

Participatory Action Research

Internship Report

Community building & empowerment

A Participatory Action Research with LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers in the South of the Netherlands.



Daniela Burba, September 2023

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1. Introduction

a. The background

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands between 2020 and 2022, and the subsequent lockdown enforced by the Dutch government, sex workers faced great challenges in resuming their work and obtaining access to the government's emergency assistance program. In this period, three reports (Burba *et al.*, 2022; Kloek *et al.*, 2021; Jules, Hamburg, 2020) were published by the sex workers' community. There was a great deal of emphasis in these reports on the challenges newcomers to the country face, especially asylum seekers and refugees working in the sexual industry. Due to their unregistered status as self-employed sex workers, many of them found themselves excluded from government assistance under the TOZO program as a result of the stringent lockdown measures during this period. Besides economic hardship, they also faced social isolation, racial discrimination, language barriers, and violence from clients who capitalized on their vulnerability. It should be noted that members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender women, who are also involved in sex work, have experienced a unique and severe intersection of stigmatization.

Moreover, instances of violent encounters with clients and a palpable fear of reporting such incidents to law enforcement were documented. An in-depth study conducted by Burba *et al.*, 2022, brought to light that transgender asylum seekers and refugee sex workers residing in the southern regions of the country suffered extreme isolation and a lack of community support throughout the pandemic. They faced additional obstacles in accessing specialized healthcare and hormone treatments, often traveling to North Holland for these services. Furthermore, they recounted distressing experiences of violence, especially within asylum centers, and the discrimination based on gender identity and racial background, which deterred them from seeking police assistance, as they frequently felt unheard and dismissed. Linguistic barriers further obstructed their access to essential services, such as medical consultations for prophylaxis and specific treatments. The broader context revealed an alarming absence of support networks for LGBTQ+ sex workers newly arrived in the south of the Netherlands, notably in the regions of Limburg, North Brabant, and South Brabant.

Consequently, SOA AIDS Nederland recognized the urgency of the situation and engaged us as Participatory Action Research (PAR) team to tackle such issues. The primary objective was to connect with LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugee sex workers¹ in the southern Netherlands, fostering a process of community development that could address the detrimental effects of heightened stigmatization and social isolation within their milieu.

b. Team & Funding

To ensure the sustainability of the project, SOA AIDS Nederland secured government funding under the PAR initiative. This financial support facilitated the employment of two intern researchers, namely the author of this report and Julia Raxones, alongside the project coordinator, Misha Tydeman. The grant encompassed provisions for compensating the PAR community for their dedicated time commitment, covering their travel expenses and various expenses associated with the PAR project, including transportation, venue rentals, and the procurement of essential materials.

Mischa Tydeman's extensive experience as a PAR researcher proved instrumental in guiding the team through conceiving a coherent workflow and delineating pertinent activities throughout the various stages of the PAR process. Her well-established network of local affiliations with government entities, municipal institutions, hospitals, community centers, and sex worker advocacy organizations significantly contributed to the expansion of the PAR community. Meanwhile, Julia Raxones played a pivotal role in establishing connections with LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers, as well as with personnel within asylum centers. The author of this report took charge of the team's activities planning, organizing and participating in the PAR activities, interviews, and focus group sessions. Furthermore, a key responsibility of the whole team entailed the analysis of the collected data.

c. Approach & Methodology

The primary activities of the PAR team spanned from January 2023 to July 2023. The initial two months, January and February, were dedicated to the Orientation phase. During this period, our focus was directed towards a comprehensive review of the existing literature pertaining to the issue of stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers. Concurrently, we engaged in extensive dialogues with representatives

¹ Also called "target group" throughout the text.

from sex worker organizations. The outcome was a preliminary PAR design, encompassing elements such as the analysis of the current situation, articulation of the desired situation, formulation of the PAR goal, the main questions, specification of a set of sub-questions, the elaboration of the methods and concepts. As the complexity of the information grew, we also devised Problem and Solution trees (see figure on page 11), instrumental in simplifying comprehension for both the project team and external stakeholders. The forthcoming sections will explain the contents of this preliminary analysis.

The subsequent phase, denoted as System Exploration, started in February 2023 and extended until mid-June 2023. In this phase, we initiated interviews with the stakeholders identified in the Preliminary PAR design, augmented by additional participants referred to us during the research. With participant consent, some of the interviews were recorded. These recorded sessions, where available, in conjunction with field notes, were transcribed, anonymised and analyzed. Throughout the interviews, we encouraged the interviewees to openly discuss their personal experiences, needs, and desires. Additionally, we employed the Appreciative Inquiry² method to delve into the existing assets, positive elements, and collective values at both the individual and community levels. We also used the methods of Participant Observation at events attended by the target group and one event hosted by the Municipality of Tilburg relating to sex work (*Reimagining Sex Work*³).

