings. An interaction could lead to a conflict, rather than a formal communication that in practice becomes meaningless words. Therefore, attention must be paid to how this interaction is interpreted and implemented. Throughout history, individuals — such as ambassadors, diplomats, emissaries — have understood the importance of the persons' familiarity and competence with the cultural practices of their destination audience in order to gain good diplomatic relations (Deardorff, 2009). Public and private leaders have started to show interest in selecting and training employees in the skills and competences that might facilitate the initiation and maintenance of profitable forms of interaction. Historical elements, such as development, a rejection of the consequences of World War II, a world market, and the rise of multinational organisations — public and private, profit and non-profit — converged in the Post World War II (Deardorff, 2009). This period reveals several factors that led to greater interaction among different cultural and ethnic groups.

Several scholars (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999) have identified two different perspectives in describing the approach of the host society towards foreign cultures: the *multicultural perspective*, ethnocentric and solid, and the *intercultural perspective*, ethno-relative, interactional, and liquid (Bauman, 1999). These two widely used models explain the presence of foreigners who carry with them a set of values, symbols, costumes and languages that sometimes do not fit with the dominant practices of the host culture.

In a *multicultural* perspective,³ the aim is to encourage the recognition of different cultures, the affirmation of their values and the possibility of their continuity in time (Brandalise, 2002). In this assertion, ethnic groups are distinct realities in contemporary society, with the right to be recognised as such along with their values that will be transmitted within the same groups in an attempt to preserve specific cultural values and characteristics. Consequently, the group of origin remains as a unique cultural reference, which hinders interaction with other cultures, risking a negative effect, limiting interaction between different groups occurs; it could even offer pretexts for crises then conflicts: external (between different cultures) or internal (within the same culture). According to Bauman (1999), individuals will be induced to ‘veil/conceal’ their characteristics in order to adhere to the patterns imposed by the group to which they belong. This is the case, for example, of an individual who is forced to hide and repress his/her feelings towards a person who belongs to a different religion, or more generally to a different cultural group in which relationships with people from other beliefs are strongly discouraged and, in extreme cases, condemned by law. The multicultural perspective gives less value to the interaction, which does not represent a key element in forming culture. Culture is placed at the core of identity, so it does not change through interaction. Multiculturality needs to maintain culture as a border element of identity.

Consequently, from the multicultural point of view it is possible to achieve a cohabitation in which different ethnic groups are able to live together in the same society, but the mutual recognition of different cultures is absent. Rather, the recognition here is a unilateral act that is accorded by the host society and it does not involve the attempt to evolve culture. Hence, it is appropriate to consider the intercultural perspective as the most suitable approach for individuals to create and maintain relationships with different group-level frames of references. More specifically, it appears to be the most effective tool to use in delicate negotiations, including those relating to the refugee and asylum seeker context. Refugees and asylum seekers represent a specific case because of their status of isolation and needs. Despite fleeing their home country, they remain strongly linked to the original culture, which has different approaches to societal practices. This is especially the case for people coming from regions of the world where the concepts of democracy, freedom, family or the status of women are interpreted or implemented in different ways than in the host country.

³ At times this thesis refers to ‘multicultural perspective’, at other times to ‘multiculturality’. Both the terms refer to the same model to explain the interaction between ethnic and cultural groups.

The *intercultural* perspective's mission is to observe differences, perceiving them as parts of an essential mechanism in the progress of first impacts and of exchanges of values among different cultures. In this context, the culture of origin is no longer considered as an outlined/stable reality that possesses its members and declares its ownership (Bauman, 1999), but as a mobile whole of resources to be involved in the self-awareness or environment cognition of individuals. The intercultural perspective aims to create continuous interaction and constant communication between cultures and society, the latter representing the cultural mainstream (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002). Cultures are increasingly perceived as open spaces, where the space of action becomes the place where the intercultural meeting occurs. This circumstance significantly reduces the risk of clashes between cultural groups and avoids assigning excessive importance to stereotypes of identity, in contrast to the multicultural perspective. Here, the concrete actions that take place inside the 'contact zones' (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116) are placed in the foreground. The vision of concrete events can be found within this space/dimension of interaction, as well as the relations and the pluralism of identity that have the tendency to disappear when interpreted, although daily acted out. The concept of interculturality (and all related matters) is to be imagined as a space where different cultures interact, constantly modifying and transforming each other when having no other choice than living together. The interaction between humanitarian organisations and refugees and asylum seekers represents this space in which the interactants reciprocally modify their perceptions of the other.

The intercultural interaction is based on the daily actions and relationships created by the society in the context of everyday life. That is, the relationship that is established between classmates or colleagues when interactions are determined by the social context in which daily actions happen — in workshops, support for homework, collaborations among several offices or simple requests for advice. Here, culture moves from the core of identity to the border, to the 'contact zone' (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116), where, throughout the interaction with strangers, cultures could be reimagined and altered by influences, with cultural elements acting as connectors among different identities, rather than borders that enclose and isolate the identity. Conversely, the multicultural model places culture at the heart of identity. Despite the interaction between groups cultures remain separated and their members will aim to become a homogeneous group (Pasqualotto, 2009; Rhazzali, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999). Whereas interculturality is focused on the evolution of cultures, the multicultural focus is on the specificity of cultures, maintaining the different cultures free of pollution over time from

other cultural groups. These particular aspects of the intercultural perspective — the daily actions that happen along cultural borders, the culture as one thing constantly changing and evolving — guide this present investigation of the evolutionary interactions between immigrants and the host society. Without the evolution of culture, it would not be possible to understand problems deeply connected to the resettlement process, because every different ethnic group would be seen as a single entity with little or no connection between them.

Scholars have identified three assumptions of the intercultural formulation. The first concerns the intercultural process, which is a dialogical process involving culturally different individuals characterised by the desire to communicate, to learn and to establish connections with each other. This includes self-development, relational transformation and change in communication patterns (Heidlebaugh, 2008). These skills allow interactants to explore their counterpart's commitment and perspective, as well as their own (Black, 2008). In an ideal state, both distinct cultural parties will assume the role of a cultural agent; nevertheless, there are differences (such as power, knowledge and wealth) that change the balance so that one sometimes dominates the other, or vice versa. Owing to this situation, interactants are constantly in tension and struggle for recognition. But, as Honneth (2003) indicates, 'each party recognises his or her dependence upon the other, and each can allow the judgement of the respective other to be valid as an objection against oneself' (p. 12).

The second assumption stipulates that individuals involved in the process of developing intercultural practices adapt to each other and, as a consequence, negotiate their previous identities. In other words, through mutual adaptation and going beyond their cultural boundary, the two parties are re-socialised into a larger intercultural community and evolve as a more inclusive identity. The process of mutual adaptation involves both recognition and inclusion on one hand, and autonomy and differentiation on the other hand. Given the dialectical principles of inclusion and differentiation that are the basis of the intercultural identity negotiation, intercultural interactants often perceive they are becoming progressively similar to each other and begin to accentuate differences. Yet, when they feel that difference is discouraging the maintenance of intercultural connection, they start to develop common views. This process maintains the balance of intercultural interaction (Kim, 2012; Brewer, 1999; Brewer, 1991).

The third and final assumption is about individual efforts to reach intercultural accord and to establish a productive connection with the others. The intersubjective space appears as the place where people communicate with each other according to a general model, or to a role model provided by his/her own social group. Conversely, in the context of intercultural communication, the agreements based on cultural similarities and on universal values of humanity are interculturally negotiated. In doing so, individuals use two human mechanisms to bridge the cultural gap: taking the role of the other and the self-reflection. The former allows seeing things from the other's perspective, thus simplifying the achievement of an intercultural agreement. The latter gives the opportunity to test the validity of his/her representation of the reality about the others (Dai and Chen, 2015).

The three assumptions just mentioned, however, are based on the interaction among several ethnic groups. The first dialogical assumption focuses on the desire to communicate, to learn and to establish connections. The second assumption draws attention to the skill of mutual adaptation, in which conflicting elements — such as recognition and inclusion, and autonomy and differentiation — are involved in order to affect the balance of intercultural interaction. The third one leverages on the effort to reach intercultural accord and to establish a productive connection. Acting on the border of identity, an intercultural perspective could not exist without interaction. The interaction represents the space in which exists the opportunity to change cultural elements in order to achieve and maintain relationships with different groups, which are carriers of different values, traditions and concepts — that is, different cultures. Interculturality is the more appropriate approach to analyse and understand the extent to which NGOs and CBOs can contribute to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. This is possible through analysing the interaction that is created in the 'contact zone' (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116), the space where different cultures constantly modify and transform each other. Mutual recognition and understanding are key elements in order to demonstrate evidence of full resettlement within the host society.

Specific governmental and NGOs have been established to welcome and provide affordable and convenient resettlement to these individuals. To be effective, this research proposes that these associations should follow intercultural practices with trained intercultural personnel. One of the most significant professionals who acts within the intercultural space is the *intercultural mediator*.

An intercultural mediator reflects the communicative competence of the intercultural approach. In fact the term mediation highlights the link to the metaphor of a 'bridge' built between cultures, and is in tune with the aspect of the social capital identified as 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 2000, p. 22); that is, a horizontal link between heterogeneous groups that allows contact between several social and cultural environments and creates trust. Just as Sargent and Lanchanché (2009) state:

the mediator's function is literally to translate, on the one hand, but also (and perhaps more significantly) to bridge social worlds. Thus his role is to translate conceptually the discourse of state institutions to migrants while conveying to biomedical and social work personnel the local meanings and practices of migrant clients (p. 7).

Moreover, the European Union highlighted in the document 'Guidelines for the recognition of the profession of intercultural mediator' (2009) two factors of an intercultural mediator: the language factor and the socio-cultural factor. Therefore, the intercultural mediator can be viewed as an operator to promote a synthesis (when possible) between cultures, in order to create cultural and environmental situations that can lead to mutual trust. The role of intercultural mediation is to assist individuals who belong to foreign cultures to become more confident with instruments for deeper interaction with the host society.

Hence, the intercultural mediators' aim is dual: with mediation they act to reach a synthesis between several cultures, but they are also try to maintain diversity. This may explain the diversity of perspectives in societies with a multicultural matrix and those with an intercultural matrix. A multicultural society contains distinct and separate cultures, whereas an intercultural society includes a plurality of contacts, relationships and exchanges among different cultures. In other words, interculturality, through daily actions, allows dialogue beyond identity borders. This dialogue focuses on the achievement of an effective settlement in the society, which involves every aspect of socialisation.

The main focus of the intercultural perspective is concentrated on building a dialogue between those involved in organising relational practices. Thus, the use of mediation strategies appears indispensable in contemporary societies where there exist different cultures and values. There are different approaches to coexistence between several ethnic groups. Integration and inclusion are slippery concepts; interpretation and implementation are determined by how the host society welcomes foreigners, such as refugees, asylum seekers, and economic immigrants.

The intercultural way to define integration is related to how the individual tries to fit into the host context. According to Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009), the concept of integration has the common denominator of maintenance, maintenance of the effort to adapt to another culture, and maintenance of the preservation of one's own culture. The focus is on assimilation and integration. Assimilation is a result of the immigrants adapting to the host culture, but annihilating their own. The difference is accepted, but only if linked to the private sphere. Foreigners are expected to leave their culture of origin in favour of a resettlement to the rules of the host country. On the other hand, integration, interpreted from a pluralistic point of view, allows cohabitation between different groups, but their values must not interfere with the rules of the host society. There is no interpenetration, interaction and mutual modification in the society. However, it is worthy to note that some scholars (Waters and Jiménez, 2005; Alba and Nee, 2003) propose a new theory of assimilation. Analysing immigration flows in America, these authors assign to the assimilation process a positive outcome. Indeed, focusing on four main elements characterising immigrants, which are the socioeconomic status, the spatial concentration, the language assimilation and the rate of intermarriage (Waters and Jiménez, 2005, p. 107), it appears that assimilation allows an effective participation into the American society.

With the intercultural approach, the host society helps the individual in achieving his/her purpose. In this context, this present study argues intercultural mediation is a privileged way towards a more inclusive social integration, reflecting the efforts that society and immigrants are completing to face an issue that, if approached without fear and with the willingness to know and meet the other, can provide an added value to all involved. Hence, the intercultural definition of integration is more appropriate for the understanding of the extent to which the intercultural practices can affect the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, as specific tools of immigrants' organisations. How are these kinds of organisations involved in intercultural practices? Interaction is the main path to achieve intercultural outcomes. And how are they putting into practice intercultural behaviours? Both Australian and Italian organisations that declare they have an intercultural perspective often do not apply intercultural efforts to achieve a social integration, providing instead only administrative services to refugees and asylum seekers. Studies conducted in Italy (Rotondo, 2014; Rhazzali and Schiavinato, 2012; Rhazzali, 2009) show that intercultural mediators — acting on behalf of public institutions — consider themselves merely as translators or employees. Consequently, the efforts of the host society are minimised and the integration process will reflect an image

that will not match reality. Humanitarian organisations should aim to achieve different outcomes by using professional intercultural mediators provided with specific training to give immigrants a chance of inclusion and integration. In fact, these particular kinds of organisations are significant yardsticks of the success of integration, with the ability to respond to specific communities with special characteristics and needs. They are the practical actuation of the concept that integration is not an individual process because it is not a unilateral path (Brandalise, 2002). Rather, it involves more subjects: the foreign citizen, the citizen and the host society. Inclusion and integration are processes that cannot be achieved unilaterally. Both need to be supported by immigrants, citizens and public institutions.

The cited Italian study also highlights the existence of a lack of immigrants' willingness to integrate. Some of them consider mediators as 'traitors' who abandoned their own community in favour of the host society (Rotondo, 2014; Rhazzali, 2009). In these cases, the intercultural perspective is not enacted, because one of the main actors, the immigrant, does not behave in the spirit of mutual acceptance. To address the gap in research on this issue, there is significant value in specifically incorporating refugees and asylum seekers rather than just generic immigrants (as the Italian study finds) in this present study. Refugees and asylum seekers are specific categories of immigrants that can involve all the actors in these processes. On the grounds of their different and fragile conditions, this study argues refugees and asylum seekers are more predisposed and open to dialogue, and that they are also able to achieve values that belong to all cultures.

Refugees and asylum seekers

The focus of this study is on refugees and asylum seekers, groups that appear particularly vulnerable in the complex landscape of mass immigration. According to the UNHCR, refugees and asylum seekers are individuals who need international protection. Furthermore, UNHCR in 1997 declared that the term refugee incorporates other characteristics:

- (i) those recognised as such by states party to the Convention and/or Protocol; (ii) those recognised as such under the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention and the Cartagena Declaration; (iii) those recognised by UNHCR as 'mandate refugees'; (iv) those granted residence on humanitarian grounds; and (v) those granted temporary protection on a group basis. (p. 1)

Hence, this definition made by an international organisation identifies the refugee as needing security and acceptance. However, several contemporary governments — such as the United States of America, Hungary, India and Croatia, just to name a few — are currently building physical walls to stem the tide of migrants, or are implementing naval fleets to block boats carrying asylum seekers on the open sea. These developments for the purposes of border-protection disregard the fact that many of these immigrants are fleeing war-torn countries (declared or not).

Despite the UNHCR's definitions, there is a conceptual confusion on who is considered a 'refugee' (Haddad, 2008). Zolberg et al. (1989) find that the common element on the definition of refugee is 'a well-founded fear of violence', which leads these individuals to become a group with 'a strong claim to a very special form of assistance, including temporary or permanent asylum in the territory of states of which they are not members' (Zolberg et al., 1989, p. 33). Connolly (1983) argues that the term 'refugee' causes disagreement on three main points. First, the term involves judgements on value; second, it is set up with complex components — such as protection, pressure, fear, violence and security — that make it in turn complex; and third, as a result of the different ways in which the definition of this concept is applied by host countries, it is hard to achieve a full and definitive resolution.

The definition of refugee and asylum seeker status — 'fear of being persecuted' — that is stressed by the United Nations Refugee Agency (1951, p. 14) indicates why these individuals play a crucial role in the intercultural context. Maintaining the focus on the causes of the fear, as suggested by Zolberg et al. (1989), facilitates the understanding of different meanings of refugee and asylum seeker status compared with other categories of immigrants, such as economic and undocumented immigrants. Since the crafting of the first definition of 'refugee', refugees and asylum seekers became key representatives for the 'cohabitation' issue of several ethnic groups, while they symbolise migration and everything it involves (having no choice but to adapt to a new social environment). Hence, they provide an ideal example to further understand the concept of interculturality and how it helps them to resettle in the host country. An ideal example because they are naturally predisposed to remove barriers that are posed by cultural borders, such as different background, age, education, gender, religion, political beliefs, values and so on. The need for these individuals to integrate into the new environment is reflected in the recognition that all cultures have values in common and desire effective integration in a host society. In doing so, they will act in order to have a full understanding of

the host culture and its traditions, but also in order to give a different cultural cue to the host society. As a result of these natural predispositions, individuals will try to connect their own traditions to the new society using skills that are naturally involved in the intercultural communication — such as mutual recognition, empathy, and cultural knowledge. One key skill of intercultural communication is active listening (Ioppolo, 2014). Active listening is defined as ‘the process in which a listener actively participates in the communication interaction by attempting to grasp the facts and the feelings being expressed by the speaker’ (Ioppolo, 2014, p. 14). For intercultural communication, active listening is required by both interacting subjects, being necessary for mutual recognition and to allow the establishment of connections between each other.

In order to support inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, public institutions and civil society have collaborated to create various organisations offering assistance and services, such as NGOs and CBOs. The activity of humanitarian organisations addressing the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, providing practical assistance immediately after their arrival, are widely considered in this study.

Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations’ intercultural communication and the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers

This second section engages with questions referring to NGO and CBO strategies referring to the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, it describes how the intercultural communication plays an effective role in the inclusion on the host society. NGOs and CBOs provide practical assistance immediately after the arrival of refugees, but for asylum seekers assistance is provided first in detention centres through legal and social services (Fiske, 2006). This section clarifies the significance of the role of NGOs and CBOs in supporting an effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

The section is divided into three subsections that shift the discussion from the part NGOs and CBOs play in the refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process to their application of the intercultural perspective in the field of practices dedicated to them. The first subsection, *Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations’ missions*, includes the concepts in which

NGOs and CBOs are rooted and the specific role they play to support refugees and asylum seekers.

The second subsection, *Intercultural communication*, clarifies the role of intercultural communication in the interaction between refugees/asylum seekers and humanitarian associations. The discussion moves from the general concepts of intercultural communication to their application in the resettlement process.

The third and final subsection, *Strategies and practices of NGOs and CBOs on resettlement issues*, considers the strategies and the activities adopted by these types of organisations in order to support refugees and asylum seekers resettlement. Here, the study highlights the connection between the resettlement process and the activities and strategies adopted by NGOs and CBOs.

The section concludes by underlining the support of the intercultural practices in the activities regarding the resettlement process within the NGO and CBO environment.

Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations' missions

According to Fiske (2006), NGO and CBOs tend to create the first connection between refugees and asylum seekers and the host society. In order to support the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, these associations put into effect several practices and provide support services. Therefore, their strategies are conceived and designed to ensure cohabitation, based on mutual respect and recognition. This study aims to explore whether and how humanitarian organisations apply the principles of intercultural practices, in order to examine the effectiveness of those practices on the resettlement processes of refugees and asylum seekers.

NGO missions and activities perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, such as taking citizens' concerns to governments, advocacy and monitoring policies, and encouraging political participation through dissemination of information. They also act as promoters of public opinion, defenders of under-represented viewpoints, watchdogs or civil society enforcement agents, and as bridges between state and non-state actors connecting local and global politics (Esty, 1998).

These groups are recognised as part of the fabric of international decision-making in many realms (Weiss and Gordenker, 1996). They are organised and act around several issues, such as human rights, health, food, environment or trade (e.g., Human Rights Watch, Australian Council for Overseas Aid, One Acre Fund, to name a few). Moreover, they provide analysis and expertise, give early warning about issues concerning their fields of activity and help monitoring and implementing international agreements. In doing so, NGOs participate in public debates, helping to compensate for deficient representativeness in countries with weak democratic institutions. They also act when policies of the national government do not fairly and accurately represent the citizenry's views (Ohanian, 2009; Esty, 1998). Ohanian (2009) asserts that governments, which receive aid, are welcoming of NGOs, but only because they need to compensate gaps in their own government services. This is the reason why Ohanian names them 'implementing agencies' (2009, p. 479), reflecting their ability to develop increasingly responsive policies to the needs of the host and immigrant communities.

Consequently, the most important and distinguishing feature of NGOs is the independent dimension in which they are co-located in the political and decision-making processes. Fitzduff and Church (2004) highlight how the independence of NGOs in their approach to state and state-centric institutions reflects the commitment of a civil society within a country, which is a positive political value. NGO autonomy is considered a necessary condition in order to achieve a meaningful relationship between global and local policy actors. Organisational independence reinforces the NGOs' political role, because their autonomous actions enable them to support democratisation processes, and to maintain governments accountable to the people — as in the case of the advocacy.⁴ Furthermore, what is relevant in this study is the role of NGOs in the implementation of the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. In fact, owing to their independent status, NGOs are free to adopt a variety of policies: they might act in order to solely provide a range of administrative services; they might provide only moral support to refugees and asylum seekers; or they might attempt to influence the balance of governmental policies against immigrants by advocating improvement or change. Whatever the policy adopted by NGOs, they are affected by the external environment represented by their partners, donors and other institutions. As Richmond and Carey (2005) have observed, 'non-state actors have become intricately entwined with official actors and transitional administrations' (p. 29).

⁴ Advocacy is defined as 'the package of activity which tries to give protection' (Clark, 2013, p. 302).

Similarly, CBOs act as apolitical mediators between citizens and government, by shaping processes of social regulation and integration (Milbourne, 2010; DeFilippis et al., 2010; both cited in Trudeau, 2012). These associations are mainly defined by their membership in the local community. People identify themselves as members of a shared community and their allies in a larger system, and engage together in the process of community change. The principal objectives of these groups are to identify common problems or goals, mobilise resources, and develop and implement strategies for reaching the goals they collectively have set, which are identified by the community itself (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2005). CBOs as well as NGOs, are involved in several fields of activity — such as health, education, support for minorities, and resettlement to name a few.

The organisational models of NGOs and CBOs influence how they welcome refugees and asylum seekers and support them in the resettlement process. The NGOs' role is recognised in the relationship with the United Nations Refugee Agency. Even though the Refugee Convention (1951) and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees UN Refugee Agency (1967)⁵ have declared that the supervisory responsibility about legal, procedural or technical perspectives are held by the UNHCR, scholars (Arakaki, 2013; Clark, 2013) state that this crucial role is shared by the UNHCR with civil society. Governments still have a primary role with respect to the interpretations and implementation of treaties related to human rights, but the participation of the civil society organisations, such as NGOs and recognised communities is increasing. They are expanding the implementation of treaties to the legislative, judicial and administrative areas. One of their actions is to inform society of latest international norms, to present their concerns to government representatives and provide new points of view and expert knowledge. They also act as a pressure group to confront institutions, especially in areas related to human rights and humanitarian issues (Arakaki, 2013). Through their knowledge, skills and practical abilities NGOs and CBOs are able to affect the decision-making processes and the decisions of an authority. They spring out of civil society, being part of the non-state organisations.

⁵ The article 35 of the Convention provides that: '1. The Contracting States undertake to co-operate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or any other agency at the United Nations which may succeed it, in the exercise of its functions, and shall in particular facilitate its duty of supervising the application of the provisions of this Convention. 2. In order to enable the Office of the High Commissioner or any other agency of the United Nations which may succeed it, to make reports to the competent organs of the United Nations, the Contracting States undertake to provide them in the appropriate form with information and statistical data requested concerning: (a) The condition of refugees, (b) The implementation of this Convention, and (c) Laws, regulations and decrees which are, or may hereafter be, in force relating to refugees' (UNHRC, 1951).

The Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1993)⁶ has collected data about NGOs involved in the fields of human rights, refugees, migrants and development since 1961. The OECD was not able to give them a definition owing to concepts about the nature of NGOs' activities varying from country to country. Nevertheless, it provides some criteria to help recognise this specific type of association. NGOs' activities have to be involved in at least one of the following fields: awareness about human rights and refugees, support and assistance to people from and in developing countries regarding human rights, and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

The role of NGOs and CBOs in refugee and asylum seeker resettlement is mainly to provide essential services such as social, legal and educational services. Fiske (2006) in her study 'Politics of Exclusion, Practice of Inclusion: Australia's Response to Refugees and the Case for Community-Based Human Rights Work' highlights the role these groups have had in contrasting governmental law relating to refugees. NGOs and CBOs put in place a series of actions aimed to provide support to refugees who were released from detention centres, to supply legal services to asylum seekers still detained on these centres or those to whom visas expired. They also taking action to put pressure on governments for legislative changes, and against detention and temporary protection regimes (Fiske, 2006). Furthermore, they are raising awareness for refugee and asylum seeker issues in the community by organising multicultural events for the host society, and providing English language classes for refugees. CBOs have different structures and different roles for supporting refugee resettlement because of their distinct characteristic of community level participation, reflected in the organisational capacity and motivations of the members. In other words, CBOs recognise the essential human need 'to belong, to be a member of a community and to have certain rights and obligations as member of that community' (Fiske, 2006, p. 226). They are creating a specific space for refugees' needs in their community in order to confer on these individuals a sense of belonging to a human community.

Both NGOs and CBOs, to achieve their purposes and intentions, need an effective communicative system able to create mutual connections and influences between refugees, asylum seekers and host societies. By aiming to create continuous interaction and constant communication between cultures and society (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002),

⁶ The OECD promotes policies that will improve the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world. It involves 34 member countries. www.oecd.org/about/

intercultural communication appears to be the most effective communication system to be used in interactions among cultures.

Intercultural communication with refugees and asylum seekers

The features of intercultural communication in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers — such as mutual understanding and recognition — drive interaction to a desirable level of efficient interpersonal communication among humans, instead of the simple administration of services. This entails the assumption that intercultural communication as a ‘tool’ can be applied to a broader context of resettlement within the host society. The nature of the intercultural model acting on the borders between several ethnic groups and their cultures drives attention to the interaction between subjects. Dai and Chen (2015) use the concept of *intersubjectivity* to define the intercultural perspective as a multiple connection between individuals with different cultural background. Intersubjectivity represents the relationship between people who have a positive perception of each other, and it is also conceived as a social relationship taking into account mutuality and consensus, as well as disagreement and tension (Dai, 2010; Brandalise, 2002). Based on this concept, the intercultural perspective could be defined as the dimension where individuals with different cultural backgrounds act to reduce cultural distance, and to compromise on sharing meanings for mutual identities, reciprocally applying themselves to determine communication. Consequently, the intercultural model mainly involves constructive interaction and communication skills, which are commonly referred to as intercultural communication. Communication, in all its forms, is the most effective way to set up a connection that allows finding similar common perspectives for different cultures, but also to face different positions in order to reach consensus.

Intercultural communication competence refers to ‘the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world’ (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009, p. 7). Paisley (1984; 1990) stated that the roots of intercultural communication were in cultural anthropology, and Harman and Briggs (1991) suggested that anthropology was the leading influence on the field, with sociology, linguistics and psychology following. Hart (1999) identified psychology and communication studies as the main influencers.

In the 1970s, intercultural communication began to appear as a specific and recognisable field. Scholars and practitioners were involved in the implementation and consolidation of the list of characteristics of interculturality, highlighting general relevance of intercultural competence, including such skills as language, adaptability, responsibility, cultural sensitivity, interest in nationals, realism of goals, agreement and compromise, self-reliance, initiative, reliability, argumentativeness, courteousness, cooperativeness, friendliness (Deardorff, 2009). In the 1980s, sophisticated efforts were made to develop, validate and refine measures of intercultural competence (e.g., Hammer, 1987; Koester and Olebe, 1988; Abe and Wiseman, 1983). From the 1990s, conceptual models were increasingly elaborated and progressively contextualised in specific fields, such as human resources, education, religious organisations, health care, to cite a few. Most studies assessed knowledge and skills as distinctive elements of interculturality (Bradford et al., 2000), but largely ignored the affective — or motivational — component. The affective component involves emotions that affect the motivation to interact with others, such as fear, pleasure/displeasure, anger/stress, unperceived emerging needs and prejudice (Liu et al., 2015; Ioppolo, 2014). At the same time, several models consider these components (e.g., Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984), inducing a shift in the communication and social psychology disciplines that allow an additional focus on relationship development across a variety of contexts and on the relational focus expected in intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2009). Furthermore, the present research aims to unveil the real function of the knowledge element into the communication process related to refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, the existence of universal values among cultures and societies (Laszlo, 1973, p. 256) makes the knowledge of refugee and asylum seeker cultural backgrounds still useful, but not essential to conduct an effective interaction.

This study takes into account the intercultural feature of communication as the core of interculturality. Intercultural communication focuses on the contact between interactants with different cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst, 2005; Dodd, 1991; Kim and Gudykunst, 1988). This communication is enacted on two levels: interpersonal and intergroup, both focused on identities and relationships respectively between individuals or groups (Gudykunst, 2005). The present research focuses mainly on the interpersonal communication that is created during the interaction between humanitarian organisations and refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, it considers essential the evolution of the cultural elements of the interactants as a key aspect in the resettlement process of these kinds of immigrants, enhancing their understanding of the new society that they are co-constructing.

According to scholars (Aneas and Sandin, 2009; Triandis, 2000), there are three different approaches to studying cultural and intercultural communication. The *cross-cultural* approach presents as the most appropriate to examine interaction between different groups, while the second *indigenous* and third *cultural* approaches are more focused on the meanings of concepts within a given culture context. The cross-cultural approach is applied in studies that involve two or more cultural groups, and assumes that the aspects under investigation exist in all cultures examined. In doing so, it utilises *etic* research which takes into account factors that are universal across cultures; the focus is on the ‘comparative cross-cultural point of view’ (Brislin et al., 1973). Furthermore, the use of the *etic* approach strengthens the claim that universal values are true over different cultures as indicated by Laszlo (1973), moving the focus of the communication from the interaction between different cultural groups to an interaction among human beings. Hence, the *etic* approach appears to be an optimum fit for the examination of the intercultural practices enacted by NGOs and CBOs to increase the effectiveness of refugee and asylum seeker resettlement. Resettlement involves the participation of asylum seekers and refugees in the continuous construction of society by looking for similarities and facing differences. The purpose of cross-cultural communication is to stress similarities and differences among several cultural groups. Conversely, indigenous and cultural perspectives use an *emic* approach, which focuses on things that belong exclusively to a culture and on ‘the native’s point of view’ (Ægisdottir et al., 2008, p.190).

Kim (2005) states that cultural and cross-cultural communication are ‘complementary and integral parts’ (p. 556) of intercultural communication, because of the development of the definition of the term ‘culture’. Originally, culture has been utilised in order to represent whole cultural groups as recognisable through their collective experiences, symbols and customs, such as a nation, a geographic area. Then, the concept has been extended to take into account different kinds of groups — such as subcultures, domestic ethnic or racial groups — that still exist within a homogeneous cultural group. This inclusive perspective of culture allows researchers to think of all communication acts as potentially intercultural, with varying degrees of ‘interculturalness’⁷ (Kim, 2005, p. 556). Following this perspective, communication with refugees and asylum seekers tends to be mainly based on their individual characteristics, rather than their cultural group of origin. Gudykunst (2003) draws a distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural aspects. Cross-cultural communication is involved in comparing

⁷ Or heterogeneity (Kim, 2005, p. 556).

communication among different cultures, but intercultural communication relates to understanding the communication that takes place during the interaction between people from different cultural groups. This present study focuses on examining the interaction and communication between refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian organisations in order to understand in which ways they are able to affect the resettlement processes of these individuals. These processes represent the interaction among people from different cultures who are trying to construct a mutual understanding of society. Intercultural communication is generally associated with interpersonal communication, that is direct and face-to-face (Kim and Gudykunst, 1988), because of interpersonal relations that inevitably develop during the interaction. The intersubjective space appears as the place where people communicate to each other according to a general model, or to a role model provided by the social group of origin. Conversely, in the context of intercultural communication, the agreements based on cultural similarities and on universal values of humanity are interculturally negotiated. In doing this, individuals use two human mechanisms to bridge the cultural gap: taking the role of the other and self-reflection. The former allows seeing things from the other's perspective, thus simplifying the achievement of an intercultural agreement. The latter gives the opportunity to test the validity of his/her representation of the reality about the others (Dai and Chen, 2015).

Interculturality is also related to concepts of culture-general and culture-specific perspectives (Pusch, 2009; Kim, 2005). In other words, intercultural communication considers personal identity rather than the connection with the specific cultural group. The culture-general perspective focuses on the interaction between refugee/asylum seekers as individuals and the operators of the humanitarian organisations. Conversely, a culture-specific perspective takes into account the specificity of a cultural group, but not the individuality of its members. In the present study, the focus is on the interaction that takes place among individuals, avoiding the general designation of the individual to a cultural group, such as refugees or asylum seekers (Pusch, 2009). Indeed, a culture-general perspective facilitates the understanding of an infinity of ways in which cultures differ within universal categories (Kim, 2005). The present research project, arguing the presence of shared elements in all cultures (Laszlo, 1973, p. 256), intends to emphasise communication between individuals, instead of intergroup communication, to highlight the role of intercultural/intersubjective communication in creating the right context for effective resettlement.

This study examines the application of intercultural communication as a practical tool related to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The settlement of refugees and asylum seekers is considered as active participation in constructing the society from cultural, social, political and economic points of view (Haddad, 2003).

Strategies and practices of Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations on resettlement issues

The core of this research observes the role of intercultural practices in contributing to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers through the use of these by humanitarian organisations. As the ‘first interlocutor’ in the resettlement process of immigrants (Fiske, 2006), these organisations appear to be the most effective mediators in their interactions with host society and the government. Hence, the study focuses on the actual role of refugee and asylum seeker support organisations and their practical possibilities to influence the immigration policies.

The critical importance of the role of humanitarian organisations in the early stages of settlement (Bloch, 2002) is due to the capacity of their operators/facilitators for communication and comprehension. The term ‘settlement’ reflects the belonging and participation in the ‘construction and reconstruction of the society’ (Haddad, 2003, p. 20) from a social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual point of view. A study commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship⁸ in 2011 highlights the role of the Australian NGOs and CBOs in the settlement experience of refugees. Furthermore, the Australian Survey Research Group (ASRG, 2011) reports that 21.4 per cent of refugee respondents had support on their first steps in the new society through cultural organisations or community groups. To better understand the success reported by humanitarian organisations, 4.3 per cent of family migrants looked for the support of community groups, and only 3.1 per cent of skilled migrants (ASRG, 2011). The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA, 2014) drafted a list of six priority areas for support: social participation, economic wellbeing, independence, personal wellbeing, life satisfaction and community connectedness. Social participation is a result of NGOs’ and CBOs’ bridge-function between refugees, asylum seekers and community services, the empowerment of refugees who are regarded as having a fragile profile, civic participation, and of the

⁸ The study was commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to the Australian Survey Research Group, see the references.

organisations' commitment to advocate and raise awareness for refugee communities. Economic wellbeing concerns the resolution of financial issues (by pooling financial resources or supporting employment transitions), which are a significant barrier for refugee entrants (Olliff, 2010). Then, the RCOA's report (2014) explains the role of NGOs and CBOs on refugee and asylum seeker independence through the settlement support, such as providing transport, accommodation, interpreting, employment links, and orientation programs. Promoting health and wellbeing, and conflict mediation are the actions through which CBOs take care of refugee's personal wellbeing. Meanwhile, building social connections and supporting the reunion of families focus on life satisfaction and community connectedness.

The Italian agency that manages the reception of refugees and asylum seekers, The Central Service of the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees⁹ (SPRAR, 2015), published a list of nine areas in which services were considered as a guaranteed minimum for an effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. The first area involved in welcoming these individuals is (1) accommodation, which consists of providing a home, food, clothes, bed-linen, sanitary products and any other special needs requested. The special needs are usually related to the respect associations pay to the religious and cultural backgrounds of immigrants. The second area focuses on (2) intercultural-linguistic mediation to facilitate linguistic and cultural communication with the host society. The purpose is to enable the construction of relationships. The third area of minimum services guaranteed regards (3) orientation and access to the services on the Italian territory. The managing organisations have to facilitate the access and the use of public services, such as health care, school system and education, public transportation, post, pharmacy, associations. They also have to ensure access and attendance at classes of Italian language. The fourth point indicated on the report is for (4) education and professional requalification. Associations dealing with refugees and asylum seekers need make an effort to facilitate the recognition of achieved degrees and professional qualifications from Italian institutions, in order to promote tertiary studies and recognise previous education or training of the immigrants. In doing so, operators of the humanitarian associations have to direct refugees and asylum seekers to professional training and classes in which they learn how to fill in a resume, for example.

The next three areas are directly related to inclusion and resettlement in the host society. They all involve orientation and insertion, but in three different areas: (5) the labour market,

⁹ The 'Servizio Centrale del Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati'.

providing information on the Italian labour legislation, on the existence of protected working places, and employment; (6) the housing market, facilitating access to the public and private house market and to protected houses; and (7) social integration, promoting dialogue between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society, social and cultural activities, the development of local support networks, and participation in public life. The eighth area deals with (8) legal support. Organisations provide support throughout the process of resettlement, advocating for immigrants in bureaucratic and administrative procedures and informing them of Italian and European asylum laws, rights and duties established by Italian legislation including programs for assisted and voluntary return. The ninth and last area relates to (9) social and health services, which ensure access to healthcare services, psychological and social assistance and help with social security related matters.

The nine macro areas cited in the SPRAR report (SPRAR, 2015) indicate not only the considerable role that Italian associations have in the resettlement process, but also the obligation of the associations to offer these services that lead to refugees and asylum seekers gaining independence and autonomy, and becoming integrated actors in Italian society.

A first comparison of the priority areas of the Australian and Italian agencies indicates the two groups have corresponding purposes. They differ in taking into account the cultural background of refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, although the RCOA did not mention refugee and asylum seeker cultures in its priority areas, preferring perhaps an approach based on universal values, or just on their own values, the Italian agency inserted the recognition of different cultural backgrounds in the very first area, calling them ‘special needs’. In doing so, the Italian system seems to further stress the creation of ‘hypothetical’ different groups, pushing the differentiation between them and between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Scholars (Ohanyan, 2009; Esty, 1998; Weiss and Gordenker, 1996) point out that the purposes of NGOs and CBOs are to perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions toward refugee and asylum seeker communities. Their purpose is to affect the welcoming system and the resettlement processes of refugees and asylum seekers including activities that encourage political participation through information, defend the point of views that governments do not represent or under-represent, provide analysis and expertise, give early warning about issues concerning their fields of activity and help monitor and implement international agreements. Furthermore, NGOs participate in public debates, helping to compensate for deficient

representativeness present in many countries with weak democratic institutions. Therefore, NGOs and CBOs¹⁰ are considered as significant elements in the process of resettlement, providing essential components for the understanding and the participation in the construction of the host society.

Research questions

The core of this research observes the role of intercultural practices in contributing to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The intercultural perspective, identified as the most appropriate approach in the process of interaction among different cultural groups, allows refugees and asylum seekers to re-codify their social references in host societies. To become efficient, interculturality requires a supportive organisational structure to encourage interaction. This work focuses on NGOs and CBOs from this perspective. Because of their role of ‘first interlocutor’ in the resettlement of immigrants, these organisations appear to be the best mediators in their interactions with the host society and the government. Therefore, the central question of this study is:

In what ways do intercultural practices in refugee and asylum seeker organisations contribute to their resettlement?

To answer this central question, the study also addresses three subsidiary questions, which are essential to understanding the effective role of intercultural practices in these organisations, and the ways in which the intercultural perspective contributes to the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement processes.

The first subsidiary question relates to NGOs and CBOs. They are effectively the first mediators between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society. Therefore, their strategies are conceived and designed to ensure cohabitation, based on mutual respect and recognition. This study aims to explore whether humanitarian organisations are applying intercultural practices principles, in order to examine their effectiveness. This leads to the question:

¹⁰ As said on the previous subsection, often a NGO matches a CBO, so it can be assumed that NGOs act as community organisations in their effort to contribute to the resettlement of refugees.

