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Cyprus - Case Study 2

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Harmonizing a new life through music

When I got to Cyprus from Cameroon, I had to learn how to survive several challenges hence music became my backbone in the new country. This was especially so owing to some of the cultural and linguistic differences that were evident, and hence integration was not an easy process. But in any case, music helped me to find meaning and belonging in this new country.

In this particular case, to elaborate more about my experience and / or challenges of getting accustomed to the social environment in Cyprus, this case focuses more on how my passion for music saved the day. It evolved from being just a pastime activity to a device I used to communicate, share ideas and interests and create bond with new people of the society. In other words, I found that the obstacles could be overcome by playing music and actually make new friends and slowly start assimilate with the Cypriot people.

Introduction

I left Cameroon in order to run away from political upheavals and came to Cyprus to seek refuge. However, when I first joined I was faced with a number of problems. Language was also an issue in this culture as most of the time, I found myself struggling to make new friends or rather interact with the populace of the community.

But I soon came to learn that I can always use my capability in music to counter this. Music was my love, and when I was in Cyprus it became my means of relating to other people. Thus, the possibility to share the music let me discover the ways to influence people even if we don't speak the same language. Performing enabled me to climb out from the social confinement and, stage by stage, integrate into my new society.

In this situation, I discuss how I applied themes of music to help me overcome general challenges of asylum and Adjustment. But it was not only about living through the hardship; it is about trying to learn how to live triumphantly and how to embrace the community one feels alienated from at first sight. Music was my means through which I was able to create social relationships and therefore gain a foothold in Cypriot society.

Main Challenges

- Culture Diversity

Main Opportunities

- Embracing diversity



Jean (alias)

A young man from Cameroon



Jean's Story

Being a refugee I was so glad that I reached Cyprus – finally, a safe country – but it was short-lived because soon I realized my life in Cyprus. Even the language was different, and the behaviors of the people, and even the culture that was practiced in the country seemed to be different. It means I felt lonely at one point because I couldn't speak well and that made it challenging for me to make friends and Catholics or even find a job or relate to places. I wanted to cry for help, to scream out loud that I am here but no one saw me, no one heard me.

That is the reason the issue of language became one of the most difficult challenges. The only other languages I spoke were slightly English and French learnt in Cameroon and the rest was completely unknown to me; trying to find my way through stores, or even asking for directions from people would just get me bewildered looks on their faces which in a way irritated me. It simply made me get a feeling that I don't fit in anywhere. I began to be a loner, avoiding to interact with people because it proved too mortifying having to explain myself without being understood.

Besides, to get a job was out of the question; the chances of employment were almost non-existent. Since I did not have a network, I could not consult anyone as to where to look for a job. As much as I thought I was well qualified, this feeling continually overwhelmed me because I could not speak the language of the people and I did not know etiquette of the country. The harder I looked for such chances the harder it became to land a job or even an interview. It was frustrating, and there were times when I felt like I've never belong to any group on earth, no group has a place for me, or I can't find my place.

But through all of this, one thing remained constant: My music Instrumental composition is one of the unique ways of expressing ones ideas and general creativity. For Cameroonians adapting to the new Cypriot environment, it was the only facet that one didn't have to abandon. Music, was always my love, my escape and despite being in a very different place, in a different culture helped me feel like I had a purpose. I also began strumming my guitar, at least the strings which belonged to me at my makeshift small room, just to cheer myself up. But soon it dawned on me that music could be my window of opportunity in as much as it was a door to making new friends. Perhaps if words turned into melody, then the word between them could be filled.

I started performing in public parks and occasionally on street corners in the hopes that someone would stop and pay attention. And people did, gradually. Even if they weren't familiar with my background or the words to the songs I was playing, I could see how the music made them smile. I felt as though I was finally breaking through the wall of isolation for the first time since I arrived.

It was through those little shows that I began making new friends. Some wanted to know where I was from, while others would just talk to me because they liked the music. I got asked to perform at a local community center's cultural event one day. That marked a sea change. These days, it was more than just music—it was about belonging. People were reacting to me when I shared a little piece of myself.

I started instructing the kids at the centre in music not long after. Seeing how something that had served as such a private release for me could now be used as a means of giving back to others was humble. These exchanges gave me a sense of realism and made me feel like I belonged in this new group rather than just being an outsider looking in. I began to see that, in spite of everything, I could control how I integrated into Cypriot society.

Naturally, the difficulties did not go away right away. There were certainly times when I felt frustrated, especially with trying to find steady employment and keep honing my language abilities. However, music turned became my compass, opening doors for me and introducing me to people and chances I never would have otherwise met. I never would have guessed the avenues that sharing my talent with the community has opened for me.

Looking back on my path, I see now that my struggle was not only about getting a job or learning a new language, but also about rediscovering who I was. Cyprus has evolved into more than just the location where I applied for asylum; it is now a part of my journey, where I've made new friends and discovered a means to follow my passion.

Conclusions

My case proves that cultural and artistic orientation are important for changing the essence of the integration process. Music is an excellent way of expressing oneself when they cannot use any verbal communication; through music, I was able to touch the local community. This is why my story is clear that it is possible to create opportunities for refugees like me, instead of just offering programs that let refugees "talk" about their ordeal – to create opportunities for refugees to contribute to society and start new lives.

Key takeaways from my experience are clear: community support is very important, and also the art, culture play specific role in minimizing factions in the society. At this, they are not only getting a chance to find themselves in mainstream society, but we are also benefiting from their input into the larger society. My experience is the testament that when empowered we can news the adversities into advantages and loneliness into togetherness.

Annexes

Community music workshop, Details of cultural festivals and events, Greek language course curriculum



Greek language course

<https://generationforchange.org/portfolio/greek-as-a-second-language/>



Community music

https://www.facebook.com/SistemaCyprus/?locale=el_GR



Details of cultural festivals and events

<https://www.cyrefugeecouncil.org/event/world-refugee-day-festival-2024/>