The languages spoken within the PAR community included Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Russian. Language diversity could have potentially posed a challenge, as not all community members were proficient in English. Nevertheless, we received substantial assistance from members of the PAR community, who took on the role of translators during interviews and focus groups. Their dedication ensured that everyone could comprehend and actively participate in the discussions and activities.

On April 14, the first focus group of the Sharing Insights and Solutions phase took place, serving as a platform for sharing insights emerged from the interviews. The System Exploration phase overlapped with the Sharing Insights and Solutions phase, as, after this first focus group, we resumed our data collection through in-depth interviews. Later on, three additional focus group sessions took place on July 03, 13, and 20. The session on July 03 was designed to trigger a discussion on potential solutions to identified challenges. The

² As a reference for our PAR methodology we used: Eelderink, 2021.

³ See: <https://reimaginingsexwork.nl/de-exposities/>

objective of the session on July 13 was for participants to engage in the formulation of a Co-creation Plan, while the focus of the July 20 gathering was the actualization of the first activity outlined in the Action Plan, realized by the PAR community itself, with the logistical support of the PAR practitioners (ourselves). After this final focus group, the Action Plan was handed to the PAR community.

To expand the scope and reach of the PAR community, as well as to gather additional insights into the subject matter and facilitate greater support for the PAR initiative, we reached out to a diverse array of entities. Our outreach efforts extended to sex worker organizations, law enforcement personnel, interested municipal bodies (e.g., Tilburg and Eindhoven), LGBTQ+ collectives, AZCs (Asylum Seekers' Centers), medical professionals, academics, and legal experts. For each interviewee engaged, we tried to secure at least one additional contact.

In summary, in the initial phase we gathered 26 in-depth interviews, involving a diverse array of participants, including:

- 3 representatives from sex workers' collectives.
- 4 LGBTQ+ activists.
- 6 representatives from AZCs and affiliated organizations.
- 1 representative from an organization focused on drug addiction and harm reduction.
- 2 representatives from municipal bodies (Tilburg).
- 1 legal expert.
- 2 academics.
- 7 individuals representing the target group (LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugee sex workers).

Most of these interviews took place within the areas of Eindhoven, Tilburg, and Limburg, except for two interviews conducted in Amsterdam. Three interviews with activists were instead conducted remotely via online platforms.

In reference to the focus group sessions, the initial session in April was hosted in a residential setting in Eindhoven, intentionally chosen to ensure participant comfort and safety. The first focus group exclusively involved five individuals from the target group only;

this arrangement was aimed to provide a safe environment for discussing interview findings and initiating preliminary brainstorming.

The following focus groups in July were organized in rented spaces. For these focus groups, we benefited from the invaluable support and network of LGBTQ+ activists, who possessed extensive connections within the LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee community in the southern Netherlands. This network substantially increased participation, with the last three focus group sessions accommodating up to 30 participants, mainly LGBTQ+ asylum seekers (both sex workers and not), but also Municipality staff and sex workers as well as LGBTQ+ organizations. Moreover, the municipality of Tilburg generously provided a public space for the July 13 focus group.

Throughout this research, the logistical aspects and activities associated with the focus groups were coordinated by our PAR team, with occasional assistance from enthusiastic members of the PAR community. Notably, the activities of the last focus group were entirely organized and executed by members of the PAR community themselves, while our only role was to provide logistical support, encompassing space rental, distribution of invitations, and provision of necessary transportation tickets.

2. The PAR phases

a. Orientation

In the initial phase of our Participatory Action Research (PAR), our team sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the foundational factors and challenges linked to the absence of essential healthcare and community support, as well as the exacerbated impact of stigma on LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers in the southern region of the Netherlands. This entailed an exhaustive review of the available literature on the subject, which, notably, is relatively limited in volume⁴. Additionally, we gathered insights and narratives from sex worker organizations with whom we had established prior connections, such as Sexworks in North Brabant.

⁴ For a relevant academic research on this subject see: Van der Pijl *et al.*, 2018. Outside academia, I recommend the sharp autobiography of a transgender asylum seeker in the Netherlands: Ortiz, A., 2022.