What practices do NGOs and CBOs employ to assist asylum seekers and refugees?

The second subsidiary question considers the role of intercultural communication in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. Its features — such as mutual understanding and recognition — drive interaction to a desirable level of efficient interpersonal communication among humans, instead of a simple administration of services. This entails the assumption that intercultural communication as a ‘tool’ can be applied to a broader context of resettlement within the host society. Hence, the second subsidiary question is:

What is the role of intercultural communication enacted by associations in the process of resettlement?

The last subsidiary question reflects the actual role of refugee and asylum seeker support organisations and their practical possibilities to influence the immigration policies:

Are asylum seeker and refugee organisations seeking to influence the immigration policy and/or to provide services at a community level?

Conclusion

The existing literature examined in this chapter explored what is known about the interaction between different cultural groups. Assigning a key role to intercultural communication in this interaction allows refugees and asylum seekers to re-codify their social references in the host societies. The chapter focused on NGOs and CBOs and their role of ‘first interlocutor’ in the resettlement of immigrants. These organisations appeared to be the best mediators in their interactions with host society and the government. Therefore, how do intercultural practices in refugee and asylum seeker organisations contribute to their resettlement? To answer this central question, the chapter examined the relationship between immigrants and culture, and the interaction between different cultures. Then, it focused on intercultural communication as a pivotal element in the construction of the strategies adopted by NGOs and CBOs.

The first section depicted the intercultural perspective as an interaction established on the daily interactions and relationships created by the society, interpreting culture as an element in constant evolution. Interculturality aims to establish continuous interaction and communication

between cultures and society (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002). The latter leads the intercultural perspective to focus on the role of the intercultural mediator, identified as a 'social bridge' able to create connections between heterogeneous groups that, interacting with different social and cultural environments, create trust between each other (Putnam, 2000, p. 22).

The chapter argued that the intercultural approach appeared the preferable approach to interacting with refugees and asylum seekers, two categories of immigrants with 'a strong claim to a very special form of assistance, including temporary or permanent asylum in the states in which they are not members' (Zolberg et al., 1989, p. 33). Refugees and asylum seekers provide an ideal counterpart in the intercultural interaction because of their particular status, that does not allow them to return to their home countries. As a matter of fact, the need of refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the host society leads these individuals to be willing to understand the host culture and its traditions, and to seek mutual recognition. In doing so, they cover the three assumptions of the intercultural formulation, which are: the desire to communicate, to learn and to establish connections; mutual adaptation and going beyond the cultural boundary; and the effort to achieve an intercultural accord and a productive connection with others.

The second section addressed the environment in which the interaction takes place. The first part of this section explored the role that NGOs and CBOs play in welcoming and supporting refugees and asylum seekers within the context and use of intercultural communication. Indeed, to achieve their purposes and intentions, humanitarian organisations need an effective communicative system able to create mutual connections and influences between refugees, asylum seekers and host societies. From this point of view, the intercultural approach appeared to be the most effective communication system to be used in interactions among cultures, because of continuous interaction and constant communication between cultures and society (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002).

Dai and Chen (2015) used the concept of *intersubjectivity* to define the nature of the intercultural model. In fact, the intercultural approach acts along the interaction between different cultural groups and their cultures, but focusing the attention on the relationship among subjects. For this reason, intercultural competences include skills such as languages, adaptability, responsibility and cultural sensitivity (Deardorff, 2009). Another distinctive

element of interculturality, recognised in most studies in this field (Bradford et al., 2000) is the knowledge element that relates to what the communicators know about each other (Ioppolo, 2014, p. 102), and to the cultural background of the individuals involved in the interaction.

This research intends to argue the function of the knowledge element in communication processes related to refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, the study supports the existence of universal values among cultures and societies (Laszlo, 1973, p. 256), and intends to demonstrate that the knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural backgrounds, although useful, is not essential to effective interaction. Furthermore, the intercultural approach also relates to the concept of a culture-general perspective (Pusch, 2009; Kim, 2005), which focuses on the interaction among individuals as human beings, instead of identifying the individual to a cultural group — such as refugees and asylum seekers. With these elements underpinning the research, the aim is to emphasise the intercultural/intersubjective communication foundations of interactions among individual human beings.

Finally, the last paragraphs of the chapters focused on the strategies adopted and the services provided by the humanitarian organisations to support refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. After highlighting the critical importance that NGOs have on the early stages of settlement of these individuals (Bloch, 2002), the section outlined the priority services required in the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers.

From the literature presented in this chapter, it appears that interculturality plays a significant role within humanitarian organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers. NGOs and CBOs utilise intercultural communication to provide a large range of services, new meanings, information, cultural values and traditions of the new, host society. The next chapter will explore how communication affects individuals' construction of knowledge and its role in the resettlement processes of refugees and asylum seekers.

Chapter Three

The role of communication in supporting refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement process

This research project aims to investigate the interactions between refugees, asylum seekers and Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations involved in their reception. The first assumption of this study expects that the communication process acted during these interactions is underpinned by intercultural elements. Hence, it focuses on the role of intercultural communication enacted by humanitarian associations to support the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. From the viewpoints of this research, interculturality acts as an essential element for host societies and refugees and asylum seekers to understanding the new environment.

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework of the research, investigating the significance of key terms within the intercultural interaction that occurs between refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian organisations. Communication has a crucial role in forming social actions and hence in understanding the social context. The notion of intercultural interaction leans towards a mutual recognition among different persons; a mutual recognition that is grounded on the ways in which people communicate and act to achieving a ‘satisfactory mode of socialisation’ (Pearce, 1976, p. 20). NGOs and CBOs, being the first interlocutor that refugees and asylum seekers interact with in the process of reception, play a crucial and effective role in the progress of their resettlement. These organisations claim that their strengths come from the interaction and communication they establish with immigrants. The socialisation is further conditioned by the specificity of meanings that immigrants share and acknowledge.

Following the ‘Coordinated Management of Meaning’ (CMM) framework originally drawn up by Pearce and Cronen (1980), this chapter explains the values of communication, as applied in their theory. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section contains the link between communication and the construction of knowledge — that is, the way in which the world is acknowledged/explained. Knowledge also includes the understanding of the social

context. Then, the section explains the role of communication within CMM theory. Concepts of ‘management’ and ‘coordination’ enable an examination of the cultural interaction practices in humanitarian organisations, focusing on their quality of ‘first interlocutor’ for refugees and asylum seekers. Further, the CMM perspective is compared with the traditional perspective of communication. Indeed, as unfolded in the second section, communication perspective places dialogue as a ‘primary social process’ in creating meanings, and it is related to the actions of people.

The third section focuses on the role of NGOs and CBOs in contributing to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. Within this role, communication becomes the action that prompts the construction of the social process referring to refugee and asylum seeker participation in the host society. Furthermore, the knowledge and the affective components of intercultural communication are analysed as specific aspects of the interaction. NGO and CBO operators face the consequences that immigrants carry from their past. These affective components play a pivotal role in the resettlement process, and may interest the benefit or the recognition of resettlement. The fourth section looks at communication as a strategy utilised by humanitarian organisations in relation to the refugee resettlement process, and in promoting their resettlement. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the main elements of the theoretical framework of this project, addressing relevant aspects of data collected.

With reference to the role of these organisations in the process of interaction between immigrants and host societies, communication assumes a key active position as facilitator of the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Through communication, they are able to understand and construct the knowledge related to the new, host society.

Communication and its role in constructing knowledge

Refugees’ and asylum seekers’ understanding and knowledge of the host society is central to their resettlement process. The extent to which they are able to interact with the new environment is strongly connected to mutual acknowledgment and respect, hence understanding. Through communication, NGOs and CBOs provide tools to actualise their resettlement. From this point of view, intercultural communication establishes continuous

interactions and communication between refugees' and asylum seekers' cultures and the new society (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise 2002).

According to social constructionism theory, language is a form of social action. Indeed, this theory positions communication as the pivotal point of people's everyday interactions in the construction of knowledge (Burr, 2015). In order to define this theory, Gergen and Davis (1985) state four key assumptions. Any assumption reflects a way in which knowledge could be considered in a social constructionism context. First, this theory is critical of any taken-for-granted way of understanding the world. The knowledge does not come from an observation of reality. Instead, it is constructed from each version of reality, which allows for several 'knowledges' for the same reality. That means knowledge is the consequence of the perspective in which the world is acknowledged. The second assumption is the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge, which becomes a product of the world in which one lives. These specificities of knowledge justify the different approaches adopted by host communities and societies to welcome, or to reject immigrants more generally.

The remaining two assumptions identified by Gergen and Davis (1985) directly connect knowledge with social processes and social action. The ways in which people understand the world are not derived from an objective reality, but rather are constructed through the daily actions that take place during everyday life interactions. Therefore, truth is a product of social processes and interactions. Knowledge is something that people create and enact together. This last assumption also reflects the perspective of the intercultural interaction, based on the daily actions that take place in the 'contact zone' (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116), where interaction influences, alters and reimagines cultures. Finally, social constructionism highlights the role of knowledge in supporting some patterns of social action, excluding others. The way in which people understand the world influences people's action, indicating what is allowed and how to relate to others. Burr (2015) explains the relation between knowledge and social action through the change of social perspective with respect to alcoholics. Before the 19th century, the typical response to drunken behaviour was imprisonment of the person. After the rise of the temperance movement in USA and Britain, which changed the perspective from alcohol as the problem to people as addicts, the response moved from punishment to medical treatment. Similarly, through communication, NGOs and CBOs are able to change a social perspective related to refugees and asylum seekers. Their communication, characterised by elements of intercultural dialogue, plays a dual role in the interaction between refugees, asylum

seekers and the host society. On the one hand, the operators of these organisations communicate with immigrants to transmit knowledge that will accomplish resettlement in the host society. On the other hand, the associations have to engage with the host society, transmitting messages to change, or solidify a local perspective about immigrants.

Therefore, social interactions, specifically daily actions, are crucial in constructing knowledge, the way in which people understand their environment. Social constructionism perceives language as one of the principal means by which people construct social context. Indeed, language is asserted as a pre-condition for thought, as suggested by Lacan in his 'Theory of Language', drawn from Saussure's suppositions in 19th century (Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher, 2014, p. 23). People acquire concepts that develop the use of language and reproduce them in daily interactions with others, sharing culture and language. Thus, communication does not reflect merely a way of expressing ourselves, but rather it reflects a form of action, with practical consequences for people such as restrictions and obligations.

According to Burr (2015), there are two main approaches to social constructionism: micro social constructionism and macro social constructionism. The former focuses on the daily interactions taking place through language, suggesting that there are numerous versions of knowledge, all with meanings specific to the holders of those versions. The latter shares the importance of the language, but considers it as related to social relations and institutionalised practices. Notwithstanding, these two approaches should not be considered as mutually exclusive.

The consideration of the two approaches to social constructionism leads to the dichotomy of realism/relativism, which represents a continuum of objective reality at one end and multiple realities on the other. Indeed, the macro social approach views the world's existence as independent of the substance of its own representation. As for realism, objective reality exists independently from its acknowledgment. In contrast, the micro social approach refers to the creation of multiple knowledge and interpretations of reality. Relativism argues that this reality is inaccessible, that the only available knowledge is contained in the various representations of the world. Although social constructionism appears to refer to a relativist position, Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim that society exists both as subjective and objective realities. The latter focuses on two-way interactions that take place between people and the society. In fact, the

meaning of the interaction is embodied by routines, forming a general knowledge continuously reaffirmed in interaction.

The subjective reality is achieved through socialisation, which occurs in interactions with individuals who mediate the objective reality. The interaction gives meanings to the objective reality, consequently being internalised by individuals as routine (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). As socialisation takes place through language, social constructionism theory conceives language as the action in which concepts are constructed and prompt thoughts, avoiding the idea that language is a simple means to transmit thoughts and feelings (Burr, 1995). In the specific case of providing services to refugees and asylum seekers, the role of language is to favour their resettlement. Through communication, NGOs and CBOs assist refugees and asylum seekers to re-codify their relationships within a context so as to settle within the host society, a resettlement that necessarily involves the evolution of culture, as expected from the intercultural perspective (Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999). Indeed, cultural changes appear essential in deeply understanding issues in the resettlement process that refugees and asylum seekers undergo. A different approach, such as the multicultural one, would present every different ethnic group as a single entity, with no connection with the other groups.

Communication plays a crucial role in acknowledging the world, and therefore the society. It has been asserted that communication is the most important means of maintaining, modifying and reconstructing subjective reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

The concept of communication within the Coordinated Management of Meaning framework

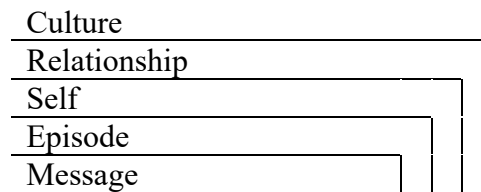
This study focuses on the communication conceived during interpersonal interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds. In the examined case, refugees and asylum seekers need to interact through communication, within a new/different cultural environment in which values, norms, symbols and even concepts are elaborated differently. Hence, communicators must negotiate through their previous cultural patterns, permeating beyond the boundaries of their identity. To this aim, they endeavour to create a productive connection, which allows a better resettlement founded on mutual recognition and respect. In this way, the resettlement process will accurately reflect the implementation of common values such as freedom and mutual respect, demonstrating that people of different cultural background can effectively co-

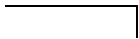
exist in the same environment. The importance of intercultural communication, from this point of view, resides in its daily interaction of relationships in a society context, in everyday life (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116).

The CMM approach, employing the concept of 'coordination', diverts the criterion of successful communication from a transmission perspective, which functions on principles of understanding and effects, to a communication perspective, where the consideration is interaction (Pearce and Pearce, 2000). The transmission model assumes that communication is an 'instrument' for the interchange of information. This perspective focuses on the message of the conversation: what is said, what is meant and what is understood. Here, meanings carried in the message are just conveyed and received. Conversely, the CMM perspective claims that communication and content of the message are involved in the construction of meanings, defining communication as material and consequential (Pearce, 2004), which means participants in communication have several ways to interact and for their construction of meanings to create possibilities or constraints for action.

CMM is grounded in social constructionism theory, in which human beings understand their lives and experiences across various meanings extracted from social realities (Montgomery, 2004). It reveals the relationship between action and meaning, and how the context and socially constructed realities influence it (Pearce, 2004; Cronen et al., 1989; Cronen et al., 1982). Social meanings are organised on a hierarchical model, in which communicators process the information, and meanings have a reflexive influence on each other. Consequently, any meaning at one level is understood in the context of the higher level, but also including the context of the lower level. According to Pearce (2004), CMM's hierarchy model includes five levels of understanding (see Figure 3.1): the lowest level is the content of the (1) message: the cognitive process that individuals adopt to organise and interpret the words involved in communication. Subsequently, the speech acts are interpreted through meanings that communicators provide when performing their content. (2) Episodes represent the temporal context in which messages are enacted and refer to a descriptive sequence of speech acts. (3) Self context relates to a set of episodes able to shape the self-perception of the individual, in which they are free to decide if they wish to participate or not. The (4) relationship level provides the context in which interactants enact communication. Lastly, (5) culture context is the highest level of the hierarchy that provides an understanding of all the levels displayed above (Orbe and Camara, 2010; Pearce, 2007; Pearce, 2004).

Figure 3.1 CMM model – Hierarchy of Meaning.



Where  means 'in the context of'.
Source: Pearce (2004).

The elements of the hierarchical model are not a pre-fixed asset; the order of relevance can change and, consequently, the meanings of an action can vary depending on the order. A meaning that is understood and influenced from the higher levels to the lower levels can strongly affect the interactional context (contextual effect). Conversely, if a meaning is understood the other way, the interpretation of the action will not affect the context in which it happens (implicative effect).

This approach is relevant for this study because it prompts a focus on some aspects of the communication taking place between refugees, asylum seekers and the organisations dealing with their resettlement. It allows us to question the highest level of the interaction that occurs between refugees/asylum seekers and humanitarian organisations. If the interpretation of meanings is culture-based, both communicators will be able to have an overview of the interaction context, in which integration and inclusion are necessary for accomplishing an effective resettlement. Indeed, owing to intrinsic attributes of their status as refugee/asylum seekers, they do not have the option to return to their home countries. At this point, it is necessary to highlight the paradox that there are still countries practicing rejection policies, in defiance of the UNHCR definition of refugee (UNHCR, 1951).

Conversely, if the interpretation is based on the relationship level, the categorisation as 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' could provide confused meanings, consequently causing problematic resettlements. In this case, there is the possibility that some central intrinsic features of intercultural communication — as mutual respect and understanding — can be lost. Furthermore, increasing waves of populism in the host countries are charging the terms 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' with negative connotations. In this context, how can intercultural communication support refugee and asylum seeker resettlement within the host society?

Communication as a 'primary social process'

In these circumstances, communication creates meaning, considered as a 'primary social process' (Pearce and Pearce, 2000, p. 408) focused on co-constructed events and tools produced by cooperative interactants. Actions are not a summative product, but rather a succession of meaningful sequences, giving special significance to the episodes. An episode has been defined as 'any part of human life, involving one or more people, in which some internal structure can be determined' (Harré and Secord, 1973, p. 153). According to Pearce (1976), explaining communication is necessary to differentiate episodes on the basis of what they are referring to. Pearce identifies three episodes referring to individuals' patterns of meanings and behaviours. Episode 1 refers to the patterns of meanings and behaviours that individuals learn from their culture, and exists independently of subjects. Episode 2 is the individual's understanding of social interactions. Episode 3 refers to the interpretation that communicators give to a sequence of messages that they co-construct. Consequently, two persons communicate when they select or construct an action (Episode 2) from their own cultural repertoire of patterns (Episode 1), aspiring to enact what they want or what they think is appropriate. The actions enacted by both communicators structure Episode 3.

The current study assumes that an episodic-oriented analysis of the intercultural interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian organisation is necessary for understanding communication dynamics and the reason the interactants choose a certain strategy instead of another. Despite the spread of national populism against the phenomenon of immigration, contemporary Western society is characterised by *multiculturalism*,¹¹ by people's desire for contact with different cultures and traditions (Pearce, 1976). Nonetheless, there are population groups in the world who are compelled to change their context (country) to improve their lives; consequently, they are faced with resettlement within host societies. This situation frequently leads to interaction and communication with others who did not experience a similar Episode 1, or conflictual Episode 2. Hence, there may be difficulties in the coordination of their management of meanings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, intercultural communication occurs through a culture-general approach with focus on the individual, and not on his/her belonging to a cultural group, such as refugees and asylum seekers. Further, within the intercultural interaction, culture is an element in continuous

¹¹ In this context, the word multiculturalism intends to mean the presence of different cultural groups in the same territory.

metamorphosis, influenced by daily interchanges with others. Therefore, what is the real role of culture in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers? In the interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and, humanitarian organisations what is the role played by culture?

According to Kelly (1955), people are able to construct and understand an Episode 3 going beyond their cultural patterns (Episode 1) and their private symbols (Episode 2). In doing this, people process information combining the rules for meaning — describing the way in which information is elaborated within the hierarchical model — and their actions. Pearce and Cronen (1980) make a net distinction between rules of meaning in two aspects of the information process, categorising them as constitutive rules and regulative rules. Constitutive rules establish the meaning of the action, whereas regulative rules cognitively reorganise constitutive rules. The focus on antecedent circumstances contextualising subsequent circumstances conditions the execution of particular actions.

In the intercultural interaction, communicators coordinate their interpretation of meanings at an abstract level, to create the context of the episode they are acting. After contextualising the action, interactants will consider the previous act of the sequence within the frame of their personal narratives and their relationship. All these elements make sense only within the coordinated context, which considers a sequence of actions.

Furthermore, Pearce and Cronen (1980) involve the concept of ‘logical force’ (Hall, 1977) to explain the interpersonal rule system created by individuals’ communication, which is combined with actions. The main aspects of this concept are the prefigurative and the practical logical forces. Both aspects exist in interpersonal rule systems and lead to the choice of one action rather than another. Prefigurative force refers to specific acts in the rule structure, which are imposed by existing prior acts. It is the representation of the sentence ‘I did that because of ...’. Practical force, in turn, links acts to targeted consequences, and is represented in the sentence ‘I did that in order to ...’ (Pearce and Cronen, 1980, p. 164). Refugees, asylum seekers and organisations are driven from both these aspects of rule systems, even though the interaction among them is often equivocal and ambiguous.

The behaviour of an immigrant could assume multiple appearances, enriched with the interpretation given by the operator, which could fit with a different pattern. Further, it may be that the interpersonal rule system does not appropriately respond to indicate the specific

behaviour to enact or the correct interpretation of it. Both immigrants and operators need to share the same rule system to coordinate their understanding of meanings and their actions. In this way, they would correctly interpret the significance of any reaction to certain behaviours. According to Pearce (1976), there are more ways to coordinate actions within an episode; negotiation appears to best fit intercultural interaction, because it allows people to compromise their Episode 2 in order to achieve a satisfactory mode of resettlement.

Humanitarian organisations, intercultural communication and resettlement process

The term resettlement reflects the participation of refugees and asylum seekers in all aspects of social life. Immigrants participating in the social interactions of the new environment from all points of view, such as social, economic, cultural, and spiritual, are able to participate in the ‘construction and reconstruction of the society’ (Haddad, 2003, p. 20). From this perspective, intercultural communication is employed to explain and understand a practical way in which an effective resettlement is applied. An example is explaining to a refugee how the labour market of Western societies works, stressing the differences with the refugee’s previous situation, as well as the complexity of the application process, which requires correct evidence of skills and characteristics requested by that job. In that example, humanitarian organisations should give a clear and correct understanding of the structural system of the labour market, in order to allow immigrants the opportunity to enter and actively participate in the host society and the new environment. Another example is access to the healthcare system, which may be greatly different to that of the origin countries of refugees and asylum seekers. In that case, the ability of NGOs and CBOs is based on their degree of understanding how important it is to comprehensively present the host system in addition to the operators’ capacity to objectively illustrate the differences and create the virtual ‘bridge’ (Putnam, 2000, p. 22).

Based on this theory, the study focuses on how intercultural communication, supposedly involved in the interactions between refugees and asylum seekers and host organisations, could contribute to an effective and positive resettlement. The study is based on two key assumptions that originate from NGO and CBO definitions and purposes stated in the literature. The first is that NGOs and CBOs plan their strategies adopting an intercultural perspective, aiming to

achieve mutual appreciation and recognition. The second, considering the core of this perspective, assumes that the employment of intercultural communication raises the impact of NGOs' and CBOs' contribution in the process of resettlement. NGOs and CBOs, who are the first connection that refugees and asylum seekers have with the host society (Fiske, 2006), have an active and positive role in assisting those immigrants to become an active part of the host society. The operators of NGOs and CBOs, practicing an equitable dialogue with the immigrants and employing intercultural ethics, are able to indirectly influence the opportunity of refugees and asylum seekers to become involved in the host society. Indeed, explaining the new social context to an appropriate extent and providing tools to reach an effective inclusiveness are refined intercultural tools, intrinsically related to the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. In the course of the intercultural communication process, individuals bridge the existing cultural gap exerting two typical human behaviours: assuming the role of the other and the self-reflection. These mechanisms of management of meanings support the achievement of an intercultural agreement, testing the validity of the interpretation of the others and, therefore, deciding in which way to enact an episode. Nevertheless, communication among different cultural groups still does not lead to effective or expected results. This point allows the present study to ask questions about intercultural communication and the effective role of cultural patterns, and how far they can affect the communication process.

Furthermore, the study considers two specific components of intercultural communication: the knowledge and the affective. The knowledge component refers to the principle that persons reflect, behave and perceive the world in different ways (Ioppolo, 2014). The affective component involves emotions that determine the motivation and the effectiveness to interact with others: fear, pleasure/displeasure, anger/stress, unperceived emerging needs and prejudice (Liu et al., 2015; Ioppolo, 2014). These components can be easily connected with the CMM theory, referring to the different cultural background of the involved actors (Episode 1) and the refugees' and asylum seekers' behaviour (Episode 2). A different cultural background could imply a contrasting understanding/interpretation of the principles in which the host society is founded, even though common values are shared. Moreover, a person's available set of behaviours can affect the process of resettlement, including practical inclusion in the host society. Hence, the role of communication in refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement is deeply relevant. This research aims to study the two elements — knowledge and affective — and to what extent they affect the communication process.

It becomes quite important for the management of migratory flows (humanitarian or not) when organisations dealing with them are able to build dialogue, offering — in the contexts of welcoming — concrete perspectives for enhancing the migrants' presence and participation in the host society. From this point of view, communication becomes a key part of the mission of NGOs and CBOs. NGOs and CBOs are expected to deal with the relationship regarding the presence of refugees and asylum seekers, and that will be reflected in how the host society will perceive their presence and accept it without dispute (Brandalise, 2002). In doing so, stakeholders of the host society will also be involved in the dialogue. Consequently, it becomes possible to imagine initiatives related to the dissemination of information, to the construction of a shared image of immigrants, and to their direct participation within host societies. Initiatives such as community centres, religious leaders and educational centres organising gatherings as occasions to create direct contact with refugees and asylum seekers. This would be crucial for the resettlement process because it gives the host society the opportunity to create a realistic awareness of immigrants' situation and to compare that entity with the image proposed by mainstream entities, such as media and political parties.

In the interaction established between humanitarian organisations and refugees and asylum seekers, communication focuses on different aspects: the operator of the association will strive to achieve the elements which are key to effective cross-cultural communication; similarly, immigrants will try to estimate what and how they need to report, in order to send a clear message concerning their needs. The simple challenge for all involved is to establish what kinds of prime elements are to be included in the message.

Communication as strategy

One of the aims of this research is to identify the strategies adopted by the humanitarian organisations in order to ensure an achievable and effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers into the new society. The study intends to position intercultural communication as a practical tool in supporting the resettlement of these individuals, facilitating the construction of new connections and relationships with the new community and with other cultures.

The CMM perspective establishes a foundation of communication in specific contexts. To highlight this assumption, this study gives priority to the context of the interaction, the quality of conceptualisation and dialogue between interactants involving the profile of ‘facilitator’. Aspects related to conventional practices such as reaction, remedy/assistance (instead of prevention) and division (accusation and victimisation) are prejudiced only to majorly focus on the intercultural practices adopted by interactants. Humanitarian organisations are mainly involved in practices related to the assistance of refugees and asylum seekers. Nevertheless, that assistance is both practical and psychological; indeed NGOs and CBOs not only supply essential goods and accommodation, but also organise courses to enhance the ability of the refugees and asylum seekers to adapt and resettle in the new society. They also provide psychological support for a clear understanding of how the host society functions on certain levels. Through communication, NGOs and CBOs act to bridge different cultures and make clear to the refugees and asylum seekers the commonly termed 'rights and duties'. The efficiency of the strategies adopted by the humanitarian organisations — information and education, advocacy, and legal, medical and humanitarian assistance — is related to the way in which they are provided and communicated. If refugees and asylum seekers clearly acknowledge how the system to access community services and labour market is structured, and how the community supports their resettlement, their resettlement in the host society will be easier and more tangible. By establishing that dialogue, humanitarian organisations are facilitating the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the host society and enhancing the opportunity for an effective resettlement.

The concept of ‘facilitation’, introducing the profile of ‘facilitator’, is applied in this study in the context of NGOs and CBOs responses when establishing first contacts between refugees/asylum seekers and host societies. According to Pearce and Pearce (2000), the role of the facilitator is characterised by its responsibilities, including the establishment of an environment of mutual trust and respect, active listening, assistance with communication, and advocacy. In this context, the humanitarian organisation’s role becomes a blend of being participant in the dialogue as well as a leader of the co-constructed episode. In doing so, the functions of NGOs and CBOs are not connected just to a language factor which, even if relevant for the resettlement of these individuals, is not sufficient to construct an effective participation in the host society. These organisations need to take into account the socio-cultural factor as well, bridging the rule systems of meanings between immigrants and host societies. They are acting as intercultural mediators, operating to promote and create cultural and factual situations

based on mutual trust and respect. However, even though the role of the intercultural mediation is recognised at an international level (European Union, 2009), often the role of the mediator is misunderstood or underestimated, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

The communication established between the operators of the humanitarian associations and refugees and asylum seekers depends on the interaction created in this context. In some cases, the interaction is framed as social service, identifying themes and situations directly related to the induction of organisational aspects: daily actions as what to accomplish first, which offices or public institutions to approach for resolving specific issues, how to properly act. In determined cases, the operators of NGOs and CBOs focus their attention on dimensions related to the sensibility and the cultural identity of refugees and asylum seekers. In this respect, there are several aspects regarding the development of this interest. A humanitarian operator could focus on a specific cultural characteristic of an immigrant but, in case the strategy of the association leads to remove cultural differences, he/she will strictly follow a politically correct perspective. In any case, if the operator wants to deepen the cultural aspect and give the refugee/asylum seeker a chance to reveal it, how can he/she accomplish this mission? How will he/she interpret the immigrant's will to express it or not?

Furthermore, humanitarian organisations could adopt an additional strategy. Through the dialogue, NGOs and CBOs communicate the nature and the situation of refugees and asylum seekers, and the opportunities available in the social and cultural contexts in which the reception takes place. Society can be called on to communicate the nature and the context in which refugees and asylum seekers are welcomed to the host society; such a direct connection with immigrants creates an interaction that gives society an understanding of the resettlement of these individuals, a greater understanding than gained by dealing with the professionals who assist the migrants. When NGOs and CBOs involve stakeholders from the host society, a stronger connection is created between immigrants and citizens that strengthens participation in the reconstruction of daily social interactions. Stakeholders from the host society are those able to influence opinion on public issues, such as church leaders of parishes with immigrant members, schools with teachers who apply to their teaching programs an intercultural perspective, or local media to name a few (Brandalise, 2002). Ultimately, people, acting in interactions that lead to mutual and positive experiences, trigger a virtuous circuit in which the construction of the label of refugees or asylum seekers, or immigrants has a positive prospective.

The Refugee Council Of Australia (2014) and SPRAR (2015) identified priority areas in which humanitarian organisations should focus their attention. Although organised differently, the identified areas cover the same key topics and show similar approaches to the main questions on resettlement issues. The RCOA selected six priority areas and SPRAR selected nine, but all are developed to enable a full use of the instrument of the intercultural communication to achieve the purposes indicated. The purposes of the humanitarian associations can be summarised as providing services and organising activities and events, in order to affect the reception system (Esty, 1998; Weiss and Gordenker, 1996; Ohanyan, 2009).

Conclusion

The theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter centre the study on the role of humanitarian associations within the context of the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The everyday dialogue and actions of interactants become relevant from the communication perspective, not other criteria as class, gender or ideology. The communication perspective is grounded on the assumption that what people do during their interactions gives meaning to the social context. Consequently, the cognition and the affective components set the experience of communication through cultural patterns, attitudes and behaviours. In this way, the practices of humanitarian associations during the resettlement process do not label refugees and asylum seekers as such, but rather as participants in the various interactions that happen in the everyday life of those belonging to a society. Furthermore, they work on aspects focused on the nature of the speech act, relationships, the nature of episodes and cultures (Pearce, 2004) of the communicators, enabling NGOs and CBOs to transform power relations in collaborative participations. In doing so, they are enacting a crucial feature of intercultural communication, which is finding a way to use actions and meanings to create interactions through which people can actively participate in the society. This participation reflects an involvement in many and varied aspects of the reconstruction of the society.

This research intends to explore the use of intercultural communication as a practical tool in supporting the refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process. In order to achieve its scope, the study focuses on the interaction that takes place within NGOs and CBOs that are dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. These particular associations are considered the first

connection between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society (Fiske, 2006). Following this intent, the chapter explained the concept of communication that guides the analysis of the empirical data in the forthcoming chapters. Pearce and Pearce (2000, p. 408) consider communication as being able to create meaning, a 'primary social process' focused on co-constructed events/tools produced by cooperating interactants. This study affirms that NGO and CBO actions are equivalent to those acted by the facilitators identified by Pearce and Pearce (2000). It states that these actions are able to increase the level of resettlement of immigrants by helping them to understand the host society and to change the meanings of both. The researcher assumes that these organisations, in the construction of communication, utilise intercultural skills. Furthermore, they question the role played by the culture context in this interaction, claiming that in facilitating the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, the higher levels of the hierarchy of meaning in this communication should be the episode context. In this way, it would be possible to focus on that specific interaction, which could lead to collaboration, learning, and conflict in some cases.

Chapter Four

Methodology: Researching humanitarian organisations

In investigating how intercultural practices contribute to the effectiveness of resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers, this research specifically focused on the role played by Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations. With the aim of creating a diversified and sufficient sample for this study, 15 Australian and Italian organisations involved in the provision of support services for refugees and asylum seekers were invited to respond. The advantage of the case study method was that it could rely on and benefit from multiple qualitative methods. This chapter outlines the research methods involved in this study, the process of selection of NGOs and CBOs in Australia and Italy, and the strategies adopted in organising and managing the collection of primary and secondary data.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section refers to the research strategy adopted, motivating the choice for a variety of available methods, both qualitative and quantitative. The second section focuses on the methods adopted to collect data, explaining why the qualitative methods of interview, observation and reflection were chosen. This section explains how the interviews were conducted and how profiles of interviewees were selected, including volunteers, operators and coordinators. Then, it frames the process of observation and reflection within two contexts: in direct interaction and communication between humanitarian organisations staff and their clients, and through participation in meetings organised by these associations to plan and program strategies and events. The last section explains how the collected data was organised and thematically codified. Themes were drawn out from the data collected and used in the analysis of the findings to respond to the research questions examined by this study.

A case study approach

In order to investigate the ways in which intercultural practices enacted by humanitarian organisations support the resettlement of these individuals, the current research investigates a series of case studies.

The case study strategy favoured an in-depth research on the practices involved in different contexts/organisations. According to Yin (1994), this research strategy aligns with studies meeting three specific conditions. Firstly, the research questions of the study are shaped with the adverbs ‘how’ and ‘why’, focusing on processes and reasons that triggered the phenomenon. This research principally questions ‘how’ the intercultural practices utilised by NGOs and CBOs in supporting refugees and asylum seekers contribute to their resettlement. Furthermore, it analyses ‘how’ these associations enact the interaction with their clients, ‘how’ and ‘why’ intercultural communication processes contribute to the resettlement, and ‘why’ NGOs and CBOs provide certain services but not others. The second condition to be observed refers to the extent of the researcher’s control over the facts examined. Yin (1994) affirms that one of the strengths of the case study strategy is in ‘its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence — documents, artefacts, interviews, and observation’ (p. 8), which allow access to an exclusive level of information. For this study, the researcher did not have any control of the events he investigated, however major attention was required for preserving an impartial role when participating in meetings of the associations involved and observing the interactions. The last condition mentions current events, which in this research is interpreted through present-day concerns regarding refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement in the host societies.

The case study research strategy was employed to explore NGOs’ and CBOs’ contribution to the resettlement process and its outcomes (Yin, 1994). As Creswell (2009) explains, case studies are bound in their activity; likewise this research was concentrated on a pre-specified period of time, examining resettlement activities between 2016 and 2017.

Fifteen NGOs and CBOs were selected for case studies, using as criteria their activities to facilitate the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. As performers of the first connection between people seeking asylum, refugees and host societies (Fiske, 2006), these associations were considered high-potential case studies for collecting and analysing data on the intercultural practices employed to enhance humanitarian immigrants’ resettlement. Australia

and Italy were chosen as the locations of NGOs and CBOs because of their significance as favourite destinations on the global map of migration, although with different functions. Australia represents the final destination of the journey that asylum seekers are constrained to complete, while often Italy was considered as a gateway to a resettlement in Europe.

For each organisation, several volunteers/operators and a representative of the management board were interviewed, totalling 42 participants. Because of their different functions within the Australian and Italian reception systems, the associations involved in this research presented different constitutions and structures. Australian associations have an institutional role in the reception of refugees. They offer a consistent range of services, privately and voluntarily, to asylum seekers and other people in need. Conversely, Italian organisations have a structured role in every phase of the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers.

Table 4.1 compares the nature and funding of the Australian and Italian organisations. In Australia, four out of six associations were identified as presenting both non-governmental and community-based characteristics, and the remaining two were funded by the Victorian government. However, all were defined by their membership in the local community, engaging in its process of change and responding to the need of collective belonging. These organisations were providing support services to facilitate refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement, although utilising different client-targets and provisional methods. Three of these associations limited their services to people seeking asylum, while the others provided assistance to all clients experiencing hardship, immigrants and locals. Australian interviewees were mostly volunteer operators or even coordinators; however, four out of six managers and operators were paid staff. Most activities took place in the state of Victoria, however one association was operative in the states of Queensland and New South Wales.

Table 4.1 Australian and Italian organisations: comparison of nature and funding.

<i>Country</i>	Organisations involved (both NGOs and CBOs)	NGOs	CBOs	Funded by government	Funded by private funds & donations
Australia	6	4	5	2	4
Italy	9	9	9	8	1

Nine Italian associations were involved in this project: five social cooperatives and four associations. NGOs and cooperatives both belong to the category of not-for-profit associations,

which are organisations engaged in the field of solidarity that address the profit to third parties and do not carry out commercial activities (Concas, 2015). NGOs are regulated through Act 49 (on 26 February 1987), which defines them as private organisations acting in the field of international solidarity. Cooperatives are a specific type of not-for-profit association established by Italian government through Act 381 (on 8 November 1991) with the aim of recalling the general interest of the community in promoting human and social inclusion among residents. There are two categories of social cooperative: type A, which provides social, educational and health services, and type B which supports disadvantaged people such as single mothers, ex-prisoners, drug addicts. This study analysed type A cooperatives acting in two of the three phases of the Italian reception system. They were mainly involved in Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS)¹² for asylum seekers and in accommodation structures subordinated to the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR)¹³ when interacting with refugees. The Italian system of reception is further explored in chapter five. Italian associations were classified as CBOs, because of their focus on engaging the community change in their quality of service providers. They were an active part of the reception system, receiving funding from the government and employing paid staff. One organisation only was not involved in the system and relied only on volunteers/activists in the provision of Italian language courses and casual accommodation. The Italian associations involved in this study were based in central and north Italy, delivering their activities in cities where the presence of immigrants was particularly high, such as Roma, Padova, Vicenza, Treviso, Bologna, Milano e Pesaro.

The case study strategy facilitates the collection of information using a variety of data collecting methods (Yin, 1994). Several qualitative methods are utilised to respond to complex issues regarding NGOs and CBOs practices in assisting asylum seekers and refugees. The qualitative approach is used to analyse intercultural practices and their role in shaping and supporting the resettlement process, employing the intercultural perspective as a theoretical filter (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative methods of interviews, observation and reflection were utilised for an in-depth exploration of the interaction and communication created by NGOs and CBOs. Mainly utilising qualitative data, this study also considers existing secondary data for a more accurate definition of the operational framework. The existing secondary data consisted

¹² Acronym of Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria.

¹³ Acronym of Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati.

of figures referring to refugees and asylum seekers receiving assistance, and their presence in the reception structures.

Qualitative methods for data collection: interviews, observation and reflection

This research utilised the qualitative methods of interviews, observation and reflection to explore the interaction enacted between associations and refugees and asylum seekers. These methods were identified as most appropriate in accessing the ‘untold stories’ (Pearce, 2004) of people involved in the activities of humanitarian organisations. The intercultural nature and role of interaction were identified as main factors in the resettlement process.

The investigation is balanced by interviews and observation to address the research questions, in common with complementary theories of reflective analysis and experiential learning (Moon, 1999; Schon, 1983). They highlight the potential that reflection has as a means of developing a researcher’s awareness of the field. This research was inspired by the researcher’s experiential reflection, and also on the reflections of several scholars and theorists whose impact and focus in the field is well acknowledged. The interviews have provided significant insight into how different policies, geographical and cultural contexts influence the enactment of intercultural practices performed by humanitarian NGOs and CBOs in Australia and Italy.

