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Cultural Policies for migrant inclusion: a survey

ABSTRACT

Integration of migrants is a priority in destination countries, but high unemployment and low wages and a strong segmentation still dominate the picture. The linguistic distance and the cultural distance are at the basis of the lack of soft skills which limit their inclusion. Cultural policies which have been considered redundant, are instead a priority for their positive effects on individuals and, in particular, on the foreigners.

The present survey reviews the extensive research in the field using choir participation as pivotal activity. The results are measured with physiological and psychological indicators to understand the increase in self-esteem, self-efficacy and social inclusion which are needed for migrants to grasp the social capital of destination countries needed for integration. Even if the empirical studies are not scientifically convincing, i.e. small samples, no randomization, the numerosity and variety persuades about the positive effect.

JEL Classification: C23, J31, J61

Keywords: Integration policies, Migrant, Cultural policies

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1.Introduction

The economic integration of migrants is at the core of the migration debate. Migrants bring benefits for the economic system, but these benefits are less immediately perceived, or rather not perceived at all, because migrants potentially involve a larger use of the welfare state. Also, they only have a limited ability to integrate into their receiving society in particular in the labour market. Hence, actual costs are coupled with a negative sentiment towards foreigners which feeds negative stereotypes, ultimately nourishing populist movements.

Public and private institutions - the third sector and the private foundations - promptly implement activities which aim to fill this gap, with many programmes which favour migrants' integration. However, very few analyses are carried out to understand the dynamic of the phenomenon and to evaluate migrants' improvement and the quality of each project. A lot of attention is devoted to professional training and to language knowledge, but much less attention is provided for other forms of training which could support not only technical competences but also social skills and which could help in the "acculturation" process (Berry, 2005).

In this paper we inquire into the root causes of the limited economic integration of migrants, and we survey the role played by the participation of foreigners in cultural activities, notably in choir singing, by delving into their dynamics and their effects. The relevant issue here is the lack of soft skills, that is to say deprivation the social capital which favours interaction with the native population, and the comprehension of the expectations of others. This being the foundations of the poor assimilation of migrants, we wish to understand how the effects of cultural participation can be measured, and which types of effects it produces. Hence, the present survey encompasses traditional migrant integration literature and beyond, bridging with psychiatric literature, educational research, and music therapy research. The track we pursue in this survey is obviously unable to cover all the research literature and we concentrate into psychological research, sociological and anthropological ones. However, we deem it is sufficient, on the one hand, to support the issue of the efficacy of choir activities in terms of improving migrants' soft skills and to increase their cultural and social integration. On the other hand, we believe it is unable to predict the size of the effect due to the large variability of projects and participants covered by the literature. Nevertheless it seems a good starting point for a thorough investigation of soft skills, their level and their enhancement in the migrant population.

2 Difficult migrant labour market integration

We do not want to enter the social scientists' debate on the appropriate wording to define the migrants' lower performance in the labour market - under assimilation, low integration or low inclusion - we will use the term integration, without any broader reference, recalling that in the economic analyses we calculate it by comparing the remuneration or the employment of foreign workers to the one of native workers with the same characteristics. For this purpose, it looks like the most appropriate denomination.

In all European countries, empirical research shows that foreign workers coming from extra-European countries experience a lower employment rate and lower remuneration than natives (see fig. 1, Unemployment rate, Fig. 2, Income decile by women, Fig. 3, Over education; EUROSTAT data). Even after controlling the empirical analyses for the individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, the difference remains very high and it is even higher for women. Also, brain waste, namely the difference between level of education and level of occupation, is higher among foreigners.

To explain this difference many causes are taken into account:

the knowledge of the language of the destination country seems the most important one. It is crucial both to find a job and to get remuneration appropriate for the human capital of the worker, since poor language skills force foreigners into manual jobs, where interpersonal communication is very limited and in general the occupation requires low skills (Venturini & Villosio, 2017).

The duration of the stay in the destination country seems to affect the actual integration process. The longer they stay, the more the migrants learn the language, the more they have contacts with the society of the destination country, the more they increase their human capital and the opportunities to find a better job. In brief, these channels favor their integration in the long run.

Within this mechanism, however, the size and role of the community of migrants is very important. In fact, the larger the community, the lower will be the knowledge of the language of the destination country - which is not used inside the group - because the larger size reduces the contacts of the migrants with the society of the destination country's citizens (De Palo, Faini, and Venturini 2007). All this comes to reduce not only their social, but also their economic integration, because the increase of their human capital slows down and so does the knowledge of the labour market of their peers.

The empirical research which uses linguistic distance (Strom *et al.* 2018), even better language competence or performance tests (Chiwich & Miller 2003, Dustmann & Glitz 2011), explains the difficulties of migrants' integration in different countries.

If the community of origin is large and linguistically belongs with a distant language group, its negative effect is larger. Even though, on the one hand, it favors the economic and social integration of migrants initially, on the other hand, it creates a barrier outside the community by reducing contacts and thus the knowledge of the society of the destination country.

The role of linguistic distance recalls the role of culture distance, in fact the two measures – the Hofstede's (2001) index and the Adsera & Pytlikova's (2015) index (the first for cultural distance and the second for linguistic distance) are strongly correlated, and frequently the second one is used when the first one is not available. On a similar line, the impact of religion, affects cultural behaviors, on the employment of foreigners and in particular migrant women's unemployment rate (Fullin (2015)).