During this phase, we designed our preliminary PAR canvas, delineating the core issues confronting our target group, articulating the desired situational improvements, defining the overarching goals of our PAR, formulating the primary questions and sub-questions to guide our research, identifying a broad array of stakeholders, and selecting the methodologies and concepts.

The PAR design process already gave us a hint of the intricate interplay of multiple layers of discrimination - sex work stigma, racism, and transphobia - as well as the geographical marginalization suffered by LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers from essential support structures, LGBTQ+ collectives, specialized transgender clinics, sex worker organizations, and more. We also identified the nuanced challenges faced by transgender refugee women in gaining inclusion within LGBTQ+ collectives, which, according to some interviews I obtained for another project⁵, are sometimes perceived to be primarily gay-centric.

Notably, LGBTQ+ asylum seeker sex workers often face precarious working conditions, as clients frequently seek to take advantage of their vulnerable status. Unfortunately, due to fears of deportation, adverse impacts on their asylum claims, and the potential for heightened stigma, incidents of violence or theft often go unreported. Moreover, these individuals tend to avoid contact with law enforcement authorities due to the illegal nature of their unregistered work. However, every individual in the Netherlands, regardless of their citizenship status, possesses the legal right to report crimes committed against them. Yet, social isolation, characterized by a lack of community support and limited access to such kind of information can impede newcomers to the Netherlands from being aware of their rights.

In response to these complex challenges, our Preliminary Design phase outlined a set of key objectives encompassed within the Desired Situation (see also the Objective Tree on page 11):

1. Cultivation of a safe environment for LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers, underpinned by an empowered community that is respected by police and clients and feels confident in reporting crimes.

⁵ See: Burba, 2023.

2. Formation of a community of LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers who trust the authorities and are equipped to seek assistance from them.
3. Establishment of a community that disseminates information regarding rights and provides guidance on accessing specialized psychological support and medical treatment.
4. Encouragement of institutions and authorities to collaborate in fighting abuses against this group.
5. Provision of training to asylum facilities and staff to better address the unique needs of this community.

Subsequently, we formulated the PAR goal as follows: *"To foster an empowered LGBTQ+ sex worker community newly arrived in the Netherlands, particularly in the southern region."*

To guide us in achieving this goal, we developed the following main PAR question: *"How can LGBTQ+ sex workers newly arrived in the Netherlands build an empowered community in the southern region?"* This central question was complemented by a set of sub-questions designed to provide focused direction:

- How can the target group establish alliances with local and national authorities?
- How can relationships of trust be fostered with institutions?
- How can authorities become more attuned to the needs of the target group?
- How can the target group establish robust partnerships with sex worker organizations and other potential allies, such as LGBTQ+ collectives?
- How can both general and specialized healthcare be made more accessible?
- How can the level of violence against the target group be reduced?
- How can other sectors, e.g. academia, provide support to the target group?
- How can the target group be made more aware of their legal rights?
- What information is pertinent and beneficial for the target group?

- How can valuable information for the target group be disseminated more effectively?

Regarding the PAR community, we identified a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, with primary contributors including:

- The target group (LGBTQ+ sex workers newly arrived in the Netherlands) in the southern region.
- Local institutions (Municipalities, police, hospitals).
- Local, national, and international sex worker organizations.
- LGBTQ+ organizations.
- Local organizations addressing social inequalities, poverty, and drug-related issues.
- Transgender clinics in the northern region.
- Academics possessing expertise on the subject matter.

With regard to our methodological choices, we considered semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation as the most appropriate means to gather information on the individual perspectives and experiences and to initiate trust-based relationships within our PAR community. Additionally, we drew a list of concepts to be discussed and refined in collaboration with the PAR community, including:

- Empowerment.
- Community.
- Discrimination.
- Access to services.

inherent within the community and, in their view, how these assets could actively contribute to community development, collective empowerment, and the realization of PAR objectives.

Within this context, we actively participated in events organized by Queer Red (Striptopia) in Amsterdam, involving select participants from our target group. We also attended the launch of the Reimagining Sex Work exhibition in Tilburg, where sex worker activists emphasized the threats and dangers inherent in the further criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers. This was particularly important for those more in a more vulnerable position, such as LGBTQ+, asylum seekers, and refugee sex workers.

By analyzing the data gathered from interviews and the participant observation sessions, we were able to construct a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of both the current situation and the needs of the PAR community. Furthermore, a broad spectrum of assets emerged, including knowledge, talents, and financial capabilities. It became evident that presenting and discussing these assets in subsequent focus group discussions would be a pivotal catalyst for the community's development of its Action Plan.

