Non-formal Education for Children on the Move in Northern France: Does it help realizing their Living Right to Education?

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Francesca Nicora | 12295612
nicorafrancesca.9519@gmail.com

Supervisor: Olga Nieuwenhuys
Second Reader: Esther Miedema
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Dedication

To my aunt who was a strong woman, and always cared about me like a mother.

To the children I met in Northern France, may you find a new home elsewhere and be able to pursue your education to realize your dreams.

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver - Wild Geese
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I would love to have the space to write another thesis just to acknowledge all the people I met during the years that inspired me and led me to the point where I am now. Unfortunately, I do not have enough space for it, so if I do not mention you, do not take it personally, please!

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Thanks to my Romanian and Italian family for their warmth and support, I feel privileged to have origins from these two beautiful countries.

I thank my close friends, Audrey, Victoria, Anna, Carolina, Emeline, Mariona, Sara, Filippo, Sylvie, as well as my classmates Marina and Dan for the great time spent together and for supporting me.
Finally, I thank the co-founders of Children Together and the volunteers for accepting me in their team, letting me participate to the activities and contributing to my thesis through their insightful interviews.
Abstract

In this thesis I argue that non-formal education offers children on the move an alternative way of learning and stimulates perceptions and demands of their living right to education. Nevertheless, this form of education is not sustainable without the intervention of the state and does not fully contribute to children’s living right to education: the NGOs and its volunteers often victimize children, do not always directly ask them what they want or need from the activities, thus fail to acknowledge their agency in realizing their rights.

The European migration crisis resulted in an increasing presence of children on the move, who live in hostile conditions and lack protection of basic rights in informal camps across Europe. Despite international human rights initiatives, implementation of the right to education in the EU varies according to country. Studies show that often non-formal education substitutes formal education. The thesis is based on an exploratory qualitative-ethnographic study of children on the move in Northern France aiming at filling the knowledge gap in understanding how non-formal education contributes to children on the move’s living right to education, in the absence of state provision of formal schooling. Research methods included interviews involving Children Together’s volunteers working for children on the move, observations conducted during non-formal educational activities in accommodation centers as well as informal conversations with children. According to volunteers, through non-formal education children learn how to: regulate their emotions and cope with their trauma; build confidence and communicate their ideas; nurture their creativity and curiosity; learn; have structure in their lives and cooperate with each other. Using a living rights approach is useful to understand the right to education from the point of view of children, nevertheless, Children Together should also foster ties with local people and authorities and establish partnerships with schools, which would facilitate their enrolment. Furthermore, the precarious living conditions in Northern France, accentuated by police violence, the lack of basic needs and the lack of school access - despite France adherence to international conventions, suggest that the state is to be held responsible for its actions and should consider revising its policies.

Key words: children on the move; right to education; access to education; non-formal education, living rights to education, Northern France.
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<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CESCRR</td>
<td>Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFR</td>
<td>Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Children Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Committee</td>
<td>European Union Committee on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCR</td>
<td>Global Compact on Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSORM</td>
<td>Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYDRM</td>
<td>New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCK</td>
<td>Refugee Community Kitchen</td>
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<td>RYS</td>
<td>Refugee Youth Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>RWC</td>
<td>Refugee Women’s Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBP</td>
<td>School Bus Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCRC</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
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Introduction

‘Dara comes towards me and asks my name. I tell her and she smiles back.
‘You have the same name as my English teacher in the Ionian Sea!’
‘Where did you meet her?’ She replies, ‘I met her when I was in Italy!’.
I ask her whether she likes learning. She says ‘I love school, I even have paper and coloring pencils at home!’

(Dara, 10, field-notes, 25 February 2019)

The European migration crisis marks a period of unprecedented flux of people entering the EU space via terrestrial and sea routes, fleeing from conflict or setting off to enhance their economic conditions (European Commission, 2016). Guild et al. (2015:4) outline that the crisis is marked by the absence of safe and legal outlets to Europe, and the lack of cohesive procedure in receiving refugees and migrants, as some of the member states lack facilities. Hence, EU witnessed the creation of informal camps in places at the frontiers with other states, such as Lesbos, Lampedusa and Calais. These emerged due to the combination of different factors: the securitization of borders, the organization (or lack) of the reception of migrants, as well as lack of solidarity between the member states (Bouagga et al., 2017:9). Yet, this political negligence clashes with the fact that the EU members have a common legislative framework and recognize the Refugee Convention. Wannesson (2015:18) pinpoints how these informal camps, called “jungles” come to form a ‘Europe of jungles’, thus highlighting the presence of the displaced people at the frontiers. Moreover, authorities send patrols to control the borders, as well as, dismantle camps, alternating to periods of calm, where people find settlement temporarily (ibid. 20).

What has come to be defined as crisis saw an increasing presence of children on the move, who found themselves living in harsh conditions and lacking protection of basic rights in these informal camps. Data shows that around 50 million children migrated or were displaced in 2016 (Save the Children, 2018: 7). Children on the move have recently been considered in migration studies (Heidbrink, 2014), and their social agency has been overlooked by states, which sought to regulate the social problem they came to constitute. Among the basic rights is the right to education. However, despite international human rights law initiatives such as the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) recognizing the right to education for all, implementation in the European Union varies according to country.

As the EU Committee (2016) and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (2016) report, France does not respect the right to education for unaccompanied minors or those living
in precarious conditions and point at the dire living conditions of young migrants in Northern France. This fact captured my attention; hence, I conducted some further research about education for children on the move in Northern France and I found out that some grassroots organisations such as the School Bus Project (SBP) were operating on the ground. I contacted the responsible coordinator of the programme in October 2018 and discovered that SBP was teaching adults and not children anymore. Consequently, I decided to conduct an exploratory research in Northern France to understand what type of educational services children on the move had access to. Once I arrived in Calais, I found out about Children Together\(^1\), a young organization founded few months before my arrival. I gained access after meeting few requirements and I explained them my intent to do research about children on the move and the non-formal educational activities provided.

Literature about children on the move is divided: Manzo (2008) states that these young migrants should be victims; while Heidbrink (2014) affirms that they too are social actors and their viewpoints should be researched. I opted for a bottom-up approach in my research which would acknowledge children’s agency and would include their perspectives about education, as advocated by Liebel (2012). Hence, I applied a living rights approach to my research. The notion of living rights begins from the idea that children ‘become aware of their rights as they struggle with their families and communities to give meaning to their daily existence’ (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 4) and when they think about their rights they do not use the language of law (Liebel, 2012:126). Therefore, my research set out to understand how non-formal education can contribute to children on the move’s living right to education.