If foreigners have the hard skills necessary for a specific type of job, but they do not have the soft skills necessary for it, they do not get the position.¹

Frequently, this result is interpreted as a form of discrimination, but OAXACA decomposition or similar statistical analyses are fragile. They are based on limited information and this does not include the quality of the variables used.

An example is the level of education: the field of education, quality of the school and performance of the students are not taken into account because they are not measured. This is a problematic issue among the native students, therefore with foreign students measuring the quality of education is even more difficult. In addition, many degrees are not recognized in the destination countries (Bruecker *et al.* 2021) or they are virtually of no use in the labour market, as for instance is the case with the humanities, thus confining the role of education to that of a vague indicator of potential performance.

Human resource management stresses the importance of the soft skills in the selection of workers both for low and for highly skilled positions. The ability to work in a team, to solve problems, to understand instructions are, for instance, crucial in the selection process. Skill assessment tests are used as basic selection tools before individual interviews aimed to understand how potential workers interact in a working group.

The criteria and the way of approaching communication with others are strongly connected to the culture of a country. In highly skilled sectors, diversity of cultural background can enhance innovation (Montobbio, Fassio, Venturini 2019), whereas according to empirical research it is not an advantage in medium or low skill sectors because it will overall increase the cost of communication and the complexity of relationships among employees.

Heckman and Kautz (2021) stress how important soft skills can be in producing success in life. They identify personality traits - openness to experience, consciousness, extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism - which

¹ The culture of the community of origin conditions the labour force participation of its members, of women in particular as Blau, Kahn and Pappas (2011) point out and also Scoppa & Stranges (2018) for Italy.

complement cognitive abilities and ultimately determine the total human capital of the individual, then monetized in the labour market. The personality traits are related to the culture of the family of origin but it can change if the environment changes and if investments are made. A remarkable amount of time is needed to design and improve the soft skills. In theory, second generation migrants are more able to master the language and the culture of the country of destination, which should increase their soft skills. However, the presence of large communities and the existence of local segmentation can slow down the process, in particular, for linguistically and cultural distant communities.

How can the soft skills, notably cultural soft skills be stimulated and enhanced? It is difficult to teach them, because that would mean teaching values, ways of interpreting actions and verbal expressions, actions which inscribe emotions - and emotions are better conveyed by activities which break through the emotional dimension of people. Sports are, always, suggested for team building; cultural activities which produce emotions and interpersonal relations are suggested for the enhancement of wellbeing through the expansion of personal and social dimensions.

If we wish to speed up migrants' soft skills enhancement and integration, would practicing cultural activities in groups be effective? And would participation in choir singing be effective?

3 Evidence from empirical research on the effects of participation in cultural activities such as choir practice

The research on the effect of cultural participation on wellbeing - aggregate wellbeing or one component such as health, friendship, leisure - is very wide.

Cultural participation has been shown to improve both ***physical wellbeing*** with positive effects on the health of patients and more in general to improve ***physiological*** (Clift *et al.* 2010, Iron *et al.* 2020, Wiech *et al.* 2020) ***and psychological wellbeing*** (Clift & Morrison 2011). Participation in cultural events improves the physiology of the neurological system with a positive impact on the individual psychological wellbeing, thus yielding a reduction of stress. This, in turn, increases the ability of people to approach and find solutions to problems and increase self-esteem. If you like yourself, approaching others become easier and this further reduces stress and enhances positive interaction. Even if the sequence and causality are not very clear, the final effect of the process are strong, positively changing perceptions and subsequent *behaviors* (Campbell *et al.* 2021).

The research shows that even **passive participation** in musical events (Daykin *et al.* 2018), museum visits (Grossi *et al.* 2018), dancing (Dunbar *et al.* 2012) and sport events (Valentine & Evans 2001) enhances the aggregate wellbeing of people .

Looking at the different wellbeing domains. The positive effect is very large on health wellbeing, friendship satisfaction, leisure satisfaction; less strong on income and work satisfaction, because they are less related, or even in competition, with the consumption of cultural goods due to the time constraint.

For the Italian context, empirical evidence can be found in Bertacchini *et al.* (2021) where both the frequency and variety of cultural goods consumption increase all the dimensions of wellbeing. In particular, health increase is reached with a limited variety of goods consumed but strong cultural consumption, whereas for general wellbeing the variety of consumption goods dominates the intensity effect in increasing the general status.

Empirical research on the effects of cultural participation on the health of participants is much more extensive. The World Health Organization (Fancourt & Finn 2019) published a survey of 2000 investigations which finds evidence of the positive effect. Grossi *et al.* (2019) in a study which is most interesting because of its clarity, show that the visit to the Abbey of Vicoforte, in Piedmont, region of the Northern Italy, improves the health of participants with less production of “cortisol” (reduction of stress) and perception of increase in wellbeing.

Art participation is currently becoming a point of reference in the medical community, where musical or cultural activities are organized in oncological departments or more generally during hospitalization of the patient and relatives. Projects such, as for instance “Medicina a misura di donna²”, follow this approach to support patients and get the best from the clinical therapy.