The interviews with the target group revealed prevalent safety concerns within asylum centers, instances of abuse while engaged in sex work, an absence of information and community support, and a pervasive sense of distrust in law enforcement agencies. However, it's worth noting that positive interactions with police officers were mentioned in a few cases. Specific to transgender women, the difficulties associated with obtaining hormone treatments⁶, both in terms of access and information, were underscored. Consequently, transgender asylum seekers sometimes resorted to self-administering unprescribed hormonal treatments or sharing them with individuals who had access, potentially putting their health at risk.

"There are difficulties in getting hormones in Heerlen at the center, doctors are often absent and nurses make them wait a long time. So I get hormones from M., but that means I don't have a personalized treatment."

Interviewee, transgender asylum seeker.

"Trans women need hormones. Because I work with them, know them and have many friends who are trans women, I know how important this is to them. When

⁶ It is indeed difficult across the whole country, with long waiting lists even for transgenders who are citizens.

their medicines run out, it is always very difficult. There should be a spokesperson who could explain to COA⁷ people how important this is to them.”

Interviewee, volunteer working in an independent organization at an AZC in Limburg.

“We need to speak up about problems trans face, while demanding equal respect and rights.”

Interviewee, transgender asylum seeker.

Furthermore, interviewees frequently highlighted concerns related to depression and drug addiction. They articulated a pressing need for improved access to information and support in addressing these challenges. To address this concern, we reached out and conducted an interview with a representative from a drug harm reduction organization. Moreover, they generously volunteered to establish direct contact with the target group, offering to provide them with up-to-date and trustworthy information on drug addiction and harm reduction.

“There are not “difficult people”, only people with complicated problems.”

Interviewee, member of harm reduction organization.

“It is difficult to get a psychologist or a psychiatrist in the (asylum) center and after, there is more need for guidance, especially after they are moved to a house. [...] They are placed in a house, alone, and need to get started.”

Interviewee, local LGBTQ+ activist.

The most trusted institution in the country for transgender treatment among the target group is PG292, located in Amsterdam. This facility offers specific medical examinations, advice, and hormonal treatments free of charge⁸. However, geographical and financial barriers often rendered it inaccessible to many, as transportation costs had to be factored in. While engaging with representatives from PG292, we gained valuable insights into their interactions with law enforcement agencies, shedding light on aspects of this relationship.

“I want that the trans community have a political position and acknowledgement at the international level”

⁷ COA: Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers.

⁸ Long waiting lists for hormonal treatments are present here too.

Interviewee, transgender asylum seeker.

The needs articulated by the target group and activists can be categorized into two overarching groups: personal and collective needs. It's important to note that these two categories are intricately interconnected. The summarization of these needs is as follows:

Personal Needs:

1. Access to more information on asylum seeker rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and medical-related rights, as well as knowledge of existing LGBTQ+ and sex worker collectives that can provide support. Accessing more precise information about the asylum procedure has often been mentioned as well.
2. Cultivation of trust, both within and outside the community, to facilitate open expression of oneself.
3. A set of capabilities, namely: the capacity to choose their clients as sex workers, the ability to communicate about the challenges faced by the target group, ready access to psychological support and harm reduction for drug abuse.
4. Recognition and respect from asylum center staff and authorities, particularly the police.

Collective Needs:

1. The establishment of a robust community that the target group can rely on, which can advocate for its members, provide educational resources, and offer role models to empower its individuals.
2. The need for more allies beyond the target group's community, including LGBTQ+ and sex worker collectives, as well as institutions that should increase their awareness and support in regard to the needs of this group.

"Together we are much stronger. I want sounding board groups, where everyone comes! Cis and trans, born in the Netherlands or new to the Netherlands, I want them to come here, so that we are all together!"

Interviewee, local sex workers' organization.

During this phase, a wide array of potential solutions emerged. These proposals ranged from providing training to asylum center staff on LGBTQ+ needs to facilitating meetings with organizations like PG292, which had already forged cooperative and trust-based relationships between sex workers and law enforcement officers. Other suggestions included organizing community events, such as Sunday picnics, to foster camaraderie and strengthen bonds within the community.

Significantly, the Tilburg Municipality played a pivotal role in supporting our efforts. They expressed a keen interest in becoming a part of the PAR community to enhance their existing support for local sex worker organizations. They sought a better understanding of the needs and specificities of a group with whom they had limited prior familiarity. In a twist of the PAR roles, they requested to interview a member and representative of the target group to gain insight into their existing challenges. Simultaneously, they inquired about ways in which the Municipality could provide support. Following the interview session, they offered to assist the community in their quest to establish a transgender clinic⁹ in North Brabant, leveraging the expertise of local medical professionals. Furthermore, they offered to provide space for the focus group session in July.