Participants were recruited with the active contribution of the management of NGOs and CBOs, who enabled access to their networks. The *snowball* method was applied, using participants’ potential to facilitate further possible connections. Further planning was required to create a heterogeneous group of interviewees by avoiding the recruitment of staff with similar experiences. The criteria for selection also considered the opportunity to collect data from both local and foreign participants. In other words, the interviews included former refugees and asylum seekers now resettled and actively volunteering and/or working in the resettlement process.

The interviews

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in this study, utilising open-ended questions to identify and prompt new points of view for exploring and

increasing the insight into the topic (Appendices A and B). Oakley (1998) claims that not only are interactions and outcomes documented within the framework of qualitative research interview, but also how the interviews lead to new views, challenge expectations or reinforce meaningful concepts. Most interviews are lightly, in-depth or semi-structured (Mason, 1994), however unstructured interviews are generally considered most appropriate for research fieldwork that involves a long-term investigation. Unstructured interviews allow participants to provide data expressed in their own terms and points of view. For this specific kind of interview, the interviewer does not have control over the replies (Corbin and Morse, 2003).

The current study utilised semi-structured interviews to explore the interaction and communication enacted by NGOs and CBOs with refugees and asylum seekers. The in-depth interviews collected responses to a pre-set of open-ended questions, which apply better to face-to-face individual interaction (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) that lasts for 30–60 minutes (DiCiccio-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The interview guide (Appendices A and B) is a schematic presentation of questions or topics that the research aims to explore. The interview guide is a tool for the interviewer to maintain the focus of the interview and to conduct many interviews with different respondents systematically (DiCiccio-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Participants were divided into two groups: volunteers/operators and representatives of management boards. Volunteers and operators were selected and interviewed because of their direct participation in the ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116), creating interaction with refugees and asylum seekers. They represent the main strength of these organisations, providing services and facilitating the interpretation of host society codes through the daily interaction they enact. The choice to interview a member of the management board was motivated by the necessity to investigate the planning level of strategies. The involvement of organisation management board representatives was crucial, as they also provided a point of view referring to the political direction of these groups: that is, were they providing services at a community level or were they contributing to the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers? The interviews provided different points of views, different stories and historical information about the context investigated.

Volunteers, operators and coordinators were selected because they were able to fairly represent NGOs’ and CBOs’ efforts in supporting refugee and asylum seeker resettlement, a choice justified by the investigation of intercultural practices utilised by these individuals. This

strategy was adopted in order to focus on humanitarian organisations’ activities in supporting the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. A direct involvement of the clients of these associations — that is of these types of immigrants — was not necessary because of the participation of volunteers, operators and coordinators who had already experienced the process of seeking asylum and being a refugee.

The study further focused on the concerns and personal experiences of participants, examining the actual practices deployed by NGOs and CBOs to create and enact the interaction. Table 4.2 compares participants from Australian and Italian organisations. A total of 42 interviews with volunteers, operators and coordinators were conducted in Australia and Italy. In Australia, 20 interviews were conducted in six organisations involving six coordinators, 13 with volunteers and one operator were realised. In Italy, nine associations provided participants for 22 interviews, including eight coordinators, 13 operators and one volunteer.

Table 4.2 Participants from Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs.

<i>Country</i>	Organisations	Coordinators	Operators	Volunteers	Native	Foreigner
Australia	6	7	1	12	14	6
Italy	9	8	13	1	15	7
TOTALS	15	15	14	13	29	13

Participants were asked a range of non-invasive questions regarding their professional practices and interaction with refugees and asylum seekers. This study was designed to document staff experiences in developing their practice as facilitators (Pearce and Pearce, 2000) in communication between host society and refugees/asylum seekers. The interviews were conducted and audio recorded face-to-face, gathering data on how intercultural practices supported and contributed to immigrants’ resettlement, focusing on interaction, communication and strategies. They were designed and conducted to understand the intercultural aspect of respondents’ communication and interaction skills, and to analyse the adoption of different approaches among participants or organisations.

For this reason, the interviews were structured in two parts: the first consisted in collecting demographic information on respondents, and the second focused on the aspects investigated by research argument (Appendices A and B). The first part examined data regarding

respondent's specific details. Participants were questioned on their role within the organisation, education, spoken languages, on the motivation they had to start volunteering or work in this field, and the time they spent supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement. The ethnicity of interviewees was also considered in the analysis, intending to highlight the presence of individuals who personally experienced the process of resettlement in new societies and had achieved the right to participate in the community. From this perspective, the use of terms that recall legal definitions were avoided — such as citizenship or nationality. For example, enquiring into the citizenship of participants, the researcher would have collected data about their legal status, without having the opportunity to access information on possible significant components of their cultural backgrounds. This part of the interview was extremely useful in understanding past experiences of the participants, which could have affected the hierarchy of meanings (Pearce and Cronen, 1980) in interpreting and enacting actions in communication.

The second part of the interview to gather primary data for this research focused on four topics. The first topic concerned the interaction among different cultural groups. It investigated the meaning of the term 'culture', allowing interviewees to decode their personal hierarchy of meanings of actions referring to this kind of interaction. Then, it focused on how the interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds was generally perceived. The second topic explored was in regard to interaction and communication. This part of interview aimed to uncover the use of specific skills used in communicating or in creating interaction with refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, within these arguments the research also investigated connections between the communication enacted by the respondents and the resettlement processes of their clients. The third area focused on two distinctive elements of intercultural communication, that is, the knowledge and the affective components (Ioppolo, 2014). The researcher investigated these elements in order to find out how they affected the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The last topic regarded strategies and practices adopted by the associations. That was necessary to understand how the organisations involved in this study acted to enhance the effectiveness level of refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement in the host society. The researcher also intended to analyse the practical contribution of NGOs and CBOs. In other words, whether they were providing support services at a community level and changing the immigration policies adopted in Australia and Italy.

Observations

Observation procedures collected additional data. Volunteers and operators were observed in their work context in order to take field notes of behaviour and activities. The research involved observation that did not include participation in the interaction (Creswell, 2009). This approach was taken for the direct experience of intercultural communication, and to observe particular or negative aspects of the interaction. Observation was semi-structured and focused on a few prior questions involving the knowledge and the affective components of the intercultural communication. More specifically, it allowed the researcher to note the role played by these components — feelings and cultural background — in forming the interaction and to discover critical aspects of communication. Observation took place at the research site where the intercultural interaction emerged spontaneously in the context of humanitarian organisations' activities.

In Australia, observation concerned the direct interaction between volunteers and refugees and asylum seekers during the provision of services such as English courses and the provision of basic material relief. The researcher also had the opportunity to observe the initial interaction with these immigrants in which the focus was on the first assessment and advocacy. This interaction was particularly relevant to this research because it highlighted the mutuality of the relationship and the extent to which culture was taken into account to create the interaction.

The observation of the operators working for the Italian associations was instead focused on the interaction and communication with refugees and asylum seekers during daily interactions within organisations' housing structures. These observations were necessary because of the different systems of reception in use in Australia and Italy. As Australian associations supporting asylum seekers do not provide accommodation, the interaction mainly occurred during the provision of the services. Conversely, the Italian law regarding the reception of refugees and asylum seekers makes it compulsory to provide accommodation and Italian language classes (Australian and Italian reception systems will be more fully compared in the next chapter). In this way, Italian operators had the opportunity to create a relationship that went beyond the provision of services, because they had a constant presence during the refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process.

The researcher's positionality during observations relates to his Italian background and experience in working as both a paid intercultural mediator and also a volunteer in private and public organisations. These organisations provided support services for refugees and asylum seekers. The researcher was keen to learn about the interactions within these organisations from the perspectives of coordinators, operators and volunteers who were working within these types of associations. In doing so, he mainly focused on NGO and CBO workers' effort to create effective communication, rather than on refugees' and asylum seekers' reactions. However, both in Australia and Italy the researcher found a welcoming and comfortable environment where the interactions occurred in a very friendly way. During all the observations refugees and asylum seekers did not appear to be annoyed by the presence of the researcher, or to limit the interaction with the organisation staff.

To further refine the analysis of humanitarian organisations' action plans and of the criteria for their elaboration, the researcher attended several meetings organised in Italy and Australia, even though those meetings were different in substance and purpose. In Australia the meetings focused on resettlement issues resulting from governmental initiatives. They were organised through the Migration Settlement Committee (Eastern Region) in Melbourne, and addressed issues regarding strategies to adopt, and apply through the organisation of cultural events or other activities. In Italy, the meetings were managed by the associations themselves, and organised occasionally with specific purposes, such as occasions to campaign against immigration policies adopted by the government. Another difference between the meetings attended in Australia and Italy was their composition. In Australia, representatives of public institutions — such as from Victoria Police Community Engagement — were present at all the meetings, proposing new activities and supporting the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. However, in Italy meetings were not attended by representatives of any public institution. The researcher attended these meetings with the purpose of better understanding the processes used by NGOs and CBOs supporting refugees and asylum seekers to organise their activities.

Methods of analysis

After the transcription of the recorded data, the responses were organised and coded under thematic headings. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a theme ‘captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’ (p. 82). The current project identified four themes of interest related to the relationship between intercultural practices adopted by humanitarian organisations and the processes of refugee and asylum seeker resettlement. The first theme was about the way in which the participants identified the term ‘culture’ and how it affected the interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds. The second theme revealed how volunteers, operators and coordinators constructed and enacted the interaction with their clients. Here, it was possible to identify the interaction as intercultural, and the role played in this interaction by the cultural elements that derived from the country of origin of the interactants.

The third theme was about communication patterns adopted by the interviewees as well as the problematics encountered. Further sub-themes focused on the two elements of communication explored in this project: the knowledge and the affective components (Ioppolo, 2014). Finally, the fourth theme focused on the strategies NGOs and CBOs adopted to increase the effectiveness of refugee and asylum seeker resettlement. Three sub-themes were developed in order to investigate activities and intents of these associations in-depth. They related to the services provided by the organisations, their purposes, and the ways in which they interacted with host communities and governments in order to make public and promote the needs and circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers.

The encoding process was developed and analysed without computer support, in order to connect the transcript of the interviews and observations to the situational and emotional context that emerged during the field research. Subsequently, the exploration of codes generated a description of the intercultural contexts created by the humanitarian organisations involved in this research project. The analysis was conducted in reference to the areas identified by the research questions. The first being the assessment of the practices exerted within the activities of these organisations: that is, were they intercultural practices? The analytical goal consisted of exploring the exertion of these practices in creating interaction and communication with refugees and asylum seekers. The aim of the second area was to observe whether

intercultural practices effectively played a role in refugees/asylum seekers' resettlement processes. The third area focused on the strategies deployed in the NGOs and CBOs environment, questioning their role in providing support services and in putting pressure on governments to change immigration policies. This last set of data was mainly gathered during interviews with representatives from management boards.

The exposition of the outcomes involved a mixed narrative-descriptive approach. Narrative was adopted in order to report the findings in detail, examining interconnected issues, and the descriptive approach reported data from participants. The final interpretation of data allowed observation of the different ways and extent to which intercultural communication is practiced in the support and promotion of refugee and asylum seeker resettlement. To put it another way, the study examined whether specific components of intercultural communication — such as knowledge or affective — were indeed effective in influencing the capacity of refugees and asylum seekers to successfully be included in the host society.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the methods for collecting data from Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs. The associations were selected because they created the first connection between refugees, asylum seekers and host societies, and for their role in providing essential services and pressuring governments for legislative change (Fiske, 2006). It explored characteristics of 15 Australian and Italian associations that were providing support services to people seeking asylum and refugees. The research examined associations in Australia and Italy because of their relevance to immigrant flows in their corresponding geographical areas.

The case study research strategy allowed in-depth research on the intercultural practices deployed by several organisations, with the opportunities to compare different activities and interactions. The case study application to the exploration of NGOs' and CBOs' contribution to the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers was particularly useful because it allows the use of qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation. Qualitative methods of interviews and observation were employed to achieve a full understanding of the interaction and communication created by NGOs and CBOs participating in this study. Quantitative data from existing secondary data sets — such as the number of assisted refugees and asylum

seekers, and their presence in the reception facilities — was analysed to further define the context of these associations and their activities.

Interviews were face-to-face, and semi-structured with a schematic presentation of questions grouped in topics. In this research project, respondents comprised volunteers/operators and representatives from management boards. Volunteers and operators were selected and interviewed because of their direct employment in creating the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers, and the representatives from management boards for each organisation were interviewed to investigate the planning level of their strategies. This study involved a total of 42 interviews with volunteers, operators and coordinators in both Australia and Italy. The structure of the interviews was designed to focus the investigation on four main aspects: the interaction among different cultural groups; the interaction and communication between refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian organisations; the knowledge and the affective components of the communication enacted by the participants; and the strategies and practices adopted by them. Together, these four aspects shaped the collection of the primary data for this research.

Observation allowed the researcher to collect data regarding two distinct aspects. The first involved volunteers and operators, and attempted to reach the direct experience of intercultural communication with refugees and asylum seekers. The second aspect of the research that involved observation aimed to refine the analysis of humanitarian organisations strategies. In doing so, the researcher attended association meetings both in Italy and Australia. Although meetings dealt with similar topics, such as their contribution to change immigration policies and in connecting refugees and asylum seekers with host communities, meetings were substantially different. In Australia, these meetings were attended by representatives of public institutions, such as the police, but not in Italy. These differences highlighted the different approach of Australian and Italian associations in dealing with the coordination of their actions and those enacted by public institutions, resulting in cases of stories that were previously untold (Pearce, 2004).

Finally, the recorded data was transcribed, organised and coded by thematic headings inspired by the exploration of the relationship between intercultural practices adopted by humanitarian organisations, and refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process. Themes were created to: capture the main aspects of the interviews, such as the role played by 'culture', and how the

participants in this study interpreted the interaction with their clients; to examine communication patterns adopted by the interviewees as well as the problematics encountered; and strategies planned by humanitarian organisations to support refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement. The research design enabled this study to analyse the data in-depth and compare different associations in a systematic way so as to analyse specific components of intercultural communication and their effects on the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers.

Chapter Five

Systems of reception in Australia and Italy

This chapter presents existing statistical data concerning the processes of migrant flows in Australia and Italy. The reported statistical data were systematically organised and reviewed in a parallel analysis of the two contexts. The investigation focuses on the characteristics of several organisations operating within the two reception systems, and their role on refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. Further, different types of organisations that participated in this research will be presented, with particular regard to the structural differences between Australian and Italian associations.

The chapter has two sections that develop the argument from general and geographical characteristics of Australia and Italy to an interpretation of statistical data on migrants. Consequently, Australian and Italian reception systems are explored in order to provide an understanding of the asylum process and the role that humanitarian associations play in it. The first section analyses the geographical characteristics of the two countries, highlighting their impact on the respective immigration policies. Further, it considers data related to the presence of refugees and asylum seekers, requests for asylum, and figures referring to refugee status granted. The second section refers to the reception systems of Australia and Italy to manage refugee and asylum seeker flows, focusing on the role played by associations in the first stages of the resettlement process.

Refugee and asylum seeker contexts

In order to understand the role of intercultural practices adopted by humanitarian organisations in the refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process, it was necessary to explore the context in which they were received and assessed by the host countries. The reception had a crucial role in the immigrants' resettlement process, affecting their perception of the host society and the reception system developed by the governments. This section analyses the Australian and

Italian contexts from a broad point of view that considers refugee and asylum seeker resettlement, including the geographical characteristics, the number of requests of asylum received and number of refugee status granted, the structures in which the reception systems operate and, the different treatment given to refugees and asylum seekers.

This part of the chapter has two subsections. The first, *Australian and Italian contexts*, analyses statistical data displaying proportions between Australian and Italian surface, population and percentage of immigrants present in their territories. These factors affect host society's perception on immigrant issues, in some cases exasperating them and creating obstacles to communication and interaction. The second subsection, *Refugees' and asylum seekers' context in Australia and Italy*, reports on the numbers of people seeking asylum in Australia and Italy, and on the percentage of refugee status granted. The substantial amount of time taken before receiving an outcome to their application for recognition of refugee status negatively impacts on their resettlement process, altering their comprehension of host societies' characteristics. All data presented in this section refer to the year 2016.

Australian and Italian contexts

Australia and Italy have a similar role in the immigration routes of their respective areas, despite their different geographical characteristics. The main differences between the two countries specifically determine the impact of immigrants' presence on the territory (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Australian and Italian demographic details.

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Surface	7,692,024 km ²	302,073 km ²
Population	23,401,992	60,589,445
Population density per square km	3.04	200.57
Births in Foreign country	33.3%	8.3%

Sources: The Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Italian National Institute of Statistics.¹⁴

¹⁴ Statistical data referring to the two countries involved in the current study are available on the websites www.istat.it and www.abs.gov.au.

Australian territory is larger than the entire European continent, hosting a relatively low population — Australian residents counted just 3.16 per cent of European population in 2016 (Statistica, 2017). Australia's population density of 3.04 per square kilometre, can be explained by two key elements: the nature of available territory and the distribution of population itself. Indeed, almost 90 per cent of the Australian territory is uninhabited owing to extensive inhospitable areas within its borders. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than half of Australia's residents are concentrated in two states: New South Wales (7,739,274) and Victoria (6,179,249), with a major concentration in their greater cities, Sydney and Melbourne.

Despite strict Australian immigration legislation, the number of Australian residents who originate from other countries is one-third of the total population. It is worth underlining that Australia has been responsible, along with the United States of America, Canada, Sweden and Norway, for the resettlement of over 95 per cent of all refugees during the last 10 years. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2017), only two other countries process more refugees for resettlement than Australia does, although that fact refers only to migrants who sought asylum and achieved the status of refugee through the UN agency.

Conversely, the Italian surface area is limited — only 3.93 per cent of Australia's; the only uninhabited spaces are in higher and remote mountain areas or protected natural parks. In 2016, Italy's population was over 60 million, or 200.57 persons per square kilometre. The percentage of foreigners in Italy was significantly lower compared to Australia, as was the number of people in Italy with a different country of origin. Italy received the main flow of asylum seekers from Africa during the last decade, however the majority preferred to resettle in other European countries, such as Germany, France and England (Euro Stat, 2017). From this point of view, Italy appeared to be the preferred point of entrance in Europe for people seeking asylum in the northern hemisphere.

The geographical characteristics and locations of Australia and Italy affected governmental decisions referring to immigration policies, specifically for the reception systems of asylum seekers and refugees. Australia has a major concentration of people of different cultural background in the main cities, while in rural areas people without an English ancestor are fewer. Conversely, in Italy people of different backgrounds are equally spread across the territory. In terms of constructing the meanings of society and the immigration policies, the

geographical differences between Australia and Italy are relevant, along with other elements such as the economic status and the employment rate of the country.

Refugees' and asylum seekers' context in Australia and Italy

The geographical contexts of Australia and Italy impact on the structure of reception systems and on the way in which migration processes are managed. Australia stands in the Pacific Ocean, isolated from other countries by sea and allowing access to its territory only by boats and flights. Similarly, Italy is almost totally surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea; the only land border with the rest of Europe is in the north. However, the two countries reported substantial differences between the numbers of requests for asylum and, consequently, for all data referring to refugees and asylum seekers. Table 5.2 presents figures referring to refugees and asylum seekers for the year 2016.

Table 5.2 Refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and Italy – 2016.

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Requests of asylum	22,143	126,600
Granted requests	17,555	36,660
Boat arrivals	0	181,436
Resettled refugees	34,193	N.A.
Presence of refugees & asylum seekers in reception structures	27,174	188,084

Sources: The Refugee Council of Australia and the Australian Department of Home Affairs; the Italian UN Refugee Agency and the Italian Interior Ministry.¹⁵

During this period, more than 20 thousand people sought asylum in Australia, and almost 80 per cent of them were granted refugee status. However, it is worth noting that most people who were able to achieve refugee status in Australia arrived after completing the assessment process of UNHCR and were accepted as refugees before arrival, while only slightly over 2,000 individuals sought asylum in Australia. Furthermore, the reintroduction of rejecting unauthorised maritime arrivals from Australian waters by the Abbott Government in 2013

¹⁵ All the data was extracted from the websites: www.refugeecouncil.gov.au; www.homeaffairs.gov.au; www.unhcr.it; and www.interno.gov.it.

(Phillips, 2017) led to a reduction of arrivals of asylum seekers by boat. These characteristics of the Australian reception and immigration system will be examined in detail in the next section.

The analysis of the data referring to the years that precede and follow 2016 shows an increase of requests of asylum in both Australia and Italy. According to statistics published by the Australian government, Department of Home Affairs (2018), in 2015 the number of requests presented reached 26,955 units – a greater number than in 2016 and 2017, the trend remains positive with an increment of 968 requests. The same statistics explains the numerous requests presented in 2015 as due to the humanitarian situation of Syria and Iraq, which urged the Australian government to add 12,000 places above the planned 13,750 annual Humanitarian Program intake. The Italian Ministry of Interior Affairs website (2018) presents statistics showing similar positive and negative trends. During the three years taken into account the requests of asylum increased from 83,970 in 2015 to 130,119 in 2017, while the number of granted requests had a sudden decrease in 2017, due to a change of policy of the Italian government after the signature of a Memorandum of understanding (Uselli, 2017). It increased from 29,548 granted requests in 2015 to 36,660 in 2016, and then it came back to 33,873 requests with positive outcomes in 2017.

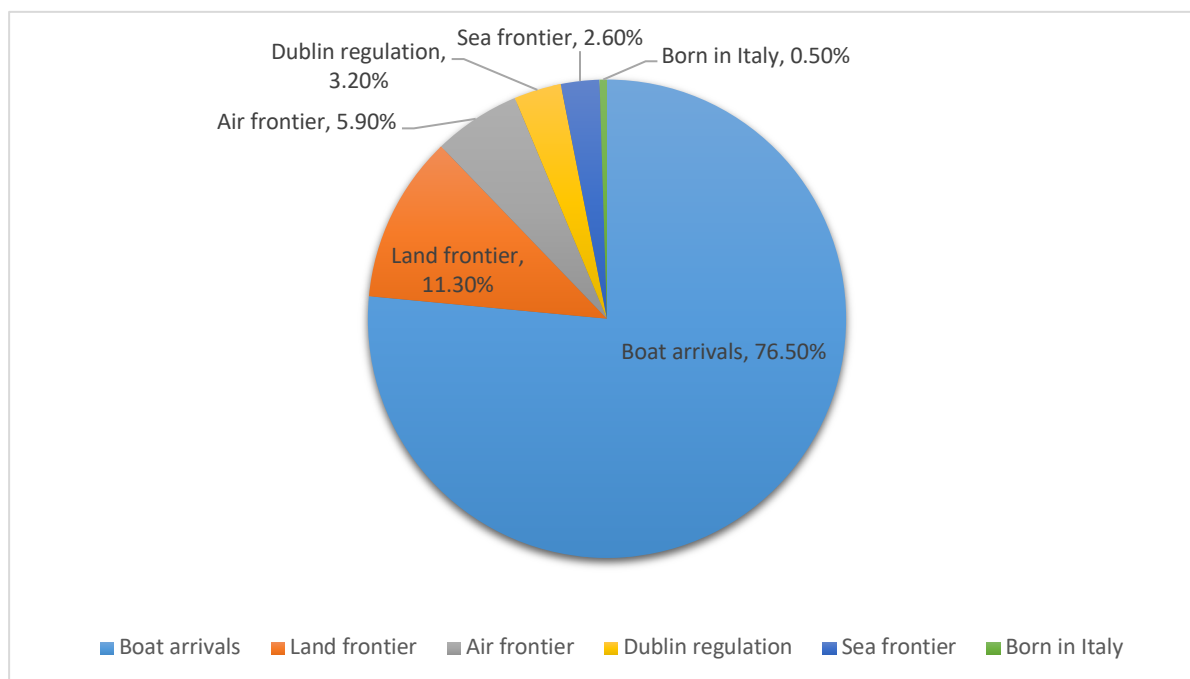
According to the RCOA website, during 2016 Australia resettled 34,194 refugees and asylum seekers, which represented 1.36 per cent of the 2.5 million refugees who received refugee protection or resettlement all over the world in the same period. Nevertheless, there were over 27 thousand individuals present in detention centres or community detention centres awaiting recognition of the status of refugee, or on bridging visas recognising the status of asylum seeker but disregarding many of the rights refugees have.

Despite its smaller territory, Italy received over 20 thousand people seeking asylum in 2016. In contrast to Australian decisions, the Italian government accepted only 29 per cent of asylum requests, and rejected the rest. This is reportedly on the grounds that, given the short distance between Italian and African coasts, numerous economic immigrants flee their countries of origin to resettle in Europe. For the same reason, immigrants who reached the Italian territory by boat represented the large majority (see Chart 5.1).

In 2016 more than 180,000 refugees and asylum seekers entered the Italian reception system. According to Italian legislation, the reception system was articulated in three phases

differentiated by size, organisation and purpose. The different scopes of these phases are examined in the following section, nevertheless here it is valuable to distinguish the three steps which are first aid and assistance, first reception, and second reception. The second phase, first reception, accommodated 80.8 per cent of people who sought asylum in Italy, the same people waiting for recognition of their status as asylum seeker or refugee.

Chart 5.1 Entries of asylum seekers in Italy – 2016



Source: <http://openmigration.org/infografiche#italia>.

In summary, both Australia and Italy play a key role in supporting the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers in their respective geographical areas, while implementing different systems to manage refugees and asylum seekers. Whereas Australia managed to stop unauthorised arrivals by boat and to focus on the resettlement of the UNHCR refugees, Italy concentrated its efforts on the reception of asylum seekers who mainly arrive by boat. Here it is evident the role played by the geographical characteristics of the two countries: Australia's isolated position and the nature of territory favour authorised immigration and allow a strict border control, but Italy dealt with a huge flow of immigrants from the North African coasts — 76.5 per cent of arrivals in Italy were by boat — making it difficult to filter requests for asylum.

Furthermore, the different sizes of territory and the differences between policies adopted in receiving refugees and asylum seekers have led local populations to build different perceptions

of immigration. Indeed, in Italy immigration is often perceived as an ‘invasion’ rather than an opportunity and a duty to support refugees and asylum seekers. In these contexts, it is useful to fully understand the role played by NGOs and CBOs in the reception process.

Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations within Australian and Italian reception systems

Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations support the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers both in Australia and Italy. They provide essential services that facilitate interaction and communication with the host society. They also report refugees’ and asylum seekers’ conditions to local communities, promoting and implementing their practices. Being part of the processes deployed by the governments, they play different roles in assisting refugees and asylum seekers as a result of different legislation aimed at managing the flow of refugee and asylum seekers. In order to better compare the organisational structures of Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs involved in the resettlement process, it is useful to briefly explain the two reception systems and the roles assigned to associations.

The reception systems of the two countries

The procedures of reception of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and Italy are substantially different. This section explores the procedures enabled by the two countries to manage asylum requests and the outcomes expected.

Australia’s asylum policy is centred on the modalities of arrival for people who seek asylum and claim refugee status. The Humanitarian program consists of two main components: offshore and onshore programs. The offshore program offers resettlement to people who were granted the status of refugee by UNHCR. Their places of departure are the first reception centres set up by the UN Refugee Agency near countries of origin, where they were assessed and recognised as refugees. This program also contains the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP). The SHP targets people who do not necessarily meet refugee assessment requirements, but who struggle to gain recognition of human rights in their home countries. In this case, applicants need a pre-existing connection to Australia, a sponsor who will support their

resettlement processes and who must possess Australian citizenship or permanent residency, or an Australian organisation. People under the offshore program represented 88.6 per cent of humanitarian entrants in 2016.

Alternately, the purpose of the onshore program is the resettlement of people who applied for refugee status after their arrival in Australia. This detail affects the entire pathways they will consequently follow.

Therefore, two categories of arrivals are distinguishable:

- Entrants with a valid tourist or working visa, who are eligible to apply for protection. If the request is accepted, the applicants are granted a permanent protection visa. Otherwise, they can appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal.
- Entrants without a valid visa, who travelled by boat and are defined by the government as Illegal Maritime Arrivals (IMA) and detained until they are granted a temporary visa.

The Australian system of detention of asylum seekers is organised in categories: closed immigration detention within Australia, community detention, regional processing and settlement. Closed immigration detention centres receive asylum seekers waiting for the outcome of their application for recognition of refugee status. These centres are located in Australian territory and the detainees are not allowed to leave the premises. The community detention program constitutes an alternative detention targeting specific cases such as immigrant families, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable people. Despite the negative term 'detention' contained in its name, this program provides asylum seekers with real support in accessing safe housing, education, healthcare and financial support.

Regional processing and settlement, the third type of detention, is planned to manage the arrival by boats of asylum seekers without a valid visa. Since 2013, this specific category of arrivals is no longer allowed to settle within Australian territory, since the Abbott Government reintroduced the boat 'turnback' policy. These immigrants are transferred to detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, although Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court ruled last year that restricting the movement of asylum seekers who have committed no crime was unconstitutional, therefore they are in process of closure. The cases referring to this specific category of asylum seekers are assessed according to the law of these countries and, if accepted, result in a Temporary Protection Visa and the offer of permanent resettlement in Cambodia.

The first two types of detention permit only an application for a temporary visa, such as Temporary Protection Visa, Safe Haven Enterprise Visa or Bridging Visas. All of them include limited work rights, access to social support, healthcare and education.

Australia structured its policies for refugees' resettlement through the development of the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), which provides early practical assistance. Its services support refugees to access housing, physical and mental health care and wellbeing, budgeting and transport, community participation and networking, protection from family violence, social support, justice, language services, education, training and employment (Australian Government - Department of Social Services, 2018a). The program aims to provide refugees with skills and knowledge to enhance social and economic wellbeing, and covers the first stage of resettlement, generally for the first six to 18 months. However, only refugees holding permanent visas are eligible to apply for these services. Temporary visa holders requiring urgent and critical support may access Specialised and Intensive Services (Australian Government - Department of Social Services, 2018a), specifically for refugees with disabilities, special health needs, mental health, victims of domestic/family violence or homelessness.

Unlike Australia, Italy does not have a key role in resettling refugees from UNHCR facilities. According to the UN Refugee Agency world ranking for 2016, Italy was in the 12th place, receiving only 537 refugees (UNHCR, 2018). They accessed directly the third phase of the resettlement process, which was structured on three stages as a result of Italian asylum policies. The first phase refers to the very first contacts following the arrivals of immigrants on Italian territory, involving First Aid and Reception Centres (CPSA¹⁶). These centres manage identification procedures and provide asylum seekers with first aid and material support.

The second phase of the humanitarian intake in Italy is called 'first reception', referring to the assessment of asylum seekers' basic legal conditions, through the submission of an application for refugee status recognition. During this phase, asylum seekers are settled in governmental accommodation centres called 'collective centres', or 'centres for accommodation of asylum seekers' (CARA¹⁷). Despite the presence of at least two collective centres in almost all Italian regions, this phase has been implemented by the government in response to the increasing flow of immigrants. In 2015 the Italian government¹⁸ defined the institution of the 'extraordinary

¹⁶ Acronym of Centri di Prima Accoglienza Sanitaria.

¹⁷ Acronym of Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo.

¹⁸ Legislative Decree n. 142 – Art. 11 of the 18th of August, 2015.

reception centres' (CAS¹⁹), as a result of an agreement between the local governments, NGOs and CBOs. The associations provide to asylum seekers accommodation, Italian language courses and access to the public health system. The accommodation services are strictly limited to the time necessary to receive the outcome for the request of status recognition, and in any case for no longer than 18 months.

The third phase, referred to as 'second reception', is provided by the 'system for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees' (SPRAR²⁰), consisting of access to a network of inclusion projects developed by humanitarian organisations and local institutions to ensure effective resettlement in Italy. This program contains small-sized projects with programs specifically tailored to assist immigrants to build their independence, and is open to people already granted the status of refugee. SPRAR guarantees by law²¹ access to services in nine priority areas: intercultural-linguistic mediation, accommodation, orientation and access to services on Italian territory, educational and professional requalification, orientation and facilitation to the labour market, orientation and integration into the housing market, facilitation of social inclusion, legal support and social and health services.

In summary, the Australian reception system is structured to process the arrival of migrants, specifically on modalities and locations chosen by asylum seekers to claim their status as refugees, focusing mainly on people already recognised as refugees by the UNHCR. Conversely, the Italian system is largely centred on the reception of asylum seekers. NGOs and CBOs play crucial (although different) roles in the resettlement processes of both Australian and Italian systems.

Humanitarian organisations operating in the reception system

This subsection provides a brief exploration of the role played by humanitarian organisations in the reception systems deployed by Australia and Italy. It includes an analysis of the structural differences, specifically referring to modalities of constitution and operative personnel.

¹⁹ Acronym of Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria.

²⁰ Acronym of Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati.

²¹ Attachment A to the Decree of the 30th of July 2013 of the Ministry of Interior, indicating the guidelines for accessing to the National Fund for the Asylum Policies and Services: [http://www.sprar.it/images/ALL A-LineeGuida2.pdf](http://www.sprar.it/images/ALL_A-LineeGuida2.pdf).

In Australia, NGOs are involved as providers of services offered by the HSP. The organisations offering these services are funded by government and act to achieve the outcomes identified in the Humanitarian Settlement Program Outcomes Framework by the Australian Department of Social Services (2018b). As mentioned above, the eligibility for HSP program is mainly related to the previous granting of refugee visa or a permanent visa. Consequently, a multitude of small to medium associations operate to access governmental funding, acting in support of people who sought asylum onshore and are awaiting the recognition of their status. This is the case for the Australian NGOs and CBOs in this research, which employ a low number of staff and rely especially on volunteers. As a result of their limited financial resources, they provide specific services in focused areas, rather than plan extensive activities typically seen in an HSP program. Further, they assisted refugees previously involved in the HSP, but who were still struggling to achieve effective social and economic inclusion.

In Italy, the collaboration between NGOs and institutions pre-exists asylum seekers' arrival in the territory. The Italian immigration system does not apply a 'turnback' policy for boat arrivals, consequently NGOs actively support migrants in open waters, often using their own ships for the last part of the trip if it is ascertained that the original boat is unsafe. In addition to this essential role, which allows human lives to be saved, humanitarian organisations are involved in all stages of the resettlement process. From the first moments after arrival, operators of NGOs and CBOs provide migrants with first aid and material support. The second and third stages of the program see Italian humanitarian organisations managing accommodation facilities in which asylum seekers and refugees spend often considerably long periods waiting for recognition of their refugee status, or training to build skills and knowledge for an effective resettlement. It should be noted that after the data collection for the current project a fundamental policy change took place in Italy. The then government signed a Memorandum of understanding with Libya (Uselli, 2017) in which the Italian government made the commitment to finance, supply and train the Libyan Coast Guard in order to intercept immigrants' boats and forcing them to 'turnback'.

All organisations involved in the Italian reception system are funded by the government. Owing to a governmental decision, they also provide refugees and asylum seekers with a daily monetary allowance (known as 'pocket money'). For this reason, humanitarian associations based in Italy chose to employ paid staff rather than volunteers. The employees, also called

‘operators’, closely follow all aspects of the immigrants’ life inside reception centres, building daily interaction and communication.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the Australian and Italian reception systems of refugees and asylum seekers. It examined some geographical characteristics impacting the policies adopted by the governments and the interpretation of immigration phenomenon. It took into account several statistical data sets referring to refugee and asylum seeker arrivals, their reception and different processes of resettlement. The analysis of these elements has built an understanding of the role played by NGOs and CBOs along the path towards the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

Population in Australia is concentrated in a few major cities, which have developed a *multicultural*²² societies that favour daily interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds. The *multicultural* model is demonstrated by one out of every three Australian citizens having a different country of birth. In this context, refugees’ and asylum seekers’ presence stands out because of the considerable impact of their dramatic stories, rather than their visibility. However, the migrants settled in regional areas have fewer possibilities of interaction with different cultural groups because there is little diversity outside of metropolitan areas.

Considering that Italy has a high density of population within a smaller geographic area than Australia, Italian residents hold a different perception of migrants. The majority of Italian municipalities are involved in projects to resettle refugees and asylum seekers, albeit a requirement of SPRAR and CAS systems. As a result of this policy, the presence of refugees and asylum seekers is evident in most urban areas. The majority are asylum seekers waiting for the assessment of their status under the Extraordinary Reception Centres as a consequence of the procedure implemented by the Italian reception system. They are provided accommodation, basic monetary amounts for daily expenses and access to public services, but they do not hold work rights. Consequently, they are impeded from building legal connections with the new

²² In this context, the word multiculturalism intends to mean the presence of different cultural groups in the same territory.

environment while waiting for the assessment of their claims. This legislative deficiency does not encourage native residents to hold positive perceptions of refugee and asylum seeker. The extensive cultural homogeneity of the Italian population (91 per cent), does not favour a high level of *multicultural*²³ interaction.

NGOs' and CBOs' policies are also affected by the procedures of reception implemented by Australian and Italian governments. Indeed, Australian policy that is focused on migrants resettled through UNHCR leads humanitarian organisations to create different groups of action: NGOs involved in HSP (dedicated to refugees and permanent visa holders), and non-governmental CBOs, offering support services to asylum seekers and refugees who are not eligible for this specific program. Conversely, Italy is mainly involved in the reception of asylum seekers, especially those arriving by boat, which represented 76.5 per cent of the arrivals in 2016 (see Chart 5.1). Humanitarian organisations are involved in all stages of this process. During travel from African to Italian coasts, international NGOs assist and actively contribute to the safety of asylum seekers; subsequently, CBOs provide first aid, basic material relief and support in all stages of the resettlement process, providing skills and knowledge towards further inclusion in the host society.

In summary, Australia and Italy implemented consistently different procedures for the reception of refugees and asylum seekers. Australia chose to give priority to refugees previously assessed by UNHCR programs, thus approving a high percentage of asylum requests. However, the Australian government decision was to not process claims presented by people who arrived by boat, without a valid visa. This category has been assessed through Papua New Guinea and Nauru immigration laws. On the other hand, Italian policy allows all asylum seekers to reach Italian territory and to present their claims. However, the high rate of rejected requests (more than 70 per cent) and scarce application of laws in the case of repatriation results in a large number of not-registered immigrants within Italian borders. Although they have limited access to a range of services such as emergency health care, they cannot legally work in Italy.

Finally, the parallel analysis of the two countries reveals an additional difference between resettlement systems. Australia developed its first Humanitarian Program in 1977 under the

²³ In this context, the word multiculturalism intends to mean the presence of different cultural groups in the same territory.

federal government which was led by Prime Minister Fraser. That program was designed to deal with the assessment of onshore protection claims and to support refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process. Australia's reception system appears to be a structured and stable process in which NGOs and CBOs provide refugees and asylum seekers with essential skills and knowledge for the resettlement process, especially focusing on their social and economic wellbeing. Conversely, the Italian reception system develops a process divided in three stages, directly connected to the activities of the humanitarian organisations involved. However, this system was originally developed in 2002²⁴ and established SPRAR as the unique network of local institutions and humanitarian associations, funded by government to deal with refugees and asylum seekers' processes. In 2015, the Italian government instituted the Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS), with the aim to compensate the lack of available places for asylum seekers in ordinary reception centres. According to statistical data published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the large majority of refugees and asylum seekers in 2016 were accommodated in Extraordinary Reception Centres (73 per cent of the total – source: Open Migration, 2018). Hence, it appears that the Italian program mainly acted to respond to extraordinary and temporary factors related to the flows of immigrants rather than functioning as a structured system acting to enhance the effectiveness of their resettlement. It should be noted that in 2018 the new Italian government approved Act 113/2018, addressing immigration and public security matters. The Act 113/2018, also called 'decreto Salvini', the name of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, affected the role played by NGOs within the Italian reception system, reducing access to SPRAR to refugees and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers only and closing the access to CAS. This new policy indicated a shift towards the Australian approach, moving the focus of the reception system on people who already gained the status of refugee.