If we consider, instead, the **active participation** in cultural activities and we focus on choirs, the research is very rich. We concentrate first on the effect on **native citizens** to develop indicators used to measure the effect and to explain the directions of the effects. We then move to **foreigners** and focus on the specificities of this group to study the effects of choir participation.

4. Choir groups made up of native members

The majority of studies focus upon the effect of active choir participation in **native groups** and inquire into the wellbeing of members.

A lot of research is qualitative, consisting of interviews with participants, and provides very rich material which, however, is very difficult when it comes to yielding generalizations.

² See <https://www.medicinamisuradidonna.it/>; last consultation on 06/04/2022.

If we look instead at the quantitative empirical analyses we find many accurate surveys and meta analyses (Clift *et al.* 2010, Daykin *et al.* 2018, Gridley *et al.* 2011, Zentner & Eerola 2010, Dingle *et al.* 2019, Dindle *et al.* 2021).

These studies measure the effects on three *dimensions: self-esteem, self-efficacy and interpersonal relationships* which are, by the way, the dimensions of individual personality analyzed in the human capital selection for jobs.

They use three types of indicators which measure the changes in the psychological status before and after the participation in a choir session. They are frequently used in the same research, but we keep them separate because they refer to different dimensions of the same experience.

- i. **Physiological indicators**, such as biomarker as cortisol, oxytocine and beta-endorfine³,
- ii. **Psychological indicators** through use standardized scales as i.e. PANAS, IOS, VAS which are used for the self-evaluation of people's wellbeing before and after the cultural activity⁴;
- iii. **Social indicators** to measure the change in attitudes towards the others before and after the cultural activity⁵.

(See Figure 4)

i. Physiological Indicators

Greenberg *et al.* (2021) provide an explanation which is very clear, even to a non-technical audience, about the social functions and brain mechanisms, underlying the musical adaptation used for human interactions. Their conclusion is that participation in musical activities engenders effects that cannot be achieved by non-musical paradigms.

They highlight the role of oxytocine and endorphine, the neurocircuitry associated with reward, stress, and the immune system. They also show that the social brain networks involved in music production overlap with the brain networks involved in the social processes of human cognition – mentalization, empathy and synchrony, which are components of herding and are evolved for social affiliation and connectedness. Castillo-Perez *et al.* (2010) go even further, suggesting that music therapy was more effective in reducing depressive symptoms than psychotherapy.

Zang *et al.* (2017) explain that an important role in the process is played by the cardiorespiratory system which is enhanced, optimizing breath. Also the individual's posture improves the cardio-respiratory system causing changes in neurotransmitters and hormones, including the upregulation of oxytocin, immunoglobulin A, and

³ See Clift *et al.* 2010, Zentner & Eerola 2010, Schladt *et al.* 2017.

⁴ See Clift *et al.* 2010, Daykin *et al.* 2018, Gridley *et al.* 2011, Zentner & Eerola 2010.

⁵ See Zentner & Eerola 2010.

endorphins, thus improving, on the one hand, the immune function, and on the other increasing feelings of happiness.

Rhythmic synchronization creates a high sense of cohesion in the group and is induced by a physiological synchronization in the heart function of group members (Gordon et al 2020).

If we wish to understand the size of the effect of choir participation the results are positive but of limited size. The impressive survey by Clift *et al.* (2008, p.69) revises 5 studies in which the production of oxytocin is tested before and after the choir participation. The groups analyzed in the survey are small and very heterogeneous: semiprofessional singers (Beck *et al.* 2000, Galati *et al.* 2006) amateur singers (Kreutz *et al.* 2004), students (Valentine & Evans 2001, Becker *et al.* 2006). However, for all the groups the comparison with the control group which “remains silent” shows that choir participation has a positive effect. By using Cohen’s test to compare the pre-post results in the different cases, the effect is positive in all cases and larger than 0.20 which shows a medium-high effect.

In addition, participation in performances produces a stronger effect than participation in rehearsals, and short sections of popular songs have the same effect as a lengthy performance of a major choir masterpiece ⁶.

Control group

When the analysis is more rigorous and there is a control group with which the results of the choir participation is compared, if also the control group is involved in an *interesting activity*, the difference in wellbeing between singing in a choir or for instance sharing with the others an amusing event of your life, the effect is not very high or even lower if compared with a swimming activity (Valentine & Evans 2001).

Pearce *et al.* (2015) compare in three points in time the amount of endorphin released before and after choir practice and after crafts or *creative writing classes*. Singers experience a much faster bonding at the first observation, but at the second, they were equally connected as the other class groups. They call this the “ice-breaker effect of singing” in promoting fast cohesion between unfamiliar individuals which, contrary to the expectation, is reached also by the other classes but later. These results are interpreted by the authors as induced by the specific activities done in the choir, which use some muscular and synchronous effort which trigger the release of neuropeptides such beta-endorphin which enhance the willingness to cooperate.