At this stage, a multitude of assets came to the forefront. Many participants highlighted their capabilities and talents, including skills in sports, arts, culinary arts, beauty, visual arts, music, and various professional skills such as accounting, event organization, design and sex therapy. For instance, a member of the target group volunteered to prepare a meal for the first focus group on April 14. Additionally, a member of a local LGBTQ+ collective offered his networking, planning, and design skills to organize the focus group on July 3. The talents and capabilities of the PAR community were effectively harnessed even before embarking on the development of the Action Plan.

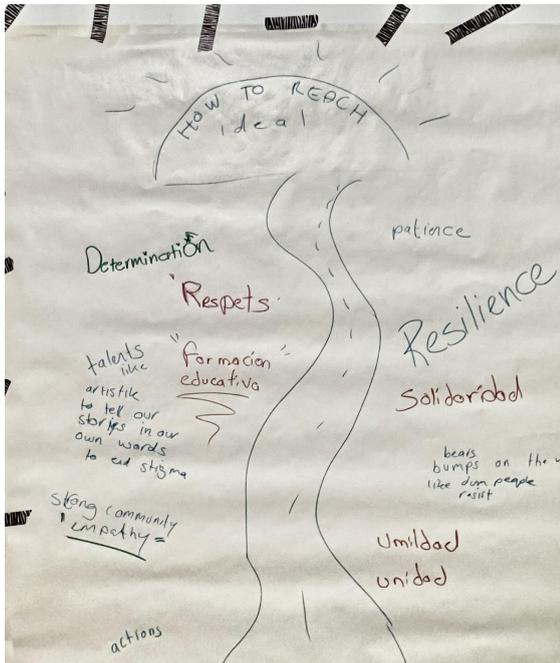
During this phase, we successfully cultivated positive relationships with all stakeholders we interviewed. Whether it was the target group, academics, Municipalities, or organizations, they recognized the project's value and importance. It was evident that the project held significance not only for the future well-being of the target group but also as a venture that could bring broader societal benefits.

⁹ This parallel project is currently taken care of by the transgender refugee community in the South, the organization Sexworks Brabant and the Municipality of Tilburg.

c. Sharing Insights, Solutions & Plan co-creation

The inaugural focus group, where we shared insights from the interviews, took place on April 14th at the residence of one of the participants. A total of five participants, all belonging to the target group, attended the session. As there was no time constraint on our location, we took the opportunity to foster a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere by sharing refreshments before commencing our activities. In total, we dedicated approximately four

hours to the session, including post-discussion drinks and food. It's noteworthy that we view this informal segment of the day as an integral part of our PAR efforts, as it significantly contributed to the development of trust within the group, facilitating more open sharing of thoughts.



Following this, we introduced an ice-breaker activity in the form of a talent bingo, complete with prizes. This activity not only entertained the participants but also allowed us to delve into their skills and talents, highlighting the assets within the community. Subsequently, we invited the participants to discuss the needs,

desires, and proposed solutions that emerged during the interviews. At this point, there was a heightened exchange of personal life stories, which we regarded as a positive element towards community building.

Finally, we invited participants to engage in a brainstorming session regarding their



aspirations, values, and desires for the community. We utilized the framework of the "Road to Progress" to encourage participants to envision the future of their community, even though this exercise was at a more abstract level and not yet a

concrete plan co-creation. Once again, the compelling need for safety and community support emerged, but notably more pronounced was the desire to secure time, space, and guidance for skill and talent development and leisure. This included activities like museum visits and holidays with friends and the community. Furthermore, there was a heightened aspiration for personal growth in terms of artistic development, including music, visual arts, and dance.



In the following focus groups, we adhered to the same approach of allocating ample time for informal conversations and refreshments. This consistently proved to be a successful strategy, allowing



participants to acquaint themselves with the space, initiate conversations with those they hadn't previously met, and foster a greater sense of ease and rapport with us.

In the months following the initial Insight Sharing and Brainstorming session, we conducted another round of in-depth interviews. Later, we decided to organize a final series of focus groups in a condensed timeframe in July, to invite the PAR community to share ideas and formulate an Action Plan. We received invaluable assistance from a local

LGBTQ+ activist in expanding our reach to a broader community of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugee sex workers, as well as non-sex workers, additional LGBTQ+ organizations and activists, and local collectives like Buurtkamers. This PAR participant played a crucial role in helping us secure a venue in Eindhoven, coordinate logistics, promote the event, and manage the invitations for the gathering held on July 3rd.