Both Australian and Italian reception systems rely on the cooperation of NGOs and CBOs to deliver their respective resettlement programs. The conditions and services provided by the two countries to facilitate an effective resettlement designate humanitarian organisations as main operators in the process. The partnerships between governments and humanitarian organisations confirm Ohanyan (2009) that governments value NGOs' activities because of their abilities to respond to the needs of the host society and immigrant communities (Australia) and to compensate for the deficit of immigration law (Italy). The following chapter explores the services provided by Australian and Italian associations and the role played by intercultural

²⁴ Law 189/2002.

communication when NGOs and CBOs assist refugees and asylum seekers in the resettlement processes.

Chapter Six

Communication in Australian associations: Towards the ideal resettlement

This chapter presents findings from the interviews with the Australian research participants. Refugee and asylum seeker associations often represent the first point of contact between these immigrants and the host society (Fiske, 2006), hence they have a key role in the resettlement process of these individuals. In exploring the practices employed by these associations to provide support and construct an effective interaction for refugees and asylum seekers, the chapter examines how intercultural communication practices support the associations' contribution to refugee and asylum seeker settlement.

The Australian associations involved in this study represent the support network created by citizens to help refugees and asylum seekers with their resettlement, thus providing a range of services that fill the void left by the government and legislation. This void relates primarily to education and employment, which are the main areas where refugees and asylum seekers need support. In addition, these associations are involved in triggering community change. These areas of need affect the resettlement of both refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, owing to Australian immigration law, there is a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers based on where they presented the asylum request. Refugees, who applied their request 'offshore', possess rights — for example the right to work — but they do not have the skills or the opportunity to apply for work. In contrast, asylum seekers — who applied for their request 'onshore' — do not have the same rights until they obtain the status of 'refugee'. That is, these circumstances do not allow them to be independent. Furthermore, their request for asylum can be rejected, forcing them to leave the Australian territory and everything they built — such as social and economic networks — during their temporary residency.

Six Australian associations were considered for this project. As a result of their community-based nature, the large majority of the persons involved in the associations' activities were volunteers, and few were employees. The study takes into account the points of view of both

volunteers and coordinators. Volunteers were interviewed because of their direct contact with refugees and asylum seekers, but coordinators were involved in order to investigate the planning level of their activities and strategies. In summary, 20 interviews were conducted.

Table 6.1 Demographics of Australian participants

<i>Organisations</i>	Coordinators	Operators	Volunteers	Female	Male	Australian	Other Ethnicities
A NGO/CBO	1		4	4	1	4	1
B CBO	1			1			1
C NGO/CBO	1				1		1
D CBO	1			1			1
E NGO/CBO	2		4	5	1	5	1
F NGO	1	1	4	4	2	5	1
TOTALS	7	1	12	15	5	14	6

As illustrated in Table 6.1, the majority of the participants were female, because more females than males work in these organisations. The participants were mainly from an Australian background, with 30 per cent from a different cultural background. Furthermore, 13 out of 20 participants indicated that they had been provided with proper training from the associations, which focused on the construction of the interaction using intercultural and reflective practices.

The chapter is divided into three sections, which represent three topics addressed during the interviews. The first section focuses on the interaction between humanitarian organisations and refugees and asylum seekers. It considers the meaning of ‘culture’ for volunteers and coordinators and how it is related to interaction, highlighting the role of cultural patterns from an intercultural perspective. The second section takes into account the communication that occurs between refugees, asylum seekers and volunteers. It identifies whether or not the communication is intercultural, exploring also the knowledge and affective components of communication, which possibly affect the resettlement process. The third and final section shows the strategies adopted by the Australian organisations to support refugees and asylum seekers. The purposes and plans of the associations were explored to understand the roles played by communication and the services provided to enhance refugees’ and asylum seekers’ inclusion in the host society.

Interaction and communication between different cultures and individuals

This section focuses on the practices adopted by the Australian associations when assisting refugees and asylum seekers. It considers how they interacted with these individuals and makes observations about specific patterns adopted to create better relationships between humanitarian organisations and people seeking asylum, and those who have obtained refugee status. Drawing from a culture-general perspective (Pusch, 2009), this study focuses on the interpersonal interactions that take place between people with different cultural backgrounds. In the case studies, the communication between refugees and asylum seekers and the volunteers of the humanitarian organisations aimed to fill the social and cultural gap with the host society. However, cultural patterns need to be negotiated in order to achieve a productive connection, which allows a better resettlement founded on mutual respect and recognition.

The current research aims to understand the role of the cultural element in the communication process between different people, as opposed to the individual element. The individual element tends to focus the interaction on communicators as individuals, rather than on their cultural background. This way, the interaction is based on the intersubjectivity of communication, while the communicators' cultural background becomes a barrier in the relationship. Hence, an understanding of the term 'culture' among the participants is crucial.

Culture in interaction and communication

Intercultural interaction considers culture as a set of resources able to create connections among different identities (Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999), thus allowing their evolution rather than preserving them in the context of the culture of origin. This way, the culture of interactants constantly changes, permitting a focus on communication between individuals rather than cultural groups. In order to understand why culture appears to strongly influence communication between different individuals, this research analysed how workers from the Australian associations interpreted the concept.

Almost all volunteers and coordinators involved in this study considered the meaning of culture to be related to the background of an individual. As reported by two respondents:

I guess culture means ... your standards, your way to behave, related to where you are born or your family situation, the norms of behaviour, relationships with your

family and so on ... related to your ethnicity or your country of origin ... it is very wide and broad. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

Culture is about people's backgrounds, their personal histories, their systems of belief, their values, what frameworks they have grown up with ... even the language they speak is part of it ... and the protocols that people have grown up with and come in their background, and the country of origin. (Coordinator, female, Australian)

Elements such as family, religion, language, history, lifestyle, traditions, values, customs, and the place from where an individual originates constituted the standpoint from which people understood the world. But how did they understand the term 'culture'? Were they connecting its meaning to individual experiences or to the background of their cultural group? In other words, were they referring to refugees and asylum seekers as groups with different cultures or as individuals, each one having their own knowledge of the world?

Of the respondents 30 per cent (six out of 20) from the Australian associations broadly defined culture as 'a sense of belonging to a broader community' (Coordinator, female, Australian), tying the cultural elements of different individuals to their place of origin. As mentioned during an interview:

Culture is specifically related to the country where you were born and grew up, I think. Your own way to think is your culture, how you grew up there, in the country you were in. [...] You never forget the culture where you were growing up. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

As pointed out in the excerpt above, culture belonged to a place and the cultural group of its inhabitants. This group of volunteers identified the term 'culture' as a set of values, traditions, and norms of the cultural group to which the individual belonged. Here, the individual's personal behaviour was not contemplated, but was directly related to the values and traditions of his/her cultural group. In this case, culture was associated with 'what you expect, what people expect' (Volunteer, female, Australian) from individuals who belong to a particular cultural group.

This understanding of the term 'culture' seemed more concerned with achieving effective intergroup communication and overcoming cultural barriers between people from different cultural background, paying relatively less attention to person-to-person communication. Indeed, it highlighted a culture-specific perspective (Pusch, 2009) in which the general designation of the individual was directly related to a cultural group. Conversely, the remaining

majority of participants in this project appeared to be more comfortable with definitions underpinned by subjective elements. These elements related to individual values and behaviour, rather than to expectations derived from broader cultural group elements. Culture was generally defined as:

those values that are important into your community and society where you live, on the small scale ... the values that are important to us, the values we want to pass on to our children, and our grandchildren ... and the things that are important to us in the everyday life. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The above excerpt shows that, even though the respondent has considered the notion of belonging to a community, the definition focused on the personal understanding of the world and the transmission of that knowledge. This definition was also supported by other volunteers, who identified culture as ‘people’s behaviour, and how they think and feel about a broad range of things, about other people, about how they interact, all of those things’ (Volunteer, male, Australian). In this way, culture appeared to be shaped by individuals in their own way. Cultural elements have acquired personal significance, in which culture became ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 1999), encouraging the creation of thousands of different cultures; thus the interaction between different people becomes a daily routine to the understanding of the society. As expressed by a coordinator:

[Culture] is not just about people’s costumes, it is about where you come from, your identity, it is about how you see yourself in relation to where you grow up. We are also talking about gender, disability... that can be a cultural group, too. Therefore, I see it in a much broader sense and not just, you know, ethnicity and cultural traditions. (Coordinator, female, Australian)

The above-mentioned definitions tended to reflect the micro social constructionism approach (Burr, 2015), where the creation of multiple knowledges and interpretations of reality was expected by the different combination of different cultural elements, creating in this way several subjective realities. Indeed, the term ‘culture’ was generally identified as a ‘particular way of living’ (Volunteer, female, Australian) that enables people to understand their world and reality. In these terms, culture appeared as a reflection of everyday influences including food, music, literature and general background, among others.

This section examined the definitions of culture expressed by the humanitarian operators in Australia and pointed out that culture was mainly associated with the subjective component of the individuals. Hence, the interaction appeared to be set as communication between

individuals (communicative interactants), rather than different cultural groups. According to Pearce (1976), culture influences the ways in which we understand the world and is the main element of the communication process. Nevertheless, the interviews from the Australian fieldwork pointed out a cultural approach based on individual elements, relegating cultural groups' backgrounds to a secondary role in the construction of the interaction and communication.

The interaction between different cultures

The chapter now shifts from identifying how the term 'culture' was understood by the respondents, to examining and understanding the role of culture within interactions. Findings from the Australian associations indicated that people from different cultural groups built an interaction that was able to go beyond individuals' cultural patterns. Communicators interpreted messages exchanged in a co-constructed dialogue (Pearce, 1976), establishing the meaning of the actions through a regulative rule system (Pearce and Cronen, 1980). Hence, they constantly reorganised the meaning of the actions, contextualising them to the subsequent circumstances.

The initial findings from the interviews conducted in Australia showed a propensity for a relationship based on the subjectivity of communicators. However, a residual cultural component was still present in the definitions of the interaction between people coming from different cultural backgrounds. The interaction was defined as 'understanding a different perspective, and so understanding and having some awareness and some knowledge of the other person's background and their perspective' (Coordinator, female, Anglo-Irish). Even though recognition of the pre-existing cultural background was still present, the definition provided by the coordinator above focused on the interaction between individuals. In this case, the 'knowledge of the other person's background' was intended as a means to achieve an effective, but still subjective communication.

As interpreted by coordinators and volunteers, the interaction focused on communicators and involved several elements on communication. The most prevalent feature was the previously mentioned 'knowledge of the other person's background'. This element was strongly connected with the understanding and the appreciation of the other interactants, and the ability to construct a productive communication. It also confirmed the pivotal role of the knowledge

component, as described by scholars (Liu et al., 2015; Ioppolo, 2014) in their attempts to define the main distinctive elements of interculturality. However, others pointed out that the focus of the intercultural interaction was on the ‘contact zone’ (Pasqualotto, 2009; Hermans and Kemper, 1998), a space where different cultural elements influenced each other.

The interviewees identified three further elements of the interaction among persons with different cultural backgrounds: trust, respect and mutual support. These three elements reflected the three assumptions of interculturality. Indeed, the need to construct interactions based on reciprocal trust was often referred to as ‘essential’ in the interviews. Relationships based on reciprocal trust were believed to favour a more friendly and honest conversation. Consequently, trust in interaction reflected the third intercultural assumption based on the effort of individuals to establish a productive connection with the others. The second element related to the notion of ‘respect’ and ‘understanding’ between interactants. Again, the element was connected to the effort to create effective communication, because of its role in forming the dialogue among persons from different cultures of origin. This element replicated the second intercultural assumption in which adaptation and the skill to interact beyond cultural boundaries created intercultural communities and more inclusive identities. The third element reflected the first assumption of the intercultural formulation stated by Dai and Chen (2015), which refers to the desire of the individuals to communicate. As indicated by one of the volunteers, ‘if they do not want to have the interaction, you cannot push yourself on it’ (Volunteer, female, Australian).

All the identified elements reflected the subjectivity of the interaction. Nevertheless, the humanitarian operators also highlighted the role played by some element directly connected to being part of a cultural group, such as the language. The use of a different language was often reported as the main barrier in the communication:

So, language is the biggest barrier, they [refugees and asylum seekers] only meet with those of their cultural group. Although some of them have been more than 40 years in Australia, they are still in their own cultural group. But, again, the [association] understands that they need to be together because they have the same language, they have the same cultural heritage. [...] It is because of the language barrier that they want to be in their own groups. (Coordinator, female, Eritrean)

Sometimes people come here [to Australia] later in life, and they do not want to learn a language necessarily very well ... for example, one of my cousins is married to an Italian girl and her mum lived here for like over 40 years. Her English is very

poor because she has never really needed to speak English as much ... her friends, her relatives are there, and they all speak Italian. (Coordinator, female, Turkish)

The above extracts pointed to the relevance of language within the interaction. It was a distinguishing cultural element able to intrinsically influence the way a person interprets the reality. Indeed, as stated by Ioppolo (2014), in order to reach an effective communication, the aim of the interactants has two shades: knowing the meaning of words and being able to convey that meaning. Hence, language clearly affected the interaction, as a cultural element able to define reality. All participants agreed the interaction between different cultural groups could be classified as mainly subjective elements rather than cultural. So, how did they manage the relationships? Several volunteers elaborated their own approach to overcoming the language barrier, and it appeared as a very intersubjective *modus operandi*. When questioned about how they dealt with the language as a cultural element and with the obstacles that it could create, the volunteers involved said they had a common practice: acting ‘as a human being’. This attitude was clearly expressed as follows:

They even cannot speak their language, they cannot speak mine, a smile is always welcome. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

A lot of them cannot speak much English, and that is ok. A big smile, and a hug, you know. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

You have to be careful to not offend someone. But a friendly smile I think that it goes a long way. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The interaction focused on the relationships between subjects — as highlighted by the importance given to a smile, as well as on the intercultural communication. Dai and Chen (2015) utilised the concept of intersubjectivity in order to describe the intercultural perspective as a multiple connection between persons from different cultural groups. In this way, the interaction would carry a positive perception among the interactants, and mutuality and consensus. Hence, volunteers were definitively acting from an intercultural perspective, reducing cultural distance and sharing meanings.

To summarise, coordinators and volunteers from the Australian fieldwork mainly preferred to deal with their clients²⁵ by underpinning the communication process with the person, rather than on a stereotyped reflection of his/her cultural group. They expressed awareness of the role

²⁵ Refugees and asylum seekers were almost unanimously referred to as clients by both coordinators and volunteers.

of the cultural background of refugees and asylum seekers. Generally, a strong association with the culture of the country of origin was related to a negative element in the interaction. Often the bond with the country of origin also brought old frictions between different cultural groups. These frictions were reported as ‘small questions between groups, based on similar language and feelings of superiority’ (Coordinator, male, Anglo-Australian), or rivalry caused by sports competitions, or by more critical reasons. A volunteer reported:

They [refugees and asylum seekers] are still hanging on to some of the issues from their countries of origin. For example, I think there is quite an animosity between Indians and Sri Lankans, because of the war. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

Finally, the interaction among persons of different cultural background was thought to be positive. At this point, a close examination of the responses to the following questions was considered: What practices did humanitarian operators develop to interact and assist refugees and asylum seekers? And how did they create them? Focusing on these questions provided this research with essential information on the interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and persons involved with NGOs and CBOs.

The interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian operators

The participants in this research unanimously believed that the interaction and communication with refugees and asylum seekers represented one of the key elements of their activities. The interaction was described as:

working remarkably, people look after each other, whether they are staff, volunteers, or people that we are helping, everybody seems to blend together for a common goal, looking after each other. (Volunteer, male, Australian)

According to Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory (Pearce and Pearce, 2000), communicators must negotiate their previous cultural patterns to build a productive connection. In the examined cases, the interaction was shaped by interculturality, allowing the interactants to create a favourable context to the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement process.

The positive context created by the interaction and the communication between the people seeking asylum, refugees and operators was mainly connected to the common effort of both groups. The humanitarian operators indicated the willingness to interact as a fundamental element of the relationships created inside the associations. These kinds of relationships

reflected two of the three assumptions of interculturality identified by several scholars. Indeed, the identified interaction underpinned on the desire to communicate, which involved the transformation of communication patterns (Heidlebaugh, 2008), and the effort of refugees and asylum seekers to establish a productive connection (Dai and Chen, 2015).

The interaction described above reflected a communication perspective very similar to the one presented by Pearce and Pearce (2000) in CMM theory, in which the understanding of the meanings was not just transmitted; rather it took place — with the content of the message — in the construction of meanings. In this way, the interactants also collaborated to build mutual recognition and respect. As remarked by a volunteer, the interaction was considered as ‘a breaking down with the barriers’ (Volunteer, male, Australian), allowing the creation of coordinated meanings where people from different cultural backgrounds were able to communicate beyond their cultural patterns. According to one volunteer, humanitarian operators were people who:

try and look at people as human beings, rather than just people who are from a particular country or from a particular situation, because I find that ... even when I meet people for the first time I avoid that stereotypical view: ‘this is an Afghan male, he is going to be like this’. But most of the time I find the person is quite different from what I thought. Although I had those many experiences, I still always or often have had the initial thought in my mind: ‘that is the sort of person who may be ...’, and I further found out they are not. (Volunteer, female, Anglo-Australian)

The above excerpt clearly showed the attitude of the humanitarian operators to interact with individuals, instead of representatives of cultural groups. As mentioned in the previous subsection, often the connections with the original cultural background were seen as barriers among different groups. Hence, the interaction focused on the volunteers’ commitment ‘to see the value of each person regardless of where they come from, their ethnicity, gender and religion’ (Volunteer, female, Scottish). All the elements cited reflected those generally identified with specific cultural groups. Consequently, volunteers and coordinators preferred to direct their attention on an interaction based on a relationship between human beings.

All the coordinators highlighted the role played by the volunteers in building an environment that allowed the creation of a positive interaction. They came from different cultural backgrounds, and some of them (six out of 20) were refugees themselves in the past. Hence, they contributed to the interaction with their own understanding based on their life experiences, and with language support. Thanks to their origin, they were also able to identify the difficulties

and the challenges that refugees and asylum seekers were facing during their resettlement. A coordinator declared the participation of volunteers in the association as follows:

just incredible ... everyone is really here because they have the right heart in the right place. They really want to help people [...] For example, the role of my volunteers is to help people, but they go further this doing all they can within the organisation, and then make sure they have been all received, understood well their needs and this sort of thing. But they do that. (Coordinator, female, Turkish)

The interaction was also based on a non-discriminative approach and on a reciprocal exchange in learning different cultures. A volunteer paid attention to this aspect, affirming that: ‘they [refugees and asylum seekers] are not only coming here to learn what we teach here, but they are also learning from the people around us. Here they learn a social culture’ (Volunteer, female, Australian). In this way, humanitarian organisations’ actions led to an increase in the sense of belonging for a new community in which cultural elements were constantly modified.

The previous paragraphs indicate that the humanitarian operators considered the interaction between people from different cultures as a positive and subjective experience. However, the ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116), in which different cultures constantly modify and transform each other, was restricted by the time it took to provide the services. This was a result of the reception system adopted in Australia and the consequent role played by humanitarian associations, as already examined in chapter five. Nevertheless, the interaction within that ‘contact zone’ appeared to be sufficient for the establishment of an effective relationship, distinguished by communication playing a key role.

Communicating with refugees and asylum seekers

Communication covered a pivotal significance in the co-construction of the interaction between humanitarian operators and immigrants. From the communicative perspective identified by CMM theory, communication contributed to creating, along with its content, the meaning of the co-constructed message. This study considered NGO and CBO communication as a primary means to transmit the necessary knowledge for an effective resettlement in the host society. In this way, communication modified and reconstructed the interactants’ subjective reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), allowing the creation of a cultural context in which the meanings were co-constructed. Thus, this chapter examines the role of intercultural

communication in the construction of the above cultural context, with special attention to refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes.

This research holds that NGOs and CBOs utilise communication based on intercultural elements and investigates if specific skills, such as active listening, empathy, mutual recognition and cultural knowledge (Ioppolo, 2014), were adopted by the coordinators and the volunteers involved. Out of 20 interviews, 17 participants indicated that they used at least one of the above mentioned intercultural communication skills. As explained by a volunteer:

I think we are using these specific skills in any communication, with anybody. In particular, when people's first language is not English, we certainly use both verbal and non-verbal communication. We try to get into their shoes and understand [...]. It does require skills and knowledge about the background of someone from a different community group. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The above extract confirmed the intersubjectivity of the interaction, in which in 'any communication, with anybody' intercultural elements were considered essential. It also pointed out the existence of people's private culture, their own way to understand the world. According to Sciolla (2002) the interaction between different cultural groups already happens within a territory, even in the absence of immigration. Hence, it is worthy to examine the role played by cultural patterns on the communication process. In doing so, the study needed to identify the strategies used for communication between refugees, asylum seekers and the humanitarian operators.

The strategies of the humanitarian communication

During the interviews conducted in Australia, the participants deployed several strategies in developing a communication that allowed an effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. All the approaches to the interaction reflected elements of interculturality and intersubjectivity on the communication. Indeed, almost all the participants were aware of using active listening skills, such as listening very carefully, repetition, understanding real needs and focusing on body language. These skills were considered essential elements in constructing an effective communication:

I am not meeting clients, I am meeting new people, I am meeting some really lovely individuals who have really individual needs, and some really individual goals. In the time I have been here [working at the association] I have learned so much about how to sit back and listen. Yes, it is active listening, because just sitting there is a

sort of asking, trying to draw out what they really want from the association.
(Coordinator, female, Scottish/Irish)

The above excerpt reflected the definition of active listening presented by Ioppolo (2014), which focused on the participation into the communication to understand the facts and the feelings of the other communicator. It also highlighted the relationship between the intercultural communication and the resettlement process. Indeed, active listening was considered as an effort to ‘looking at and finding out a lot about their situation, and also working out a way to reach what they [refugees and asylum seekers] hope to achieve in the next few months and in the next few years’ (Volunteer, female, Australian). In this way, the volunteer highlighted the key support of intercultural communication to the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

The second skill of the intercultural communication employed by the humanitarian operators was empathy. Empathy was considered crucial in the context of the circumstances of refugees or asylum seekers, in order to focus on them individually. One of the volunteers involved in teaching English summarised the importance of empathy:

It is not like classroom teaching, where you are teaching a specific topic and so the kids are going to learn it. Every student has a very, very different need. For example, if you can generalise, Asian students have very good written English, reading and writing, but they find very difficult the speaking, they are shy, and they don’t want to speak. Some who have been here for many years, who are from Greece and places like that, they can talk, they can communicate well, but cannot read and write. And the ones from Africa may never have learnt to read and write. So, they have a whole different problem that they have to deal with. One of the things we have to try to, with our limited experiences, is to try to get quite base specific needs and teach them, and it will be different for any other student here which is a very different way of teaching from a normal classroom. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

In the above excerpt the volunteer highlighted the effort made by humanitarian operators to understand refugees’ and asylum seekers’ culture and background in order to develop an effective relationship with them. Coordinators and volunteers indicated other communication skills related to the interculturality of the interaction, such as being positive and aware of the body language, maintaining eye contact, and selecting words appropriate to the interactants. Furthermore, the participants indicated three additional elements in which communication was underpinned: the reciprocal respect, the construction of a relationship based on trust, and mutuality. The latter was indicated as a pillar of the communication with people seeking asylum and refugees:

Because you want to try to understand each other, and because we both want to try to find a way. But if one does not want to try, then there is trouble. [...] Anyway, mostly the interaction is very good because both sides want to understand the other, so they make an effort to do it. (Operator, male, Anglo-Australian)

Not all the participants recognised the structure of their communication patterns as intercultural, even though it was clear that communication with the refugees and asylum seekers was built on mutuality and reciprocal respect. In this way, the communication process relied on a relationship grounded on the interaction between human beings:

I just love them, and if they respond, then we work more with them. [...] Anyway, if they want my help I am willing to help, if they do not ... I am ok with that too. (Volunteer, female, Australian).

As discussed in the previous section, language was often indicated as a barrier to communication, but it was also related to a different point of view to understand the interaction between volunteers and, refugees and asylum seekers. In this case, it was associated with a common effort in trying to open a communication channel:

My problem is that I can speak only English. Everyone that comes here, they can speak at least one other language, and they try to communicate to me in English. So, I am the one with disadvantages ... but they understand, and we can get on with it. (Coordinator, male, Anglo/Indian)

Summarising, all the volunteers and the coordinators defined, either explicitly or implicitly, communication with refugees and asylum seekers as being intercultural strategies such as active listening, empathy, mutuality, for example. These elements were often considered essential skills in co-constructing an effective interaction. Further, they often referred to the communication as focused ‘on the person as an individual and not putting people in this sort of box’ (Volunteer, female, Anglo/Australian). Hence, they intended to avoid labelling people as belonging to specific cultural or social groups. Again, the findings from the Australian fieldwork pointed out the creation of interaction and communication based on the daily actions, rather than on cultural patterns. This way, cultural barriers were avoided focusing on a person-to-person communication within the space of the ‘contact zone’, where interactants’ cultural elements influenced each other. Here, it became relevant to understand how communication was affected by elements such as the knowledge of the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ cultural backgrounds and their emotions about their status. In this context, the relevance of CMM theory becomes evident.

The importance of the cultural and individual background

The CMM theory illustrated three main episodes in which people construct the action, and thus the communication patterns (Pearce, 1976). Episode 1 referred to the patterns of meanings and behaviours that individuals learn from their culture, and Episode 2 was connected to the individual's understanding of social interaction. Both structure Episode 3, that is, the actions enacted in the communication. In other words, Episode 1 and Episode 2 reflect two specific components of intercultural communication, respectively the knowledge and the recognition of the existence of different cultural background, and the affective component regarding the behaviour of the individual, where the focus of the study was posed on their emotions on interaction. One of the aims of the current study was to understand the extent to which these two components affected the communication process between refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian volunteers who participated in the project.

Coordinators and volunteers acknowledged the role of the cultural backgrounds of refugees and asylum seekers from two different points of view: (1) their resettlement process and (2) the interaction/communication with them. From the point of view of refugees' resettlement, the knowledge of the cultural background of an individual in his/her resettlement process was considered an essential element. Indeed, the majority of the participants (83 per cent, or 16/20) agreed in highlighting the connection between refugees' cultural patterns and their resettlement in the host society.

The element most indicative of affecting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process was the education received in their country of origin. People with a previous education were considered favourably during their resettlement. This was because they would learn quickly how to access the network of support they required. On the other hand, people who had no literacy skills had to deal with a range of difficulties, from learning a new language — with no previous knowledge of grammatical structures even in their own language — to the understanding of the new/host community. Indeed,

people from third-world countries are struggling the most, because they have not the educational background in their own culture, they have not learnt to write in their own culture. (Coordinator, female, Australian)

The lack of education created barriers for an effective and positive resettlement, leading to misunderstanding about the new/host society.

The knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural roots were also revealed to be essential in specific situations, such as within the health services system, the socialisation into the new community and to address emotional issues. This view was clearly explained in an example reported during the interviews.

In health it [the knowledge of the refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background] is important, because in health there are risks associated with the country of origin, such as disease, psychological distress, maybe history of colonisation, and people's level of disadvantages ... if you are going to understand the persons' health histories, you have to know their cultural background, you have to know their countries of origin, you have to understand their previous experience that led them to the health system. (Coordinator, female, English/Irish)

Although the above extract was situated in the health services system, it could be also applied to other topics regarding the resettlement process, topics in which the cultural background played a significant role in creating obstacles in the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Only a few participants from the Australian fieldwork did not give relevance to the relationship between refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background and their effort to a new life in the new society. During the interviews, the volunteer and the coordinator (from two different associations) expressed their dissent of this dichotomy pointing out that people seeking asylum and refugees had 'to leave their country, their own family ... they came here because they had to' (Volunteer, female, Australian). The two participants evaluated their situation more relevant to their cultural background.

In line with social constructionism theory (Burr, 2015), there was evidence of communication as a form of social action. That is, the participants indicated the interaction and the communication with refugees and asylum seekers as a pivotal point of their everyday interactions in the construction of the meanings of the society. One of the key assumptions of social constructionism is that the meanings associated with society are a product of the society in which one lives, that is they have an historical and cultural specificity. Hence, this research focused on whether the knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background was considered as affecting their interaction and their communication process with the respondents.

Although the knowledge of the cultural background represented one of the main components of the intercultural interaction (Ioppolo, 2014), only two of the respondents agreed in defining it as an essential element of the communication. In these two cases, knowledge was associated

with the developing of the conversation, but also with preventing possible barriers in interactions. Specifically, one volunteer thought that:

It is very important to know the background of people [...], it is so important where this [cultural background] is going to trigger some potential conflict between individuals or groups just because, perhaps, of political situation or cultural issues. So, yes, I think it still is very important, even though we are treating people as individuals. (Volunteer, female, Anglo/Australian)

As mentioned above, the interactions with refugees and asylum seekers were described as interactions between individuals. Nevertheless, many of the Australian participants (18 of the 20) focused on this aspect without considering relevance of cultures. Rather, they avoided combining cultural background and the individual, thus treating ‘everyone the same, they are all men and women, they are all parents, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters... they are all the same’ (Coordinator, female, Turkish). The cultural background often reflected just the personal interest of the volunteer or the coordinator to learn more about different cultures, but it was never considered as a compulsory skill in the communication.

The majority of the participants highlighted the negative role that the knowledge of the cultural background could play in the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers. From this point of view, it was clear the proposed connection between knowledge and the construction of barriers created by the unconscious application of stereotypes. In this way, communication lost the element of intersubjectivity, moving the interaction from a one-to-one relation to an interaction between individuals (volunteers and coordinators) and cultural groups. However, the knowledge of refugees’ and asylum seekers’ past was also perceived as a way to help understanding their situation, and so to promote the interaction. For example:

Somebody from Myanmar who is a Rohingya, in the country that they come from they are considered non-citizens, then there is more understanding of how they are feeling as a non-citizen in Australia, because they come from there to here, and what is improved? They have an enormous frustration regarding their status. (Volunteer, male, Australian)

In the above excerpt the volunteer highlighted the use of refugee and asylum seeker cultural background as a lens to better interpret and understand their feelings regarding their status. Other participants also emphasised that the knowledge of the countries of origins and the cultural backgrounds of their clients helped in the construction of a safe and cosy environment.

The second component examined by the current study was the affective one. This component reflected the behaviour of refugees and asylum seekers during the interaction, affecting the communication and consequently the resettlement process. Hence, the question to the respondents from the Australian fieldwork was: How do refugees' and asylum seekers' emotions affect their resettlement process? Almost all the participants described the relationship between emotions and resettlement as an active element in creating further obstacles in refugee and asylum seeker resettlement. Aiming for clarity, the responses were divided into three groups regarding the emotions directly connected to (1) the individual refugee and asylum seeker, the emotions caused by (2) the Australian reception system, and the role played by (3) the host community.

The emotions most described during the interviews reflected refugees' and asylum seekers' anxiety, which was often connected to their feelings about a lack of adequate understanding of a different socioeconomic and cultural context. For example, volunteers pointed out the role played by refugees' and asylum seekers' fear of the Australian police because of how they were viewed in their country of origin, or the anxiety provoked by their traumatic experiences during their journey to Australia. Anxiety was reported to be caused by a wide range of factors, among them the distance from their families was particularly underlined. This factor was most connected to asylum seekers, because they did not have the status of refugee which would allow them to bring their families to Australia, consequently they could not see their children for years. As stated by a coordinator, 'for somebody who had to leave their country, because of force of circumstances, for conflict, personal issues, and they are not allowed to come back, the distance from family becomes an issue of grief and loss' (Coordinator, female, English/Irish).

Nevertheless, anxiety was also seen as an emotion affecting both refugees and asylum seekers, indeed:

People who are asylum seekers, who do not have permanent visa, live in anxiety every day. People who are refugees, who have already a permanent visa, do not have the same anxiety, but they may have other, which might be related to what happen in their home country. (Coordinator, male, Celtic)

The above extract clearly identifies a main distinction between the status of refugee and asylum seeker. Within this distinction, the current study explored the second proposed group, which regards the emotions caused by the Australian government reception system and its

mechanisms. Here, the feeling of anxiety reflected the fear about the unknown future that asylum seekers had to face, owing to their status. More specifically, the status of asylum seeker was seen as a pyramid shape in which at the very top there was the residence problem, and below it others issues such as the reunion with their family and job opportunities. This way, the reception system could affect the resettlement process of asylum seekers and also their behaviour. People seeking asylum appeared to be the group who were most affected by the Australian immigration policy. Within this legal system, asylum seekers live in constant uncertainty about the future, especially those elements that play crucial roles in their resettlement processes, such as the opportunity to find a job, reunification with family, and to participate in the community. This situation increases asylum seekers' vulnerability, affecting their willingness to interact. As remarked by an operator:

I think that the biggest problem in resettlement is the time that it is taking [to get refugee status], so they [the asylum seekers] don't know what their future is, they don't know if they are going to be allowed to stay. So, that affects them over time, and often they got family in their other country, so this starts to affect them ... people run out of patience, they run out of hope. (Operator, male, Australian)

The third group represents the Australian participants in the current study who connected the behaviour of refugees and asylum seekers to the effort of the host community in welcoming them. From this point of view, it was important to establish a common 'sense of belonging and identity' (Coordinator, female, English/Irish). To this end, the host society played a pivotal role ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers were included and that the community tried to remove barriers to social inclusion. A participant pointed out that:

a bit is about the way in which society values and embraces them [refugees and asylum seekers] as well, how it provides opportunities, and if there is a barrier to opportunity it would be because of disruption of education, or lack of education support, or not seeing a pathway into education and employment. Then people ... you know, that's a barrier to them actually feeling part of the society, so the obligation is on the society in the interest of prevention, to actually make sure that people are looked out for ... and then to deal with the risk. (Coordinator, female, English/Irish)

From the above extract it was clear the role that NGOs and CBOs played in the refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process was about the essential human need to be a member of a community (Fiske, 2006, p. 226). Nevertheless, the coordinator also pointed out how a lack of communication and interaction could lead to a problematic resettlement. For the purpose of the current study, this example was useful in highlighting also the role that NGOs and CBOs played

in the resettlement process as the first connection between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society. Coordinators and volunteers declared that this interaction was often positive and useful, reporting a few problematic cases as noted in the following section.

Problems in communication

NGOs and CBOs are often the first connection between the host society and refugees through the provision of support services (Fiske, 2006). This is possible through the interaction that they create with people seeking asylum and people who already get the status of refugee, an interaction that was considered intercultural in this current study, in view of the elements brought to it by the humanitarian operators. As mentioned in chapter two, within the intercultural space there is a specific professional, the intercultural mediator who, according to Sargent and Lanchanché (2009), allows individuals from different cultural groups to gain more confidence and gives them more instruments in order to understand the host/new society.

As the structure of the Australian association is based more on volunteers rather than professionals, the term intercultural mediator was never mentioned during the interviews. Indeed, the coordinators of four out of six Australian associations stated they relied on professional interpreters, who were able to help with translation into the original language. In relation to cultural barriers, 17 of the 20 respondents relied on the know-how learned while volunteering or learned by other humanitarian operators. Indeed, ‘an interpreter can help with language, but you need to understand the prospective of the other person in the first instance, at least to some extent’ (Coordinator, female, English/Irish). Only one of the organisations involved in this project mentioned the use of external people as experts of specific issues. For example: ‘some of the Muslim women might raise an issue, we found out particularly around family violence, and so we will bring in an expert from the family violence service network who will address them’ (Coordinator, female, Australian).

Generally, cultural barriers in communication were directly managed by the volunteers and the coordinators: ‘there are a lot of volunteers here who speak different languages, so they understand cultures as well’ (Volunteer, female, Australian). Further:

if there was an issue that arose, it would be dealt with assistance by their [of the volunteers] team leader, or their manager ... the composition of the staff is culturally and linguistically diverse. (Coordinator, female, English/Irish)

Cultural problems were faced mainly in two ways: through training and communication. However, only three associations offered training programs to their volunteers. Furthermore, communication itself was considered a means to break down cultural barriers:

Culture becomes part of the conversation between two people, over a period of time. And you develop understanding, you develop a working relationship. And they [refugees and asylum seekers] trust and respect these two ways. [...] There is a perception that West is really wealthy, that everything they want they can have ... they need an honest communication, they need to be explained how things work. (Coordinator, male, Celtic)

Even though all the 20 participants from the Australian fieldwork noticed issues related to the language, one-third of the respondents have not had cultural issues during the interaction. This situation was common among the volunteers involved, as summarised in the following interview extract:

I have not come across a situation where we have needed to engage a mediator. Well, as volunteers we are advised to get one of our managers to come and assist us if there is a problem. I mean, sometimes we have some people who are very anxious, because of their visa situation, because they are angry and, you know, they are worried about the family, and then something happens in their country, where they come from, and they have mental stress, [...] I think people who are coming here understand they are coming in a good place, they come here because they have known that we are going to help them, so they are not coming here without an open mind. (Volunteer, female, Scottish)

To sum up, communication was considered a tool to manage problematic interactions, and the use of professional interpreters was restricted to language issues. However, the associations involved preferred to use their own internal resources, such as the cultural knowledge of the volunteers or the knowledge of the coordinators. This section clearly showed the effort of the organisations in supporting the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers in the host society through the construction of a positive communication. That is, communication to enable the creation of a space in which different individuals interact, constantly modifying each other. What were the other practices NGOs and CBOs provided to assist refugee and asylum seeker resettlement? According to scholars (Milbourne, 2010; DeFilippis et al., 2010), CBOs' constitutive purpose was to engage the process of community change. Was this the only purpose? Which strategies had they planned to achieve their goals?

The contribution of the Australian organisations to refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process

The current study aims to understand the extent to which the intercultural practices adopted by humanitarian organisations contribute to the refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. Findings from the Australian associations showed that they have multiple strategies and different goals to achieve in order to support the resettlement of these individuals. How were these organisations dealing with this issue? Were they assisting that process only through the provision of services at a community level? Or were they seeking to contribute to or change immigration policies?

This section analyses the purposes of the Australian associations involved, highlighting the connections with refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement in the new community. Then, the strategies adopted by the organisations are explored in order to understand the different ways in which the associations were supporting the resettlement process. Finally, the last subsection explains the participants point of view about the ideal resettlement and what role communication plays in that process.

Services and community: Supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement

The purposes of the NGOs and CBOs involved in this research represented a wide range of actions enacted in order to improve the interaction among people from different cultural groups and to increase their level of resettlement. In this way, the purpose of their activities declared during the interviews corresponded with those indicated by scholars (Ohanya, 2009; Esty, 1998; Weiss and Gordenker, 1996). In their studies, the authors pointed out that the ultimate purpose of these organisations was to have impact on the reception system and the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. Consequently, they need to provide services and humanitarian functions towards these individuals.

The main purpose declared by all these organisations was to support refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement. Among the different associations, this purpose was achieved through different means, according to their policies and competences. Although the purpose of the smallest association was just to provide food and material relief, the main purpose of one association relating to the health care system was 'to provide access to health for people with

migrant background. This community based service was set up to fill a gap that there was between people and how to access health care' (Coordinator, female, English/Irish). In both cases, the associations were looking for the same result, which was to improve refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process ensuring material support and access to medical assistance.

To facilitate this process, the associations involved were providing services 'which can improve the life of people in this area' (Coordinator, female, Scottish/Irish). This interview excerpt illustrated the dual approach used by the organisations. Indeed, they provided direct support to refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process improving the 'life of people' involving the community of 'this area'. This point of view was clearly illustrated by an interviewee who described the purpose of the organisation as:

To enable people to live in a peaceful place, such as we have the privilege to live in, and to empower them to be independent and to be a contributing member of the society. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The above interview portion pointed out the relationship between resettlement and host society. Indeed, humanitarian organisations advocating refugees and asylum seekers also created interactions with the community, for example teaching English language or giving the opportunity to submit an application for a job position. These interactions generally lead to positive experiences, in which the label of refugee or asylum seeker took on a positive perspective. In other words, in this way 'the Australian community understands that the majority of these people [refugees and asylum seekers] are not to be feared, that they are actually to be accepted and that our country's history is based on immigration' (Operator, male, Australian).