Schladt *et al.* (2017) in a very interesting study compare choir versus solo singing activities for the same individuals. They find that while the feelings of excitement remained stable during choir, for solo singing they reported an increase in excitement before which dropped significantly after. The salivary Oxitocine test declined for choir singing (81% of the basal) – similar to Fancourt *et al.* (2016) who find a reduction of 75%

⁶ See Clift *et al.* 2008 p.68, where popular songs are compared to Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*.

of basal - while it increased for solo singing, pointing out the importance of *the social interaction* which is part of the positive effect both on health and social relationship.

Group singing seems to be a potent mood-busting, but it is not very clear if this is due to an increase in social bonding or it relies on the cardiovascular benefits of singing, which requires controlled breathing. Good & Russo (2021) compare two groups of 9 healthy aging older adults randomly allocated to the two activities: singing solo or group singing⁷. The analyses show an increase in mood-rate (range 1-50) only in the group singers (before 34 after 40), the solo singers start with a higher mood rate (35.8) which declines after the experiment (35), with an increase in salivary oxytocin (7,8 to 15) only for the groups and decline for the solo singing (12 before 10 after). The cortisol measure declines for both group as expected. The authors find a positive correlation between change in mood levels and change in Salivary oxytocin, and none with the Salivary cortisol. So they conclude that group singing is a *mood-boost* due to the group interaction supporting the social dimension of the treatment.

We do not enter the complexity of **evaluation of these types of tests**, which lies outside our field of competence. Rather, we just limit our analyses to the main results which support the utilization of this instrument to favor the dimensions of self-esteem, self-efficacy and socialization mentioned before.

The **limitation** of this type of research are, however, many. The positive conclusion is the sum of inquiries with very inhomogeneous background by age (students and aging individuals), income, education, region, etc., reinforcing the conclusion whereas results are not supported by a large survey and predictions become difficult.

The evidence, however, seems to show that women are more numerous than men in group singing, students and retired people as well because they are less constrained by time.

In addition a crucial role is played in this type of activities by: the choir organization which set the location (i.e. easy to reach, friendly, transport to arrive on time), the schedule, the selection of the singing group, if participants had previous connections, etc. This information in general is collected by qualitative interviews, but is missed or not controlled when the effect of the participation is studied.

Moreover, very little is said on the choir director⁸, who is the most important manager of the activity and who selects the texts and the music. The activities organized for the control group are also very important to emphasize the positive results: the more enjoyable and amusing they are, the smaller the differential effect.

⁷ The solo signer entered in a sound attenuate chamber where they listened to an audio recording of their choir director leading them through the same regular choir activities.

⁸ See Jansson D., Balsnes A.H., Durrant C., 2021, The gesture enigma: Reconciling the prominence and Significance of choral conductor gestures, *Research Studies in Music Education*, 1-18.

Limited consideration of these issues, which are not neutral for the results, and the lack of specific instructions, make the replication of the experiment difficult and the results are a mosaic, though with a positive indication.

ii. Subjective indicators

The use of these instruments, given the complexity and the contradictory results of the physiological indicators, seems a good way to proceed and deepen the understanding of the outcomes of choral activities on people's aggregate wellbeing. Frequently physiological indicators and subjective indicators are combined to reinforce the results.

Many indicators exist (for a review, see Zentner & Eerola 2009), such as standardized mood/emotion self-report scales **measuring perceived and expressed emotions as correlates of** individual differences in response to music. The more frequently used are:

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-X Watson, Clark & Tellegen 1988)⁹ a self-report affect combining two dimensions (20 items): the positive and the negative activation; *Profile of Mood States (POMS*, McNair, Lorr and Droppleman 1981) assesses current mood states. It is a 65-item self-rating across six categories, Anxiety, Anger, Depression, Confusion, Fatigue, and Vigor.

Many other systems of evaluation of emotional participation are available, such as for instance:

Differential Emotion Scale (DES Izard et al. 1993)¹⁰ it is an index of frequency of emotions, as expected to be related to the broad personality traits; *Activation-Deactivation Adjective Check list* (Thayer 1986), developed from the PANAS, as bipolar factor of mood; *Affect Intensity Measure* (AIM Larsen Diener, 1987),¹¹ refers to individual differences in affect intensity.

Available are also *Visual Analogue scales (VAS*¹²) widely used to assess subjective states; *Self-Assessment Manikin scale (SAM*, Bradley & Lang, 1994), which uses face or visual expressions to identify the emotional state of the person in a specific situation.

A very important contribution is the *Geneva Emotional Music Scale (GEMS* Zentner et al. 2008)¹³ which rates the emotions evoked by various music genres. The effect produced by singing is strongly conditioned by

⁹ The Positive activation scale reflects the level of pleasant engagement, the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, excited, active, and determined. Similarly, the Negative Affect scale reflects a general dimension of unpleasant engagement and subjective distress, such as being *hostile, irritable, scared, ashamed and guilty*. 60 items reduced in 5 point scale.

¹⁰ 30 emotion words, 3 for each of the 10 basic emotions

¹¹ It distinguishes among four factors Positive Affectivity, Negative Reactivity, Negative Intensity and Positive Intensity or Serenity.

¹² They consist of 10 cm lines, the ends of which are marked with semantic opposites—and participant are asked to indicate their positioning on the line between die two extremes. For a critical discussion see Ahearn 1997.

¹³ See Zentner and Eerola 2009, p.206.

physical posture, breathing and also by the type of music performed even though the latter is not at the core of the experiment.