This study aimed at finding what kind of role organisations such as Children Together play; what type of non-formal education activities are offered to children on the move and how they contribute to their living right to education. In my research I sought to understand to what extent Children Together included children’s point of views in its practices and how sustainable non-formal education was. That was to fill the gap in research regarding the provision of education in Northern France, examining the topic of non-formal education as a solution in the absence of formal education and contributing to the living rights literature. Although I started my research with positive feelings about non-formal education, the situation on the ground sobered up my thoughts about its benefits as I show in chapter 5.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 engages with the literature and shows the theoretical framework at the basis of this research. Chapter 2 introduces the research questions, the methodology used, the limitations, the challenges encountered and the ethical considerations I reflected on during my fieldwork. Chapter 3 extensively explains the precarious situation in Northern France, the lack of formal education provided by the state, an introduction to Children Together and a description of the accommodation centers where I conducted my observations and the informal conversations with

\(^1\) This is a pseudonym used to substitute the real name of the organisation I volunteered for.
children. Chapter 4 and 5 address the research sub-questions. Chapter 4 analysis *Children Together’s* mission, the activities it offers and the impact it has on children. Chapter 5 sets out to understand how non-formal education stimulates children’s perceptions and demands about education. This is analyzed through observations of children’s during activities and informal conversations that occurred spontaneously in the field such as the one I had with Dara in the introduction, proving that living rights to education are active in young migrants’ minds and actions. Ultimately this chapter tries to understand whether *Children Together* really addresses children’s living right to education and to what extent non-formal education is sustainable in the long run. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarizing the chapters and linking them together. In the last sections I offer further research and policy recommendations.
Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework of my research. In the first section I discuss who children on the move are, why adopting this concept is important in the context of global movements of children, and what are NGOs and States’ responses to what they consider a new social issue. In Section II, I explore the offer of education for children on the move, distinguishing between formal and non-formal education, engaging with key research on children on the move’s access to education. In Section III, I unpack the legal concept of right to education according to three levels: international; European and national level- France. Section IV illustrates the living rights approach I adopted as a lens of analysis for my research in Northern France, which contrasts the specific view of childhood and children’s rights as it appears in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Section V provides a link connecting the concepts elaborated in the literature and demonstrates their relevance to my research. Finally, the conceptual scheme will be introduced.

I. Children on the move

In the last years the number of ‘children on the move’ has incremented, unaccompanied children constituting the most vulnerable group emotionally and physically (ECA, 2015:2; Shuteriqi, 2013: 84; Wernesjo, 2011:499; UNICEF, 2017: 14). According to Save the Children (2018:7), around 50 million children migrated or were displaced in 2016. Only recently scholars have started to consider children’s migration in migration studies, despite their historical presence in migratory flows (Heidbrick, 2014:6-7). NGOs and states are framing it as a ‘new social problem’ despite the lack of reliable data (ibid. 6-9). Consequently, this new face of the migrant child classifies them as the “other” the state must control and regulate (ibid.).

Children on the move is a notion that encompasses several categories of children whose status may change until they reach their destinations (Save the Children, 2018:12). They can be: ‘migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied and separated, internally displaced, trafficked, Roma children or other nomadic groups.’ (ibid.). Reale (2013: 65-66) affirms that this umbrella term puts children at the center of focus independently from their category or status. In fact, it highlights the shared dangers and challenges children encounter in various contexts- being at the beginning, during and at the end of their journey, as well as the potential their mobility can have in ameliorating the quality of their future. Therefore, dividing children into strict categories results in some categories being protected more than others, such as refugees and trafficked children, while others are left out from the picture and are not provided the legal and social protection they need (ibid. 67). It is hard for organizations to deliver protection and support for children in transit. They are likely to be alienated from the local communities;
often they do not have documents, or they do not speak the language making it difficult to communicate their needs and receive help, especially in the case of unaccompanied minors (ibid.).

Young migrants are portrayed as youngsters living in precarious conditions; they are likely to be traded like criminals; they are denied protection and basic human rights such as: shelter, access to food, healthcare and education; and they are likely to face deportation as much as adults (ibid.; Bhabha, 2009: 416-418). Often their journeys last longer as they encounter ‘legal, cultural, and/or economic barriers’, which prevent them to arrive at their intended destination (Save the Children, 2018:8).

Many of them are unaccompanied. Wernesjo, (2011:496) defines unaccompanied children as an heterogenous group, a ‘specific category of migrants and asylum-seekers since they are minors and separated from their parents or caregivers’. Another way of conceptualizing them is ‘Arendt’s children’, which constitutes a wider concept than ‘unaccompanied children’ (Bhabha, 2009:413). Arendt’s children are minors; they are or are likely to be divided from their family; and they are stateless (ibid.). In this research I will use children on the move to refer to asylum seeking children, economic migrant children and unaccompanied children I encountered during the educational activities in which I took part in in Northern France.

These children experience abuse, trafficking and exploitation during their journey (UNICEF, 2016: 37; UNICEF, 2017:14), or in the hosting countries (Bhabha, 2009: 436). Moreover, whether they travel individually or with a group, the length of the journey, as well as their level of education might make a difference in their experiences- people with less education are more likely to be exploited (UNICEF, 2017:30-33).

Comprehensive data about children on the move is difficult to obtain, only Germany and Serbia have accurate figures (UNICEF, 2016: 11). This impedes the initiative of the European member states to efficiently focus on children’s ‘rights and needs’ (ibid. 28). Furthermore, in certain European states, laws and policies have diminished entitlements and services, such as provision of basic needs for children due to their status- asylum seeking children have been hit hardest (ibid. 96). For example, in Calais, France, asylum seeking, unaccompanied and migrant children are held in unsafe environments and lack effective care and support (Devi, 2016).

Heidbrink, (2012:17-19) sustains that victimizing children is problematic as it disregards their social agency, i.e. the ability to choose for themselves and be agents of their own destiny. Children take part in the decision of leaving their countries, too. They leave their homes due to conflicts, insecurity, economic reasons, natural disasters, but also due to their willingness to find better opportunities for their future, such as educational opportunities (ibid.; Boland, 2010; Save the Children, 2018: 8).

NGOs and states often downplay children’s points of view. On the one hand, NGOs do not listen to their feedback to determine which type of intervention is most suitable for them (Shuteriqi, 2013:90).
They miss what is the outcome of the programs they offer, or what their personal demands and needs are, resulting in ‘unhelpful or counterproductive’ activities for children (Dottridge, 2013:8). On the other, despite children have rights under international law, states have the power to freely interpret which to prioritize and implement (Bhabha, 2009: 421-439). In fact, they adopt an ambivalent behavior towards these children, treating them as if they were invisible and depriving them from social services and legal protection (Dottridge, 2013: 8).

In Europe young migrants have normally the right to education if they receive a documented recognition by the hosting country, but when they do not receive the papers, they are left in a state of rightlessness and they constitute an exception (Bhabha, 2009: 450). The next section examines the definitions of formal and non-formal education, what kind of education they are entitled to and which roles it plays for them.

II. Education for Children on the Move

Formal Education

According to UNICEF (2016: 97), educational opportunities for undocumented children in the EU are not evenly spread, with only ten countries acknowledging the right to education, five member states denying them free schooling, while other countries have restrictions. The disparity of access to school is mainly on account of EU member states’ inability to adjust to children’s educational needs - their school systems do not have the capacity to meet the higher educational demand of these children (ibid.). FRA (2017:2) in its report about 14 European countries, underlines the absence of education for children in detention centers in 9 countries, France included. Others, such as Poland and the Netherlands, provide non-formal education, whereas in Slovakia NGOs are the main non-state actors offering it (ibid. 6).

Furthermore, in Greece children are denied access to education when waiting for the confirmation of refugee status, whereas in Hungary they are forbidden to exit the transit zone. Access to formal education is also difficult for children above compulsory school age (FRA, 2017: 16-18; Essomba, 2017:214). Consequently, NGOs become the main providers of non-formal education for undocumented children (ibid. 7-8; Crul, 2017: 2).

Crul (2017:1-5) recognizes that education for refugees has recently acquired attention and stresses the importance of inserting refugee children into host countries’ educational systems. In some cases, even if children are given access to local schools, their situation makes it difficult to function well because they move a lot, suffer from trauma and anxiety and have sizeable gaps in knowledge. Overall, education is unevenly provided, and access is impeded by children and families’ legal status and the fact that they are highly mobile (ibid. 8). Crul (2017:8) urges for ‘context-specific’ policies, ensuring refugees access to the kind of education suitable for them.
Eurocities (2017: 4) asserts that when cities oversee education, they adopt a more open outlook to all children independently of their status. Nevertheless, they face problems such as: addressing children’s needs; training staff; and facing the unpredictability of children’s stay (ibid. 14). Cardarelli (2018) sustains that there is an ‘education crisis’ in the camps such as in Lebanon and in neighboring camps of conflicted areas and wonders what the future of children on the move will be. There is a difficulty in providing education due to: lack of resources; overcrowding in the camps and lack of qualified staff. Furthermore, she pinpoints the significance of offering a holistic type of education including music, art and play to children and stresses the necessity to meet their educational needs (ibid. 65).