Services to provide and policies to change

The current study explored whether the Australian associations involved were seeking to provide services to refugees and asylum seekers for a better resettlement, or to contribute to the creation of a fair immigration policy through legislative change. The organisations demonstrated they took into account both these aspects in planning their strategies.

The offer of services was planned in order to provide refugees and asylum seekers with a range of information that would allow them to reach independence:

About the strategies, I think that probably they are broken down in two parts. First, we help them with their applications for Temporary Protection Visa, that is the legal assistance. This is the first step, because if you do not get that right, you potentially back home. The second aspect is that we help them in all aspects their resettlement in Australia, so we are talking education, we are talking English education, we are talking tertiary education, we are talking employment, setting up businesses, food support, clothing support, so all the range of ... (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The above extract summarises all the supports that all the NGOs and CBOs together were able to provide in order to facilitate the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. From this point of view, the Australian associations involved in the current research provided to these individuals a wide range of services. Owing to their different structures and constitutions (see chapter five), some organisations were focused on only one priority area, for example the health care system, which explains the variety of services between the associations. Nevertheless, the combination of services provided by each association covered the six priority areas identified by the Refugee Council Of Australia (2014): social participation, economic wellbeing, independence, health, life satisfaction and community connectedness. The services supporting refugees and asylum seekers were divided into three groups representing the main areas that the organisations concentrated on: (a) community, (b) education, and (c) employment and legal support.

All the associations involved in this study provided services and activities focused on (a) social participation, the provision of material relief, and the access to the community services. These services were organised according to their purpose under two aspects: services that offered support to refugees and asylum seekers, and services focused on creating connections between them.

Supporting services represented material and psychological relief provided, as well as the facilitation of the access to the public services. NGOs and CBOs from the Australian fieldwork provided refugees and asylum seekers with food, clothing, kitchenware, and electrical goods. For some of the smaller associations involved, material relief represented the main service provided:

We have around 300 people and 105 families coming once a week for food. We also have a free OP shop where there are things small enough to fit in a shopping trolley, so people can bring it and take away. We do not have furniture, because we do not have storage, we do not have transport so, simple things. (Coordinator, male, Anglo/Indian)

Psychological support was provided through family support and counselling services, for example running programs designed to help parents and children to improve communication. Material and psychological support represented essential services for refugees and asylum seekers and their resettlement process. The support provided by humanitarian organisations also focused on facilitating the access to the public services.

The second aspect related to the services offered in order to create connections and friendship networks among refugees and asylum seekers and within the host community. A wide range of social activities were provided, as explained in the following extracts:

We have soccer club, we have a very active art group, for people with disability or people with brain damage, and we have a community lunch, which is the opportunity for some people to have a good and free meal. We have craft, and friendships groups, we have a sewing group, and we also have time for women. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

We do social activities, we take people on groups' tour and camps, to see different parts of Victoria, different parts of our community groups. We have our classes, we had some music therapy. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

All the above excerpts highlighted the effort paid by the NGOs and CBOs to create connection and community with refugees and asylum seekers. Two of the organisations concentrated their efforts on developing community projects to support refugee communities, and on activity groups designed to help people socialising. Further, community support was also provided, to some extent, during the attendance of English classes, by the provision of language tools that allowed a better understanding of the host society.

The second main group of services provided from four associations out of six was connected with *(b)* education. All the respondents highlighted the relevance of the English classes organised by the associations, indeed it was considered a primary goal

to get them [refugees and asylum seekers] to a level where they can feel happy to communicate and also, hopefully, to help all of them to get in a job, or going to study. (Operator, male, Anglo/Australian)

The courses were organised in different levels, from beginner to advanced, and often alongside the development of conversation. A coordinator stated:

We provide education support for adults, particularly those who recently arrived, to migrants who need help with 'survival English', or need pathways to go on further

their studies, and they need help with English. And connected to that is computer literacy and help with that. That particularly with migrants who may have a low literacy level. (Coordinator, female, Australian)

The above extract of interview expresses the possible interconnections that were created along with English courses. Computer classes were developed to offer better opportunities to learn the language. Further, often the topics of the lessons included information about the host society, the community in which the students, all refugees and asylum seekers, actually resided and the services they could find in that territory. Courses were also designed in order to help asylum seekers to deal with tertiary education courses.

In summary, English courses played a broader role, not only language purposes, but also in teaching refugees and asylum seekers how to interact with and understand the host community. The respondents pointed out the role that communication had in promoting the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers in different ways, as discussed in the previous section. Acting as the first contact zone between people seeking asylum, those who have obtained refugee status and the host society (Fiske, 2006), NGOs and CBOs involved in this study reflected the role of *facilitator* proposed by Pearce and Pearce (2000, p. 413). In this way, the associations helped refugees and asylum seekers to reconstruct the meanings of the host reality, as well as to understand the host society and to help their inclusion. In this context, they were bridging the understanding of the society between refugees, asylum seekers and host society, promoting and creating for this reason cultural and factual situation based on mutual trust and respect.

The third group of services provided by the Australian associations covered (*c*) assistance with the labour market and in dealing with asylum seekers' legal path toward the status of 'refugee'. Although, only one organisation provided a structured service to assist refugees and asylum seekers in dealing with the Australian system of the labour market, those two kinds of assistance were often mentioned during the interviews connected to their resettlement process.

Employment was considered a key element in the resettlement process, because it allowed financial independence and stability. Indeed, all the participants imparted tips and suggestions on how to deal with the labour market during the English courses provided. The specific courses proposed by the association involved in the current study examined several topics: learning about the work force, interview skills, how to write a curriculum vitae and find a job. As well explained by the only operator involved:

We try to get people to be what we call 'job ready', so they [refugees and asylum seekers] understand a little bit about the Australian work place, occupational health and safety; we also make sure they have got a useful resume and they have done some role play for interview technique. We also provide a service where we try to match them up with companies that list themselves with us, which are happy to employ people seeking asylum. [...] we only do that when we can, if we can match a job we will, but sometimes there is not opportunities. (Operator, male, Anglo/Australian)

The above extract clearly pointed out the effort spent by the organisation to prepare refugees and asylum seekers to enter into the Australian labour market and, where possible, to act as an employment centre for individual cases.

Similarly, the previous component of this set of services, the need of legal advice for the asylum seekers was a constant and central element in discussing with the participants about the first steps of their resettlement process. Indeed, the attainment of the permanent residency, and therefore the status of refugee, was considered essential in the asylum seekers' resettlement process. That was true for two reasons: permanent residency allows full access to the healthcare system and to the labour market, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, only two associations were able to provide concrete assistance in this field. As a result of their mainly community-based and non-governmental nature, all the other organisations dealt with these issues by referring people to larger associations with relevant legal services. The existing service offered was called 'legal triage' (Coordinator, female, Turkish), and involved the study of the individual case, or of the family case, and the identification of the relevant organisation able to provide free advocacy. On top of that, the association also provided direct support to asylum seekers in their process toward the legal recognition of their status of refugee. As highlighted by a volunteer:

One of the major things that [the association] does is provide legal assistance. So, when they [refugees and asylum seekers] are trying to fill out a 60 page form, in English, we give assistance. (Volunteer, male, Australian)

In short, the services provided by the Australian associations involved in this study were focused on establishing a dialogue and facilitating the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the new society. Further, communication represented an opportunity to enhance the probabilities for a positive resettlement.

The second aspect of the question related to the presence of strategies used to contribute to or to change immigration policies. It was found that all the associations involved were concerned

about the legislation relating to reception of refugees and asylum seekers, hence about the government: ‘We are trying to change the policies of the Australian government, and also trying to change the view of the Australian public’ (Volunteer, female, Australian). The tightening of the reception system towards people seeking asylum led the humanitarian associations to deal with policies on immigration in different ways. Three main strategies were identified during the analysis of the interviews. The first strategy was in regard to a direct involvement in committees that were dealing with immigration topics. In this way, the organisations were able to express their points of view and debate the topic of concern to the committee. In some cases, the associations tried ‘to make contact with the government to try to explain how to deal with a particular problem connected to refugees and asylum seekers, or how to observe the context from a different point of view. But sometimes they do not let us...’ (Operator, male, Australian).

The second strategy used by the Australian NGOs and CBOs was to respond to the lack of assistance created by the law. Through the provision of services and support to refugees and asylum seekers, these associations were supporting people to access services they normally would not be eligible for. As well illustrated by a participant:

We [the association] are just trying to look after people and to find a fair system because of the government. It is not helping them [the asylum seekers], so we are just trying to integrate them to the society in a positive way. We are trying to offer programs and services that they are not eligible for outside the organisation. (Coordinator, female, Turkish)

The third strategy identified was of an indirect way to affect the approach to immigration issues, namely the creation of connections and programs to join the host community and share with it the context surrounding refugees and asylum seekers. With this strategy the associations intended to change the communities’ point of view. In order to achieve this, Australian NGOs and CBOs shared information and ran programs in which refugees and/or asylum seekers went to schools, or to meetings organised by the community in order to explain or clarify misunderstandings. Acting in this way, the organisations were also able to focus the effort on the construction of an interaction between human beings, rather than between cultural groups:

There are asylum seekers who go out and talk to school groups or other groups about themselves and their situation. They are trying to demonstrate that they are like everyone else, they are humans and they [the students or the audience] need not to be afraid of them. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

In summary, the Australian organisations involved in the project focused their effort on planning strategies that covered both aspects mentioned above. Indeed, they provided services to refugees and asylum seekers at a community level, and they also directly participated in the public debate on immigration policies. All the actions taken by these associations reflected the purpose of supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process. From this point of view, the organisations 'encourage communication between different communities and support communities that are settled here [in Australia]' (Coordinator, male, Australian). The refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process appeared to capture the main efforts of the associations participating in this study. How have coordinators and volunteers identified a resettlement process as positive? And what was the role that the intercultural communication played in that process?

Community interaction and independence as key elements for the ideal resettlement

Humanitarian organisations play a critical role in the early stages of refugees' settlement (Bloch, 2002). According to Haddad (2003, p. 20), settlement is effective when individuals feel that they belong and participate in the 'construction and reconstruction of the society' through dimensions such as social, political, economic and cultural. NGOs and CBOs involved in the current study identified two main features that characterised an ideal and effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers: the interaction with the host community and their independence.

The majority of the participants associated the effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers with their participation in the community. Indeed, communicating the context in which refugees and asylum seekers were welcomed helped the host society to understand the resettlement process of these individuals. Furthermore, the creation of a friendship network outside their own cultural groups was highly encouraged by the associations that took part in this project. As illustrated by a respondent:

A resettlement is considered positive when people have a job, feel welcome in Australia and have some friends. Something really important for their [refugees and asylum seekers] resettlement is to have friends who are Australian. When I say Australian friends, I mean people who have been here a little bit longer, not necessarily that they were born in Australia, and people who are able to stay here

permanently. To be successful in resettlement here, they need a job, being able to speak English and to have friends. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

From the above extract, it appeared to be clear how the interaction with the host community was considered crucial in the resettlement process of these individuals. Interaction and communication between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society were considered crucial for the achievement of a positive resettlement. From this point of view, a volunteer associated the realisation of a positive resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers with the moment in which 'they are starting to help somebody else' (Volunteer, female, Australian), hence totally connecting that process to a direct and specific involvement within the society.

In addition to the interaction with the new community, the Australian organisations involved in this project also highlighted the relevance for refugees and asylum seekers to attain the goals they planned, especially regarding their job situation and their independence. These two elements represented a double challenge in the achievement of an effective process. The following extract of conversation provided an example about this challenge:

Well, I can tell you about one little family that I am supporting, a family that have supported since they come out from the detention centre three and a half years ago. They fled from their own country and then they were in Darwin, Perth, Nauru and their own community detention centre. They have just received a bridging visa two weeks ago, so they are out of the community detention now. They are so excited because for the first time, well they both got jobs, part-time jobs in that two weeks. They can support themselves, and they are able to provide food for their family, and to feel safe in the house that they are settled in. To me, that is a successful resettlement. [...] They are earning money, so they are not relying on the government, because most people [refugees and asylum seekers] want to be independent and contribute to our society. Yes, definitively when you are independent and when you can manage your own affairs, you are having a positive resettlement. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The independence was evidence that the associations were able to transmit the knowledge and the skills required to interact and communicate with the host society understanding its system and its operation. In this way, refugees and asylum seekers were able to plan their lives without having to rely on services or institutions. However, this element was affected by the achievement of the permanent residence, as discussed in chapter five.

To summarise: the Australian associations supported the ideal resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers into a new society through a real interaction within the host community and the opportunity to be independent. In this context, the organisations from the Australian fieldwork

reflected the role defined by Pearce and Pearce (2000) as ‘facilitator’. According to the authors, this role is characterised by the assistance for the communication, including the development of mutual trust and respect, active listening and empathy, and advocacy. In other words, humanitarian organisations were reconstructing the context of the interaction between refugees/asylum seekers and the host society facilitating the communication between the two parties.

Associations involved in the current study acted as facilitators of communication between refugees/asylum seekers and the host society. Communication also played a role in the effort to achieve an effective resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers. The participants recognised the support provided by the use of intercultural techniques in the communication process. Both the elements identified in the development of a positive resettlement, which were the participation in the community and the independence, were supported by intercultural communication. The following example clarifies the relationship between communication and resettlement:

I am trying to think of the project that we can get them to start on. I mean, we were thinking about something that can help asylum seekers to be more integrated in the community, but not just like something that they have to do, like learning English or making food. Something they can enjoy and make friends. So, I was thinking maybe we do like a friendship group, so other asylum seekers can meet other people and, we can all try to speak English, so everyone can communicate and make friends. Like going to a movie, or to a restaurant, or something. Understand what people do, just ordinary things to do with friends. (Volunteer, female, Australian)

The above extract of interview shows the attempt to create new contexts in which people from the host community and, refugees and asylum seekers were able to interact. That is, the associations ‘help in teaching them to start to be part of the community’ (Volunteer, female, Australian).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings from the Australian associations involved in this research. In order to understand the ways in which intercultural practices in refugee/asylum seeker organisations contribute to the resettlement process of these individuals, the interviews were analysed to identify: (1) the interaction and the communication between groups from different

cultural backgrounds, (2) the communication that took place within the associations, and (3) the strategies adopted to achieve an effective resettlement.

The findings indicated that the interaction and the communication between different cultural groups was subjective and provided opportunities to create contexts in which individuals communicate, regardless of their cultural background. Here, communication was used as a tool to break down the barriers created by cultural patterns. Indeed, for the majority of the participants in this project the culture of people was more strongly underpinned by the personal elements of the individual, rather than the individuals' cultural group more broadly. As a matter of fact, the respondents recognised the communication between volunteers, coordinators and, refugees and asylum seekers as intercultural, especially with regard to features such as the use of active listening and empathy.

Furthermore, refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background and emotions were crucial to their resettlement process. The cultural background was essential in planning an appropriate personal project to resettle them in the host society, even as emotions affected these individuals' capacity to communicate. Nevertheless, the respondents considered the knowledge of the cultural background pointless in the communication process, paying more attention in constructing a person-to-person interaction.

The services provided by the organisations involved supported refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. Communication also had a key role in this context, indeed it allowed a clear understanding of the services offered, often focused on the interaction with the host and new society. All the services offered by the associations were means towards an effective resettlement process. Indeed, the provision of English language classes and of opportunities to enter the labour market with enhanced skills directly affected refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process. Furthermore, the creation of social networks within and outside the associations facilitated that process, allowing refugees and asylum seekers to better interact with the host society co-creating its meaning.

The associations from the Australian fieldwork focused on the construction of an interaction and so communication, based on relationships between human beings rather than individuals from specific cultural groups. The cultural background was often considered as a barrier in the construction of the interaction, even though necessary for the understanding of refugees' and asylum seekers' circumstances. From the point of view of the resettlement process of refugees

and asylum seekers in the new society, but also of the communication, the main issue noted by the respondents was the language. Further, the majority of the participants declared that they never had problematic interactions resulting from individuals' cultural elements. All the efforts of the associations involved were directed towards the achievement of an effective resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

Chapter Seven

Interacting and communicating within the Italian associations

This chapter presents the research findings from the interviews with the Italian associations. Addressing the research questions of the study, it explores what kinds of practices Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations employ to assist refugees and asylum seekers. In doing so, it highlights the role of the intercultural communication adopted within the process of resettlement of these individuals. Further, it focuses on the associations' strategies related to the resettlement and the reception of immigrants. Focusing on these points, it reveals an understanding of the intercultural perspective adopted by refugee and asylum seeker organisations and how this contributes to practices in the resettlement process of these prospective immigrants in Italy.

After their arrival in Italian harbours, asylum seekers are managed by the Prefectures, which are government jurisdictional agencies. Prefectures have agreements with associations and cooperatives that act as Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS).²⁶ Cooperatives are a specific kind of organisation with the purpose of providing socially useful services and jobs. Within humanitarian organisations there are several roles interacting with refugees and asylum seekers: coordinators, operators, intercultural mediators, psychologists, and volunteers, for example. This research considers the two main groups of the organisations' staff: one consisting of operators, and the other consisting of leaders of humanitarian organisations. Operators were involved in this study because of their direct contact with refugees and asylum seekers, managing first contacts between them and the host society (Fiske, 2006). Whereas, a member of the management board of each association was interviewed to investigate the planning level of the strategies used to facilitate interaction. Furthermore, a volunteer from an unofficial political association specialised in identifying what was thought to be unfair immigration policies organising events, participated in the project. In this way, the research

²⁶ Original Italian name: Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria.

reflected the context of organisations engaged in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers. A total of 22 interviews were conducted across nine organisations.

Table 7.1 Demographics of Italian participants.

<i>Kind of organisations</i>	Coordinators	Operators	Volunteers	Female	Male	Italians	Foreign
Cooperative	1	4		2	3	5	
Association	1	3		3	1	3	1
Cooperative	1	1		2		1	1
Cooperative	1	5		3	3	4	2
Cooperative	1				1		1
Association			1	1			1
Association	1				1		1
Cooperative	1				1	1	
Association	1				1	1	
TOTALS	8	13	1	11	11	15	7

As displayed on the Table 7.1, special attention was paid to create a heterogeneous group, to obtain information from those with diverse experiences and backgrounds. The number of men and women participating in the research was equal. Also, a third of the participants were not Italian natives; of these almost all had personally experienced the asylum seeker process.

The chapter is divided into three sections, which correspond to the topics addressed in the interviews. The sections move from the interactions with refugees and asylum seekers to the role of communication, the types of services offered by the associations and the strategies adopted to achieve the purpose they outlined. The first section involves the interaction created between operators of the humanitarian associations and immigrants. It considers the role of cultural patterns and intercultural perspective, and highlights the meaning of ‘culture’ for the operators, and how it is related to interaction. The second section focuses on the communication that occurs between immigrants and operators. It analyses the presence of intercultural characteristics, and the knowledge and affective components of communication, which possibly affect the resettlement process. The third and final section shows the strategies adopted by the Italian organisations to achieve an effective resettlement. It displays the services that organisations are offering in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers and the importance

given to the communication process in offering them. A large range of facilities were administered, covering legal, educational and social aspects of the resettlement process. Here, the purpose and the plans were implemented to favour inclusion in the host society.

Interaction and communication between cultures and individuals

According to the first assumption of this research, humanitarian organisations interact with refugees and asylum seekers to adopt an intercultural perspective. This perspective allows the creation of a continuous interaction and constant communication between individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002), during the daily actions that take place inside the ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the interaction originated by the daily relationships gives meaning at the objective reality, singular and unknown. That is, through socialisation, meanings are internalised and become routine in the communication with refugees and asylum seekers to help them in understanding the host society and their resettlement process.

All operators and coordinators of the Italian organisations participating in this study argued that, even if seen as definitively positive, the interaction between different cultural groups was perceived as problematic and complicated. Bringing together people with different cultural backgrounds was seen as a bilateral exchange of knowledge. An exchange had to be: ‘always propositive. When you are willing not only to accept the other, but also to make available your culture, once you do this, you can actually notice the limitations of your own culture’ (Operator, male, Italian). From this point of view, the interaction between immigrants and locals, but also between immigrants with different background, was considered an opportunity to efficiently involve resources. Generally, the interaction between immigrants was perceived as collaborative and constructive:

For what concerns the relationships between them [the immigrants] ... they are kind and respectful people, especially with regard to religious differences. I work currently in a home where 28 immigrants live, and there are Catholics, Pentecostals, Muslims and others, and everyone respects the prayer times of others, everyone respects traditions and customs of others, they are very kind, because I don’t think it’s easy. (Operator, male, Italian)

The associations organised daily interactions between the operators and refugees and asylum seekers, in which they discussed ordinary issues such as Italian language, the organisation of home cleaning, the planning of any medical appointment, among others. The daily interaction, a key element in forming the intercultural perspective and reaching its purpose, encouraged communication and interaction beyond the cultural patterns of communicators. Further, weekly meetings were organised for operators to focus on broader social topics regarding the relationship between local and foreign people — such as creating dialogue and debates relating to the situation of the asylum seekers in the reception centres spread across Italian territory and acknowledging the immigrants' points of view. Ultimately, the interaction between cultures was interpreted as an opportunity to encounter other people and realities, and to become aware of how problematic life is within certain contexts. However, all the participants in this study were aware of certain resistances and rigidities associated with the process.

Problematic interactions

Although refugees and asylum seekers occasionally perceived the operator as 'disrespectful' or 'too authoritarian', operators' duties required them to enforce observation and respect of accommodation rules and public order, and to apply a penalty for each violation. Immigrants' reaction to the application of such rules — based on respect of the law — sometimes was a 'wall in interaction' (Operator, female, Italian). The operators' perception of limited communication with refugees and asylum seekers is related to the reported inappropriate behaviour of those 'establishing the rules and telling us what to do' (Operator, female, Italian), whereas the immigrants felt that they were limited in their opportunity to reach their dream, their imagined resettlement within the host society. They perceived they were being treated as 'kids ... and found themselves inside a reception centre with pre-established rules, timetables and where they felt constrained and limited in their actions' (Operator, female, Italian). However, the employees of the organisations were working on improvements by trying to identify common goals together with refugees and asylum seekers in order to eliminate the perception of rules as something imposed.

Another reason that was indicated by the respondents as an element of problematic interaction was the host society's lack of real interest in meeting refugees and asylum seekers. It was often affirmed in the interviews that the only opportunities to meet people with different cultural backgrounds were created by the associations. However, even in these cases, there was no

effective interaction. They were informal meetings with specific goals which, once achieved, did not favour further interactions. A partial solution to this problem was a project created by several associations that aimed to create a context in which refugees and asylum seekers met local school students. In the opinion of the operators, after spending some time together, sharing their experiences and cultures, students and refugees overcame any previous rigidities and prejudices.

Some aspects of the interaction were related to the differences between immigrants' cultures of origin. In order to create a social network within the apartments or the houses utilised as accommodation for the immigrants, the coordinators recommended a mixture of different cultural backgrounds for each habitat community. The aim was to encourage an *etic* approach, which promotes intercultural communication focused on stressing similarities and differences among several cultures. In doing so, coordinators also briefed refugees and asylum seekers about communication with the host society. There were other implicit goals: the encouragement of the daily use of Italian language and preventing racism among immigrants. Indeed, participants complained that there also were racial prejudices between different African countries, or even between communities from the same country. As reported by an operator:

It is true that even among Africans, the perception of Nigerians is definitely negative. When we tried to organise accommodation for Nigerians and Senegalese, Gambians and people from some other countries to live together in apartments, it was refused initially. Especially where the group was compact,²⁷ at a level of country of origin, the guys [immigrants] who were already living in the apartments reported that it would have been impossible to share the same facilities, due to different habits, and also because of significant cultural differences. Often, they have pointed out that Nigerians are mostly Christians while they [the other residents] are Muslims, that Nigerians drink a lot, or speak English, so they cannot communicate. There are many reciprocal resistances, which disappear if you bring together only French speakers, it is easier to create relationships. (Operator, female, Italian)

The above interview extract described barriers that strong cultural bonds can create in the interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds. Belief, language and customs played a crucial role in the early resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, even among them. To overcome this problem in interaction, Italian coordinators and operators participating

²⁷ In the context of this interview, the term 'compact' was used as a synonym of strong cultural bonds, such as religious rites, historical rivalries between countries, and even food.

in this study started to focus their effort on creating a person-to-person interaction, rather than on interfacing with refugees and asylum seekers on the basis of their cultural backgrounds.

The role of culture in interaction

Almost all the respondents defined the interaction more individual than cultural, as follows. They acknowledged the presence of cultural elements related to the culture of their country of origin such as the religious beliefs, but they also acknowledged the presence of individual elements. This widespread awareness among the Italian participants in this research reflected the concept of intersubjectivity used by several scholars (Dai and Chen, 2015; Dai, 2010; Brandalise, 2002). From this point of view, intercultural interaction is defined as a multiple connection among individuals with different cultural background, in which intersubjectivity represents the relation between people who have a positive perception of each other.

Findings from the Italian fieldwork substantiates the crucial role played by individual elements in interaction, although the cultural level was described as the foundation of these elements. In other words, the operators of the humanitarian organisations were aware of the role played by the ‘culture’ of the interactants. The term ‘culture’ was unanimously identified as a set of values, habits and practices that constitute a worldview, a vision of himself/herself, and how to interact within the context. In other words, culture is ‘simply what allows us to move within this reality’ (Operator, male, Italian), a reality that is influenced by the everyday interactions in the construction of knowledge (Burr, 2015), and therefore by the communication. Nevertheless, culture was not the only element considered to analyse and explore this interaction, rather some of the respondents focused on human relations. From this point of view, the intercultural aspect of the interaction with immigrants became secondary, in favour of similarities. As explained by one of the coordinators of the associations:

Then there is the religious aspect, many of them are Muslims ... it occurred to me, for example, to bring in the Imam, [to interact with the group] but they were not interested ... You think you have done something important, [pretending to address the group:] ‘I talked to the Imam, he wants to know you, are you interested?’, but they reply ‘Hmmm ... not so much’. In short, it is a bit of a mystification involved [that religion is so important] ... they are human beings with a lot of problems, the same problems people have here [in Italy], but with different cultural connotations, and therefore definitely confused. (Coordinator, male, Italian)

The above excerpt highlighted the weak impact that an interaction focused on elements relating refugee and asylum seeker cultural background — such as religious belief — can fail. Indeed, in this example there was an absence of mutuality that is needed to create an intercultural interaction. The coordinator finally emphasised the nature of the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers, a person-to-person relationship between human beings with different problems.

The human aspect prevailed over the cultural one

Other operators from different associations confirmed that the human aspect prevailed over cultural identification in effective interaction. From this perspective, even in situations presenting important cultural gaps, relevant similarities were present — as quiet enjoyment of daily life, a job, a family. The same claim was made by Laszlo (1973) in asserting that all cultures belong to a cultural universality and share absolute common values.

The coordinator of an association involved for many years in supporting refugees and asylum seekers declared that problems were often related to their condition of not being yet assessed, causing frustration. He put particular emphasis on the long period of waiting for the approval of refugee status, and its complex process. Indeed, according to the coordinator, often immigrants had to wait more than a year to receive a preliminary response from the evaluation Commission for International Protection (CIP). Once the CIP rejected the request of international protection, immigrants could appeal the decision, but the waiting for the re-assessment was equally long and exhaustive. Considering that refugees and asylum seekers had two chances to appeal, they were sometimes expected to spend five to six years waiting for a decision.

Further, it was highlighted in the interviews that the term ‘assistance’ often had an uncomfortable connotation for the operators. In fact, the majority specified that they were not assisting immigrants, rather they were trying to accompany them along a path of interaction assessed as reciprocal exchange. From this point of view, some interviews revealed that operators sometimes misinterpreted the dynamics involved in their role, at time acting as tutors for immigrants and pretend to make decisions for them, and ignoring the respect for personal dignity that was anticipated. For the operators, the interaction with refugees found its core in prompting the autonomy of the individuals. An operator, who was a former coordinator and

had long-term engagement in the reception of immigrants, classified the attitude to label the newly arrived as needy people as malicious and deleterious. Indeed, he preferred to immediately present the reality of the new society, highlighting its limits caused by the economic crisis, and the absence of a central project planned and driven by government. Hence, he challenged this attitude by trying to influence it:

There is a largely common attitude among the kids [the immigrants], a kind of 'InShaAllah' [if it is God's will] attitude that we do not consider appropriate. Instead, we need smart, intelligent people who take initiative, so you can build projects and find out who is able to work with us in building these projects, that not only involves immigrants, but the whole environment as well. More things of this kind I can do, more I break down the prejudices. (Operator, male, Italian)

Summarising, the operators of the organisations acknowledged their role within the interaction as accompanying refugees and asylum seekers as they progressed to a forthcoming inclusion in the host society and in the choices regarding their future. The interaction was materialised in a communication enabling the understanding of the host society and its rights and duties. It also created the conditions for the operators to understand the limits of their society and overcome cultural barriers. The employees of the organisations confirmed the importance of two main aspects of the interaction that needed refining. First, a clear ethical code for their professional profile, identifying their role as 'different from the one created in an interaction between friends or volunteers' (Operator, female, Italian). On the other hand, they identified the priority of the operators to transmit primary notions of knowledge, not within a top-down system but drawing on the communication within the framework of a bottom-up design. Ultimately, the focus of the interaction was the communication process.

Communicating with refugees and asylum seekers

The current study considers that intercultural interaction, the communication between humanitarian operators and refugees and asylum seekers, has to be analysed from an episodic-oriented perspective to better focus on and understand the communication dynamics and the role culture plays on these interactions/communications. People are able to construct an effective communication process beyond their cultural patterns (Kelly, 1955), combining how they understand information and their consequent actions. Hence, in the intercultural model — where cultural backgrounds are expected to be different — interactants have to coordinate their

interpretation of meanings to create a communication that allows a satisfactory mode of resettlement in the host society, negotiating their cultural patterns and cultural symbols.

The operators of NGOs and CBOs employed techniques from the intercultural communication practices in the process of interaction. Indeed, a significant number of interviewees was aware of using specific skills of communication: ‘active listening’, ‘empathy’, ‘mutual respect’, for example. All these elements are naturally involved in intercultural communication (Ioppolo, 2014). In the case of the active listening, it is defined as ‘the process in which a listener actively participates in the communication interaction by attempting to grasp the facts and the feelings being expressed by the speaker’ (Ioppolo, 2014, p. 14). The use of these elements aimed to realise a communication process characterised by an improved collaboration between operators, coordinators and refugees and asylum seekers. As pointed out by an operator:

We increasingly comprehend and apply the intercultural practices. At first, you might have a tendency towards a ‘managerial’ approach, for example coldly exposing how things should be done, but this method does not support further constructive developments (Operator, female, Italian).

The above extract explained the reason why intercultural practices were considered the most effective tools to create an on-going interaction. Although different approaches such as the ‘managerial’ one can lead to better organisation of activities or to a better definition of the situational roles, often these approaches create barriers in communication, rather than effective interaction.

The interculturality in communication

The ‘active listening’ was the most common element of communication. The participants generally recognised active listening as the ability to listen with a high degree of attention and the participation in the communicative action, rather than the simple transmission of information (Pearce and Pearce, 2000). The high degree of attention to the conversation also helped in translating nonverbal language:

One thing I am learning as very important is listening, not just verbal listening, but also observing people while talking. The gesture, facial mimic, because often nonverbal communication tells us more than what is explicit. Especially when there are language barriers, different exclamations, but also additional meanings. (Operator, male, Italian).

The problem most frequently reported by the operators in the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers was regarding language, hence nonverbal communication took the aspect of a helpful and useful tool in providing support and services. Generally, the active listening ability was considered essential to communication, as well as ‘empathy’ and ‘mutual respect’. These three characteristics were considered the basis for building effective, problem-solving communication. Moreover, they corresponded to the main characteristics of intercultural communication, thus confirming one of the two assumptions of this study: intercultural practices and intercultural communication are efficient tools for the operation of humanitarian organisations. Acting within an intercultural perspective involves using the frictions created during interaction in a constructive way (Brandalise, 2002). The problem-solving characteristic of communication was invariably determinant for most interviewees:

What I am trying to do is to give hints and stimuli and then try to find solutions, to let him speak [...] When a person formulates a request and you listen, the sole act of listening is an answer. It is like saying ‘I am here to listen to you’, ‘what you are saying is important’. (Operator, female, Italian)

The operators clearly expressed their will to build interaction based on mutual trust, while acknowledging that communication was ‘a long journey that needs to be fully experienced, allowing it all the necessary time’ (Operator, female, Italian). Trust was an element to be co-built investing efforts and time. Indeed, during the interviews several situations were mentioned in which operators intervened to help and support, materially and psychologically.

Trust needs to be mutual and reciprocal as with all elements in intercultural communication. The first problem reported by operators related to the lack of reciprocity, a critical element. An operator suggested that ‘often we [the operators] should just remember that it is a mutual relationship, so we should not be too self-critical and start claiming the collaboration, otherwise there is no dialogue’ (Operator, female, Italian). Indeed, to provide support from the literature, it is a useful reminder that Ioppolo (2014) claimed that active listening is required by both the participants in the conversation, as it is necessary for mutual recognition and to allow the establishment of connections between each other. Another problem with trust was connected to the role of the operator as ‘controller’ of the observation and the respect of social rules and laws. As indicated before, often the reaction of refugees and asylum seekers to admonitions and corrections of their behaviours from the employees of the organisations was to construct a wall in the interaction, and so a breakdown in communication. Despite immigrants’ reaction, the operators were aware of their role in the application of the rules:

In professional matters, this [trust] changes, so we are on two different levels. Here, there is also a control function. We also try to apply communication techniques, but we are also aware that there are things that are not always possible, and sometimes we also need to do things we do not like but which are necessary for the functioning of the association. (Operator, male, Italian)

In this case, the operator was in agreement with other colleagues underlining the need to respect and enforce rules since they had specific roles for the correct and effective operation of the organisation. As mentioned in the previous section regarding services provided by organisations, one of the aims was to transmit the significance of the rules and their respect. The operators also highlighted in the interviews that they insisted on the application of a principle of reciprocity as a response to their efforts of acknowledging all aspects of the intercultural perspective regarding the immigrants. They were acting in a very comprehensive manner, and respecting the differences of cultural background, however they were expecting immigrants to respect the rules of the new environment: 'here [in Italy] there are different rules, hence it is correct that they, in exchange, respect our rules' (Operator, female, Italian).

Explaining their efforts in building mutual trust, the participants' narrative focused mainly on two aspects: the rules of the associations and Italian law. Operators reported more examples of peaceful coexistence inside the houses and compliance with internal rules, even if they admitted that in the past there were small law-related offences. The internal rules were especially regarding the attendance to Italian language classes, and the operators were keen to highlight that this form of control had a very constructive aspect, intrinsically related to resettlement. Imposing attendance at Italian classes was related to the importance of speaking the language of the host society, as previously mentioned. Hence, even when imposing certain rules, they were acting to extend the utility of a service and to increase the advantages for refugees and asylum seekers. Ultimately, the operators concluded by highlighting the issues related to this aspect of the interaction, stressing the importance of respecting the rules. Operators' expectation of the interaction and communication with refugees and asylum seekers reflected the evolutionary aspect of culture, highlighting the necessity of reimagining it to construct a positive resettlement process.

Furthermore, the creation of a relationship based on mutual trust was recognised as fundamental in achieving an effective interaction. An operator, explaining his/her own model of communication developed through his/her own practice, chose to focus his/her statements on two essentially interconnected key elements in building this specific relationship: trust and

dignity. Acknowledging the dignity of the newly arrived people was an additional important element, considered an intrinsic part of interaction and communication. This example was reported by an operator and former refugee who defined the importance of considering participants' dignity in interaction:

As intercultural mediator, I had to intervene between a lady and a young African family living in the apartment above her. The couple was young, so ... and she always complained because their bed was making noise. So, one day, she bought a new beautiful mattress and a carpet. It was meant to be a kind thought, certainly better than quarrelling with them. But when she brought them home these things, they felt hurt. The lady did a nice thing, but she did not consider the dignity of those people. (Operator, male, Rwandan)

As pointed out in the fragment above, immigrants demanded to be treated as adults, in some cases they even had their own families. Of course, they needed assistance in many respects, but 'they cannot be treated like children' (Operator, male, Lebanese). In other cases, the operators commented on 'how much patience' was needed to create interaction efficiently and constructively.

The interaction and communication with immigrants emerged from intercultural practices, consciously or non-consciously. In other words, not all the operators were aware of using skills related to intercultural communication; rather, they unconsciously applied them as additional tools to perform interaction, to build trust, mutual respect, reciprocity and consideration of dignity. Ultimately, the creation of a positive and efficient interaction and communication was related to the personal relationship between operator and asylum seeker. A few operators focused on some personal aspects of the dialogue. Indeed, they had to 'understand the person in front of them, to understand how he/she is facing this moment of his/her life, his/her thoughts at the moment, his/her plans for the future, his/her background' (Operator, female, Italian).

To obtain this information, the associations organised weekly individual meetings in addition to weekly group interviews. The latter was more focused on topics related to life in the new social environment, interacting with people inside and outside the protected structure they lived in. Coordinators and operators considered the group conversation sessions as opportunities to discuss accommodation rules: how to keep the apartment/house clean, respect for the habitat and public quiet, and civic education, for example. Conversely, the individual meetings were planned as 'a dedicated space [...] where to better shape the personal interaction, to better understand each other through a face-to-face dialogue. It is a moment in which I dedicate all

my attention to this person, and this positively influences the relationship' (Operator, female, Italian).

The outcome of these meetings reflected an increased awareness of operators regarding refugees' and asylum seekers' past, habits, education, profession and friends in their countries of origin. Further in individual conversations, an opportunity was given to find solutions for everyday issues, to identify the most effective strategies to achieve specific goals, such as improving Italian language skills. In this way, the individual meetings confirmed the crucial role of the intersubjectivity in the interaction. They were focused on the creation of a relationship grounded on a positive perception of each other, mutuality and consensus, as well as disagreement and tension (Dai, 2010; Brandalise, 2002).

Operators were also aware that the misuse of intercultural practices could create confusion and even distort conversations in which participants were both initially positive to each other. As mentioned by an operator, one of the most significant characteristics in the resettlement process was to always keep clear the distinction between their ideals and their temporary situation/condition. For example:

An unbearable thing, which exists so much in the operator-immigrant relationship, is responding positively to all their requests. The problem is that often the operator receives so many inputs from many different people and fails to follow all the requests. This builds a wall and immigrants later tell you things like, 'Telling you everything about me did not improve our relationship'. Then they start to lie, to omit certain things or to do things secretly, and the relationship lacks in honesty. (Operator, female, Italian)

The above fragment of interview mentions the case in which the sensibility of the operators caused a communication breakdown and negative behaviours. Very few operators tried to transmit to refugees and asylum seekers a realistic sense of their situations. Because of this, there was a lack in understanding the society and their circumstances. Consequently, refugees' and asylum seekers' expectations were not aligned with the actual opportunities of resettlement. Nevertheless, they reported that conversations were generally friendly and direct, often involving the use of practical examples or the re-examination of previously explained social or legal frameworks. Other times, the conversation started from the very beginning in a positive or negative manner. Often communication risked being 'brutally interrupted' because of cultural frictions in addition to barriers of language. In this case individuals' cultural

background played a key role in the interaction between interactants on opposite sides without any point of contact.

The use of professional intercultural mediators

The nature of problematic relationships was related to two different issues: language and cultural barriers. Various solutions to both problems have been identified, demonstrating a different approach and use of resources within associations, but also among operators within the same organisation. All the NGOs and CBOs involved in the Italian interviews indicated that they benefited from the services offered by professional intercultural mediators to solve situations where a cultural element was predominant. Indeed, the humanitarian operators considered the language element in daily interactions as a solvable problem, because in many cases the origin of the immigrants, mostly former British and French colonies, meant that they had additional language skills of English or French. Thus, the operators and the coordinators were able to effectively communicate with immigrants who did not speak Italian, sometimes involving the assistance of a colleague. Furthermore, when the refugee spoke exclusively his/her own language, they could rely on the support of other refugees/asylum seekers, who lived in the same accommodation.