Both Unwin *et al.* (2002), using POMS with a group of 107 individuals randomly allocated between the singing and the listening group, and Kreutz *et al.* (2004), using PANAS on 32 members of a choir society and a session of listening, find a higher and more long-lasting positive effect with choir participation.

Rigorous surveys are very difficult to carry out because there are many small, single site studies and studies of short duration. Longer term programs, however, report the risk of contamination with the control group and the results could not be considered reliable.

The survey by Daykin *et al.* (2018), which focus only on non-professional individuals and quantitative studies, is a very important point of departure. They excluded paid professionals and clinical cases but included musical therapy (61 studies). Given the heterogeneity of the cases they compare in a meta-analysis the results of 8 studies with control groups and find positive results on the anxiety dimension (top standard mean difference -0.84, average -0.21), and 8 further studies on depression (top standard mean difference -0.95, average -0.43). In both sets of studies the cases of reduction dominate and the average effect represents the lower bound of the estimate of the effect. The group for which the effect seems stronger is the group of old adults for whom singing activities can enhance and maintain wellbeing and prevent isolation, depression and mental illness. Evidence of reduction of anxiety and mood improvement is relevant also for young adults, women and prisoners.

No way to compete with swimming activities, all choir participants or music listeners were happier than before the activity, but less happy than the student participants in a swimming group, according to the study by Valentine and Evans (2001).

The research by Boy *et al.* (2020), using PANAS, VAS, and the State of Self-Esteem scale compares 2 groups with 33 and 27 members respectively, the first singing and then listening, the second first listening and then singing. The research is very interesting because it devotes attention to the content of the singing which was created by the author, using non-written music, but sounds of varied tempo, and mood with emotional and energetic balance in the repertoire, which included sounds with repeated words and musical phrases encompassing a melodic range accessible to the untrained singers. The effect was as expected. PANAS-derived results show a positive effect for singing in all the sequence singing-listening/listening-singing and a decline for sheer listening. The average VAS score was 101,56 (sd 26.36), with a strong positive effect after singing and a negative effect after listening, stronger according to sequence, the SES score ranged from 55 to 99 indicating moderately high self-esteem. In spite of its many limitations, this short experiment is however an important replicable study of temporary increase in self-esteem.

The very interesting survey by Campbell *et al.* (2021) tries to analyse the link between psychological wellbeing and physiological wellbeing and to understand if a nexus of causality exists. Their findings from 16 studies are positive for both physical and psychological effects of singing in a choir both for people with or without chronic health conditions. This supports the interpretation that group singing can be used for an array of chronic health conditions as well as general wellbeing. However, they do not find any evidence of causality. This suggests a simple bidirectional relationship where the final result will be the interaction of the two effects, thus largely unpredictable in the size of the effect but not in the direction.

IV. Psycho-social indicators reflect the effect of choir participation on the individual's social capital, the reduction of individual loneliness and the increase in interpersonal skills leading to denser friendship networks. Social connectedness can decrease all-cause mortality and prevent illness (Steward & Brown 1998) and is also related to higher subjective wellbeing (Jose *et al.* 2012).

Many interesting evidence are available. A pioneering investigation on the impact of the participation in a choir was the study organized by Chorus of Americas (2003) which has a large sample with groups of about 20 participants coming from different areas of the country. The participants were interviewed by phone, participated in focus groups in different regions and 623 in depth interview. All participants declared afterwards that they felt better and the interaction with the others was very successful. In particular they stressed that the choir was mixing people that they ordinary do not meet and represented a way for bridging of social gaps. The perception of the participants was that the choir was a "huge" social melting pot.

Although the projects tried to actually measure the effect of choir participation by comparing the singers' social improvement with a control group, the selection of people in the two groups was not random and thus the participants in the choir activities could be more social even before the experiment, thus it is impossible to measure the amount of increase in openness produced by the investigation.

The research by Fernandez-Herranz *et al.* (2021) in spite of the absence of a control group, is relevant for the large dimension of the interviews which is a non-random selection of 1,513 adults registered at the National Center for Performing Arts and Music of the Ministry of Culture. They use the CAPBES Choral Activity Perceived Benefits Scale which is organized around 5 dimensions: *Ability*, *Satisfaction*, *Optimism*, *Group engagement* (which includes the acquisition and improvement of social relationship skills) and *Belonging* (Moss et al. 2018). They not only analyze the effect on the single component with direct answers to a series of questions (at least 4 for items for each component), but also their interactions between items and their correlation. The dimension "group engagement" was not the highest one but was the one with the highest correlation with the other dimensions. The benefit seems larger for females, youth and individuals with lower levels of education.

5. *Choir groups made up of foreign members*

The link between wellbeing and participation in arts and cultural activities has been demonstrated by a growing literature. We have so far surveyed the research on native citizens, which emphasize the effects on health and on psychological dimensions.

The research pointed out the mechanisms of the beneficial effects of choir participation which get advantage of both the posture (breathing) and the interaction amongst the choir members. Even though the effects, when compared with an appropriate control group, are not very large, they are in line with the expectations. The research is, however, unable to define the size and also unable to specify the duration of the effect. The permanent effect on the health and mood of the choir participants is probably connected with the repetition of rehearsals and the setting up of a group which supports participants later on.