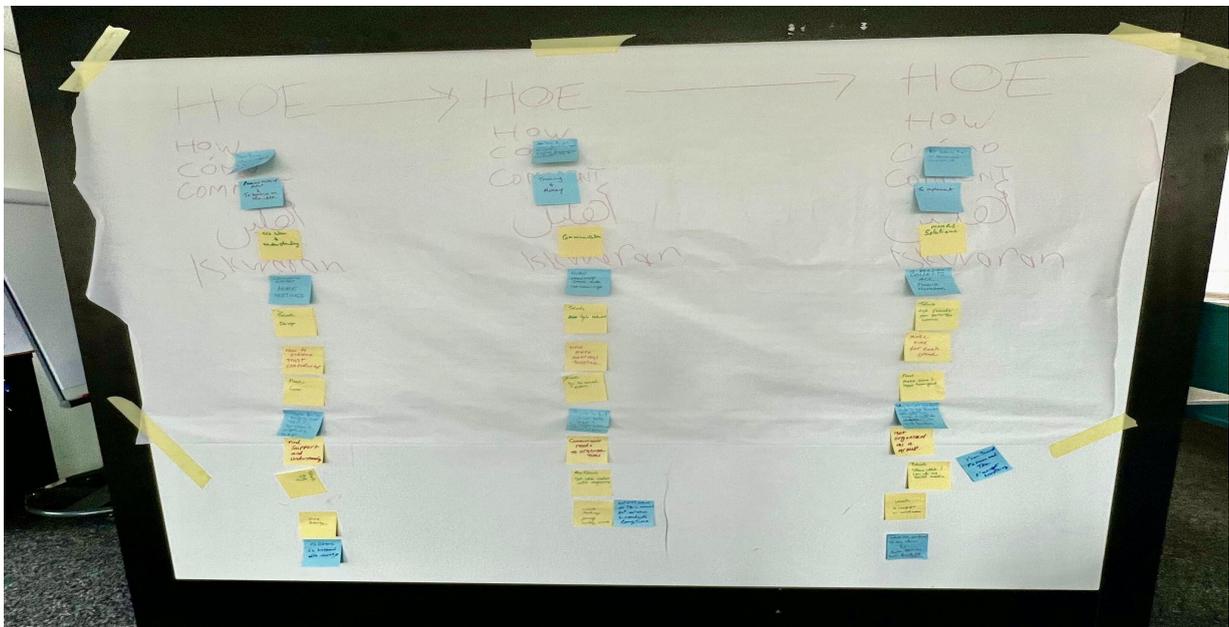
During this particular focus group, we welcomed a total of 30 participants, some of whom were new to the PAR process and had not been part of our prior interviews. Consequently, we allocated significant time at the outset to explain and discuss the PAR methodology, as well as to provide an overview of our project, its various phases, scope, and objectives. The

primary aim of this focus group was to brainstorm specific actions that the community could potentially undertake to address particular issues.

In terms of activities, we structured them in the form of workshops and games. Initially, we divided the participants into two groups. Each member was given a rolled piece of paper containing previous inputs and reflections from earlier focus groups and interviews. They then engaged in group discussions to further develop these ideas and transcribed key reflections onto posters.

Sample questions posed during this activity included:

- "What aspects of the community do you take pride in?"
- "How can effective collaboration happen within a group?"
- "In what ways can individuals' talents contribute to community-building?"
- "How can a community offer support to those facing challenging circumstances?"
- "What concrete actions can a community collectively undertake to strengthen its bonds?"



Afterwards, we initiated a challenge between the two groups, tasking them with the time-limited assignment of transforming the ideas from their posters into tangible actions.

Participants recorded these concrete steps on sticky notes and placed them on another poster, outlining a clear path towards realizing these proposed actions.

An example of a concrete action that was proposed in this activity:

Starting point: "Having a stronger and more supportive community" → How? → "Meeting more often" → How? → "Organising picnics" → How? → "Doing a fundraising to buy food".

The same starting point could start many more "how" lines, for example, in the mentioned case it was proposed to build relationships of trust, to create WhatsApp chats with the participants, to ask organizations to sustain the financial effort, and so on.