The use of a professional intercultural mediator in managing problems relating to language was restricted to the preparation of the presentation of their case in front of the CIP responsible with the decision of immigrants' status. In these circumstances, the intervention of the intercultural mediator was essential because the asylum seekers' story was presented in their own language. However, when the case was related to a cultural aspect mediation was often required. For example, the intervention of an African intercultural mediator was seen by an operator as 'really helpful, because he knows exactly the characteristics of central-African identity and how they [refugees and asylum seekers] interpret or relate to certain issues' (Male, Italian). This definition of the role of intercultural mediators corresponds to the assertion proposed by Sargent and Larchanché (2009), in which their two main functions were equally recognised: to translate and to socially and culturally bridge different geographic contexts. In addition, many operators were also professional intercultural mediators, so they could count on their skills to immediately intervene in critical situations, ensuring the removal of any obstacles to communication resulting from misunderstandings or different cultural approaches. Operators without intercultural mediation skills had attempted to find solutions based on their own

experience, with the support of other refugees and asylum seekers of the same cultural origin. Here is a report from an operator that exemplifies the relevance of the intervention of a refugee:

Some time ago we had an issue with a person who refused to attend to blood tests and vaccines for himself and his children and, regardless of how much we tried to explain the usefulness of these procedures, we weren't able to convince him. We needed to contact someone with the same cultural origin and he succeeded, even if it took him a lot of time, and probably required an adaptation of his own communication register. None of us operators would have said to him: 'Do it for your little girl', but this refugee who helped us had touched certain levels of emotional memory that for us were inaccessible whilst applying rationally our scientific methods of assistance. So, if we need to ask someone for a hand, we try to use our former guests. (Operator, female, Italian)

The operators referred to the involvement of former refugees in the interaction as 'added value'. Former refugees were able to communicate with refugees and asylum seekers using their languages, in many cases even the dialect of their region in the country of origin. They could also use their own experiences in building a dialogue based on trust, acknowledging each other as individuals with similar cultural and experiential background. They shared the status of asylum seekers, they had applied and concluded positively their hearings with the CIP; their stories were similar, as was the sense of frustration provoked by the tension of waiting for their official status of refugee to be asserted. The interaction with these facilitators was for asylum seekers an opportunity to collect data on their immediate future, and to make decisions referring to it.

The use of intercultural mediators was widespread among the associations and related mostly to language and cultural issues concerning communication. Nevertheless, some respondents declared they perceived a sort of artificiality in their interaction, even admitting their role on helping and constructing communication. Indeed, they interpreted the success of this method as depending exclusively on a common cultural background, and not on exceptional professional skills. In other words, although all the associations sought to solve the questions related to language and culture through mediation of professionals, or former asylum seekers and refugees, a small number of interviews (four) revealed that this issue was perceived not as a communication problem, but as a 'psychological barrier'. That is, 'the human aspect is more important than the background' (Coordinator, male, Italian). To understand the extent to which this last statement was reflecting the routine, the research focused on the importance that cultural background had for elaboration of knowledge.

The knowledge of refugee and asylum seeker cultural background

One of the components of an effective intercultural perspective was the ‘cultural knowledge’ of the participants in the dialogue (Ioppolo, 2014). Interviews alluded to the dominant culture of the country of origin as a prominent element in the development of the interaction, so the question was related to how crucial it was to know immigrants’ cultural background. In other words, did they need to be aware of different values, norms, concepts, or symbols of cultures in countries of origin? The answers displayed a wide range of interpretations of this issue. Almost half of the respondents were convinced that the cultural knowledge was ‘fundamental’ and ‘essential to decode some behaviours and to understand the dynamics within reception centres’ (Operator, male, Italian). From this perspective, operators had to know geo-political situations, the histories of countries of origin, and also their main cultural characteristics. Consequently, coordinators who embraced this approach organised informal classes during the weekly staff meetings to address problems and cultural aspects concerning the main countries of origin of migratory flows.

The alternative approach did not consider information regarding the cultural background as ‘fundamental’ in the interaction. As explained by one of the coordinators: ‘most of the problems are not related to the background, they are related to their existential condition. So, if an operator is efficient, and for efficient I mean capable of tuning in emotionally, he/she does not need to know anything else’ (Male, Italian). However, difficulties were reported also because of different cultural characteristics of people coming not only from the same country, but also from different villages. In other cases, operators used history and cultural particularities of countries of origin just to select topics for conversation. For operators who did not confirm the importance of accessing knowledge regarding cultural background, the purpose was focused on a communication starting from ‘here and now’, that is from the host society and its rights and duties. In these cases, the knowledge element appeared helpful, but not essential in the construction of the communication with refugees and asylum seekers.

In exploring the role of cultural background in interaction, operators asserted communication with refugees and asylum seekers as an interaction between human beings, and not as a dialogue between different cultural groups. The interaction was described as actions involving people who know each other and who talk about common issues’ (Operator, male, Italian), thus strengthening the culture-general perspective focusing on the individuality of each member of

each different group. The operators claimed to focus their efforts on building a future for refugees and asylum seekers, rather than examining their past; this was the main reason for which they preferred to interact with the individual, rather than with the group. This interaction demonstrated an opportunity to create communication going beyond cultural patterns and behaviours. The communication focused on the elaboration of the information, and the meanings given to them, as well as the associated actions (Pearce and Cronen, 1980).

The participants also stressed how thinking of individuals as representatives of a whole society or a specific cultural group, could lead to important misunderstandings. The knowledge referring to immigrants' background was often indicated as an element that could suggest negative and discriminatory feelings towards a specific cultural group. As remarked by a participant: 'sometimes [the cultural background] may confuse you, because each of us has prejudices, even if we do not want to have them. Sometimes it's better not to know too much and find out along the way. After years of experience, you will better interact with a person' (Operator, female, Spanish). In fact, categorising an individual by associating him/her to a labelled group — religious, social (as negative associations), professions — was perceived as possibly prompting prejudices and disadvantaging communication. Hence, they preferred to construct a communication in which the consideration of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background was absent. Operators isolated this element, setting it aside and focusing on the individual aspects.

However, it was important for the operators to know the cultural background of refugees and asylum seekers in order to support their resettlement process. Acting as first interlocutors in the host society for asylum seekers and refugees (Fiske, 2006), operators mentioned the intensity of their efforts towards resettlement for these individuals. They were supporting immigrants through communicative interaction aimed at achieving refugees' and asylum seekers' social inclusion. Operators and coordinators expressed their opinion on the relation between two components of communication (Liu et al., 2015; Ioppolo, 2014): knowledge (of the cultural background) and emotions within the resettlement process of immigrants.

Knowledge and emotions in the resettlement process

The cultural background was perceived by operators as relevant to and influencing the resettlement process in the host society. This group of workers focused on the immigrants'

history, the stories they had lived and the stories they told (Pearce and Cronen, 1980). As pointed out by a coordinator, a former refugee and currently manager of the North-Eastern area of Italy:

Most of the boys [asylum seekers] suffered persecution, torture, and other atrocities in the country of origin. Then they went to Libya, where the situation is certainly not better, in fact they are oppressed by these 'rebels' and robbed, tortured, raped... in Libya the situation is very serious. [Here, in Italy] some are offered professional assistance to help them forget what they have gone through, but you cannot completely forget these things. They will be persecuted by these nightmares, we have people who wake up at night screaming, reviving terrible moments. In these cases, we must operate carefully, with love, make them feel loved by the operators, by our team. (Coordinator, male, Syrian)

The coordinator related the resettlement process mostly to facts that asylum seekers experienced before their arrival in Italy: 'A painful path that left deep scars in the memories of these individuals'. The interviewee also revealed the ways in which he used to manage these problems, namely adopting a specific way to communicate and interact based on the transmission of emotions such as love, hospitality, and acceptance. The refugees' background was often compared to a 'deep wound that should be cured', otherwise they will always be at risk of 'infections' (Coordinator, female, Moroccan). That means refugees needed to face their past and leave it behind. In this way, the background was perceived as affecting the resettlement process, the cultural and social past of refugees and asylum seekers. Consequently it was often identified as a limitation to their resettlement. The cultural background especially was considered by these operators as a negative element of communication. Within this perspective, the individual who was supposed to cling to his/her set of values, norms, concepts, and symbols was rather associated with a cultural group. In this way, he/she ran the risk of experiencing problems in communicating and interacting with the host society because he/she was being associated with people with limited interaction skills from the same cultural background. The past was also described as 'too strong, too painful' (Operator, male, Italian) for the refugees and asylum seekers, but also referring to them as 'guys who want to start over in a country that offers them job opportunities, but also normal life' (Operator, male, Italian).

Education was also included in the evaluation of the cultural background in the resettlement process. Educated immigrants were considered advantaged in the resettlement process, compared to those who had a very low level of education, or who were illiterate. As explained by an operator:

In Africa, in the most provincial areas, people go to the hospital when they are dying, they do not have the concept of prevention. An educated person, who grew up in a city, recognises its value. When the guys [the immigrants] have toothache, I tell them 'go to visit a doctor, it is for free'. Often the answer is: 'No, I try to resist until I cannot face it anymore.' Or abuse medicines. (Operator, male, Lebanese)

In this fragment, a lower level of education was considered as an element disadvantaging the ability to interact with the system in the host society. In this case, for example, the point of view of the asylum seeker affected their use of the health system. A literate person seeking asylum would understand and 'translate' cultural elements that form the host society; consequently, that person would be able to facilitate his/her resettlement process and actively participate in the construction of the community. The educational level was also associated to communication problems, as it involved learning of the Italian language, and language was considered the 'bridge' for social inclusion. It was harder for an illiterate person to learn a new language.

Summarising, the cultural background of immigrants was generally considered a significant obstacle to the resettlement process. Nevertheless, it was also considered fundamental for achieving the status of refugees. The background of asylum seekers was unanimously recognised as essential in obtaining international protection. Referring to this aspect, operators noticed that shocking experiences during the journey and the high level of stress experienced mainly in Libyan prisons, affected the ability of immigrants to interact and share their stories. Telling their histories convincingly was crucial to obtaining the status of refugee, and association staff, both operators and coordinators, were striving to improve their communication skills for the hearings to the CIP. All participating organisations agreed on the beneficial use of professionals, such as intercultural mediators and mental health professionals — psychologists and psychiatrists.

The operators also acknowledged their own limits within the system they were part of: 'again, they are free to tell the stories they want, we need to believe they tell us their true stories. We do not know how it is to find yourself in a foreign country, with no other chance then to start everything again, to invent a past or to conceal part of it' (Operator, female, Italian). This last statement reflected the necessity to share a rule system of meanings in order to mutually comprehend their understanding and their actions. Here, during the intercultural interaction the actions were coordinated by the negotiation of refugees' and asylum seekers' Episode 1

(cultural background) and Episode 2 (cultural behaviours) in order to achieve a satisfactory resocialisation (Pearce, 1976).

The second element explored through interviews was the connection between refugees' and asylum seekers' emotions and their resettlement process. Operators and coordinators confirmed that the emotions of refugees and asylum seekers heavily affected their resettlement. A coordinator referred to this aspect as follows:

The first three months they do not understand anything, they are full of joy and they continue to thank us. From the third to the fourth month, they start to apply for the status of refugee, they start studying Italian, get out from our centre and get to know other immigrants, and understand how the Italian system works and acknowledge it. And then, they start to worry for the outcome of their request for the international protection. From the sixth to the ninth month they realise what happens if they don't obtain a positive outcome from the commission [CIP], and they begin to worry about how to help their families left behind in the country of origin. They start to feel fragile at this stage, and sometimes we assist them with a psychologist or a psychiatrist. (Coordinator, male, Palestinian)

The above situation, presented by the coordinator as most frequent, described the psychological pressure to which immigrants were subjected. Operators pointed out other different emotions causing misunderstandings in communication. Referring to asylum seekers' resettlement, the operators described as the most relevant emotion disappointment relating to the migration process. In this case, the disappointment was in relation to two causes: the decision of the CIP, which in many cases rejected the request, and the time it took for their official status recognition. The lengthy wait for the recognition, often followed by the rejection of their application, was a disappointment because it contrasted with their initial expectations. Yet, the disappointment was a factor in them gradually understanding their actual position and their life project. Indeed, a participant described this disappointment as 'the distance between their dream and the reality. This distance must be reduced, and you must get them back to reality because, unfortunately, the dream they had is impossible to put in practice' (Operator, female, Italian). In their past, asylum seekers have faced more complex and bureaucratically rigid societies compared to the one they were settling in. Operators acknowledged that the slowness of bureaucracy was a threat to resettlement, as a cause of widespread mistrust against the whole reception system.

Observing the refugees and asylum seekers during the period spent inside the protected structures managed by associations, operators identified four additional emotions intervening

in the interaction between immigrants and the host society: distress throughout the journey, confusion, homesickness, and anxiety concerning the future. These emotions could influence ‘their capacity to have a job, to make friends, and to learn a language’ (Operator, female, Italian). The period spent at the associations was often used to process ‘mourning’ (Operator, female, Italian), that is to manage feelings related to their country of origin, to terrifying experiences in Libya, and to the journey they had faced. Indeed, operators utilised communication as a method to elaborate asylum seekers’ and refugees’ feelings and to give them tools to go beyond that stage of their lives and to start positively a new life in the host society. This was considered helpful for their resettlement process, because ‘here they encounter difficulties, and unfortunately they will find many more, so they have to elaborate their past and we provide the instruments to do it positively’ (Coordinator, female, Italian). However, the answers to this question also expressed a sort of doubt regarding some immigrants who were believed to be exaggerating their emotions just to gain some advantages within the associations.

The actions of the humanitarian organisations were organised to help these individuals get over their past experiences and reach social inclusion in the host society. Even though operators and coordinators admitted the relevance of emotion and of the cultural background of refugees and asylum seekers, they also considered social inclusion as the main problem in achieving effective resettlement. Indeed, through daily interaction and other services, the associations were trying to provide them with a set of tools useful in interfacing with the host society and people from other cultures. The daily interactions were especially utilised as a model of communication in which those interactions were created as a ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116). Here, it was possible for both operators and refugees and asylum seekers to reimagine and influence their own culture. In doing so, they were transforming the process of understanding meanings; by focusing on the actions that daily occurred, interactants were able to take into account the antecedent actions in order to contextualise the subsequent ones. This method was adopted to facilitate the negotiation of their cultural patterns and behaviours to achieve an effective communication, and consequently a better resettlement process. However, along this interaction, refugees and asylum seekers were also provided with a broad range of services implemented to encourage their resettlement process.

Italian organisations' contribution to refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process

The term resettlement reflects refugees' and asylum seekers' participation in the 'construction and reconstruction of the society' (Haddad, 2003, p. 20). This interaction with the new environment, which happens in different fields, such as social, economic, cultural, and spiritual, enables immigrants to participate in the all aspects of the social life. Intercultural communication, encouraging a mutual acknowledgment and understanding between communicators, allows to explain and understand a practical way in which an effective resettlement is applied. This research intends to explore how NGOs and CBOs supporting refugee and asylum seeker contribute to the resettlement process. Are they only providing services to support these individuals, or are they actively participating in the change of immigration policies?

Italian participants in this research were focused on the resettlement of these individuals in the host society. More specifically, they endeavoured to assist them in building a future focused on social inclusion (Ohanyan, 2009; Esty, 1998). Through the use of intercultural communication as a tool to escalate and support coordinated systems of meanings, these organisations were able to indirectly influence the opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to resettle in the new environment. Then, the section examines the services provided by Italian NGOs and CBOs to refugees and asylum seekers in order to increase the effectiveness of their resettlement. Finally, the last subsection focuses on the way in which participants at this study interpreted the ideal resettlement of these individuals within the host society.

Italian strategies towards an effective resettlement

The coordinators, as well as the operators, formulated the similar purposes of their organisations in different ways. Associations' goals could be categorised in the three areas requiring their support: providing services, increasing immigrants' autonomy, and prompting their social inclusion. These three groups together reflected the principles declared by the Central Service of Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (2015) in its nine priority areas in which humanitarian associations have to focus.

The services they provided to refugees and asylum seekers were rarely mentioned as a purpose. Several interviewees highlighted the connection between the services they offered and their social utility for immigrants.

Most of the interviewees' answers referred to the remaining two categories, and the purpose to increase the autonomy of refugees and asylum seekers was the most widespread goal in organisations' policies. A consistent number of operators acknowledged their mission of providing refugees and asylum seekers with useful tools to gain autonomy, to get a job, to set their daily life and to become independent. Regaining independence helped the beneficiaries of the programs to connect with others and to build a new network of relationships, as discussed in the next paragraphs concerning an ideal resettlement. As stated by an operator:

For the association and for the operators, it is a victory when a boy [a refugee or asylum seeker], gets out of a reception centre and builds a social network that helps him find an accommodation, a job, have an independent life without asking our support. This is our fundamental objective. (Operator, male, Italian)

In this fragment, the operator highlighted the effort of the associations in empowering refugees and asylum seekers to become independent. Indeed, the ability and the knowledge that immigrants had to acquire to create a network were considered 'fundamental objectives', a 'victory' to achieve through the use of essential tools that resulted from interaction and communication. Here, operators were acting as 'facilitator' between immigrants and the host society. Indeed, they were giving priority to elements as the context of interaction and the quality of the dialogue, avoiding the use of conventional practices that would turn away effective resettlements.

The last category of associations' goals is the social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. The purpose of coordinators and operators was focused on integration and inclusion, to create the 'society of tomorrow' (Operator, female, Italian), but also to fight racism, to favour interaction among different cultures, and to promote an intercultural perspective. A different operator pointed out the efforts developed by associations in socially educating and teaching Italian to immigrants as a service for public benefit. In fact, 'people who do not know how to behave or are illiterate create problems for themselves and for the community, even for society' (Operator, male, Italian). It is worth highlighting that the common value in these three categories of aims was the achievement of an effective resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers.

To achieve these purposes, the Italian NGOs and CBOs adopted different strategies. For clarity, the strategies were divided into two different ‘fields of application’: assisting refugees and asylum seekers to achieve autonomy — to find a job and to build their routine in the host society, and to create interaction between the immigrants they temporarily assisted within their structures and the society outside the associations’ environment.

The entire first set of answers referred to immigrants, their inclusion in society, and their independence. The majority of coordinators and operators related their planning of strategies in their associations to these elements. Most of them suggested that the most effective way to build autonomy was through empowerment, through providing them with a set of ‘linguistic and cognitive tools’ (Operator, male, Italian). In other words, teaching Italian language, encouraging education, creating networks, and providing them with information on how to access services and opportunities offered by the society would increase their independence. Learning how to properly use these ‘tools’ was considered a fundamental step in the resettlement process. In doing so, humanitarian organisations were establishing a dialogue to help and support the acknowledgment of the new environment, to offer them effective access to community services and social systems.

Part of the operators stated that the main problem was finding a job, with all the issues connected to it including home, family, opportunity to have a social life. An operator described the basis of these techniques: ‘Strategies are meant to provide tools through training of Italian classes, practical experiences, apprenticeships, etc. They can as well be applied on single projects, focused on understanding the individual and what his/hers aims are’ (Operator, female, Italian). Providing instruments and focusing on the ‘life project’ of immigrants were the two strategies adopted by NGOs and CBOs. The operators used the ‘life project’ as a pretext to better identify the strategies to adopt, based on immigrants’ personal experiences. The main aim was the construction of a communication process based on the concept of intersubjectivity as proposed by Dai and Chen (2015), that is a relationship conceived as mutual and consensual. In doing so, they provided better services, personalised and oriented to the development of their personal skills. From this perspective, the organisation of training courses was considered essential to developing their abilities and, consequently, to help them finding a job. Increased attention was given to the search of a job, because the working place was considered the starting point for interaction with the host society.

The second 'field of application' of strategies targets the achievement of an active interaction between the host society and refugees and asylum seekers. In fact, the organisation of training courses did not involve just the beneficiaries of the projects, but also Italian natives interested in volunteering and offering support to refugees and asylum seekers. The involvement of local communities was mainly focused on the organisation of events that aimed to increase citizens' awareness of immigrants' real conditions and stories. They claimed to concentrate their efforts towards the construction of a continuous dialogue within the host society, and also between operators of different organisations and refugees and asylum seekers.

Coordinators and operators were attending conferences and meetings in which they presented different stories and motivations that prompted asylum seekers to embark on their journey, often involving the refugees themselves. The purpose of this strategy was to increase awareness of local community and institutions about the fragile condition of people who had to escape from their countries of origins, and also to eliminate cultural barriers between individuals. This last point was particularly significant for the interviewees because, even as they acted to achieve this purpose, they were trying to change and influence the generally negative perception of immigrants portrayed by mainstream media and politicians. Their efforts were concentrated on highlighting the intentions of various political groups that used immigrants as a pretext to inflict and blame opposition policies from an ideological perspective, concealing electoral motives for gaining more votes. In doing so, the associations were trying to deliver to the host community a realistic description of refugee and asylum seeker circumstance.

The organisation and participation in events and meetings was also seen as an opportunity to promote intercultural perspectives, especially 'through the encounter and, in some ways, the mutual impact between cultures' (Operator, female, Spanish). As mentioned before, the Italian participants were aware of the dualistic interaction that took place in the intercultural processes. On the one hand, the determination to create a positive interaction, underpinned on mutual respect; on the other hand, the opportunity to draw new policies from analysis of cultural differences (Dai, 2010; Brandalise, 2002).

All the associations were involved in projects in partnership with secondary schools and colleges, aiming to increase the intercultural impact on their perspective. These projects were planned and developed to increase the awareness of students on the problematics associated with the urge to escape from your home country and start a wholly new life in a new society.

The meetings were included in regular school programs and covered the time of a single class (approximately one hour). Generally, an operator and an asylum seeker or a refugee told the class his/her story and experiences and presented his current position. The operators involved in these projects reported further unexpected, positive consequences that naturally evolved, such as triggering long term interactions between refugees and asylum seekers and students outside of school. In this way, communication was a means to create a better-quality interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and the host society.

Often the realisation of these strategies was unsuccessful because of external causes, in spite of operators' efforts. One operator commented:

It is difficult for us to concentrate on long term, qualified jobs, because we always consider the possibility that their applications could be rejected and they will not have the documents [conferring the status of refugee]. For them too, it is difficult to think of building something solid. They live in precarious conditions, sometimes they must renew their visas every six months, without knowing if they'll get it or not, hence they consider making commitments as useless. It is difficult, when they feel discouraged and defeated, to talk to them about acquiring new skills, or to learn the language, because they wonder why they should do that. (Operator, female, Italian)

The policies adopted by the Italian government were often interpreted as temporary measures, in which the management of refugees' and asylum seekers' issues were treated as emergency conditions, and a long term strategic plan was never formulated. Calhoun (2008) and Musarò (2011) used the term 'emergency imaginary' to describe a concept able to shape, in terms of social imaginary, the perception of a fact and the consequent action. The 'emergency imaginary' affects the way in which emergencies are understood and addressed. As mentioned above, waiting for their official status to be assessed was the phase that mostly affected the resettlement through immigrants' emotional equilibrium. That was the motivation of some associations to protest against the implementation of certain immigration policies, through organising events and playing a concrete local political role against xenophobic attitudes perpetrated by a section of the population and/or governmental institutions. Indeed, as suggested by Esty (1998) and Ohanyan (2009), humanitarian organisations mainly performed their actions when immigration policies failed to fairly and accurately represent the point of view of (at least) a part of the society. In a specific case, one meeting prompted a collaboration with the local university, which had developed two projects: a conference entitled 'Studies on How to Codify Immigration Issues' and the establishment of a new postgraduate Master's

course called ‘Intercultural Studies — cognition and practices for the settlement of asylum seekers’, focused on training personnel to be specialised in managing refugees’ and asylum seekers’ issues and managing the organisations involved in their reception.

Outside these two main sets of strategies, one coordinator mentioned the connection between the resettlement process and the structure of immigrants’ system of reception. He considered the effects of the cohabitation on people with different cultural patterns, and concluded that facilities containing between 25 and 35 refugees and asylum seekers were the most effective solution and provided the environment they really needed. He argued that inside such accommodation, immigrants were favoured to maintain their own identities, and that sense of security prompted the immigrants to have a more proactive attitude. The defensive position instead favours depression, in part caused by the lengthy wait for bureaucratic procedures to process applicants’ status. Operators mentioned that, simultaneously, their work was focused on facilitating the interaction with other cultures. The connection between the structure of the reception system and the immigrants’ resettlement process was explained by one coordinator as follows:

little groups in small houses are perfect to disguise their presence, and perhaps would not have any negative effects on the environment. But it is not adequate to make them self-sufficient, for the life they are supposed to live here from the moment they get their documents’ (Coordinator, male, Italian)

A further strategy developed by all Italian associations included a constant and active collaboration with religious and public institutions, in addition to the collaboration with similar organisations. Indeed, the interaction with stakeholders from the host society facilitated positive experiences and the creation of a more realistic understanding of immigrants’ situations.

Communication and services supporting the resettlement process

This study focused on the services offered and provided by humanitarian associations and the role played by communication in the resettlement process. NGOs and CBOs involved in this research gave a clear and correct understanding of the structural system of the host society, in order to allow immigrants of the opportunity to enter and actively participate in the new environment. Humanitarian associations built a virtual ‘bridge’ (Putnam, 2000, p. 22) to

comprehensibly present the host system and its adjacent rights, and to objectively illustrate the differences.

The current Italian legislation on immigration contemplates two different stages of the system in the process of reception: The CAS related to the first reception of the asylum seekers, and then SPRAR, also called second reception. The associations involved in the study worked in the CAS stage. The process is developed in the following way: The Prefecture — the government jurisdictional agency managing immigrants' very first accommodation within the Italian territory in structures called 'hotspot' — distributes asylum seekers among various associations (that have been previously approved as being able to care for a precise number of people). Hence, the very first services offered to immigrants by the Italian associations are related to accommodation and basic needs: providing food, clothes, sanitary products, and a place to live. The associations also distributed what was referred to as 'pocket money', a sum offered by the Italian government to immigrants for immediate needs. The collaboration between the Prefectures and the Italian NGOs and CBOs is an example of the role of 'implementing agencies' (Ohanyan, 2009, p. 479). Ohanyan (2009) intended to emphasise the ability of these agencies to develop responsive policies to the needs of the host and immigrant communities. It was also pointed out that governments need humanitarian organisations to compensate for any gaps created by their structures.

In addition, the humanitarian organisations provided a range of additional services that are essential in the resettlement process. Beyond the provision of food and accommodation, they provided a compulsory Italian language course. Although not required by law, learning the Italian language was considered compulsory by all the associations involved. The language of the host country is presumed to be essential for the newly-settled to access society: '... the teaching of the Italian language, which is the most important service we offer [...] is a fundamental service for their inclusion' (Operator, male, Italian). Italian courses played a preeminent role in the activities of the organisations; in fact they were the only ones with mandatory attendance. At the fourth absence from Italian classes asylum seekers were penalised in their daily activities within the accommodation by most of the associations. The relevance of learning the language was also highlighted as the first service offered/imposed, and the principal one. Further, the degree of knowledge of the Italian language was often related to participation in internships in available companies, which were a good opportunity to access the labour market and to get a job:

we activated many training apprenticeships for them, depending on their level of Italian. We hope that some could become real work experiences, and prompt a contract for a job. Let's say that we have a good average today: when the Italian level comes to a good point, the boys [asylum seekers] are put into different kinds of apprenticeships. We have people in gardening services, in warehouses, in removals, in factories ... so, quite diversified experiences. (Coordinator, female, Italian)

Closely related to language learning, an essential element to access almost all the facilities offered outside the association, humanitarian organisations provided additional services. For the purposes of clarity, this study has chosen to divide them into three main groups: those related to the structure of the system in the host society, the labour market, and legal assistance. All the groups reflect the principles of the list drafted by the Central Service of Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (2015) on the nine roles to encourage refugees and asylum seekers. The first group involves accommodation, orientation and access to the services on the territory, the house market, social integration, and social and health services. The second group embraces the labour market, and education and professional requalification. The third group represents legal support, which plays a critical role of the humanitarian organisations in the early stages of resettlement (Bloch, 2002).

The first group reflects the understanding of the host society. Indeed, according to an extract of an interview: 'Along with the teaching of Italian, there are two important things: respect for rules and civic education' (Coordinator, male, Palestinian). During the first approaches to a new society particular assistance is needed, especially when there are major possibilities of interpretation and different codification of meanings. Indeed, according to Gergen and Davis (1985) the understanding of the society derives from the daily interactions, rather than from the observation of the objective reality. Consequently, most of the organisations offered '... training modules [...] ranging from road safety education, up to the use of means of transport' (Operator, female, Italian), practical examples being how to travel between different cities, or how to ride a bicycle safely. They also focused on courses explaining public services available in the territory.

There is also the orientation to services offered within a specific jurisdiction: we talk about Questura,²⁸ we talk about the offices where they must follow all the bureaucratic process. But we also talk about other services [that are] less 'official', for example where you can eat, where to ask for a piece of bread (several parishes

²⁸ The main police station present in a town, where the immigration department has its offices.

have been organised to provide it); if they live in Padova, knowing all these places can keep you safe. (Operator, male, Rwandan)

Furthermore, all the associations indicated the importance of assisting asylum seekers to access the health services, because the health service often worked in a very different way in the countries of origin, such as hospital care being private and expensive rather than public and free, or where the healthcare system was organised in another way. This assistance aimed to promote health education and prevention: ‘...there is the health cover, that is the initial screening, and specific care if they need it, and then the general practitioner, they are all entitled to claim for one...’ (Operator, female, Spanish). All the operators also agreed in ‘...teaching them how to use medical treatments and medicines in general, to avoid the abuse...’ (Operator, male, Italian). The abuse of medical drugs was associated with people who came from underdeveloped countries and were not accustomed to the correct use and dosage of medicines.

To further facilitate migrants’ understanding of the context, environment and organisational urban systems involved in their reception, the humanitarian organisations also supplied courses of orientation in the new environment. The aim of these courses was to provide basic data regarding the places of arrival and what the areas could supply in relation to their needs: ‘We offer geography lessons, indeed many of them do not even know where they are, in which part of the world they are. In many cases, it is not a responsible migration’ (Coordinator, male, Italian). The knowledge of the host environment was also nominated as one of the elements required for the promotion of the autonomy of refugees and asylum seekers.

I think that the best thing to do is to promote an autonomy that they will enjoy in their life out of the project. We must inform them about the environment and therefore about accessibility to services and, consequently, about their rights, and to give them the ‘tools’ to be able to ‘submit’ to that service, which facilitates the opportunity to obtain and to claim that specific service. (Operator, female, Italian)

The above extract points out the connection between the knowledge of the environment, the services it offers, and the independence of refugees and asylum seekers in relation to the assistance and the support of the organisations. Indeed, the relevance of this kind of knowledge, with the access to the labour market and knowledge of the Italian language were the principal elements in defining the instruments to provide the immigrants with the opportunity to enhance their autonomy. In this process, communication was highlighted by the operators as an essential tool to interact with refugees and asylum seekers, and also to create new communication

channels with the host society. In doing so, NGOs and CBOs support refugees and asylum seekers in their resettlement in the context of the host society.

The second group of services offered to refugees and asylum seekers were connected to the labour market. All the interviews demonstrated that assistance in finding a job was indeed a crucial point. Owing to the differences between systems, labour markets and previous experiences, refugees and asylum seekers have limited abilities to find a job on their own. Hence, both operators and coordinators of the Italian organisations pointed out the relevance of lessons about how to write a curriculum vitae, how to apply for a position and understand the position offered, such as the different characteristics of a specific position in the host country, or the necessity to have a licence to do a specific job.

We have done training courses on how to use personal computers, how to write a curriculum vitae; we attempt to understand person's skills and abilities from the individual reception plan, what he is able to do and what he is not, but we really cannot promise work. (Coordinator, male, Palestinian)

Furthermore, associations were keen to offer modules of professional training, basic courses and apprenticeships. They focused on work orientation lessons and IT courses for beginners, and also preparing immigrants for the compilation of the curriculum vitae. To assist with having a presentable curriculum vitae, associations provided assistance to locate free courses offered by other organisations or public institutions, such as those offered by local employment centres and municipalities, for example. Finding a job was also seen by most of the interviewees as an essential element in the first stage of resettlement, corresponding to the conclusion of refugees' and asylum seekers' journey inside the associations and a starting point towards independence.

Following initial understanding of the labour market, asylum seekers had to deal with a lack of professional licences and skills that are recognised in the host society. As explained by an Italian operator, they often name a professional profile that refers to their past when in fact it contradicts the common acceptance of that profession in the host society.

For example, it happened that when I did one of the first interviews to know a person, he explained to me what his job entailed in his country of origin. He told me he was working as the one who collected the bus fare. It is easy to imagine, if you haven't visited Africa, a controller with the uniform who releases the ticket and cashes the price. I travelled by bus in Africa, and what really does the one who collects the money in the bus. [...] In this case, [the controller] is one who has an

agreement with the driver of the bus, and not actually a controller. (Operator, female, Italian)

In the above mentioned case, the emphasis was on the difference between the asylum seeker's perspective about his/her former job and the corresponding work position in the host society. The majority of the problems with the previous experiences of work of refugees and asylum seekers was related to two principal factors: the previous job in many cases did not exist in the host society, and the difficulty of the immigrants to present documented evidence of their experiences. In this case, the ability of the operators was to create a 'bridge' able to illustrate the differences and to comprehensively present the host society in every facet.

Social inclusion and knowledge in dealing with the labour market were both seen as 'crucially important elements for the youngsters [asylum seekers and refugees] to get ready to face the reality outside the reception centre' (Operator, male, Italian). All the interviews in the Italian field confirmed that finding a job and settling in the new society are strongly connected. For this reason, all their activities were drawn to create knowledge, able to weave a supportive network for the future of the immigrants in the host society. Even though the role of employment was perceived by the participants as one of the important elements in the social inclusion of these individuals in some case it was not considered as essential. Indeed:

there are those who say that [...] to integrate them you have to give them a job; I do not think so. To be integrated, they must be educated. But education also means to understand the reality in which they are, but not just cultural, also from economic, political point of view. (Coordinator, male, Italian)

The above excerpt confirmed the definition proposed by Haddad (2003, p. 20) in which refugee and asylum seeker resettlement focuses on participating to the construction of the society in all its components. In his response, the coordinator highlighted the need for these kinds of immigrants to be involved and interact in several aspects of the host community, such as social, political and economic areas.

Services offered by the Italian associations aimed also to create a stable environment for the next steps of refugee and asylum seeker resettlement. The use of communication as a way to modify and reconstruct the subjective reality of refugees and asylum seekers towards the host society and vice versa, gave the opportunity to create a realistic knowledge of immigrants' situation. Organisations were involved in activities in the community, aiming to raise public awareness of immigrants' at risk situations and to show what they can offer to the host society.

Curiously, this reverse process resulted in asylum seekers and refugees delivering a service to the operators — foreign language lessons. As a result of the colonial history of the immigrants' countries of origin, some had good levels of English and French, and so a project called 'English Language Workshop' was created, a place where the associations overturned the typical dynamics, resulting in refugees and asylum seekers teaching English and foreign languages to Italian people. As asserted by an operator of the association behind the 'English Language Workshop' project:

It's a meeting space, we use the English Language Workshop to attract also Italian people, so people come and practice English. The idea is that only English is spoken and that we don't focus on the level, but on effective inter-communication. In this way, everyone contributes to the elaboration of meanings. We talk about different topics, often about refugees. (Operator, female, English)

The above description from one of the creators of the 'English Language Workshop' project expressed the real aim of the workshop: to create interaction between different cultural groups. Indeed, learning English was depicted as a means to 'attract' locals in a dialogue with people from other cultures. Further, the topic of the 'meeting' was often related to refugees, highlighting the common purpose of the Italian associations to raise community's awareness on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. Other activities offered by the organisations had the same purpose and also prompted effective social inclusion through organising asylum seekers' and refugees' participation in meetings with local schools and in events promoting volunteering. The humanitarian associations involved a significant part of their resources for the social inclusion of immigrants, but a critical stage in the resettlement process for the asylum seekers is the official recognition of their status of 'refugee' and obtaining a visa that allowed them to work. The first aspect is the practical effect of the definition of 'asylum seeker' adopted by UNHCR (2005) which states: 'someone who says that he /she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated'.

The third and last group of services concerned the legal assistance provided by the associations. All the organisations involved in this research project agreed to offer bureaucratic assistance in completing the forms required to formalise the international protection request. In fact, this first step in the legal path of the asylum seekers was completely managed by the operators, especially to document and construct their stories, because, as explained by an operator and former refugee:

Regarding practices, I support the compilation of documents and preparation of the story they need to present for their status to be officially asserted. The story for asylum seekers is important, because maybe in the story there are elements that one doesn't consider important, but they turn out to be essential to one's identification as asylum seeker. (Operator, male, Rwandan)

The legal support also contributed to the preparation for the hearing scheduled by the Commission for International Protection. The CIP is expected to decide whether or not to accept the request for protection and, therefore, approve refugee status. In this case, operators were both assisting the applications in the administrative processes, and offering language and cultural mediation during the appointments with the CIP. The operators played a key role in the development of practices, but associations rely also on law firms for issues requiring professional legal assistance. In fact, when the CIP rejects an application of an asylum seeker, the applicant has the right to appeal that decision and consequently be present at any subsequent court hearing, but supported by a professional lawyer. However, the organisations and their operators were present at all hearings to support refugees and asylum seekers administratively and psychologically. The development of their techniques in legal, administrative and bureaucratic assistance led to the creation of specific professional training courses focused on Italian legislation, and especially on the statutes responsible for immigration matters. As mentioned previously, in this case the knowledge of the cultural background played a pivotal role in the resettlement processes of refugees and asylum seekers and was an essential administrative element related receiving refugee status.

In addition to services provided on these three main topics, the operators involved in this research acknowledged the necessity of being a constant source of essential information for refugees and asylum seekers. Generally, they were acting in order to give asylum seekers and refugees autonomy and the ability to understand the host society: 'They don't only need to be received/accepted, but also to settle in the new society, in this case the Italian society, so they have to learn first of all how to find their own way, their personal way, [...] a way to the inclusion into the labour market and in the society in general' (Operator, male, Italian). In other words, they were contributing to refugees' and asylum seekers' new understandings of the world in order to facilitate their resettlement process.

The Italian organisations were providing a large range of services and activities to support the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers in the new society. In doing this, their operators and coordinators worked in close contact with the immigrants, creating daily interactions and

trying to coordinate their meanings of the society through communication. The operators encouraged asylum seekers to also build a network of knowledge outside their associates or social groups, adopting specific strategies to achieve the associations' purposes for the future of refugees and asylum seekers in the new society.

Autonomy and skills to achieve the ideal resettlement

After exploring the strategies deployed and the services provided by Italian NGOs and CBOs, finally the study focused on what operators considered as the ideal resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers. Most related a positive process of settlement as finding a job, because employment was an important element for both resettlement and the achievement of autonomy. That was the motivation of the associations for adopting a policy designed to provide instruments to refugees and asylum seekers to identify and develop their skills. The process of resettlement was also generally accepted as positive when the immigrants succeeded in creating networks: 'not just within the associations, or involving people with the same cultural background, but intercultural networks developing concepts of inclusion concerning many aspects of society' (Operator, female, Italian). Refugees and asylum seekers, to achieve the goal of a successful resettlement, were expected to create a broader network that would facilitate the understanding of and participation in the host community.

Other operators connected a positive resettlement to a set of fundamental achievements including language skills, knowledge of the territory, and understanding of customs and behavioural practices in the host society. The aspect concerning behaviour was associated with the reactions of locals to habits they observed in refugees and asylum seekers. An example reported by an operator pointed out the relevance of the situation:

Sometimes we have been questioned on the fact that they often use 'Allah-U-Akbar' as a ringtone for their phones and, when the phone rings in the bus, sometimes it creates discomfort among the other passengers. This increases the distance between them and locals. I think that it is important to learn the main aspects of how to behave in the host society and act in their respect. (Operator, female, Italian)

The above example was a common misunderstanding in everyday communication and actions that can create further divisions and cultural barriers. Operators were also aware of further consequences and significance of attitudes adopted by immigrants depends on the person himself, how much he really wants to get involved, to engage in an active role in the society ...

otherwise they can't be aware of any available opportunities' (Operator, male, Italian). Indeed, the absence of the 'mutual' element in the interaction would not enable a correct and effective communication (Dai and Chen, 2015).