For foreigners the participation in choir activities is even more important, not only because it increases the individual wellbeing but even more because it is able to introduce the participants to a new and higher “mood” increasing self-esteem, while self-efficacy pushes them into a more constructive way of approaching everyday problems, and improve their relationship with the others in the destination country. This dimension which is important for everybody is even more important for the migrants who come from a different cultural background and, following Putnam (2002), helps the creation of social capital namely resources which foster social relationships, bonding and cohesion.

Choir participation by enhancing the personal psychological dimension and creating contacts can favor on the one hand **bonding within the choir group** but also **bridging with the outside context**. In this case the composition of the choir, made up of foreigners of the same nationality or from different countries of origin and mixed with natives become crucial and so do the music repertoire and the director.

Eimerman *et al.* (2020) by using Hofstede’s definition of culture as “the collective programming of the mind, distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from the others” and his six dimensions classification for cultural distance (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty, long-term orientation and indulgence), show that each culture produces different national communication patterns - which they represent with Lewis (2000, 2016) diagrams - which explain the difficulties in understanding even between European citizens or even between people of different regions in the same country¹⁴. Different

¹⁴ In Italy we have large national differences in communication, usually represented as stereotypes of people in the South being more direct and open and Northerners being less direct and closer. These differences have created many problems of integration to migrants from the South who moved North in the ‘60s and many movies report the differences and the difficulties in understanding them.

communication patterns are the crux of the difficulties in understanding the environment and the signals that the others produce.

These studies, unfortunately, only rarely refer to mixed groups and do not specify the musical content of rehearsals, nor the background and characteristics of the project director in detail.

The survey by Daykin et al (2020) cites many examples of choirs with foreign citizens namely the numerous studies of the Southcoast in Australia with different coauthors but referred to single nationalities. In 2012 with Li on old Chinese people, in 2015 with Joseph on Italian women and in 2019 with Nethsinghe on a Russian choir. They use interviews and the numbers are very small but the results very interesting because they not only report that they were able to overcome cultural stereotypes, to increase their awareness of social justice but also point out the importance of the repertoire which was not problematic in spite of its ethnicity and of its not being in line with the culture of the participants. In these projects singing together was seen as a way to bridge out to ethnic minorities and the content of the choir was highly relevant in that it made them feel placed in a sympathetic environment.

Sharing culture and heritage across demographic and social divides is providing spaces and is allowing for placemaking in which the political divisions and conflicts can be safely addressed and recomposed by building trust relationships with the excluded communities and to challenge and limit exclusionary practices based on social division, hierarchies and cultural stereotypes. It is an example of horizontal relationship which is able to create a new social capital capable of replacing the previous one (Daykin *et al.* 2020, pag 16)

Raanaas *et al.* (2019) analyzing 5 participants on a choir for refugees in a Norwegian municipality which offered a welcoming space and opportunities for integration find strong positive effect on integration because the experience was embedded within the broader context of Norwegian society and Norwegian choir members were helpful also in concrete action. Even if the results are positive, it is not clear if choir participation was the driver of the effect or was simply an opportunity offered, because no other activity proposed to favour refugee integration is investigated for comparison.

Similarly, de Quadros & Vu (2017) analyses a companion project in Sweden, interviewing also the choir directors, and conclude that for sure the inclusion in the choir is an appreciated act of goodwill but that there is the need of new model of community music engagement to be more effective. The multicultural gospel choir proposal studied by Schuff (2014) in Norway with very diverse participants who sing in different languages report the appreciation of the participants in a cultural interaction in which they fill actors of the culture which they create in the country of destination. The choir represent an entry point in the destination country society, specifically Norway, and act as a “family” in a vulnerable situation and the strength acquired in this arena can be transferred in others arenas, thus engendering aggregate positive effects. On the same line Lenette *et al.* (2015) report the positive effect of musical activities in Immigration Transit Accomodation camp for asylum seekers to develop resilience and Adrian (2013) analyzing 20 Lutheran congregations actively

involved in musical activities for migrants and refugees find that participants support the creation of a multifaced identity in the US, which combines new elements of the new culture but also cultural practices of their home land.

The survey by Henderson *et al.* (2017) represents the most important survey in this field, because it only concerns foreign migrants namely culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people who could be described as vulnerable and at risk. Of the 7 studies which fully match the criteria, 6 are on foreign students and only one on larger groups. The utilization of students allows an easier control of the results, with longer participation, the creation of a control group and a better knowledge of the musical program. The school musical program is aimed at language skills as well as a variety of internalizing and externalizing social factors at both personal and collective level. The cultural features of the music were observed and shared, to reduce racism and foster a sense of cultural acceptance. Music can contribute to the acculturation process (Berry 2005) bringing inclusiveness and cross-cultural harmony. Collective engagement in music brings about a sense of belonging and heightened self-identity. Balsnes (2018) who is also an English teacher stresses the increase in competence and empowerment produced in foreigners by participation in choir practice.

To get closer to foreigners Urwin *et al.* (2002) use songs from the countries of origin: Paraguay, Argentina, Africa, and Caribbean with simple words easy to sing for all, and by this way already creating a comfortable atmosphere.