Towards the conclusion of the meeting, participants expressed their enthusiasm and eagerness to engage in further focus groups, a highly positive outcome for our team. Consequently, we extended invitations to all for an event scheduled on July 13 in Tilburg. The Municipality of Tilburg generously provided us with space and refreshments, establishing itself as a valuable PAR ally. Among the attendees were representatives from the Municipality as well. A total of 25 members of the PAR community took part in this event, with the objective being the development of an Action Plan.

As in earlier meetings, we commenced the gathering by welcoming participants with refreshments. Subsequently, we presented a visualization aimed at encapsulating the key outcomes of our research up to that point. The visualization utilized a tree metaphor to represent the PAR community, with individuals forming the roots, their needs, talents, and



trust representing the branches, and ideas and focal points for further development being the leaves. The community engaged in a discussion of this visualization and was then tasked with brainstorming in three groups to map out a network of people, organizations, and institutions crucial for advancing the

community-building process. These groups later presented their findings in the plenary session.



Notably, the networking brainstorming primarily revolved around securing funding for activities, addressing transportation and location logistics, and several participants affiliated with local organizations and municipalities offered assistance in these areas. The importance of trust and its role as a foundational element within the PAR community was a recurring theme, recognized as a challenging yet essential objective for the community to work on in the long term.



Finally, participants engaged in Plan Co-creation activities, splitting into two groups. Group 1 delved into the financial aspects of Plan Co-creation, brainstorming resource pooling, evaluating funding applications, and preparing a sample budget to

serve the community. Group 2 concentrated on crafting an Action Plan, resulting in the formulation of the "Trans-Sisters Show" project. This plan aimed to organize a fashion show featuring LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and allies, with the following key objectives:

1. Mobilize the community around a project tailored to and by the LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee community, a tangible step toward community building.
2. Foster collaboration with various institutions and organizations.
3. Undertake a project aimed at destigmatizing the bodies of a group subjected to significant discrimination.
4. Cultivate self-acceptance and self-confidence among participants.
5. Leverage the diverse array of individual skills and talents while providing opportunities for their development.

6. Implement positive actions to improve public perceptions of LGBTQ+ asylum seeker and refugee sex workers.

The Municipality of Tilburg once again demonstrated its support by offering a spacious venue for the Trans-Sisters show. Tailors, florists, hairdressers, cooks, designers, dancers, and various others enthusiastically offered their expertise to facilitate the event's diverse requirements. Additionally, a member of a local Buurtkamer generously provided space and sewing machines for the tailoring process. In summary, the planning of this event ignited substantial enthusiasm and a collective commitment to effecting positive change within the PAR community.

d. Formalisation & Transfer

A final event organized by us for the PAR Community on July 20 in Eindhoven served as the formalization and transfer of the Action Plan of the project. It was our responsibility to plan the logistics of the event, including sending invitations to the PAR community, reserving a venue in Eindhoven, and providing refreshments. However, the activities of this event were entirely organized by the PAR community.



As part of the preparations for the Trans-Sister show, the PAR community decided to organize an initial activity, namely a flower composition workshop led by an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker who was trained as a professional florist and eager to share her knowledge and skills. The flower workshop was conceived to train and prepare the community on one aspect of the aesthetic design for the Trans-Sister Show.

Before the event, the community met to decide and collect all the materials necessary to work on flower compositions (i.e. flowers, vases, scissors, etc.) and bring them to the venue. At the event, the florist expert taught the groups the basics of flower composition and demonstrated how to assemble one in practice. After that, she divided the participants into three groups and challenged them to create their own compositions; the most beautiful compositions were voted on at the end of the workshop, and the winners were awarded some prizes. Participants

enthusiastically participated in the workshop on a day filled with emotions and positive energy. As a PAR practitioners team, we handed the project to the community with a brief and informal speech, congratulating them on this first project activity and reminding them that we are available for further assistance. This event had a very positive impact on the PAR community in that it made them realize what they can accomplish with their own strength, together.



At the time of writing, we are planning with the PAR community the celebration of the end of the PAR and the beginning of the project.

e. Monitoring & Evaluation

As of the current moment, the monitoring phase has just begun. Moreover, we are still actively aiding the PAR community in finalizing certain funding applications, while we maintain ongoing communication with them through a WhatsApp chat for support and updates.

The project's comprehensive evaluation will start at a later stage, with our intention being to conduct a formal assessment following the execution of the Trans-Sister Show.

3. Results

The results of the project highlight the strong desire of the PAR community to work together towards community building and empowerment of the target group. The community members have demonstrated a shared commitment to collaborate and support

one another in achieving their goals. This collective effort has been instrumental in fostering a sense of unity and solidarity within the community.