Essomba (2017:2009; UNESCO, 2019: 22-23) unpacks how in practice the right to education is being challenged by member states’ different policies. They are influenced by European countries’ geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds and the risk of unpredictable situations (ibid. 208). For Essomba education should become the major focus for facilitating integration and avoiding conflict in society (ibid. 217).

**Non-formal Education**

The erratic nature of access to formal education for children on the move, suggests that non-formal education is important to contribute to children’s right to education and fill the gap left by formal education offered by the states, thus becoming a supplement. According to Willems (2015:12) non-formal education is outside formal education, nonetheless, it is still organized; it demands fewer resources; it can be directed at a specific group; and can be used to achieve certain goals. It includes the ‘totality of the activities and educational influences with an optional or facultative character, unfolded within and outside the teaching system’ (Moldovan and Bintintan, 2015; 340). Non-formal education can include activities involving skills such as: ‘musical, instrumental, dance, theatre, sports, painting, mimicry, and so forth’ (Tudor, 2013: 822).

In Freire’s (2009) understanding, non-formal education takes the name of ‘problem-posing’ education as opposed to ‘banking education’, whereby children, by entering in dialogue with their educator, mutually learn from each other and learn how to become critical thinkers, questioning their realities. Likewise, Moldovan and Bintintan (2015) stress how in non-formal education, the learning process becomes more important than the trinity ‘teacher-learning-evaluation’ (ibid. 341).

Hoppers (2006) highlights different forms of non-formal education, among which he mentions supplementary programs for defenseless children, which can be ‘substitute’ of the formal ones, for children living in precarious conditions (ibid. 95). In the case of children being movable, the provision of non-formal education by inter-governmental organizations such as UNICEF (2018) or NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children develops into a more viable option (FRA, 2017; Crul, 2017: 2).
Following a recent report, UNICEF (2018:11) provided non-formal educational activities to 10,100 children, among which children on the move in Western Balkans, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. In Lebanon, the non-formal educational program for refugees and asylum-seeking children by Norwegian Refugee Council aims at catering the needs of the children, from their arrival towards their insertion in the formal school system (Bergamini et al, 2017). Additionally, Besedic et Al. (2017: 11) illustrate how ‘Programme on the Move’ by Save the Children in Serbia, fills the gap left by the formal educational system: it combines psychological with educational aid and facilitates mutual learning between children and volunteers.

Despite its important contribution, non-formal education potential role in building resilient societies is still neglected (UNESCO, 2019: 42), with few data regarding the quality and the positive effect of the programs on the children (Lipnickiene, Siarova, and Van Der Graaf, 2018: 49). The authors spot other disadvantages of non-formal education. First, there is not mutual agreement on the significance of non-formal education among authorities and educationalists; there is a shortcoming for teacher trainings to work with vulnerable children; there is a lack of cooperation and communication between NGOs and schools, with scattered initiatives which are not mainstreamed; finally, funding is limited as well as the NGOs autonomy to manage it to create partnerships with schools (ibid. 45-50).

In the literature, children’s educational needs are linked to access to education and different activities (2017:5; Bergamini, Daoi, Wouters, 2017:3; Besedic et al. 2017:5; Devi, 2016; FRA, 2017; Essomba, 2017:212; Hoppers, 2006: 84) fostering resilience and preparing children for the future (UNICEF,2017). Also, cultural initiatives (Essomba, 2017:213) and non-formal education activities (Bergamini, Daoi, Wouters, 2017; Besedic et Al., 2017:5; Cardarelli, 2018) are used to address the psychological needs of the children. NGOs often prioritize phycological needs, while neglecting the importance of educational activities for children’s educational growth (Besedic et Al. 2017: 11; Cardarelli, 2018).

In sum, as children on the move do not always have access to formal education, non-formal education is often its substitute. This raises the question whether non-formal education contributes to the realization of the right to education as expressed in human rights law in international conventions, at the European Union level, and in France.
III. Right to Education

*International Human Rights Law*

International human rights law promotes education for all and access to schooling, which is provided upholding the principle of non-discrimination and equality (Hodgson, 2006: 5). Under article 26 of the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (UNDHR) (UNGA, 1948), the right to education is a right for everyone. Moreover, the document underlines the fundamental role education plays for the development of human potential and the understanding of human rights and freedoms.

UNESCO (1960), through the ‘Convention Against Discrimination in Education’, defines what is meant by ‘discrimination’ and ‘education’. Additionally, article 13 of the ‘International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ (UNGA, 1966), urges the signatory parties to agree on the principle of education for all, subscribing to what was asserted decades earlier in the UNDHR (UNGA, 1948).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most relevant framework for children’s rights to education (UNGA, 1989). This international document introduces for the first time all the rights of the child that should be considered by the signatory states and portray children as subjects and actors of their own rights (Liebel, 2012: 15). Among the most relevant ones to this research are: article 1, establishing that a child is any human being under 18 years old; article 12, highlighting the importance of a child expressing his own point of view, which should be considered according to his age and maturity; article 22, that pinpoints the importance of offering a safe environment to asylum seeking children and refugees; article 28, recognizing the right to education and finally, article 29, stressing that education should foster the development of a child’s personality, strengths, and psychophysical capacities to the maximum.

Lundy (2012: 396) highlights how the rights included in the UNCRC are ‘enjoyed by the child wherever they are and, in particular, are not lost because the child enters the school gate’. Consequently, signatory parties are obliged to apply UNCRC principles in domestic law and policy making (ibid.). Furthermore, the ‘World Declaration on Education for All’ has sought to reaffirm education as a universal right (Hodgson, 2006: 9).

Finally, the ‘New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants’ (NYDRM) (UNGA, 2016) mentions the UNCRC in article 32, stating that children should be ensured access to education after few months of their entrance in the host country, stressing the necessity of creating a safe environment, which can guarantee the fulfillment of their rights and abilities. Likewise, article 59, restates the right of migrant children of obtaining an education and other social services. Article 81 and 82, promote respectively access to primary and secondary education, as well as early childhood education.
The NYDRM formed the basis for the ‘Global Compact on Refugees’ (GCR) (UNHCR, 2019) and the ‘Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration’ (GCSORM) (UNGA, 2019), which include a child sensitive approach in their articles. The GCR with article 68, sets a 3 months’ time limit for refugee children to be granted access to education in the country of arrival, while the GCSORM promotes quality education and access to formal or non-formal education when children cannot have access to the former.

Overall, these international frameworks stress the right to education for all, acknowledging children’s rights and the fundamental role education acquires for increasing people’s life chances. Furthermore, with the UNCRC, the NYDRM, as well as the creation of the GCOR and the GCSORM children on the move have been recognised as rights holders and have been allocated a space of their own in international law.

However, Hodgson (2006: 9) affirms that despite the internationally widespread consensus on the right to education, the respect and endorsement of human rights is not efficient unless ‘monitoring and implementation’ are enforced with time within the international community. States often subscribe to human rights documents avoiding political commitment, thus rendering them unaccountable (Bhabha, 2009: 425). The next section zooms further into the right to education, exploring it at the European level.