We could continue reporting results on the positive effect of choir participation, but let us sum up the results. As for the native studies and even more in the foreign cases, the lack of control group does not allow for a numerical effect of the choir participation whichever indicator is taken, physiological or psychological. In this case is even more difficult to have a treated and a control group chosen randomly, thus the results reported which are positive are not standardized and do not design clear policy strategies.

The cases of the use of music for people just arrived who lack language skills is going together with people with a long permanence in the destination country. A clear message emerge that the songs should be easy and possibly multiethnic to create an easier environment, which on the one hand can favor the migrant wellbeing but also favour the “acculturation process” namely the knowledge and practice of the cultural dynamic of the society of destination which are important for the labour market performance. It is important to bear in mind that the terms are not easily translated. The emotional vocabularies are known to vary across cultures, although certain emotion concepts can be found in most cultures and it is difficult to bridge culture only experience and experimental activities enable mutual understanding (Zentner and Eerola 2009).

Little information of the music teacher or director are provided and if “cultural mediators” are used, especially for refugees or first arrival migrants.

In addition, the psychological tests adopted for natives seem inappropriate for foreigners, especially for refugees and due to the language differences and to the different life habits and should be reinterpreted and adapted to the different conditions.

The majority of the research are qualitative and report the success story but they do not inquire into the failure story to refine the organization and the implementation of the choir. As for the natives survey the teacher quality is largely unknown (Hanuchek & Rivkin 2006).

6. Conclusion

In this review we have stressed that migrants are less integrated in the labour market, suffering lower employment, higher unemployment rates and lower wages than natives with the same characteristics because they lack soft skills which would allow them to better communicate and market their hard skills.

We also explained that the soft skills are very difficult to set up, but the longer the migrants stay in the destination country the more they learn how to communicate and interact in the destination area and that cultural policies, namely policies which try to “acculturate” (Berry 2005) the foreigners seem very effective. The traditional relationship which moves from economic integration to social integration and then to cultural integration seems reverted. Cultural integration via acculturation seems to favour social and economic integration.

The survey of the specific researches on the effect of choir participation points out both with physiological indicators (i.e. oxytocin, cortisol) and psychological ones (PANAS, POMS, IOS, VAS.) the positive effect of choir practice on at least 3 individual directions: self-esteem, self-efficacy, and interpersonal relationship. The positive effects are widespread in all age groups, education groups, and countries investigated.

The evidence is numerically consistent, suggesting all positive effects, thus these practices seem a correct treatment to help marginalized individuals to overcome perceived limitations of their actions, by reducing anxiety, increasing self-esteem and consequently increasing the ability to approach problems, enhancing wellbeing and empowerment.

It is difficult to measure the size of the effect, due to the many weaknesses of the research: the randomized experiments are very few and with limited participants; when the control group exists and is engaged in interesting activities the differential effect is limited.

The point of this survey is not however to test which is the best activity to increase the soft skills of people but to validate the hypothesis that the participation in a choir, inasmuch as it offers an example of cultural activity, has a positive effect.

This policy is particularly important for foreign participants, for whom the increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy imply the increase in the possibility to act in an efficient way to find a better job or a better position inside that job. For them, however, in addition to increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy increases, participation in choir activities increases the ability to have interpersonal relationships and bonding with the group of people with whom they carry out the activity and constitutes an “acculturation practice” which helps the bridging process from the original culture to the one prevailing in the destination environment.

The linguistic distance which plays an important role is the combination of a technical-linguistic part and of a cultural part which defines how to communicate, how to ask, how to present oneself and how to interact with the others.

The weaknesses and the improvements that could be done in the empirical analyses are many. More reliable results and more standardized procedures to reach replicable results should be defined. More specification and attention to the process should be implemented, namely: selection of the participants – in the case of foreign citizens for instance the mix natives-foreigners should be preferred - the location and also the actions accompanying the choir organization- which are numerous, e.g. welcoming coffee, nursing children etc.- the role played by the director –his/her nationality, age and education - and the songs themselves which could represent a way to approach different cultural tradition. In the many surveys and papers read for this study we did not find a procedural “business plan” to follow, thus we compare results obtained in different ways.

If the treatment is so little standardized also the evaluation is scarcely standardized, however a strong positive effect emerges in all the different types of qualitative and quantitative research, suggesting an appropriate way to increase migrants’ wellbeing and ability to better integrate in society and in the labor market.