However, certain challenges and imperatives have surfaced during the project, pointing to key areas of focus for the future. First and foremost, the target group faces the obstacle of fragmentation, with individuals residing in different towns and frequently being transferred to Asylum Seeker Centers (AZCs) in various locations. Overcoming this geographical dispersal to ensure the participation of all community members in activities and initiatives will be a crucial endeavor moving forward. Another significant challenge that the PAR community must address pertains to financing transportation for the target group to reach the venues where activities are conducted. This issue has emerged as a substantial barrier to full participation and engagement, demanding innovative solutions and financial resources to surmount.

Moreover, the PAR community must uphold and monitor the individual responsibilities outlined in the Action Plan Co-Creation Phase to bring the project to fruition successfully. Ensuring that each member of the community fulfills their designated roles and tasks will be essential for the effective execution of planned activities and initiatives.

The project has also highlighted the indispensability of robust networks for the realization of community projects. Collaborations with organizations capable of providing financial support and suitable venues have proven instrumental in enabling the community to implement their initiatives effectively. These partnerships have not only furnished essential resources but have also served as platforms for invaluable knowledge sharing and capacity building among community members. Furthermore, the importance of trust within the PAR community emerged as a key point. Establishing and nurturing trust among community members and stakeholders remains vital for effective collaboration, transparent communication, and the successful implementation of projects. The project has accentuated the necessity for the community to invest time and effort in fostering trust through regular interactions, transparency, and inclusivity.

In addition to these insights, the PAR community deems it crucial to tackle the issues of stigma and self-acceptance as a strategy to combat violence against LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and sex workers. Recognizing the intertwined nature of these challenges, the community believes that addressing stigma and discrimination while fostering self-acceptance and self-confidence can be achieved by developing their own skills, talents,

and dreams. Empowering community members through skill development is seen as a means to combat societal prejudices and enhance self-worth, contributing to the overarching goals of the PAR community.

4. Conclusion

Our PAR project was successful from many perspectives, with several key aspects contributing to its achievement. Firstly, we were able to establish a strong and trusting relationship with the participants, ensuring open communication and active listening throughout the process. This foundation of trust enabled us to effectively collaborate and address their needs and concerns. Additionally, we strategically leveraged our personal and participants' contacts, allowing us to build a robust network of supporters who provided invaluable assistance and resources. Moreover, the overwhelming support we received surpassed our initial expectations, highlighting the widespread recognition and endorsement of our project. Lastly, the activities we proposed were met with great enthusiasm and proved to be highly successful, further validating our approach and objectives. Overall, our ability to cultivate trust, establish a strong network, gather significant support, and deliver impactful activities were key factors in the success of our PAR.

Furthermore, our experience as PAR practitioners have taught us valuable lessons. One of the most significant insights we have gained is that the mere act of bringing individuals together can initiate transformative change. Also, while we initially placed great emphasis on meticulously crafting interview questions and meticulously planning the focus group activities, we learned that outcomes often deviated from our predictions. However, this taught us the importance of letting go and placing trust in both the process and the participants. We discovered the power of improvisation as we navigated unexpected challenges and embraced the unexpected. Through these lessons, we have come to understand that true progress lies not in rigid adherence to plans, but in embracing flexibility and fostering an environment where collective voices can truly be heard and acted upon.

However, there are several areas where we could have improved our project management efforts. Firstly, we could have been more meticulous in tracking our expenses and

maintaining a comprehensive contact database right from the beginning. This would have saved us valuable time and energy that was spent on catching up later on.

Secondly, we could have improved our team's coordinated planning and workflow. One key support could have been the utilization of simple planning software tools. By incorporating these tools into our processes, we would have been able to enhance the efficiency and coordination among team members. Utilizing such tools would have also facilitated better communication and collaboration within the team, ensuring that everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goals at all times. Additionally, by planning more weekly meetings, we could have fostered better coordination and remained updated on the progress of each team member's tasks. This would have allowed us to address any challenges or roadblocks more efficiently. Moving forward, it is important for us to learn from these shortcomings and apply them to future projects, ensuring a more streamlined and successful outcome.

To conclude, the project unequivocally showcases the resolute dedication of the PAR community to collaborative efforts aimed at community building and empowering the target group. It emphasizes the importance of strong networks with organizations that can provide funding and venues, as well as the need to cultivate trust within the community. These results offer invaluable insights for shaping future projects and initiatives dedicated to community development and empowerment, while simultaneously highlighting the need to address the challenges of fragmentation, transportation financing, and role monitoring, alongside the importance of combating stigma through skill development and self-empowerment.

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