**European Union Law**

The right to education in the European Union has been ratified by each EU member state, but not by the EU (Canetta et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the EU (2000) has adopted the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” (CFR), where article 14 asserts the right to education, and article 24 advocates for the right of children to express their own views and encourage children’s best interests. Furthermore, with the Lisbon Treaty the CFR became part of the EU legal framework (Canetta et al. 2012:16). Although international frameworks lack legal strength, this shortcoming might be overcome with the enlargement of the UNCRC to the EU (ibid. 27).

The EU requires member states to achieve the rights stated in the UNCRC to the maximum of their resources, using an international cooperative framework when needed (Lundy, 2012: 396). Every five years EU member states are asked to report their progress to the “Committee on the Rights of the Child” (EU Committee) to check the state of application of the rights of the children (ibid. 397). Consequently, states can be held into account; children’s rights status can be monitored; expectations of states are shown; and the outcomes of the UNCRC effect on the member states educational policies are highlighted (ibid.).

The author advocates for the use of the ‘children’s rights’ framework when conducting research to raise awareness of children’s rights issues as well as educating children and parents to such rights (ibid. 408-
409). This strategy is meant to bridge the gap between human rights in the international frameworks and real situations in schools (ibid.).

The next section looks at the right to education in France and shows the limitations in its effective application.

**The Right to Education in France**

France is signatory party of the international frameworks previously mentioned. Additionally, in the “General Provisions” (Legifrance.gouv.fr., 2019) of the code of education, France aims at granting access to school to all children without distinction.

Nevertheless, the right to education is not fully implemented and available to all children in practice. The EU Committee (2016:3, 16) in its fifth periodic report, expresses concern at the unequal distribution of resources for marginalized children and the lack of access to school for unaccompanied migrant children, those living in precarious conditions and Roma children. Often municipalities impede children’s enrolment in schools or access to basic services for unaccompanied children, thus the EU Committee urges France to promote education for all children without discrimination and access to basic services. It also flags up the precarious living conditions of children and families living in Northern France, such as Grande-Synthe and Calais due to the authorities’ denial of registration for children and the lack of resources to offer the protection and the adequate services they need (ibid. 17-18).

Likewise, the CESCR (2016:4) points at the dire living conditions for asylum-seekers in reception and accommodation centres and the ‘administrative obstacles which impede access to social and economic rights’, and exhorts the state party to abolish these hurdles, which prevent the fulfilment of economic and social rights for asylum seekers. Finally, CESCR (ibid. 8) mentions the prevention of access to school of some children by some mayors, thus urging them to grant their admission in school.

After this overview about the right to education, the incongruence between the right to education as portrayed in written law and the right to education as applied in real life becomes clear. Despite France adherence to international frameworks and affirming the right to education in its domestic law, its actual actions prove that this right is often violated.

Kunemann (2015: 67) affirms that rights are more than what states grant to human beings, they are “‘supra-positive law” with human rights inherent in people’. Hence, rights are made by people, while positive law is meant to guarantee that states respect and fulfil their implementation. Likewise, NGOs are entitled to advocate for human rights and promote their application but cannot represent social

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2 Two of the locations of my research, which will be described in Chapter 3.
3 Some of them living in informal settlements.
movements or people whose rights are violated (ibid. 70). For this reason, in my research in Northern France I decided to apply a living rights approach, rather than a human right one, which looks at rights as they are experienced by children being mindful of the context and the situation they live in.

IV. Living Rights Approach

In this section I engage with key literature around the living rights approach to define this concept and show how this notion goes beyond assessing the implementation of the UNCRC. This is to understand why this approach proves to be a useful lens when looking at NGOs providing non-formal education in Northern France.

Liebel (2012: 17-23), affirms that a new social childhood literature is emerging conferring agency to children, challenging the Western static notion of modern childhood as portrayed by the UNCRC, which excludes other types of childhoods and children’s social experiences in the “majority world”. This new approach aims at involving children and including their experiences and perspectives when talking about their rights, ‘irrespective of whether they are explicit rights claims or not’ (ibid.141). The author advocates for the adoption of an approach that analyzes human rights from below, in particular ‘the ways in which rights-holders themselves relate to and use their rights, and what constraints limit the modes and the extent to which they do so.’ (ibid). There is a necessity to go beyond the implementation of rights: the local social context and the power inequalities are also important aspects to consider (ibid.46; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 3), as well as take children’s rights seriously (Freeman,2007).

Despite the codified rights present at the international level, this approach starts from the idea that children ‘become aware of their rights as they struggle with their families and communities to give meaning to their daily existence’ (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 4). Additionally, when they think about their rights children do not usually use the language of law (Liebel, 2012:126).

Often scholars, NGOs and the media downplay children agency (ibid. 177). They do so by rendering their participation invisible or portraying them as victims (see Manzo, 2008). Moreover, they seek legitimacy for the agenda using the human rights discourse in order to so (ibid.; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013:17), privileging the goals of adult facilitators present in the organizations (Stammers, 2013:284; White and Choudhury, 2007). Stammers (2013) highlights that children can both be victims and have agency, age playing a significant role.

The living rights approach acknowledges that children are social actors, whose viewpoints should be researched (Heidbrink, 2014:19). In the literature, Wernesjio (2011) highlights the need to expand further research including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’s point of views and experiences in countries of arrival. Likewise, Lopez Cardoso et al. (2015) show the benefits of including children’s perspectives when designing peace-building programs. A recent master study by Gleich (2017)
advocates for the adoption of a living rights approach to explore young refugees understanding of their rights and how they experience the human rights violations they incur in refugee camps in Greece. This is useful to create appropriate policies that meet refugee children’s needs.

In a case study of street children protesting a law criminalizing drifter as well as street children undergoing activities in the streets, Van Daalen, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2016) stress how a living rights approach may be suitable to understand how children understand their rights and come to define them in the social world. The authors (ibid. 818) deconstruct the notion of rights as imposed by the international system and argue in favor of a dynamic approach that recognizes how they are shaped in different situations. Living rights confer agency to the people who are struggling for them. NGOs and grassroot movements should not ignore the voice of children but be accountable to children as well (ibid. 820; Heidbrink, 2014: 18). Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013:19) affirm that translating children’s rights into real life is a circular and complex process and is defined by tensions created between the different ways of looking at rights, such as the normative or the living right way (ibid. 19-21).

Therefore, adopting a similar approach might be useful when exploring NGOs’ role in delivering non-formal education for children on the move and to what extent they consider children’s perceptions and demands in their practices. Listening and observing how children understand their rights could be beneficial to know how non-formal education contributes to their living right to education. In Northern France where formal education is neither available nor able to cope with the high educational demands of migratory influxes, non-formal education is the only viable alternative for children.

V. Concluding Remarks

This chapter showed how the notion of children on the move is a more inclusive concept to indicate the common struggles and positive effects children moving to other countries encounter during the entire path of their journeys, than classifying them in categories that privilege some children more than others.

In Europe, despite the international legal framework present and ratified by member states, they face unequal access to formal education. Consequently, non-formal education activities by NGOs constitutes an alternative way to offer children education. In France, the right to education is often not implemented, as remarked by the EU Committee and CESC reports. In Northern France children live in precarious conditions lacking basic needs and are prevented to enroll in schools, often by local mayors.

Including children’s perspective and demands through a living rights approach to the right to education, helps going beyond assessments of the UNCRC implementation. Therefore, my research aims at contributing to the literature of living rights, by focusing on children’s living right to education in Northern France. This is to fill the gap in research regarding the provision of education in Northern France and examining the topic of non-formal education as a solution in the absence of formal education.
VI. Conceptual Scheme

In the research I conducted I explored the right to education in the context of Northern France where children on the move do not have access to education and receive only non-formal education provided by NGOs. Using the living rights approach as a lens of analysis, allows to understand whether NGOs consider children’s perceptions and demands when providing educational activities and whether non-formal education is beneficial to them and stimulates their agency.