Subsequent opinions examined refugees and asylum seekers as a resource, as an added value for the host society. The new environment was responsible for their empowerment, and their culture enriched the local environment. Refugees' and asylum seekers' social inclusion was facilitated, because they were reportedly more willing to accept rules and duties of the host society. From this point of view, 'the main condition [for a positive resettlement] is that they [refugees and asylum seekers] must be firstly perceived as human beings, but we need to welcome their culture as well' (Coordinator, male, Italian). In other words, the application of elements and practices from the intercultural perspective allows the associations to deal with differences and similarities in the interaction among people from different cultural groups, permitting in this way the evolution of cultures.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the research findings from the interviews with the Italian associations were explored. The participants' answers were sorted into three sections according to the themes selected for analysis. The themes were identified to respond to the research questions, hence to understand the role played by intercultural communication within NGOs and CBOs in the process of resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Consequently, aiming to achieve a clear understanding of that role, the research focused on the practices and strategies used by humanitarian organisations.

The first section was dedicated to the interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and operators. The relationship with the immigrants was considered an opportunity for enrichment, in which it was worth investing organisational and personal resources. Nevertheless, the operators and the coordinators involved in the research further admitted the presence of problematic issues related to interaction. In their answers, the operators identified as highly problematic the interpretation of their role, while the immigrants usually codified it as restrictive because of how they reacted against the imposition of rules relating to accommodation and public order. In cases in which penalties had to be applied for different

violations, the reaction of immigrants to internal and public rules was considered to obstruct interaction. Nevertheless, almost all the respondents defined interaction as more subjective than cultural. They acknowledged the role played by the cultural background of the interactants, but they were also aware of the presence of the subjective elements. In summary, the employees of the organisations pointed out two main aspects of the interaction: the necessity to maintain a certain distance and lucidity in their relationships with the immigrants, and the priority to transmit knowledge regarding the host society, drawing the communication into a bottom-up framework.

The second section regarding the Italian field confirmed this research assumption with regard to intercultural practices, especially relating to the intercultural communication. As a matter of fact, 20 out of 22 interviewees acknowledged the use of specific skills connected to communication. These skills were the same that shaped intercultural communication: active listening (essential), empathy and mutual respect. Furthermore, the operators focused on the construction of a relationship based on mutual trust, in which operators and immigrants could support each other, in respect of their dignity. To improve the quality of dialogue, all the associations organised individual weekly meetings in order to understand and know more about immigrants' past, habits, their propensity for learning, profession, friends in their countries of origin, and therefore their mode of reaction to certain stimuli in the past and in the host society. In addition, there were also weekly group interviews, focused on topics related to daily life in the new social environment.

The section then discussed the employment of professional intercultural mediators in solving communication issues related to the immigrants' culture of origin, but also to elucidate language issues. However, only four interviewees perceived these issues not as communication problems, but rather as psychological barriers in which the human aspect was more significant than the background. Indeed, the knowledge of the cultural background of the countries of origin of immigrants was considered fundamental by less than a half of the interviewees. All the others were convinced of the necessity to base the communication on 'here and now', encouraging a fresh new start in the host society. However knowledge of the refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background was considered extremely important for the recognition of the status of refugee during the bureaucratic process. The emotions of these individuals in the communication process were asserted as a meaningful element affecting the interaction — as the frustration connected to the migratory process. Even if operators and coordinators

admitted the relevance of the emotions and the cultural background of refugees and asylum seekers, they also considered a lack of social inclusion as the main problem in achieving effective resettlement.

Finally, the third section introduced the purposes, the services provided and the strategies adopted by NGOs and CBOs in Italy. The main purpose declared was the increase of immigrants' autonomy through the application of different strategies. The services offered by these organisations reflected the management of emergencies, which are to provide in all cases accommodation and basic needs such as food, clothes, sanitary products, and a place to live. Another essential service delivered by Italian NGOs and CBOs was free Italian classes. Learning Italian was intrinsically related to increasing the degree of social inclusion, while language was seen as an essential instrument in the interaction and communication with the host society. The services were then separated into three relevant functional groups for the purpose of the discussion, with reference to the structure of the host society, the labour market and legal assistance. The first category involved all the services aimed to increase understanding of the host society, of its territory and of the services it offered. Among these, particular attention was given to health services and to promotion of the prevention. The second group connected the immigrants to the useful services to access the labour market, such as searching for a job, IT courses and apprenticeships. These services were considered as facilitating the resettlement process, meant to prompt interaction and to substantially participate in the dynamics of the host society, neutralising the passive nuances within their status. The last group included legal support offered by NGOs and CBOs to immigrants to finalise their request for international protection and to document and prepare their submissions to be evaluated by the Commission for International Protection.

The strategies adopted by the Italian associations were divided into two 'fields of application': the autonomy of refugees and asylum seekers, and their interaction with the host society. Autonomy was prompted with the involvement of individual projects, designed to respond to specific necessities in support of immigrant's skills. It was based on the provision of tools to achieve autonomy and connection to labour market. The interaction with the host society was performed through the organisation of encounters between refugees and asylum seekers and secondary school and college students. However, a positive stage in the process of resettlement was perceived to be related to the search for a job. Refugee and asylum seeker resettlement was

also generally considered effective when immigrants succeeded in creating intercultural networks.

Although influencing in a crucial way the interaction and the dialogue with refugees and asylum seekers, the Italian interviewees did not consider culture as the major obstacle in interaction. Indeed, several operators concentrated their effort on the achievement of a positive interaction based more on similar human characteristics than on cultural aspects. This perspective was also confirmed by their position regarding the knowledge of the immigrants' cultural background. The majority of coordinators and operators involved in this study declared that they did not consider the past of refugees and asylum seekers as a fundamental element in the interaction. Instead, they preferred to focus on the relationship between human beings, and on the formula of 'here and now', which was a useful way to transmit the idea of a 'new start'. In this way, respondents intended on the one hand to avoid the use of prejudices, and on the other hand to support their inclusion in the new society. They were convinced that not paying too much attention to cultural patterns was beneficial.

The findings also determined that coordinators and operators identified the governmental strategies for the humanitarian immigration issue as solutions for temporary emergency situations. However all respondents agreed that the governmental policies were limited in foresight and lacking in substance for long term support required for these individuals. They insisted that the same program adopted for early receptions, CAS, was still managing humanitarian immigration issues as a response to emergencies. The resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers was affected as a consequence of these policies, which ignored the necessity to implement a social inclusion project.

Chapter Eight

Do Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations' intercultural practices contribute to refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process?

This research aims to investigate the interaction that happens between Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations, and refugees and asylum seekers during the resettlement process. It argues that this interaction is mainly based on intercultural elements, that allow effective communication, mutual appreciation and respect. Furthermore, this study asserts that the employment of intercultural communication increases the impact of the activities of these associations on immigrants' resettlement process. In this chapter, the findings from the Australian and Italian fieldworks are analysed in order to reply to the following question: In what ways do intercultural practices in refugee and asylum seeker organisations contribute to the resettlement process of these individuals? Answering this question leads this study to focus on three main areas within the practices and activities enacted by NGOs and CBOs.

The first section intends to define the nature of the interaction between the humanitarian organisations, and refugees and asylum seekers. First, it identifies how the term 'culture' is seen and understood by the participants in this project. Analysing the definitions stated during the interviews, it is possible to understand how NGOs and CBOs address the creation of the interaction among different cultural groups. Then, the section focuses on the interaction with refugees and people seeking asylum and how it is interpreted by volunteers, operators, and coordinators.

The second section opens by analysing how the intercultural communication enacted by these associations contributes to refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement. It explains the logical

forces (Pearce and Cronen, 1980) of the interaction and dialogue within the facilities of NGOs and CBOs and it recognises the role played by the communication enacted by the interactants in the immigrants' resettlement. After identifying how the communication process is conducted, the section then focuses on two elements that affect this process: the knowledge of the interactants' cultural background and their emotions, in both positive and negative ways. Then, it analyses the problems that humanitarian associations face in communicating with people seeking asylum and refugees

The last section explains the strategies adopted by Australian and Italian organisations for two main fields of intervention: the provision of essential services — all addressed to enhance refugees' and asylum seekers' level of resettlement — and participation in public debates and committees relating to immigrants' issues. It analyses the role played by communication in providing these services, the main purpose of these associations.

Assisting refugees and asylum seekers

Deardorff (2009) describes the interaction among different cultural groups as a complex relationship in which several elements — such as observation, mutual respect, listening and knowledge, are explored from different perspectives. This study assumes that NGOs and CBOs involved in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers adopt an intercultural perspective in order to create an effective interaction, an interaction that allows the resettlement of these individuals based on the participation on the constant construction and reconstruction of society (Fiske, 2006). To understand what practices humanitarian associations adopt to assist refugees and asylum seekers, this research explores the interaction that takes place within them.

This section first analyses the term 'culture' and how the Australian and Italian participants defined it. The ways in which this term is identified are analysed in order to understand which kind of context NGOs and CBOs are trying to co-create. According to Pearce (1976), two persons interact and communicate by referring to their patterns of meaning and behaviours. These elements relate to the cultural patterns that are available to communicators in order to select proper actions to co-create the desired episode. Then, the focus switches on how the participants interpreted the interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds. After identifying the elements that distinguish the respondents' viewpoints, they are compared

with those identified by the intercultural perspective. Finally, the practices adopted by the associations involved in this study are analysed in order to determine similarities and differences between the Australian and Italian perspectives. In this way, it is possible to identify the elements of the interactions that can confirm the above cited assumption which underpins the research — that is the adoption of an intercultural approach — and to analyse the hierarchies of meanings in which these associations are constructing the interaction.

The creation of an intercultural context

To better understand how interaction among people from different cultural groups is developed within humanitarian organisations, the research explores the meanings that participants associated with the term ‘culture’. The analysis of these meanings allows a first understanding of the type of interaction desired by humanitarian organisations. How they interpreted culture is significant in exploring what kind of interaction they are willing to create with refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, whether they define the concept of culture as *liquid* or *solid* (Bauman, 1999), that is whether cultural elements are able to modify and evolve themselves or not, it is crucial to understanding the way in which they are developing the interaction. Hence, the interpretation of the term ‘culture’ affects the way in which the interaction is set up. Culture is defined as:

an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns that are distinguishing characteristics of the members of any given society. It includes everything that a group thinks, says, does, and makes — its customs, language, material artefacts, and shared system of attitudes and feelings. (Ioppolo, 2014, p. 16)

The above description focuses on the existence of a public and an individual culture, which allows the analysis of the interaction of different cultural groups within the same territory. Indeed, by identifying culture as the ‘distinguishing characteristics of the members of any given society’, cultural elements are connected to the individuals’ society of origin, similar to the anthropological approach, which considers culture and society as a single element. Then, Ioppolo states that culture is ‘everything that a group thinks, says, does, and makes’, highlighting the existence of a private sphere that is in contrast to the public one. In other words, Ioppolo asserts that all individuals own a private culture that represents their own ways of understanding the contents of culture. This distinction is significant to the understanding of the kinds of practices NGOs and CBOs adopt to create an effective interaction, and so to contribute to the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ resettlement.

The findings from both Australian and Italian organisations show that a large majority of the participants (36 out of 42) included elements that referred to individual culture, rather than to public culture. That is, the focus was on the characteristics of the person rather than their cultural group. Volunteers and coordinators from the Australian fieldwork considered the term culture as strictly related to the framework of the individual. This point of view highlights the role played by elements such as family, religion, language, history, lifestyle, traditions, values, customs, and the place of origin, in understanding the world. Although some interviewees related the cultural elements of different individuals to their place of origin, relating their set of values, traditions, norms and symbols to their cultural group, the majority underpinned their definitions with subjective elements that relate to individual values and behaviour, rather than to expectations derived from cultural group elements.

Similarly, the Italian case studies acknowledged the presence of both individual and cultural group elements in defining culture, unanimously identified as a set of values, habits and practices that constitute a worldview, a vision of himself/herself, and how to interact within the context. As such, Italian respondents assessed the refugees and asylum seekers as people with many problems, the same problems as Italians, but with different cultural connotations.

The definitions of culture provided by the participants in this study place cultural elements on the boundaries of cultural identity, leaning towards the creation of an interaction based on intercultural features rather than multicultural features. Indeed, by focusing on individual elements instead of those connected to the cultural group of origin, cultural elements have acquired personal significance. In this case, culture became 'liquid' (Bauman, 1999) encouraging the creation of different cultures, and also affecting the interaction between different people. In these terms, culture appears as the reflection of everything: food, music, literature, background, to name a few, rather than only of ethnicity and cultural traditions.

The majority of the respondents identify culture from an intercultural perspective, driving the attention on an interaction between subjects, rather than among representatives from different cultural groups, and confirming the culture-general perspective as an intercultural feature in the interaction between NGOs, CBOs, and refugees and asylum seekers. In this way, the different combination of different cultural elements allows the creation of multiple knowledges and interpretations of reality, creating several subjective realities that reflects the micro social constructionism approach (Burr, 2015). However, the presence of a minority of responses that

refer to a public culture indicates elements that could affect the interaction, despite a multicultural perspective that recognises and supports different cultures. The cultural group of belonging, or the cultural background of an individual, still has a role in the construction of the meaning of this reality. How this element affects the creation of the interaction, positively or negatively, will be explored in the next section on communication and resettlement process.

Furthermore, utilising the three episodes identified by Pearce (1976) to distinguish an individual's patterns of meanings and behaviours in explaining communication, it is possible to emphasise how the proposed 'subjective' point of view of culture affects the interaction among people from different cultural background. In order to enact an effective and co-constructed interaction (Episode 3), two persons communicate selecting an action (Episode 2) from their own cultural cluster of patterns (Episode 1). Identifying culture as *liquid*, and so enabling it to evolve through the interaction with others, it allows access to infinite possibilities to act. In interactions between people with different Episodes 1, or conflictual Episodes 2, the coordination and management of their meanings appears strenuous. Within the intercultural interaction, culture is an element constantly influenced by the interactions with others, hence in continuous metamorphosis.

In other words, the way in which the majority of the respondents from Australian and Italian associations defined the term culture constitutes the first step towards the creation of an intercultural context.

The interaction with refugees and asylum seekers

The interaction and communication among people from different backgrounds, although considered as the natural evolution of humankind in its socialisation, reflects a complex matter (Deardorff, 2009). It also highlights the difficult relationship between immigrants and host societies, especially regarding to refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, these two categories of immigrants are representative of the 'cohabitation' issues that invests different cultural groups. Refugees and asylum seekers provide an ideal example to further understand the concept of interculturality and how it supports their resettlement process as a result of characteristics — such as the fear of being persecuted and the need of protection (Zolberg et al., 1989) — that prevent them from returning to their countries of origin.

In order to describe the approaches in which host societies relate to people from a different cultural background, scholars (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999) have identified two main perspectives: the multicultural and the intercultural approach. Multiculturalism recognises the existence of different cultures through the affirmation of their values, norms, concepts and symbols. Bauman (1999) defines this perspective as ethnocentric — that is culture represents the core of the individual's identity, and is solid and refers to the group of origin as a unique cultural reference. From this perspective, ethnic groups are distinct realities that co-exist in the same territory with the right to be recognised along with their values. The main focus is on the transmission of the ethnic groups' values within their own communities. Similarly, the intercultural perspective recognises the existence of different cultural groups, each with its own values, norms, concepts and symbols, but uniquely focuses on the interaction between these individuals. In this way, culture moves from the centre to the boundaries of the individual's identity, and interaction becomes the means in which cultural elements constantly transform and are transformed by the other individual's cultural elements. All the organisations involved in this study, both in Australia and Italy, considered the interaction among different cultural groups from an intercultural perspective.

Australian participants showed a propensity to create a relationship based on the subjectivity of communicators, focusing on the interaction between individuals. The interviewees identified three elements of the interaction between persons with different cultural backgrounds: trust, respect and mutual support. Furthermore, they highlighted the relevance in recognising the pre-existing cultural background as a means to achieve an effective — but still subjective — communication. This element was perceived as connected with the understanding and the appreciation of the other interactants. However, often a strong bond with the culture of the country of origin was related to a negative element in the interaction, with the capacity to trigger friction between different cultural groups. Nevertheless, the respondents from the Australian fieldwork also highlighted language as an element that directly connected to being part of a cultural group. Language was often reported as the main barrier in the communication.

In Italy, all operators and coordinators who participated in this study agreed that the interaction among different cultural groups was positive and 'always propositive' (Operator, male, Italian). They argued that bringing together people with different cultural backgrounds was a bilateral exchange of knowledge, an exchange that leads to the acceptance of the other and changes your own culture. From this point of view, the interaction between people from different cultural

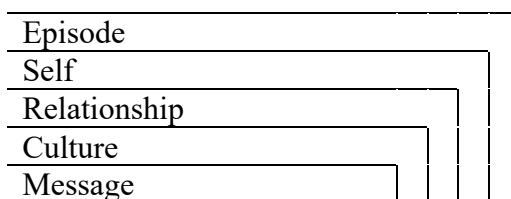
groups was considered an opportunity to efficiently involve resources and was perceived as collaborative and constructive, but also as problematic and complicated.

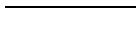
These findings inevitably connect interaction with interculturality. Indeed, the three elements of the interaction between individuals with different cultural groups — trust, respect and mutual support — identified by the Australian participants, and the bilateral exchange of knowledge expressed by the Italian participants, lead to the recognition of the three assumptions of the intercultural perspective (Dai and Chen, 2015). The need to construct interactions based on reciprocal trust reflects the effort of individuals to establish a productive connection with the others, while the element of mutual support reflects the desire of the individuals to communicate. In addition, the notion of respect between interactants and the exchange of knowledge replicate the second intercultural assumption in which adaptation and the skill to interact beyond cultural boundaries create intercultural communities.

In this way, the participants in this study recognised the role that coordination (Pearce, 1976) plays in the interaction between different cultural groups. The three elements of interaction described above focuses on the conjoint creation of a desirable context in which trust, respect and mutual support represent the starting point for effective communication. Coordination among interactants is required to produce patterns in which people conjointly enact stories, and to avoid undesirable episodes. These elements lead the interaction towards a person-to-person focused relationship, and so towards a subjective interaction.

Although both Australian and Italian associations agree in identifying the interaction among people with different cultural background from an intercultural perspective, they associate different hierarchies of meanings to it. The associations based in Australia consider the interaction on the context of the episode (see Figure 8.1), that is the temporal context in which persons act a sequence of messages within the same story. In this case, the temporal context refers to the interaction among different cultural groups, with a focus on what they are interacting.

Figure 8.1 Australian model of hierarchy of meanings — intercultural interaction.

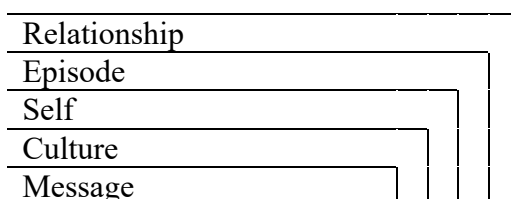


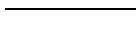
Where  means 'in the context of'.
 Source: Adapted from Pearce's (2004) hierarchy of meanings model.

The episode, which corresponds to the context of interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds, represents the higher context within which the message is elaborated. The second level of context taken into account is the self, with the goal of constructing a subjective and interpersonal communication. The last two contexts that the Australian associations relate to interaction among different cultural groups — therefore those that least affect the meaning of the message in the relationship — are the context in which messages are enacted, and the culture context. It is noteworthy that the culture context affects the message only to facilitate the coordination of the interactants' actions through a better understanding of each other, however the main focus remains on an interpersonal interaction. Therefore, the interaction appears to have an implicative force in constructing the meanings, assigning to the action enacted the opportunity to reinforce or change the context of the action.

In Italy, associations interpret the interaction between people from different cultural group in the context of the relationship where messages and actions are enacted. In this way, the same message can be enacted in different ways depending on the relationship. The hierarchy of meanings constructed by the participants from the Italian fieldwork identify the intercultural interaction as built on relationships in the higher context (see Figure 8.2). In other words, the context in which interactants create and enact the message is embedded in the relationship that exists among them.

Figure 8.2 Italian model of hierarchy of meanings – intercultural interaction.



Where  means 'in the context of'.
 Source: Adapted from Pearce's (2004) hierarchy of meanings model.

The second level of context in which the message is created relates to the episode that the interactants intend to enact. Then there is the self-context, that is how the interactants interpret the messages, and the culture context. As with the Australian participants, the Italian participants preferred to identify the interaction as an intersubjective rather than an intergroup interaction. However, they also focus on the problems that follow the interaction. These problems derive mainly from the context in which messages are enacted — such as the relationship with the NGO and CBO operators, or with the host community. In this case, the hierarchy of meanings appears to be led by a contextual force in which the context requires the action.

From the findings in this and the previous subsections, it is possible to affirm that NGOs and CBOs adopted an intercultural perspective when supporting the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Participants in this research project from Australia and Italy prefer the construction of an interaction based on a person-to-person relationship, avoiding the use of cliché and stereotypes associated with the cultural groups of origin of the interactants. The assumption of this study is that NGOs and CBOs utilise the same perspective in the interactions with refugees and asylum seekers they are supporting.

Practices deployed by the organisations

In order to understand the nature of interactions that take place between refugees, asylum seekers and the operators of the humanitarian organisations, this study analyses the key features and explores whether they are intercultural. Humanitarian associations can often be defined both as NGOs and as CBOs. The case studies in this research match both principal objectives of NGOs and CBOs. Arakaki (2013) defines NGOs as associations that, through their action, are able to inform society and to challenge and affect the decision-making processes of the authority. Milbourne (2010) and DeFilippis et al. (2010) identified CBOs as those associations that are mainly defined by their membership in the local community. Their purposes are not only to identify common problems, mobilise resources and implement strategies for reaching the goal identified by the community itself, but also to engage the process of community change by shaping processes of social regulation and integration.

More specifically, Fiske (2006) recognises the role that these associations are playing in providing essential services for refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes, and in

putting pressure on governments for legislative changes. However, the aspect that appears more relevant for this study is the recognition of the essential human need ‘to belong, to be a member of a community and to have certain rights and obligations as a member of that community’ (Fiske, 2006, p. 226). According to Fiske, NGOs and CBOs are creating spaces in which refugees and asylum seekers feel a sense of belonging to a human community, and not only to a cultural group or a specific category of individuals such as immigrants, refugees and people seeking asylum. This present research demonstrates that, in order to create this sense of belonging to the community, humanitarian associations need to act from an intercultural perspective adopting its practices. In doing this, operators and volunteers act and move in the ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116) in which it is possible to reimagine and alter culture and its elements.

The findings from the Australian and Italian fieldwork indicate that interactions within the associations are constructed on the basis of intercultural practices. In Australia, respondents characterised the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers as ‘working remarkably’ (Volunteer, male, Australian) in breaking down barriers between people from different cultural background. The effort and the desire to interact and communicate with others lead volunteers and coordinators to enact messages that create an intercultural context. In doing so, relationships are intersubjective, built regardless of cultural elements such as ethnicity, gender and religion.

Likewise, findings from the Italian fieldwork show an intercultural approach in building the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers. Operators and coordinators working for the Italian associations highlighted the positiveness of the interaction in enriching participants’ subjective realities. However, as a result of the different position of these associations within the Italian reception system, they are more concerned with the daily interaction that happens in the ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116). For the same reason, these findings also emphasise more problematic aspects of the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers, such as the relationship with CBO operators, or with the host society.

As expected, the above cited findings confirm that both Australian and Italian organisations adopted intercultural perspectives that identified in general the interaction between persons with different cultural backgrounds. Responses of volunteers and operators from the Australian associations confirm the hierarchy of meaning model already examined in the previous

subsection (see Figure 8.1). Indeed, in the episode of the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers, they act with a focus on the value of each person rather than cultural patterns, thus placing self context as the second highest level of the hierarchy. Italian findings also confirm that the interaction with people supported by Italian associations are constructing messages in the higher context of the relationship (see Figure 8.2). Again, this difference on structuring the hierarchy of meaning is the result of the Italian reception system and the role played by these associations within it.

It is useful to note that the role played by Australian and Italian associations and the services they provided in their respective national reception systems place them in different patterns of interaction. NGOs and CBOs involved in Australia have the opportunity to interact with refugees and asylum seekers when providing services. In this way, the temporal space, called the ‘contact zone’, is limited by the time required for the service. To better exploit the available time, volunteers and operators focus on the episode in which they intend to enact and coordinate with the client, for example the English lesson or the application for a concession, to name just two. Conversely, Italian operators and coordinators can count on an extended ‘contact zone’. Indeed, when providing accommodation to groups of refugees and asylum seekers, they must also play the role of controller, resulting in an almost constant presence within the association structures and accommodation. The daily interaction favours and encourages person-to-person communication and interaction that is able to exist beyond cultural patterns. However, it also uncovers all the problematics connected to the different relationship in the interactions, such as the clients’ perception of the operators as ‘disrespectful’ or ‘too authoritarian’, and the feeling they are treated as ‘kids’, which create barriers in communication.

In summary, the aspects analysed in this section confirm the practices adopted by Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs are intercultural. Since participants from both Australia and Italy identify the term culture as the personal elements of the individual, the interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds is created on a person-to-person relationship. Although the Australian and Italian participants worked through two different hierarchies of meaning when creating messages to enact, all participants placed the culture context at the lowest level. This means the culture still counts of course, for example to better understand the position of the other interactant, but it means also that in creating a coordinated interaction, respondents evaluate subjective and individual elements as more relevant than cultural elements.

Once confirmed that the practices employed to assist refugees and asylum seekers are based on a person-to-person interaction — in which individual elements are preferred to the cultural ones and culture is considered ‘liquid’ and able to evolve and modify itself, hence intercultural — this research shifts focus to communication between the participants and refugees and asylum seekers, and its role in furthering the resettlement process of these individuals.

Intercultural communication and resettlement process

Intercultural communication can be considered as the heart of interculturality. According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), intercultural communication refers to ‘the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world’ (p. 7). This present study considers that this specific type of communication increases the impact that NGO and CBO actions have on the refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process. In exploring the role played by intercultural communication in the achievement of an effective level of participation in the construction and reconstruction of the society by refugees and asylum seekers, this section investigates which elements contribute to affect positive or negative interactions.

First, the section analyses how communication is structured within the associations involved in this project, and the elements that are at the centre. It compares the ways in which Australian and Italian organisations structure communication, highlighting similarities and a relevant difference in dealing with the trust element. The second subsection, *Cultural background and emotions*, focuses on the analysis of two specific elements of communication: the knowledge of the background of the individual involved in the dialogue and his/her emotions regarding the interaction, that is the affective elements (Ioppolo, 2014). Both elements are analysed in terms of the communication process, but also regarding the influences they have on the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The last subsection, *Problems and mediation*, questions the problems encountered by the participants in this research when they communicate with refugees and asylum seekers, and the different practices adopted to resolve them.

The humanitarian intercultural communication

In order to understand the role that communication plays in refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement, it is crucial to understand how communication is implemented by the associations that support them. As already discussed in the previous section, the interaction between humanitarian organisations and their clients is a intersubjective interaction, in which there are elements such as a positive perception of each other, mutuality and consensus, and where the willingness to compromise and reciprocate with share meanings is present (Dai and Chen, 2015; Dai, 2010; Brandalise, 2002).

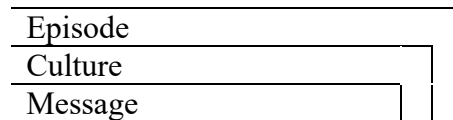
The patterns of communication mainly deployed by the participants in this study are embedded in several intercultural elements. In both Australia and Italy, volunteers, operators and coordinators expressed the use of four competences to achieve an effective communication: active listening, empathy, respect and trust. All the respondents interpreted active listening, empathy and respect similarly, in agreement with the significance found in the literature. It was in constructing trust that Australian and Italian participants differentiated their approaches.

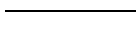
The creation of trust between volunteers/operators and refugees/asylum seekers is affected by the different relationships between these associations and the reception system of their country, similar to the problems in interaction explored in the previous section. The reception system in Italy disadvantaged Italian associations compared to those in Australia, because of their double role of support and control/organisation of refugees and asylum seekers for almost the entire period they remain within the reception structure. However, this disadvantage was compensated for by the fact that the operators of the associations were paid staff. Whereas, Australian associations dealt only with a role of support through the provision of services that are essential for the resettlement process of their clients, but they are almost absent in every aspect outside this area.

The Australian and Italian patterns of communication reveal a clear intercultural structure to support them. In this way, communication becomes one of the principal means by which persons construct their social world, assigning special importance in the everyday interactions that occur between humanitarian operators, and refugees and asylum seekers. Enacted messages are assigned meanings created in the higher episodic context of collaboration and support to create effective communication. These episodes in turn can lead to an effective

resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers and to the evolution of their culture context — such as from a context within a system in which the freedom of speech is weak to a system where this freedom is largely supported (see Figure 8.3). In other words, messages are enacted in the context of reciprocal collaboration and support that can lead to an effective resettlement into the host society and to change interactants’ cultural patterns in the culture context.

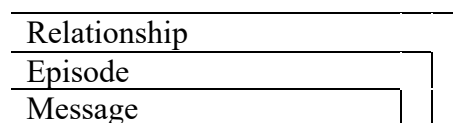
Figure 8.3 Intercultural communication within NGOs and CBOs.

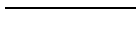


Where  means ‘in the context of’.
Source: Adapted from Pearce’s (2004) hierarchy of meanings model.

However, this model changes when trust becomes the key element in communication. It can be seen in the case of Australian associations in which the relationship context of only support facilitates a sense of trust along with communication; for example, the relationship based on the construction of trust is in a context in which the main purpose of the associations is support of the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. This context maintains the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ evaluation of the relationship as positive; even if an episode has bad feedback or negative outcomes, such as a lesson that was misunderstood, or a specific case in which the organisations were not able to help, that episode is interpreted in the relationship context of trust and support (see Figure 8.4).

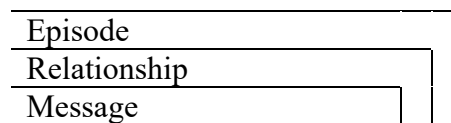
Figure 8.4 Australian model of hierarchy of meanings – context of trust.

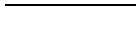


Where  means ‘in the context of’.
Source: Adapted from Pearce’s (2004) hierarchy of meanings model.

Conversely, by virtue of the double role of career/controller that operators and coordinators of the humanitarian associations play, in Italy the hierarchy of meaning in which the messages are enacted is reversed (see Figure 8.5). In this case, the double context of collaboration and conflict in the episodes enacted by humanitarian association operators and refugees and asylum seekers affects communication in a negative way, resulting in the creation of barriers.

Figure 8.5 Italian model of hierarchy of meanings – context of trust.



Where  means 'in the context of'.

Source: Adapted from Pearce's (2004) hierarchy of meanings model.

Summarising, communication between humanitarian operators and refugees and asylum seekers appear to be generally guided by an implicative force (Pearce, 2004; Pearce and Cronen, 1980). In other words, the actions enacted in the episodes of collaboration and support reinforce the context in which they are enacted, such as active listening, empathy, mutual respect and — only for the Italian associations involved in this study — trust. With regard to the findings from the Australian associations in the trust relationship, communication is more affected by a contextual force (Pearce, 2004; Pearce and Cronen, 1980), in which the actions enacted in episodes of collaboration and conflict are unable to affect the relationship context of trust.

After recognising communication patterns within Australian and Italian associations as intercultural, the study focuses on two specific elements that the literature identifies as crucial: the knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural backgrounds, and the affective elements that influence emotions that can affect the communication process.

Cultural background and emotions

Communication between humanitarian organisations, and refugees and asylum seekers reflects the characteristics that form the intercultural perspective. As explored in the previous subsection, the participants in this project enact messages in order to create a communication in which the final aim is to achieve the resettlement of the immigrants and to mutually change interactants' culture context. In order to clarify some crucial aspects of this process of communication, this subsection focuses on two distinct elements that play a role in both communication and resettlement processes: the knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural backgrounds, and the affective element, namely their emotions that determine the motivation/the effectiveness to interact with others (Liu et al., 2015; Ioppolo, 2014).

The knowledge of the cultural background, and so of the cultural patterns of people seeking asylum and refugees, was interpreted in different ways by the Australian and Italian participants. Most Australian participants (18 out of 20 respondents) identify the relationship between cultural knowledge and communication as having a negative role. It was so assessed because it facilitates the other interactant being associated with stereotypes. Again, respondents highlighted the intersubjective nature of the interaction between volunteers, coordinators and refugees and asylum seekers, and its effort in reducing cultural distance sharing meanings for mutual identities.

Only two participants from the Australian research connected knowledge of the immigrants' cultural background to a positive perspective, seeing it as a way to develop conversations and to prevent the construction of barriers in communication. Australian associations regarded knowledge of the cultural background of immigrants as an essential element in the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. The knowledge element was connected to practical issues of the resettlement process, such as access to health services, and the education they had received in their countries of origin — any level of education was indicated as an additional help in understanding the host society, and supporting the addressing of emotional issues.

The Italian participants regarded the connection between cultural knowledge and communication from two different points of view. Half found this element essential in decoding behaviours and understanding the dynamics within the reception structures. Conversely, the other half described the knowledge of the cultural background of their clients as irrelevant, because those participants understood immigrants' problematics to be the result of the situation of refugees and asylum seekers, rather than related to their cultural background. With regard to the connection between cultural knowledge and the resettlement process, the Italian interviewees considered it as a limitation in the process, especially concerning education and access to health services.

Findings regarding the affective element (Ioppolo, 2014) show that in both Australian and Italian associations emotions were considered an element that actively created obstacles in the processes of communication and resettlement. Although the definitions of refugees and asylum seekers adopted by the UNHCR focuses on the element of fear (Zolberg et al., 1989), all participants remarked that anxiety was a principal conditioning element. This emotion was often connected to the perceived lack of an adequate understanding of the host socioeconomic

and cultural context. Anxiety was also related to other factors present in refugees' and asylum seekers' daily lives, such as the anxiety provoked by the distance from their families who remained in the countries of origin, or the constant concern about their status and, consequently, their future.

The second emotion most identified referred to disappointment in the migratory processes, both in Australia and Italy. The main reasons were the lengthy wait for the assessment of the asylum seekers' requests, and uncertainty of the future. The third element recognised by the Australian participants in this research was determined by immigrants' perceptions of a lack in communication with the host society, whereas the Italian respondents indicated the third element that affected the emotions as being linked to the distress felt during the journey on land (through the desert) and sea (making the journey by boat from African coasts to Italian waters).

Analysing these two elements from the perspective of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) they can be easily associated with the episodes identified by Pearce (1976) to explain patterns of communication. The knowledge element refers to Episode 1, shaped by cultural elements that exist independently of the subjects. The affective component of communication is Episode 2, based on the symbolic system of the subjects. The last episode described by Pearce is Episode 3, which constitutes the actions that communicators enact when relying on their interpretation of both episodes 1 and 2. Kelly (1955) states that it is possible to construct an Episode 3 without using the lens of culture (Episode 1) and private symbols (Episode 2). The findings from both Australian and Italian associations indicate that in communicating with refugees and asylum seekers, NGO and CBO volunteers and operators develop the interaction by avoiding interpretation of Episode 1. In this way, communication is prompted by an implicative force, which leads interactants to enact 'in order to' achieve an effective dialogue and to change the context in which the interaction occurs (Episode 3). In doing this, participants in this study constructed communication by enacting messages on the basis of individuals' subjective elements, favouring the interpretation of the actions from the perspective of the Episode 2, hence the personal behaviour.

However, the knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of interactants from different cultural groups also represented an essential element in the resettlement processes of these individuals. As such it is apparent that the fundamentals of constructing the desired Episode 3 is knowledge of specific elements of their past lives in their country of origin, such as the level of education,

but also the different interpretation of words, concepts and relationships, to name a few. The knowledge of these elements enables the enacting of messages that support the provision of and access to specific services and social activities, health services and the labour market being two examples. Without such knowledge, operators would be limited in their understanding, which would, in turn affect refugees' and asylum seekers' access to and participation in the host community.

On the whole, the structure of communication enacted by the respondents generally prompts the refugees' and asylum seekers' subjective understanding of the society through their individual ways to understand the world and so to interpret and enact messages to achieve the desired Episode 3. In other words, they focused on the interpretation deriving from Episode 2, which embeds refugees' and asylum seekers' emotions. Constructing the interaction on the basis of the affective component of communication (Liu et al., 2015; Ioppolo, 2014) means that the interaction focuses on emotions that are able to affect the communication process and so the understanding of the host society and, vice versa, the host community's understanding of the individuals.

Generally, respondents from both the Australian and Italian research agreed that emotions were a negative component in communication. Indeed, the emotions they identified affect refugees' and asylum seekers' motivation to interact with and within the host society. As a consequence, two out of three assumptions of the intercultural formulation fail in the interaction, being the desire to communicate (Heidlebaugh, 2008) and the effort of the individuals to establish an effective connection with the others (Dai and Chen, 2015). Emotions such as anxiety from the lack of understanding of the host context, uncertainty about the future, the long wait for Australian and Italian reception systems to assess asylum requests, to name a few, affect the communication process and deprive immigrants of the will to interact.

In summary, the communication process enacted by both Australian and Italian respondents partially confirms what Kelly (1955) states: people are able to enact Episode 3 by going beyond their cultural patterns (Episode 1) and private symbols (Episode 2). In the case studies, respondents mainly enacted communication that avoided the involvement of cultural elements, while focusing on the subjective elements of Episode 2. Within the subjective elements, a key role is played by emotions. The participants in this project mainly identified emotions as a component able to affect in a negative way the interaction with Australian volunteers, Italian

operators, and host societies, which can lead to the loss of interculturality. Hence, it becomes relevant to understand how NGOs and CBOs are able to face communication problems and, consequently, to enact messages able to change the context in which the interaction will occur.

Problems and mediation

It is possible to identify as intercultural the interaction in the ‘contact zone’ (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116) that is created by the participants of this research with refugees and asylum seekers. The aim of this interaction is to facilitate the resettlement process of refugees and asylum seekers in the host society, the interaction becoming part of the dynamics and development of that process. However, there may be cases in which the communication process fails its role of support in understanding the meaning of the interaction as a result of profound cultural diversities, or the lack of one or more intercultural elements — such as mutual trust.

In order to support and facilitate the intercultural interaction, scholars and public institutions recognise the professional figure of the intercultural mediator (Sargent and Lanchanché, 2009; European Union, 2009; Putnam, 2000). The intercultural mediator reflects the communicative competences of the intercultural approach, being able to create connections with the host societies and focusing on both language and cultural factors.

Australian and Italian findings show different approaches in dealing with these problems. Volunteers and coordinators in Australia declared that communication problems were mainly associated with language factors. Indeed, a third (six out of 20) of the respondents identified language as the main barrier in communicating with refugees and asylum seekers, referring principally to their inability to construct meaningful sentences and concepts in English. The remaining interviewees testified the absence of problems in communication as being neither from a language nor a cultural perspective. In this context, the need of support from a professional figure such the intercultural mediator was not highlighted. Instead, NGOs’ and CBOs’ volunteers and coordinators overcame language barriers through the use of professional interpreters. However, their role was only to translate the dialogue, without any cultural mediation — mainly because the service was provided via phone, in the majority of the cases by the Victoria Interpreting and Translating Services (VITS). With regard to cultural barriers, most respondents (17 out of 20) relied on personal know-how learned along the way from their previous experiences, and/or on the support from other volunteers and coordinators.