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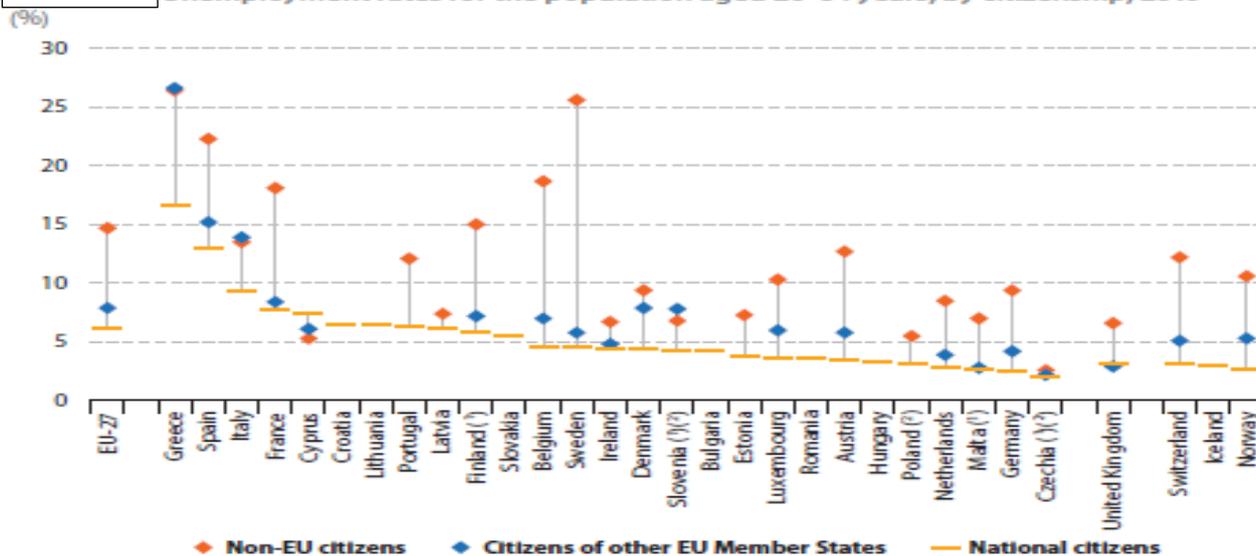
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Figure 1

Unemployment rates for the population aged 20-64 years, by citizenship, 2019



Note: ranked on unemployment rate for national citizens. Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Iceland: citizens of other EU Member States and non-EU citizens, not available. Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Portugal: citizens of other EU Member States, not available.

(*) Citizens of other EU Member States: data with limited reliability.

(†) Non-EU citizens: data with limited reliability.

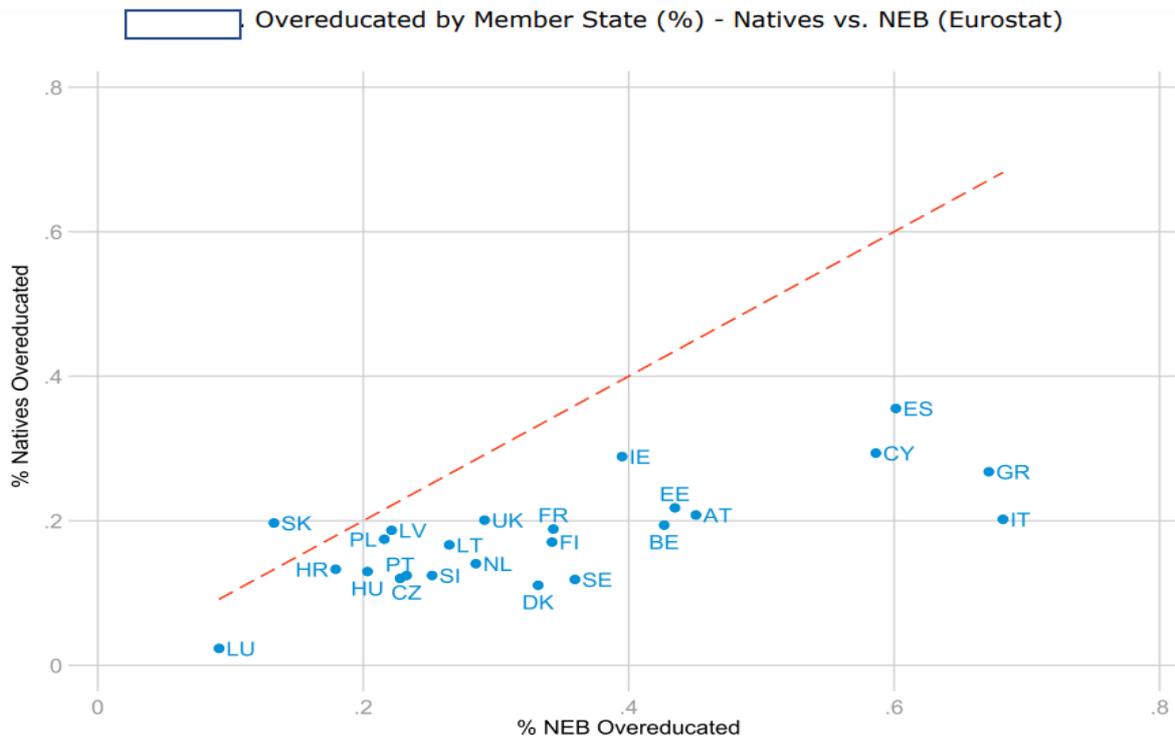
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ifsa_urgan)

Figure 2 Probability of being in the tenth (top) and the first (bottom) income decile local residents vs. (EU and third-country) migrants, by gender, 2014



Source: Own calculations based on EU-LFS Eurostat Labor Force Survey 2014 data.

Figure 3



Biagi, F., Grubanov, S., Mazza, J., Over-education of migrants? Evidence from the EU, EC, Ispra, 2019, JRC115881
 NEB Non European citizen Born outside Europe

Figure 4 Effects of choir participation