The scheme illustrates how NGOs must reconcile the normative right to education with young migrants’ living right to education. This results into a circular process, which may create tensions when NGOs only consider the normative stance of the right to education in order to fulfil their agenda.

I now move on to the next chapter where I provide the research question leading my research, followed by the description of the methodology and ethical considerations used prior and during my research.
Chapter 2
Research Design and Methodology

The qualitative and ethnographic nature of my research requires an extensive explanation of the methodology I used for the eight weeks of fieldwork conducted in Northern France - Calais, Grande-Synthe, Lille and Small-town\(^4\), volunteering for Children Together (CT). Therefore, this chapter, after laying out the respective research question and sub-questions, engages with the ontological and epistemological position adopted; the unit of analysis used, the data collection methods, the research limitations, the challenges encountered, and the ethical considerations used throughout the research process.

I. Research Questions

Main Research Question

1. Does non-formal education contribute to children on the move’s living rights to education, and if so how?

Sub questions

1. How do NGOs and their volunteers see their role in realizing the right to education and how do they involve children in their policies?
2. How do children on the move perceive and act upon their living right to education? Are there tensions between NGOs mission, their views about non-formal education and children living right to education?

II. Ontology and Epistemology

The aim of this research is to understand if and how non-formal education contributes to children on the move’s living right to education, in the context of Northern France. Given the living rights approach adopted, this research falls within a constructivist ontology. Constructivism views the world and its categories as socially constructed. Therefore, social actors confer meaning to social phenomena during interaction, whose interpretations are in constant change (Bryman, 2012: 33-34).

Consequently, due to the adoption of constructivism as an ontological stance, an interpretivist epistemology will guide this research. According to Bryman (2012: 31-31), social inquiry is aimed at understanding human conduct, rather than obtaining an objective explanation of it. Moreover, the

\(^4\) Pseudonym.
researcher contemplates human action as meaningful, conducts his/her research starting from people’s points of views and acknowledges the influence of his/her own interpretation of reality (ibid. 30-31).

III. Qualitative Research Strategy

The constructivist ontology and the interpretivist epistemology fit a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research (ibid. 400-409) explores people’s experiences in their natural settings and is characterized by thick descriptions and the use of methods such as interviews and participant observations. In this way, human behavior and its related issues are situated and understood in context. Additionally, concepts in qualitative research are not definitive, they are constructed by people in an iterative way.

Therefore, at the beginning of my fieldwork I was aware that the concepts I defined prior to my research were likely to vary according to children’s interpretation of them and the key respondents I decided to interview.

This strategy allowed for flexibility so I could modify my research direction following the themes or issues I identified during my observations and interviews.

Finally, I found qualitative research suitable to understand the process of how events and activities unfold in time, which was a strategy I needed to explore the non-formal education CT offers to children on the move in Northern France.

IV. Unit of Analysis

Circa 70 to 90 children on the move living in accommodation centers in Northern France, namely: Calais, Grande Synthe, Lille and a Small-town, constitute the main unit of analysis of this research. I also considered the perspectives of CT volunteers working closely with children as well as one key informant working with unaccompanied children. The aim was to gather their perspectives on the children they were working with, the non-formal educational activities they promoted and whether they actively involved them in their practices.

V. Methods of Research

Originally, I planned to gain access to accompanied and non-accompanied children and interview them once a relationship of mutual trust was established.

Nevertheless, I managed to gain access only to accompanied minors living in accommodation centers. Moreover, their vulnerable position, the perceptions of the NGO seeing children as vulnerable and traumatized and their poor English⁵ constituting a language barrier, impeded their participation in the interviews. Hence, I decided to rely on observations and the informal conversations that occurred naturally with children during the activities.

⁵ They were mainly speaking Kurdish language or Arabic.
Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the two co-founders of CT, my seven team-mates, and one key informant who works with unaccompanied minors under Refugee Youth Service (RYS). Combining observations with interviews was a means to gain 'access to important areas that are not amenable to observation' (Bryman, 2012:497). The strengths of each method will be addressed in their respective subsection, the weaknesses in the “Limitations” section.

**Observations**

Observations conducted in quality of participant observer form a large part of the data I gathered in Northern France. During my eight weeks of volunteering I had the chance to have access to circa 70 to 90 children living in three different accommodation centers. In this sub-section I will consider the fundamentals of participant observation O’Reilly (2004:84) stresses in her work, which are: ‘gaining access, taking time, learning the language, participation and observation, and taking notes’. For each element I will describe how I proceeded during my fieldwork.

First, I reached contact with CT after I arrived in Calais, Northern France. Since CT is a recent organization, there was not enough information on it and was not widely available on social media platforms. I gained access with the following conditions: volunteering for a minimum of two months and obtaining a criminal record check required for my participation in the activities with the children. From the beginning, I expressed my interest in working with vulnerable children and my position as researcher. I made clear I wanted to use my observations and findings gathered to write a thesis on non-formal education. The similar background that connected me to the volunteers - all Western European well-educated, aged between 20-30 years old, eased the access to my research participants. They explained me what type of activities we had to do and gave me information about the precarious context we had to operate in.

Second, the time I spent in Northern France allowed me to become a full team-member with responsibilities. I learned how to plan the activities and to familiarize with CT code of conduct I had to adopt with children. Having enough time at my disposition helped me understand what issues I had to focus on and how to formulate the interview guide I used to interview the group of volunteers working with me. Finally, the eight weeks spent in the field helped me gain trust with my team-mates and establish close bonds with children. Consequently, I used my time to design my project in a way that would ‘allow a relationship to develop between researcher and researched’ (Morrow and Richards, 1996: 101). Therefore, I was able to fully immerse myself in the context I was researching.
Third, language at the beginning constituted a barrier when working with children, as most of them spoke poor English. Nonetheless, after a few weeks, they started improving their communication skills and interacting more with me.

Fourth, my participation as a volunteer fostered a stable relationship with my team-mates and the children. I attended daily team meetings, planned the activities, organized the resources and facilitated the activities together with my team-mates. During the sessions I focused on observing how children behaved around us; how they reacted to the activities we were offering; what kind of things they expected and demanded from us; the setting they were living in and how it was influencing the delivery of the activities; how they managed their emotions and what kind of relationships they were creating with us. Additionally, during the activities I had informal conversations with them about what they liked doing, their opinion about education and their hopes for the future.

Finally, in terms of note taking, ‘ethnographic research is iterative-inductive, moving back and forth between foreshadowed problems and theory grounded data, and does not usually decide exactly what the focus of the research is until near the end’ (O’Reilly, 2004:98). Seemingly, at the beginning I wrote everything I was noticing, later I decided to write only relevant observations regarding children’s interaction with volunteers, their perception about education as well as their demands. This narrowed down my research focus and eased the formulation of the interview guide. During my fieldwork I kept a small notebook to jot down small notes I later transcribed into field-notes in the evening, or at the end of the week. Furthermore, I also kept a research diary where I noted my personal reflections and my action plan for the interviews.

**Interviews**

I opted to conduct ten semi-structured interviews, following an interview-guide, which acquired a ‘conversational style’, whose flexibility allowed for an in-depth understanding of my topic of research (O’Leary, 2004:164; Bryman, 2012:471). The interviews were conducted in English in the last two weeks of fieldwork in Calais, where CT was based. They were audio recorded after informed consent was granted and transcribed ad verbatim after fieldwork.