The Italian interviews displayed a different approach to barriers in communication. Italian operators and coordinators identified the language issue as a problem that was solvable through the daily interaction with the refugees and asylum seekers hosted in houses used as reception facilities. Furthermore, two other elements were highlighted in going beyond language barriers: the help provided by other immigrants present in the facilities, and that often, owing to the colonial past of their countries of origin, they were able to speak English or French. Unlike the Australian associations, Italian operators and coordinators dealt with cultural problems in communication through the use of intercultural mediators, relying on their skills to socially and culturally 'bridge' (Putnam, 2000) refugees, asylum seekers and the host community. However, it is worthy to note that several respondents from the Italian fieldwork described the added value of the intercultural mediator as the advantage of the mediator to interact with persons from the same cultural background, rather than a better use of intercultural skills.

The findings described in the previous paragraphs note that the professional figure of intercultural mediator is not adopted within the Australian organisations, and within the Italian associations the involvement of intercultural mediators is limited to intervening when cultural barriers occur. The participants in this project, both in Australia and Italy, mainly deal with communication barriers utilising personal resources, or through resources present within the associations. This is because volunteers, operators, and coordinators are trained in intercultural practices. Indeed, in Australia volunteers and coordinators are provided courses that focus on different intercultural aspects, such as active listening, reflexive dialogue, and conflict management. Similarly, Italian operators and coordinators usually have a course of study, which includes a focus on intercultural perspectives, or they are intercultural mediators themselves.

Owing to their characteristics as 'trained' interlocutors in communicating with refugees and asylum seekers, the participants in this research reflect the role that Pearce and Pearce (2000) identified as 'facilitator', because of their role in creating connections between the immigrants and the host societies. As they personally face communication problems, NGO and CBO volunteers and operators are able to establish an environment of mutual trust, respect and active listening that assists the interaction and advocacy. They challenge the ways in which refugees and asylum seekers understand the social world, initially joining it and then enriching, expanding, and changing it in order to help them to construct coordinated and shared new meanings of society.

In summary, the elements analysed in this section suggest that the intercultural communication enacted in the interaction between Australian and Italian organisations, and refugees and asylum seekers plays an essential role in the resettlement process of these individuals, allowing a better understanding of the host society. The use of intercultural elements — such as active listening, empathy and mutual respect, increases the effectiveness of changing the social meanings of the world of both interactants. Furthermore, through the use of these elements, NGOs and CBOs are slowly modifying the perspectives of the host societies, moving them towards more positive and open-minded positions as to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers.

After considering the ways in which Australian and Italian humanitarian organisations communicate with refugees and asylum seekers, and how the communication patterns deployed are structured in order to achieve the desired episode of collaboration and support, this study explores the practical ways in which these associations are contributing to the effective resettlement of these immigrants.

Essential services for an ideal resettlement

At this point, the study focuses on the practical activities that NGOs and CBOs are providing to refugees and asylum seekers in order to achieve an effective resettlement in the host society, as active participants in the construction and reconstruction of the society (Haddad, 2003). More specifically, this section aims to explore the two distinct approaches identified by these organisations to achieve this goal: the provision of services at a community level, and the contribution to changing immigration policies. According to Minkler and Wallerstein (2005), these kinds of organisations actively engage in the process of community change and mobilise resources in order to reach a goal or to solve an identified problem. The case studies show clearly the effort spent.

This section first analyses the aims of the Australian and Italian associations in order to identify in which elements they focus their strategies to support refugees and asylum seekers. Then, the strategies adopted are explored from the two perspectives of the provision of services and the contribution in changing immigration policies. The third and last subsection, *The interaction with the host society*, focuses on the ways in which the organisations involved in Australia and

Italy interpret refugees' and asylum seekers' effective resettlement in the host society. This subsection also aims to understand the desired effects of the actions enacted by these associations, the role that they give to the interaction, and the communication they create with their clients.

The aims of the associations

Literature points out that the main purpose of humanitarian organisations is to affect the reception system and the resettlement process regarding refugees and asylum seekers (Ohanyan, 2009; Esty, 1998; Weiss and Gordenker, 1996). The resettlement process, as understood in this study, has the aim of belonging to the community and participation in 'the construction and reconstruction of the society' (Haddad, 2003, p. 20) and its elements. In other words, refugees and asylum seekers, but also other immigrants, are considered resettled within a society when they become an active part of its dynamics. In this way, they are able to participate and collaborate in the constant remodelling of a society's social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.

Both Australian and Italian findings indicate that the main purpose of the organisations involved in this research was to support and increase the effectiveness of refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. Through the provision of services and material support, NGOs and CBOs provide people seeking asylum and refugees a set of skills that enable them to increase their autonomy and promote their social inclusion. All the organisations involved in this research also focused their efforts on creating and facilitating interaction and communication between their clients and the host community. For example, in the organising of public events, they support the construction of extended social networks that can reach outside refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural groups or the reception facilities.

The analysis of these findings through the lens of the communication perspective (Pearce, 2007; Pearce and Pearce, 2000), shows that the interaction and communication within the associations involved in this research aim to facilitate mediation between the client's culture and the culture of the host society. When observed as clusters of persons-in-conversation, communication between refugees, asylum seekers and host societies is characterised as material and consequential, that is it elicits the enactment of participants in different ways, with different permissions and limits within the interaction. Hence, the interaction between immigrants and host societies is able to change the meanings of the society through the patterns

of coordinated communicative actions. Assuming that cultural elements, and social and economic structures are *made* instead of *found* (Pearce, 1989), the actions enacted by the interactants have the opportunity to create new shared cultural patterns and meanings of the society, and so to support an effective resettlement.

Within this scenario, NGOs and CBOs act as facilitator (Pearce and Pearce, 2000) in the communication between the interactants. In doing so, they set up the refugees' and asylum seekers' hierarchies of meaning to better understand the host society and have a more successful resettlement. They also enact actions to facilitate the change of the hierarchy of meaning for society, pushing for an interaction that allows a better understanding of refugees' and asylum seekers' situation and prompt their social inclusion. To summarise: the aims of the associations involved in this study were focused on the qualitative development of refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes, and on increasing the awareness of the host society with regard to their situation.

The next subsection explores the strategies adopted by the Australian and Italian associations in supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement and in implementing the policies relating to these kinds of immigrants.

Between services and policies

In order to ensure the provision of services targeted to support refugee and asylum seeker resettlement processes, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA, 2014) and the Italian Central Service of the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR, 2015) indicated a list of priority areas in which the provision of services were established as a guaranteed minimum. The RCOA identified six different areas for services: social participation, economic wellbeing — financial issues, independence — settlement support, personal wellbeing, life satisfaction, and community connectedness. However, these areas concern only the immigrants already recognised as having the status of refugee. Asylum seekers have access to services for: social participation, independence (which does not include accommodation), and community connectedness. All these areas are covered by NGOs and CBOs and the services they provide.

The Italian Central Service of the SPRAR provides services in nine areas: accommodation, intercultural-linguistic mediation, orientation and access to services on the Italian territory, education and professional requalification, the access to the labour market, and the house

market, social integration, legal support, and social and health services. According to these priority areas, Italian associations have to provide, in addition to those in Australia, legal support and access to housing. Furthermore, they must provide accommodation and Italian language courses without making any distinction between refugees and asylum seekers.

According to Esty (1998), NGOs and CBOs also perform a variety of services aimed at developing new policies, or at changing existing policies. Some services lead these associations to act as a bridge between state and non-state actors, such as promoting citizens' concerns to governments, monitoring policies, and defending minorities' rights. In this way, they represent pressure groups that advocate for humanitarian issues to be addressed in public policy (Arakaki, 2013). However, Ohanyan (2009) specifies that governments are increasingly complying with NGO and CBO activities, aiming to cater for the existing gap between public institutions and, immigrants and local communities.

The study has found that both Australian and Italian associations provided services in response to the priority areas identified by RCOA and SPRAR to resettle refugees and asylum seekers and that they participated in political activities to push the development of immigration policies. The range of services provided by these associations is affected by the reception systems adopted in Australia and Italy, as well as how they financially support themselves, that is with public or private funding.

The organisations based in Australia that participated in this study can be identified mainly as CBOs, which support themselves through donations and private funding. Alone, they are able to provide services covering only a few areas indicated by the RCOA (2014), but when collaborating with each other they cover all six priority areas. Respondents from this research identified three fields of services through which they were providing refugees and asylum seekers with the information they needed to reach independence. The three fields referred to facilitate access to community services, to the Australian education system — where the associations also provided English language classes, and to the labour market. Legal assistance was provided by only two associations, which had adequate finances to do so, and because of personal effort made by staff and volunteers.

All the Italian associations involved in this research were CBOs with public funding under the Italian reception system, which provided funding to cover all expenses relating to accommodation, health services, basic necessities, and Italian language courses. The

participants from these associations were able to cover all the priority areas drafted by the Central Service of SPRAR (2015) with services, relying on other associations only for the provision of Italian classes. Three main groups of services were recognised: the first group involved services that facilitate access and orientation to the host society, the second group referred to services that aimed to increase refugees' and asylum seekers' access to the labour market and, the last group of services focused on providing legal assistance.

With regard to the participation in political activities to change the reception system of their countries, Australian and Italian organisations adopted different strategies. The associations from the Australian research field deployed two different ways to deal with this issue: through a direct involvement in committees advocating for immigration concerns and involving the host community and, in this way, constructing interactions and social networks. Beyond these activities, they also organised events and other activities for host communities to better acknowledge refugees' and asylum seekers' cultures. The participants from the organisations in Italy tried to affect the policies adopted in the local area of their facilities. However, they principally mediated with public institutions — such as the local municipality, and organised events and activities.

The analysis of these findings again points to the role of facilitator (Pearce and Pearce, 2000) that Australian and Italian associations play in order to create effective connections and communication between refugees and asylum seekers on the one hand, and the host societies on the other. Indeed, through the provision of essential services that allow these kinds of immigrants to face a better resettlement process, they challenge their hierarchies of meaning of the society and the world, expanding, enriching and changing those meanings. The areas covered by the associations aim to move the higher context (of the Pearce's hierarchy of meaning) in which the meanings of messages are interpreted from the culture context to the episode context (see Figure 8.3). In this way, the actions enacted within the communication with refugees and asylum seekers affect the context in which that interaction happens, relying more on interpretations that move from a contextual to an implicative force (Pearce, 2004; Pearce and Cronen, 1980). Indeed, the interaction and communication enacted through the provision of services enable association clients to better understand the host society and, consequently, to become an active part of it.

NGOs and CBOs involved in this study also focus on affecting policies related to refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to being involved with committees and political parties to

contribute to policy making, the associations utilise events and activities, challenge the status quo and suggest new proposals to influence the ways in which host society see and understand humanitarian immigration. Australian and Italian associations want to affect the interaction with host societies, creating new hierarchies of meaning in which the culture context is not uppermost. As mentioned in the previous sections, the culture context can lead to misunderstanding in the interaction and create further barriers in communication.

In summary, the associations from both Australian and Italian research are mainly focused on the provision of specific services. These services enable opportunities for the organisations to interact and communicate with refugees and asylum seekers and prepare them for an effective resettlement. More specifically, they push people seeking asylum and refugees towards independence, a quality that allows them to have autonomy from the associations and to participate in the host communities.

The interaction with the host society

Fiske (2006) asserts that these kinds of organisations recognise the essential need of refugees and asylum seekers ‘to belong, to be a member of a community and to have certain rights and obligations as member of that community’ (p. 226). In order to understand how these associations imagine an effective resettlement, this study explored the features that Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs identified for participation and belonging to the host society.

Both Australian and Italian participants identified three key elements that allow effective resettlement of their clients in the host community: independence, participation in the host community, and the provision of a set of fundamental skills that help with interaction and with the understanding of the host society. The independence element allows refugees and asylum seekers to be autonomous with respect to public institutions and humanitarian organisations. In order to achieve this element, respondents from both Australia and Italy focused on learning the local language and finding a job. Once achieved, these two factors opened the way to the second element: interaction with and within the host society, through the creation of social networks outside association facilities with locals, but also with people from different cultural backgrounds. At this point, the associations focused on the fundamental achievements or skills that refugees and asylum seekers needed to create social networks, such as language skills, the knowledge of the territory and its services, and the understanding of customs and behavioural practices enacted in the host society.

The above mentioned findings confirm the relevance of the interaction with the host society for an effective resettlement. For this reason, refugees and asylum seekers are encouraged to learn the language of the host countries. In this way, they are able to better understand the cultural patterns of societies and how to negotiate their own to become part of these communities. As expressed by Pearce (1989), relationships and structures that form society are *made*, not *found*. That is, refugees and asylum seekers, supported by the facilitator role enacted by NGOs and CBOs, are able to change the host communities' perception regarding these individuals. Here the aim is to create a 'charmed loop' (Pearce, 2004) where daily interactions and the involvement of stakeholders from the host societies lead to positive experiences that trigger a virtuous circle to better acknowledge immigrants' situations and their effort to start new lives in safe places, such as Australia and Italy.

In summary of this section, it can be affirmed that the main goal of the Australian and Italian associations involved in this research is to support refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes, interpreted as the participation in constructing the host society. In order to increase their opportunities of social inclusion, the focus of NGOs and CBOs is on the provision of essential services that improve the understanding of the host community and, marginally, to exert pressure on governments for legislative change. More specifically, through these two interventions they attempt to construct interaction and communication between refugees, asylum seekers and host communities. From this aspect, interaction and communication are planned as intercultural, allowing interactants to focus on the elements with personal significance, and leaving cultural patterns at a secondary level of importance.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to respond to the central question of this study, and explain how intercultural practices adopted by NGOs and CBOs contribute to refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes in the host societies. In order to answer this question, the research identified and investigated three aspects of Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs. The first referred to the identification of the practices adopted by these associations to assist refugees and asylum seekers. Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs enacted the interaction with these individuals by adopting an intercultural perspective, as assumed by the current research. Findings from both Australia and Italy framed the interaction among different cultural groups

as a person-to-person relationship. In this way, respondents evaluated subjective and individual elements as most relevant than cultural elements, placing the culture context of the hierarchy of meaning at the lowest level. The interaction created within these organisations was guided by the three intercultural assumptions (Dai and Chen, 2015), which are: the desire to communicate, the will to interact by going beyond cultural patterns, and the effort to establish effective connections.

The second aspect focused on intercultural communication within NGOs and CBOs, and its role in contributing to refugees' and asylum seekers' process of resettlement. In this case, all the elements analysed suggested that these organisations enact intercultural communication with refugees and asylum seekers to provide a better understanding of the host society. The use of intercultural elements — such as active listening, empathy and mutual respect, increased the effectiveness in understanding and changing the social meanings of the world of both interactants. Through this, they were able to affect resettlement processes, slowly modifying refugees' and asylum seekers' perspectives regarding the host society and vice versa. Given the different roles of the Australian and Italian associations in their respective reception systems, the latter appeared to enact a more structured communication. This is because of the daily interaction as a result of living within organisations' facilities, and the use of professional paid staff that specialised in intercultural practices. However, for the same reason, only in the Italian associations involved in this project reported problems in communication, beyond the language ones.

The last aspect examined what is identified by scholars (Ohanyan, 2009; Esty, 1998) as the two main purposes of refugee and asylum seeker associations, that is to increase the effectiveness of the resettlement process of these individuals, and to change immigration policies. Although the provision of essential services represented a constant element in all NGOs and CBOs activities and strategies, their involvement in political activities was quite marginal in both Australia and Italy. Only the bigger Australian associations involved in this study directly participated in committees and public debates on immigration issues; the remaining smaller associations focused almost exclusively on the provision of practical services for the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. The organisations involved in this field preferred to focus on the interpersonal interaction that they were able to create with their clients, and through communication based on subjective elements and daily interactions they provided refugees and asylum seekers with new meanings of the host society, meanings that aimed to

increase the resettlement processes of these individuals. Furthermore, almost all the Australian associations (five out of six) involved in this research were identifiable as both NGO and CBO for the reason that they relied on private donations to meet their limited budgets. Hence, their efforts were projected towards practical and material assistance. In Italy, activities related to changing immigration policies were limited to the local area and the organisation of events and activities. As in the Australian situations, Italian associations principally provided services to comply with legal obligations. Here communication patterns played a key role in the understanding of the host society, revealing their aspects and meanings.

It is possible now to respond to the main question of this research project, that is the identification of the ways in which the intercultural practices enacted by NGOs and CBOs involved in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers contribute to their resettlement. The adoption of intercultural elements in constructing the interaction with these types of immigrants helped to 'bridge' (Putnam, 2000) their different cultures and the mainstream culture made in the host societies. In this way, the communication enacted between volunteers, operators, coordinators, and refugees and asylum seekers, allowed the creation of an environment within the associations and their accommodations that facilitated collaboration and support. The interactants' desire to communicate, their will to interact by going beyond cultural patterns, and the effort to establish effective connections (Dai and Chen, 2015) enabled NGOs and CBOs to address communication and actions in order to achieve mutuality. Hence, interculturality contributed to a context in which collaboration and support are the main elements and cultural patterns are marginalised. This context enhanced the effectiveness in understanding the meanings of the host society, hence increasing access to it. In this way, the intercultural practices adopted by the NGOs and CBOs supporting refugees and asylum seekers affected their resettlement processes modifying their perspectives regarding the world and the host society.

Through communication based on subjective elements and daily interactions, these associations provided refugees and asylum seekers with different lens through which they could understand host societies from other perspectives, new perspectives that, in turn, improved the resettlement processes of these individuals, to ensure greater opportunities to become an active part of the community. Along with the construction of an intercultural communication, NGOs and CBOs focused almost exclusively on supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement through the provision of practical services. These services were

essential for the preparation and the empowerment of refugees' and asylum seekers' individual skills to interact, and to understand the context in which they interact. They focused on the transmission of essential skills, such as the learning of local languages, or access to the labour markets and the educational systems, as well as in the understanding of the host societies. The way in which the interaction was created within the provision of these services supported the creation of new meanings associated with the community and the country more generally. Furthermore, the provision of these services provided a practical support for the participation in and contribution to society. For example, the outcomes of occupational training provided by these associations could lead a refugee to find a job, the resulting stability enabling him/her to contribute to society.

Chapter Nine

Thesis overview and major findings

Thesis overview

Providing support services for the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers is an increasing concern that is debated at an international level. Nonetheless, the provision of these support services is rarely investigated in terms of effectiveness. This research explored this topic from an intercultural perspective, considered by scholars as an appropriate approach to create and maintain constructive relationships between different levels of the framework. Intercultural communication leads the interaction to a level of interpersonal communication among individuals and groups. It is noted that the human condition forms part of the identity of any individual, regardless of the cultural group of origins (Kim, 2005). Consequently, it is a significant element to be considered in the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. This research focused on the interaction during early resettlement, which offers the opportunity to reach a full and mutual understanding between migrants and host societies. In this context, interactants enhanced the opportunities to achieve an effective communication by avoiding communication based on the cultural elements of specific groups, as this approach was thought to create barriers rather than connections.

This research project was inspired by the global context of immigration, particularly of refugees and asylum seekers. The literature explored in chapter two shows that since the Second World War, governments and individuals have started to develop techniques to assure an efficacious and efficient interaction among people with different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2009). The rises of new technologies, which transformed the world into a smaller place, and citizens' wellbeing in some countries of the world, led a large number of people to emigrate from their country of origin, looking for a better life. However, there are immigrants have been forced to flee natural disasters, wars, violence and discrimination, to name a few. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 1951) defines these immigrants by the constant

element of fear they feel in their country of origin, highlighting the failure of the government to defend the unconditional human rights of these individuals.

In this context Non-Governmental (NGOs) and Community-Based (CBOs) Organisations are present, with the intent to support refugees and asylum seekers — that is people claiming to be a refugee, but yet to be recognised as a refugee. In recent decades, researchers have increasingly looked to develop perspectives with the aim of constructing better communication among different cultural groups, such as multiculturalism and interculturalism (Pasqualotto, 2009; Brandalise, 2002; Bauman, 1999). Nevertheless, contemporary societies are witnessing the development of immigration policies that put limits on the right to ask for asylum, or that aim to close borders and enhance controls at the frontiers, even constructing boundary walls in some cases, with the intent to physically stop the flow of immigrants.

This study focused on the intercultural practices enacted by NGOs and CBOs, and the role they play in assisting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes. These associations represent the first connection between refugees, asylum seekers, and the host societies (Fiske, 2006). As a consequence, they play a key role in the resettlement of immigrants, but also in the creation of the interaction and the understanding between them and the host society. This research argued that, in order to create effective communication between their clients and the host community, NGOs and CBOs should adopt an intercultural perspective in forming their strategies to support and facilitate this interaction. Further, it asserted that the use of intercultural elements in communication increased the impact that these associations can provide to refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement. In this research context, chapter three described the theoretical framework of the research by investigating the significance of intercultural communication. Following Pearce and Pearce's (2000) extended theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), this section explained the concept of communication as applied to this study, and the relation between intercultural communication, the actual resettlement in the host society, and the role of 'facilitator' played by NGOs and CBOs. It also examined communication as a strategy adopted by the humanitarian organisations to support refugees and asylum seekers.

Drawing on a comparison between issues concerning refugees in Australia and Italy, chapter four explained the qualitative research methods involved to address the research questions. In situating the project within the framework of intercultural communication and refugees' and

asylum seekers' resettlement process, case studies were undertaken of 15 NGOs and CBOs (six in Australia and nine in Italy) that were selected by criteria related to their activities in this field. Australia and Italy were chosen because of the key role assigned by their reception systems to NGOs and CBOs in supporting refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes, although with different relationships between the associations and the governments. For each organisation, several volunteers/operators and a representative of management were interviewed, concentrating on the concerns and personal experiences of participants and examining the everyday practices deployed by NGOs and CBOs to assist asylum seekers and refugees. The decision to interview a member of the management board of each association aimed to consider the planning level of their strategies in this context. How refugees and asylum seekers have observed and lived the practices and strategies adopted by these two groups has not been explored in detail, the necessity being for this study to focus on how intercultural practices and support services provided by humanitarian organisations contribute to the refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process.

Furthermore, to refine the analysis of humanitarian organisations' action plans and of the criteria for their elaboration, the researcher participated in the meetings they organised. Meetings were attended in Australia and Italy, although different in substance. In Australia, the meetings on resettlement issues resulted from governmental initiatives. They were organised through the Migration Settlement Committee and were focused on strategies to adopt and apply through the organisation of cultural events or other public activities. In Italy, the associations participating in the meetings discussed similar topics, but they were not representing or relying on any public institution. The research included observations, where appropriate, of the process of interaction between volunteers/operators and refugees.

Chapter five looked at the Australian and Italian contexts of welcoming of refugees and asylum seekers. It examined statistical data referring to refugees and asylum seekers, their reception and the ways in which they were resettled. The analysis of these elements allowed an understanding of the role played by NGOs and CBOs along the pathway of the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. NGO and CBO policies were shaped by the reception systems adopted by the Australian and Italian governments. Australian policy mainly focuses on those who resettled through the UNHCR, resulting in two different fields of action for these associations: NGOs that act as providers of the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) — reserved for refugees or permanent visa holders, and CBOs — which are also non-

governmental — that offer support services to asylum seekers and refugees who are not under the HSP. Conversely, Italian associations are mainly involved in the reception of asylum seekers, especially those arriving by boat. Humanitarian organisations are involved in all phases of the process. During the journey from African to Italian coasts, international NGOs assist and help asylum seekers to reach their destination safely; then CBOs provide first aid, relief materials and support their resettlement process, including providing skills and knowledge of the host society. Furthermore, the Australian reception system appears to be a structured and stable process in which NGOs and CBOs provide refugees and asylum seekers with skills and knowledge to enhance the outcomes of their resettlement process, especially concerning their social and economic wellbeing. Conversely, the Italian reception system has three phases in the process. Each phase is directly connected with the activities of the humanitarian organisations involved. However, in 2015 the Italian government added a further institution, the Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS), with the aim to obviate the lack of available places for asylum seekers in ordinary reception facilities. According to statistical data published by the Ministry of the Interior, the large majority of refugees and asylum seekers during 2016 were accommodated in Extraordinary Reception Centres. Hence, it appears that the Italian program is based on the extraordinary and temporary factors of immigrant flows rather than a structured system.

Chapters six and seven respectively explore the role of intercultural communication within Australian and Italian organisations, through an in-depth analysis of intercultural practices and their efficiency in supporting the process of resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. The findings from the Australian and Italian research confirmed intercultural assumptions. They were analysed within three main themes: (1) the practices employed to interact with refugees and asylum seekers, (2) the communication strategy adopted and (3) the efforts of the organisations involved to enhance the effective resettlement of these individuals in the host societies. Referring to the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers, both Australian and Italian participants constructed that communication on communicators' individual elements rather than cultural elements from their cultural groups. In constructing this interaction, the practices adopted by the NGOs and the CBOs were in line with the principles that scholars have considered important in intercultural communication, such as active listening, empathy, trust and mutuality. In particular, an effective communication was associated with a positive resettlement, because it allowed a better understanding of the host community. The intercultural communication enacted with refugees and asylum seekers by volunteers,

operators, and coordinators of the humanitarian associations focused on creating a person-to-person interaction. In other words, the use of intercultural elements stimulated the construction of an interaction based on intersubjectivity and developed in the contact zone (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1116) through daily interaction. In this way, the messages enacted by NGOs' and CBOs' volunteers and operators aimed to achieve the desired episodes of collaboration and support, creating the starting point for an effective resettlement within the host society. Hence, focusing on the individual, rather than his/her cultural group, facilitated the development of immigrants' feeling of inclusion in the community. Furthermore, the interaction constructed on the basis of the episode context allowed refugees and asylum seekers to better understand that society is not a granitic element that cannot be changed, but an element in constant evolution and that they can contribute to the building of it.

Then the chapters focused on two specific aspects of communication: the knowledge of the cultural background and the emotions of the interactants. The knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural background was not recognised as essential in communication from both Australian and Italian findings, rather it tended to involve an unconscious application of stereotypes. In addition, Italian respondents also recognised the importance of the knowledge of the cultural background in decoding behaviours and attitudes. Regarding the emotional state of refugees and asylum seekers, the interviews generally indicated that anxiety was the greatest influence on communication. Anxiety was linked to their status, the reception systems and the length of their processes, and the difficulties in interacting with the host society.

Finally, the two chapters examined what strategies were being adopted to facilitate and enhance refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement process. All associations involved provided services structured to enhance the settlement process of refugees and asylum seekers. Both in Australia and Italy these services were applied in three ways: the creation of interaction with the host communities, the support of refugees' and asylum seekers' access to the labour market, and assistance for legal issues concerning their immigration processes. These organisations also provided services to support immigrant education, but in different ways. Australian associations provided English courses and seminars to facilitate immigrants' access to the school system, while Italian organisations mainly offered Italian language courses, which were compulsory by law.

Chapter eight analysed and elaborated the findings presented in the previous two chapters to explore the relationship between intercultural communication and the process of resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. The chapter pointed out how intercultural communication acts and how it plays a crucial role for the further inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the host society, allowing a better understanding of the host society, and an interaction based on reciprocal collaboration and support. This chapter also introduces differences and similarities observed in the parallel examination of the two systems, especially relating to interaction and communication processes. In doing so, it first identified the practices adopted by Australian and Italian NGOs and CBOs involved in this study to assist refugees and asylum seekers. The analysis of the interaction enacted in Australia and Italy found the interaction between different cultural groups was enacted on a person-to-person relationship. In this way, the culture context of the hierarchy of meaning of the interaction remained at the lowest level of context, avoiding the danger of stereotyping people with their cultural background. Then, the chapter focused on the intercultural communication created within NGOs and CBOs, and its role in contributing to refugees' and asylum seekers' process of resettlement. In this case, the analysis of the findings determined that these organisations enact intercultural communication with refugees and asylum seekers to increase the effectiveness in understanding and changing the social meanings of their visions of the world, and so the host community.

Finally, the chapter investigated the two main purposes of refugee and asylum seeker associations as identified by scholars (Ohanyan, 2009; Esty, 1998). Although the provision of essential services was a constant element in the activities and strategies of the NGOs and CBOs, their involvement in political activities was quite marginal in both Australia and Italy. The organisations involved in this field preferred to focus on the interpersonal interaction in order to provide refugees and asylum seekers with new meanings of the host society, meanings that reflect a different way to see and interpret the world and society. Consequently, this interaction strengthened refugee and asylum seeker resettlement processes, helping them to modify their perception of the host community.

Major findings

The analysis of the findings in chapters six and seven, and discussed in chapter eight, can answer the research questions that emerge from the literature review. This subsection presents the major findings and the limitation of this study. It also indicates direction for future research.

1. What practices do Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations employ to assist refugees and asylum seekers?

Findings from both Australian and Italian associations indicated that the practices adopted by these organisations to assist refugees and asylum seekers were intercultural. All the participants in this study revealed, sometimes unconsciously, how they utilised intercultural elements in constructing the interaction — such as active listening, empathy, mutual respect and trust (Ioppolo, 2014). Furthermore, through the identification of culture as the personal elements of the individual, rather than the features of a cultural group, the interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds was created on a person-to-person relationship, confirming Kelly's statement (1955) that people have the capacity to interact by going beyond interactants' cultural patterns. Within these interactions, the culture context of the hierarchy (Pearce and Cronen, 1980) was placed at the lower level in interpreting the messages enacted.

Thus, the cultural background element in the interaction became marginal. It was helpful in understanding and explaining some immigrants' behaviour, and in translating some dynamics of the interactions with immigrants. However, this represents only the point of view of volunteers, operators, and coordinators who were involved in NGOs' and CBOs' activities. Although they directly experienced daily interaction with refugees and asylum seekers, facilitating the interaction between immigrants and the host societies, they are not able to provide all the elements to understand it. Hence, in order to have a larger vision of the intercultural interaction between people from different cultural groups, other interactants' points of view should also be investigated, more specifically those of refugees, asylum seekers and representatives from the host society.

2. *What is the role of the associations' intercultural communication in contributing to the refugees' and asylum seekers' process of resettlement?*

The intercultural communication enacted by Australian and Italian organisations in interacting with refugees and asylum seekers played an essential role in the resettlement process of these individuals. The use of intercultural elements — such as active listening, empathy and mutual respect achieved two effects. The first effect was an effective transmission of knowledge, which provided refugees and asylum seekers with practical skills, thus enhancing understanding of the way in which the host society works. The second effect of the communication enacted as a person-to-person intercultural relationship, was the increased understanding of the meanings of the host society. The daily interaction within the associations' housing facilities created a system in which was possible to coordinate meanings and actions to achieve the desired episode. In this way, the episodes collaboration and support enacted by refugees, asylum seekers and, the humanitarian organisations were interpreted in the relationship context of the resettlement. In other words, the intercultural elements of communication enacted by NGOs and CBOs facilitated refugees' and asylum seekers' understanding of the host societies, enacting messages with an implicative force, 'in order to' reinforce and change the context of resettlement, and not 'because of' it.

However, the three assumptions of intercultural formulation all focus on a common element: the mutuality of the interaction. From this point of view, the current research did not involve the clients of NGOs and CBOs, concentrating only on the perspectives of the associations. After analysing the findings from the Italian associations, who reported problems in communicating and interacting with clients, some questions emerged. How do immigrants, and volunteers and operators coordinate actions to produce patterns of communications that enable collaboration and support? The findings show that the Italian associations had a large period of time to interact with refugees and asylum seekers because of the reception system, but in this interaction they played a double role: facilitators of the interaction, and controller of their behaviours. The interviews revealed that the latter often led to the creation of barriers in communication, affecting the willingness of refugees and asylum seekers to communicate (Rotondo, 2014; Rhazzali, 2009) and so interrupting interculturality in the interaction. For this reason, further research should be developed in order to explore and clarify refugees' and asylum seekers' contribution in the interaction process, and in turn in their resettlement.

Furthermore, the interviews brought to light a distinct difference between the structures of the Australian and Italian associations that could lead to different outcomes from the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers. Australian participants who were not staff members of the associations (13 of 20) were donating their time, efforts, and support to immigrants and their resettlement. They were mainly students or retirees who, in some cases, had decided to attain further tertiary degrees to increase their ability to help refugees and asylum seekers. Conversely, the Italian participants were paid staff with a required education in this field — as intercultural mediator, for example. In addition, they had to act, as mentioned before, both as facilitator and controller. For these reasons, the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers appeared more facilitated within the Australian associations compared with those in Italy, although the time allowed for interactions was definitively less compared to that within the Italian organisations.

3. *Are asylum seeker and refugee organisations seeking to contribute or to change immigration policy or to provide services at a community level?*

The strategies adopted by the associations involved in this study reflects what Fiske (2006) indicated as being their main goal: the support of refugees' and asylum seekers' resettlement processes, interpreted as the participation in constructing the host society. It was possible to identify two main fields of action: the provision of essential services, and, marginally, the exertion of pressure on governments for legislative changes. Intercultural communication played a crucial role in shaping the interactions, thus their outcomes, in both these fields. In providing services, intercultural communication enhanced the opportunity to understand and be involved in the host society. Similarly, it would improve interaction with host societies and governments. However, governments both in Australia and Italy decided on immigration policies that limit refugees and asylum seekers rights.

Although this research focused on the interactions and practices enacted within NGOs and CBOs, findings from both Australian and Italian organisations showed that, when involved in political issues — such as events and public activities — they change their patterns of communication, recovering the culture context at the higher level of interpretation. They stressed the cultural differences between immigrants and host societies, recreating a division that was lost in the interpersonal interaction. In doing so they risked enacting adversarial forms of communication (Tannen , 1999) in which a complex issue is simplified into just

the interactants' points of view. In such forms of communication, solutions to problems retreat into the background when interactants concentrate on winning the context instead of developing better policies. In doing so, communication in public debates often focused on victimising immigrants and accusing others. Such actions can cause host societies to misunderstand the refugee and asylum seeker situation. It would be valuable for further research on the patterns of communication enacted by NGOs and CBOs towards host communities. Is it enacted utilising intercultural elements? What is its hierarchy of meaning? How do these associations coordinate their actions with governments and host societies in order to achieve their purposes?

The above three answers combine to address the central question of this research, adding elements that confirm the assumptions and identify the intercultural elements utilised in the interaction and the strategies adopted by NGOs and CBOs in supporting refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process.

In what ways do intercultural practices in refugee and asylum seekers associations contribute to the resettlement of these individuals?

The use of intercultural elements in constructing the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers helped to 'bridge' (Putnam, 2000) their different cultures with the mainstream culture of the host societies. In doing so, communication, enacted by taking into account elements such as active listening, empathy and mutual respect, allowed the creation of an environment within the associations that facilitates episodes of collaboration and support, and in which the interaction was focused on the personal characteristics of the individual, rather than his/her cultural group of origin. The three assumptions that identify intercultural interaction — the desire to communicate of the interactants, the will to interact going beyond cultural patterns and, the effort to establish effective connections (Dai and Chen, 2015) — were satisfied, at least by assessment of the NGOs and CBOs. Interculturality contributed to create a context in which personal elements connected these individuals to their cultural groups, so enhancing understanding of the meanings of the host society, and also increasing access to it by providing refugees and asylum seekers with different lens through which they can understand host societies from other perspectives, new perspectives that, in turn, increase the resettlement processes of these individuals, ensuring opportunities to become an active part of the community. In addition, intercultural practices also increased the impact of NGO and CBO

support services essential for the preparation and the empowerment of refugees' and asylum seekers' individual skills to interact with and understand the context in which they interact. The interaction created within the provision of these services supported the creation of new meanings associated with the host community and increased refugees' and asylum seekers' abilities to resettle.

As mentioned before, the current research focused on the interaction enacted by NGOs and CBOs in supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and their resettlement. In doing so, people with different positions and roles were interviewed: operators and volunteers who daily interact and communicate with NGOs and CBOs clients, and representatives from the management board who planned strategies and activities. The aim of this research was to examine practices and factors that influenced refugee and asylum seeker resettlement processes, from the viewpoints of NGOs and CBOs. The strategies adopted by these associations were documented with a focus on the interaction and communication created and enacted in the relationship with their clients. An additional purpose of the study was to explore the role played by the knowledge of refugees' and asylum seekers' cultural patterns in constructing communication and in supporting their resettlement process. The participants in this study stated their concern that relying on cultural patterns for the construction of the interaction could wrongly associate an individual to a cultural group through stereotyping.

The current research project analysed the interaction created by NGOs and CBOs in their function as facilitator of the communication between refugees, asylum seekers and host societies. In doing so, it intentionally avoided the involvement of the other main actors of the interaction, focusing on the role played by the humanitarian associations. In order to achieve a full understanding of this complex three-way interaction, further research should be conducted to investigate the ways in which refugees, asylum seekers and host societies plan and construct this interaction, and the role played by the cultural elements in developing it.

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Appendix A

Interview schedule with Australian Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations

Demographic Information

Name:

Organisation:

Gender:

Age:

Position or role in the organisation:

Education:

Ethnicity:

Native language:

Foreign language:

How long have you been in Australia?

How much volunteering experience have you had?

Why did you first begin to work in this field?

Interaction among different cultural groups

1. What does the term culture mean to you?
2. How do you perceive the interaction between different cultural groups?
3. What is your perception of the interaction between those who work at your organisation and refugees and asylum seekers that you assist?

Communicating and interacting with refugees and asylum seekers

4. How do you interact with refugees and asylum seekers? Are you aware of using specific skills, such as active listening or other forms of communication?
5. How does the communication develop during the interaction? How would you describe it and on what is it focused?
6. Is there someone who can assist with cases where intercultural communication is proving difficult?
7. Do you think that intercultural communication is directly connected with your work, as an additional skill in supporting refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process? In which way?

Cultural background and emotions within the resettlement process

8. How important is the refugee and asylum seeker background to resettlement?
9. Do they express emotions (such as fear, excitement, for example) about the resettlement process?

Strategies and services

10. Do you think that your organisation contributes to the support of refugee and asylum seeker resettlement process? If so, in what ways?
11. What is the main purpose of your organisation?
12. What kind of strategies are you/your organisation adopting in order to achieve this purpose?
13. What services does your organisation provide?
14. What characteristics should a resettlement have to be considered effective and positive?

Appendix B

Interview schedule with Italian Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations

Demographic Information

Nome:

Organizzazione:

Gender:

Età:

Ruolo o posizione nell'organizzazione:

Livello scolastico:

Etnia:

Lingua nativa:

Lingue straniere:

Da quanto tempo sei in Italia?

Quanta esperienza ha in questo campo?

Perché ha iniziato ad interessarsi di questo campo?

Interaction among different cultural groups

1. Cosa significa il termine 'cultura' per te?
2. Come percepisci l'interazione tra differenti gruppi culturali?
3. Qual è la tua percezione dell'interazione tra i lavoratori dell'organizzazione ed i migranti/rifugiati che assisti?

Communicating and interacting with refugees and asylum seekers

4. Come interagisci con i rifugiati? Utilizzi consapevolmente specifiche capacità, come l'ascolto attivo o altre forme di comunicazione?
5. Come la comunicazione si sviluppa durante l'interazione? Come la descriverebbe, e su cosa si concentra?
6. C'è qualcuno che può prestare assistenza nei casi in cui la comunicazione interculturale non funziona?
7. Pensi che la comunicazione interculturale sia direttamente connessa al tuo lavoro, come una capacità aggiuntiva nel supportare il reinsediamento di rifugiati e richiedenti asilo? In che modo?

Cultural background and emotions within the resettlement process

8. Quanto è importante il passato dei rifugiati nella fase di reinsediamento?
9. Esprimono emozioni (come paura, eccitamento, risentimenti, per esempio) che possano incidere sul processo di reinsediamento?

Strategies and services

10. Pensi che la tua organizzazione contribuisca a supportare il reinsediamento dei rifugiati e dei richiedenti asilo? Se sì, in che modo?
11. Quale è lo scopo principale della tua organizzazione?
12. Che tipo di strategie stai/la tua associazione sta adottando per raggiungere questo scopo?
13. Quali servizi provvede l'organizzazione in cui lavori?
14. Che caratteristiche dovrebbe avere un reinsediamento per essere considerato effettivo e positivo?