The first interviews helped me ‘question, prompt and probe’ (O’ Leary, 2004:166), and understand which other questions to include. This facilitated the endeavor of obtaining an overview of the access to education in Northern France; how volunteers perceived their role as educators and promoters of the right to education; how they saw children respond to the activities they offered and whether they thought children were conscious about their right to education.
Table 1

Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>How long in the field?</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>March 14, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Educationalist</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>March 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Fine Arts student</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>March 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Pre-school Teacher</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>April 6, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>7 months?</td>
<td>April 8, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Youth worker</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>April 10, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Unaccompanied minors’ coordinator</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>April 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paola</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Co-founder 1</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>April 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiara</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Co-founder 2</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>April 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>April 16, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI. Access and Sample

In early October 2018 I contacted the team leader of the UK based SBP via email. This organization has been offering educational activities to children around major camp sites, temporary accommodations and informal settlements present in the area, ever since the establishment of the Calais Jungle. The team leader mentioned that the educational activities were successful during the summer period, but they were likely to be less successful during winter. This was mainly due to the inaccessibility of certain temporary accommodations for migrants in Dunkirk, leading to the re-dimensioning of the program offered, now mainly focused on adult education.
Consequently, I decided to go to Calais in person to look for an organization working with children on the move. Once I arrived at the warehouse, where eight organization were based, I asked around whether there was any organization offering educational activities to children. Two volunteers mentioned CT, which started operating at the beginning of January 2019.

Henceforth, I spoke with Chiara, 21 years-old, one of the two co-founders of the association, and Lily, 24 years old, another long-term volunteer teacher, who granted me access to the organization. Once I obtained my criminal record check, they introduced me to the rest of the team. During the first week I informed Sophie, who is an experienced English teacher in her late twenties, I wanted to write my dissertation with the data I would gather there. She reminded the team my role there and helped me gain confidence in conducting the interviews.

The ten volunteers I interviewed and the 70 to 90 children I have observed constitute a convenience sample. According to Bryman (2012: 201), ‘A convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility’. Likewise, I had access to my children respondents through CT.

VII. Limitations
This research presents several limitations in terms of sample, methods of research and choice of research design.

First, the convenience sample of accompanied minors used in my research means that the data obtained is only valid for accompanied minors (Bryman, 2012: 201). Therefore, to obtain a vision of the 350 non-accompanied minors’ points of view about their living rights to education, I interviewed a responsible working with unaccompanied minors under Refugee Youth Service. The data I gathered is of relevance to the study: it offers a picture of the contemporary situation children on the move are living in in Northern France, the NGOs role and their inclusion/exclusion of children’s living rights to education.

Moreover, being a participant observer meant that the boundaries between my roles as active participant and as researcher were blurred (O’ Reilly, 2004: 101). As O’ Leary (2004: 172) affirms ‘observation is still the goal of the ‘participant’ and the more immersed the participant becomes, the hardest it may be to maintain the role of researcher’. For instance, several times I needed to take a step back to emotionally detach myself from the children and the volunteers I was working with.

Additionally, as Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2001 in O’Reilly, 2004:99) suggest ‘field-notes are a way of reducing events and are inevitably selective’. 
Furthermore, interviewing ten volunteers who were working with me, implies I gained one perspective on the issue, and I lacked insights from government actors and children’s parents.

Finally, since this research is a case study bound to a specific context it presents the issue of generalizability (Bryman, 2012: 69-70).

**VIII. Challenges/ Difficulties**

During my fieldwork I encountered challenges, which influenced the process and outcome of my research.

First, I went to Northern France in an exploratory journey, not knowing whether there were still NGOs operating with children, as there was not enough available information on it. I also waited for two weeks to obtain my criminal record check, which meant I had to extend my stay for two weeks. Moreover, working with vulnerable children requires previous experience, which I had to learn during my eight weeks of volunteering.

Another obstacle I encountered was language. I worked with children coming from Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq and other countries who barely spoke English.

Moreover, the precarious conditions of accompanied children in Northern France, their constant attempts to reach the UK, or the influx of new children arriving with their families at the accommodation centers implied that the whole team needed to be flexible in planning the activities.

The reliance on voluntary work as well as the lack of vehicles at times, meant that we had to suspend the activities for lack of staff, or could not reach the accommodation centers that were far away from Calais. These issues negatively impacted the provision of a regular service and the conduct of my observations.

Finally, the busy schedule of the volunteers meant that I had to interview them during the last weeks of my fieldwork, which was very stressful for me, but it turned out well in the end.

**IX. Positionality and Ethical Considerations**

This subsection offers a reflection on the positionality I adopted during my research and the ethical considerations I had to be aware of before and during field work.
**Reflexivity**

Given my involvement as participant researcher I chose to adopt a reflexive positionality during my research. Consequently, being reflexive on my positionality helped me understand how I was ‘inserted in grids of power relations and how that influences methods, interpretations, and knowledge production’ (Kobayashi, 2003 cited in Sultana, 2007:376).

I was aware that my personal background as a 24-year-old, white female Italian student, together with my own experiences and interpretation of social issues shaped how children and volunteers perceived me and behaved during observations and the interviews. Reflexivity allowed me to understand how my physical presence and emotional experience in the field influenced my research. I kept a research journal, which helped me keep track of these particularities and the steps of my research process.

**Ethical Considerations**

My reflexive positionality encouraged me to think about the ethical considerations I put in practice throughout the whole research process (Guillemin and Guillam, 2004: 274-275). Hereby, I describe the five ethical principles I used in my research in compliance with the requirements of the University of Amsterdam, namely: trust, voluntary participation, informed consent, safety in participation and confidentiality. For each principle I will explain how I applied it and how I overcame some ethical challenges I encountered.

First, Chiara and Lily introduced me to the group and helped me build trust. Once I became part of the team, I decided to conduct my observations. I participated in the activities with the consent of the organization, to learn about the environment and how the children were responding to my presence. After a month and a half, I conducted my interviews. In this way, I was sure I gained trust among the volunteers and the children.

To meet the voluntary participation and informed consent criteria, I asked each participant whether they wanted to participate in the interviews. Afterwards, I asked for their verbal consent and informed them that they could stop their participation at any point in the interview. As far as the children are concerned, I decided to limit my fieldwork to only observations during the educational sessions for many reasons. According to volunteers, children were still traumatised: most of them have experienced long and difficult journeys to reach Europe, or they have been moving with their families across Europe to seek asylum. Some of them have never been in formal education. Additionally, there was a language barrier as they mostly spoke Kurdish, Arabic or Farsi. We only held two hours sessions each time and I did not want to take precious time off their activities. Finally, even though I had parental consent to work
with children through CT, I did not have consent from the children, so I decided not to conduct interviews with them, but have informal conversations as they naturally occurred instead.

In terms of confidentiality, I informed the volunteers that the data gathered would be confidential and restricted to my supervisor and my own consultation, while the use of pseudonyms would assure that personal information cannot be traceable. This practice protects participants’ privacy and avoids causing them harm. I used the same procedure of confidentiality and data protection with children’s data.

Safety of participants was enforced by keeping confidentiality and seeking their verbal informed consent. I opted not to disclose my identity as researcher and not to ask the children for consent for my observations to ensure the principle of “no harm” to the participants was met. Additionally, as I thought interviewing them would cause emotional and psychological distress, I chose to opt for their safety first, and have informal conversations when they naturally occurred.

Furthermore, I also considered my safety as participant researcher (Bryman, 2012: 137-138). The highly precarious context with children on the move and asylum-seeking adults living in temporary accommodations and informal settlements together with the police violence in Northern France, implied I had to avoid situations that might have brought physical, as well as emotional harm. Consequently, I refrained from exposing myself to such situations. Finally, I also took some time off when I felt distressed or emotionally overwhelmed.

X. Quality of Research

To ensure the quality of this research, I focused on the criterion of credibility, using O’ Leary (2004) indicators of good research. Credibility is about whether a research is convincing and recognized as good source of knowledge. I decided to focus on five sub-criteria: ‘neutrality, dependability, authenticity, transferability and auditability’ (ibid. 56). These five sub-criteria contribute to the notion of credibility as they show the meticulousness with which the researcher conducted the study.

First, neutrality means the researcher keeps an objective stance towards its subject of inquiry, by being reflexive about its position in the research (ibid: 59). I tried to be as neutral as possible during my interviews, avoiding asking leading questions. In this way, I prevented the manipulation of the responses to obtain the answers I was hoping to find. Additionally, I mostly followed the interview schedule, adding an extra question when I wanted to have more details. Nevertheless, I am aware my role as participant researcher limits the achievement of total neutrality, as my personal experience and
interaction with children and volunteers are likely to influence my data collection and the subsequent findings.

Second, to ensure the consistency of my research I opted for dependability rather than reliability as my research deals with people and their perceptions on reality. Hence, dependability implies that people’s responses may vary according to the time, place, mood and the person that asks the questions or does the observations (ibid. 60). Consequently, I documented my data thoroughly while doing research. I kept a research diary and I recorded the interviews and transcribed them so that I could consult them any time I needed during fieldwork, and after.

Third, authenticity means that even if a study has many truths, the use of reflexive and consistent processes during research enables the reach of ‘justifiable, credible and trustworthy’ conclusions (ibid. 61). The use of thick descriptions and the transcription of interviews ensures the research process is transparent.

Fourth, the transferability criterion suites case studies such as this one, as it allows to individuate the lesson learned through this research, which could be applied in other similar settings (ibid. 63). The use of thick descriptions of the research and the methodology used enables this process.

Finally, auditability means that the research is ‘open and transparent’ (ibid. 63). In this methodological chapter I provided the full explanation of the methods I have used to gather my data, and the methodological considerations I applied in this research.

XI. Data Analysis

Data collected through the interviews was transcribed ad verbatim, together with the field-notes written down during the eight weeks of research and analyzed using the software Atlas.ti. This allowed me to first do an open coding and then a thematic coding, which facilitated a thematic analysis of the main motifs emerged during my research.

XII. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the questions, methodology and ethical considerations used while conducting my research, ensuring this research did not cause any harm to the subjects of my study and respected their privacy. Despite several limitations and challenges encountered, this exploratory and ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to immerse myself in the reality of this context, becoming a full member of the team and gathering useful information about the NGOs activities and the living right to education of children in Northern France.
I now move to the next chapter, which shows the precarious living conditions people live in Northern France and offers a description of the organization I volunteered for and the accommodations centers I went to hold the activities and to conduct my observations.
Chapter 3

Research Location and Context

I conducted my research in four localities in Northern France: Calais - a port city situated at the border with the English Channel also connected to the UK via the Eurotunnel, Grande Synthe, Lille and Small-Town\(^6\). I set my research in this context as asylum seekers, both those willing to stay in France and those seeking to pass the border, live in hostile conditions in informal settlements, or accommodation centers at the outskirts of the cities. They are deprived of basic needs, among which formal education for children on the move.

In this chapter I begin with a discussion about the situation and the type of migrants present in Northern France. Secondly, I explain the role of the state and organizations in the provision of education. I then proceed offering an account of the warehouse the organizations are in and of the three accommodation centers where I conducted observations, followed by a conclusion.

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\( ^6 \) Pseudonym for a small town located around 50km drive from Calais.

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Fig. 2. Area in Northern France where the research was conducted. The blue signposts illustrate the position of the warehouse in Calais and the three accommodations centers (Source: Francesca Nicora)
I. Northern France

Context

In the early 2000s, Calais was at the center of political attention as it saw an increasing number of migrants fleeing from conflicts in former Yugoslavia as well as Somalia, Syria Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Sudan, trying to enter the UK (Reinisch, 2015: 518). People converged to Calais due to the easier passage facilitated by France adherence to the Schengen area, as well as the opening of the Eurotunnel in 1994 enabling the passage to the UK (ibid. 515-516). Another reason for attempting the route to the UK was the different interpretation France and the UK had of what a refugee is. This resulted in France having a narrower interpretation than the UK, with refugee status being accorded only to people fleeing from government persecution in France, while in the UK it was also accorded to those persecuted by ‘non-governmental factors’ (ibid.). The increasing number of migrants living in the streets, marked the first ‘crisis’ leading to the creation of a camp in Sangatte in 1999, which was dismantled in 2002.

Fig. 3. Calais, February 2019 (Source: Francesca Nicora)
People never stopped coming to Calais as proven by the current situation where asylum seekers or migrants live in informal settlements or ‘jungles’ (Wannesson, 2015). Calais’ informal camp named “the Jungle” marked another ‘crisis’, which drew mediatic coverage (Reinisch, 2015: 516). It was formed in 2015 through the collective intervention of NGOs as well as the municipality (Wannesson, 2015: ibid. 21). The camp became more stable in appearance, yet it still showed a transient condition of its inhabitants. It could not be defined as a refugee camp since it did not meet the international agreed standards (Bossy, cited in The Guardian, 2015). The absence of humanitarian action by the French government was fulfilled by charitable and grassroot organizations, offering basic needs for survival; while other grassroot ones such as Play4Calais or Refugee Youth Service offered activities based on art, cinema and sport (Mcgee and Pelhem, 2017:24-25). Organizations such as the School Bus Project provided mobile education for young migrants.

After the dismantling of the camp in late October 2016, thousands of asylum seekers were relocated in centre d’accueil de demandeurs d’asile (CADA)- asylum seeking centers, across the French territory (Rigoni, 2017: 42-43). Nevertheless, despite the improved conditions of the shelters, the slowness of asylum procedures together with the lack of basic services, such as access to education for children, led migrants to go back to Calais and attempt crossing to the UK (Bochenek, 2018; Rigoni, 2017). According to Burton (2018), the refugee crisis is still present in Calais as more than a thousand people, including unaccompanied children, are living in the forest in precarious conditions, and many more are arriving in neighboring Dunkirk. Bochenek (2018) reports ‘many are desperate to join family and friends in the United Kingdom; others are there for lack of any better option in France’.

The newspaper LeMonde (2018) stresses how French President Macron during his January speech in Calais, emphasized French government determination not to have other jungles anymore; his support to police force; the state takeover of food distribution to migrants; his disapproval of humanitarian organizations “encouraging” migrants’ passage; and finally a stricter policy towards minors in the area. Consequently, there is a tension - also present in the first Calais crisis, between offering humanitarian help or denying it on the ground that aid attracts new migrants to the area (Reinisch, 2018: 517).

Despite the clearance of the “Jungle” and the dispersion of migrants, the French asylum procedure resulted unfair to the eyes of the exiled people, and families. It is a procedure that can take up to two years, followed by a scarcity of accommodation centers (Januszewska, 2016: 72). Therefore, it makes it less favorable for asylum seekers to request asylum in France.

Moreover, the Dublin regulation plays a major role in creating precariousness in migrants’ life. In fact, this procedure is part of a common European asylum procedure based on the principle that there must be only one country responsible for the asylum application (La Cimade, 2019:7). People are taken digital fingerprints, which they are put in the ‘Eurodac’ data system (ibid.). Those whose fingerprints figure in the system are marked as “dublined”, lowering the chances of being granted asylum in France.
This procedure expires after six months, and asylum seekers can apply for asylum in France (ibid. 57). This is a method used to discourage asylum seekers to apply: once dublined, people see their right of having an accommodation negated, thus being obliged to live in the streets and helped by volunteers. They are condemned to undergo an erratic life and be regarded as subjects to be expelled by the state (ibid. 20).

For these reasons many returned to Calais where they chose to live outside, as they refused to comply to the way the state categorizes them in those accepted to stay or those rejected (Hagan, 2018:4). The state is now policing those who are living in informal camps, constantly evicting them, thus creating a hostile environment to live in (Hagan, 2018: 17, La Cimade, 2019). Amnesty International (2018: 166) reports how police hostility as well as municipal authorities are responsible for the dire living conditions in the area and the lack of compliance to human rights.

Volunteers too are subjects to police harassments:

‘Last night the community trapped me and two other volunteers as we were distributing new kits for newcomers in front of the Church. We had the authorization by the Church, but people from the community came with journalists and kept us there until the police arrived. There were four police vans and they id-checked us. Tomorrow I need to go to the police station’ (Ben, 24, youth worker, field-notes, 27 February 2019)

Fig. 4. Exiles being evicted last February (Source: Philippe Huguen)\(^7\)

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7 https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/hauts-de-france/pas-calais/calais/calais-evacuation-plusieurs-campements-migrants-1696990.html?fbclid=IwAR0bZjZEw9TzwO9fr4gouTtSdP7P_tpxuT_yR1zHJqPaEklbrAOqMm0
Fig. 5. Two posters commemorating deaths at the border in Northern France. Two Policemen stand out in the distance (Source: Francesca Nicora).
Demographics

There are three categories of migrants in Northern France: those exiled- meaning they were not accepted as refugees somewhere else; those dublined; those aiming to attain family reunion (Field-notes, 14 April 2019). Some of them are willing to ask for asylum in France and live in temporary accommodation centers.

There are several reasons why these people want to reach the UK. They are anglophones; it is easier to find a job since there is no need of registration to work; they have a community there; they think it is easier to obtain asylum in the UK. As a solution they wait there until they can cross the Channel by paying someone to have a passage; by hiding in a lorry or by using an inflatable boat (ibid.).

There are around 350 unaccompanied children living in camps and 70 to 90 accompanied children living in accommodation centers open during the weekend. However, numbers increase during summer, while they decrease during winter (Paola & Chiara). The children I worked with are between two to fifteen years old. They are mostly Kurds, though there are also children of Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, Chechnyan
and African origin. The information known about children is their name, age, and nationality, with little knowledge about their previous education.

II. The state - Lack of Provision of Formal Education

According to Rigoni (2017:40) French schools have the obligation to welcome all children under 16 regardless of their status. Ever since 1990s, schools must provide access to educational programs to all children and adapt them to their needs. (Dubet, 2004 cited in Rigoni, 2017:42) Access to education is not always coherent, and sometimes absent when migrants do not have refugee status or registration. Often teachers are not trained to deal with English speaking young migrants, whom may have never attended school before. Therefore, the allocated resources are scarce, while territorial variations are remarkable (ibid. 49).

Most interviewees claim that the French state does not provide access to formal education for children on the move in Northern France. Paola, one of the co-founders of Children Together underlines how ‘there is no formal education, neither provided by associations or by the state. Even children who are not on the move and have claimed asylum, have but limited opportunities to access the French school system’.

The state does not give any elucidation for failing to provide education. However, the hostility expressed by the police and municipal authorities (Amnesty International, 2018:166-167; Hagan, 2018), the application of the Dublin Regulation (La Cimade, 2019) and Macron’s January Speech (2018) form part of the explanation why education is absent from the picture: to render their stay unfavourable. Most accommodation centers sourced by the state do not offer educational activities (Paola). Consequently, onus is on the families to try to get their children into schools.

‘This is the wrong way around; parents are not familiar with the system and need help from the state to give their children access to education. I am aware of at least one case in which the mayor of a town actively opposes giving some children living in an accommodation centre access to school in order to prevent integration’ (Fred, 29, English teacher).

Moreover, even if they can have access to education, ‘they rarely enter the system in France’ (Kim, 29, unaccompanied minors coordinator). According to Lily, only one ten-year-old Albanian girl, living in the outskirts of Lille managed to have access to school, thanks to local people’s help. This means that 70 to 90 accompanied children aged between zero- and sixteen-years and around 350 unaccompanied children living outside in informal camps are not enrolled in school.

8 In this research I used pseudonyms for each child I mention (see the Annex).
III. Role of Organizations: Children Together

There are several organizations such as, School Bus Project (SBP), Refugee Youth Service (RYS), Refugee Women’s Centre (RWC) and CT, who are in close touch with children on the move, promoting and offering non-formal educational activities, among other services.

Susan a 24-year-old English teacher, told me that SBP is not operating in the field anymore and is mainly delivering English classes to adults. RYS offers psychological and educational services to the unaccompanied minors in the field. Finally, RWC takes care of women, their children and families.

During fieldwork I was volunteering for CT, working with more than 70 accompanied children. CT was conceived having in mind a precise idea: offering educational activities mainly focused on play, sport, schooling and craft activities. Six volunteers working for Refugee Community Kitchen (RCK) - an organisation providing hot meals for the exiles - observed the dangers to which children were exposed because there were no organizations providing specifically targeted services (Paula). ‘It was play time, and children would run in the back of moving trucks and jump. They would always find the opportunity to make a game out of something. The only people doing activities with kids at that time were RWC’s volunteers, which would do something for half an hour’ (ibid.).

Through play the organization aims at providing a safe space for children to process their experiences and give structure to their daily lives. ‘We provide play more than formal education; it means we are actually trying to create an environment which is psychologically beneficial’ (Paola and Chiara). In an environment where children live worrying about their future, rather than living in the present, non-formal education aims at giving children a routine.

According to Paola and Chiara play is important because parents are so involved in finding ways to buy a passage to the UK, that they do not have the time and the mental energy to dedicate play time to children. In normal circumstances they would play during and after school with their teachers, their parents or their peers. ‘It’s a lot about playing and mitigating trauma, but we try to give them education, non-formal education by speaking to them in English, or games where we count. Very basic things, but I think we are making a difference’ (Emma, 22, Fine Arts student).

Therefore, in the absence of state’s provision of education, CT, together with RYS and RWC constitute points of reference for children on the move, and their families. This is especially necessary for children who have been in Northern France for years or months as well for children who have never had the chance to attend schools.
‘The kids we are working with now, have already been here for months. They haven’t had the opportunity for play or for education ever, in 8 months. There are 7-year-old children who have never been in school because they have travelled for four years. They have absolutely no stability, structure and no formal stimulation.’ (Paola)

Volunteers devote a minimum of two months of their time to help running the activities. They are between 20 and 30 years old and have a different level of experience in the field of education. There is not rigid division of tasks, leaving room for volunteers to share their ideas and contribute equally to the project. CT operates in winter accommodation centres mainly in Grande Synthe and the nearby areas as well as Lille. The access to the centres were granted through the close partnership and cooperation with RWC (Paola & Chiara).

CT aims at facilitating the activities for kids in four different centres. Children are divided in at least two to three groups and activities are tailored to their age. The team operates six times a week, thus making sure volunteers have two days off to rest. This is of vital importance as the job is psychologically and physically demanding. Each volunteer receives safeguarding and child protection training as well as fieldwork training so that they know what to expect once in the field.

IV. Children Together Location

CT is based in Calais, in a warehouse located to the south-east of the city, in the industrial area. Due to its position, not many local people, apart from volunteers, know of its existence. A white gate marks the entrance to the area. There is a spacious courtyard with three small offices of three different organizations to the right. To the left there is a parking lot. The warehouse is divided in different sections where each organization sorts out the donations and packs them in boxes ready to be distributed during the day or the night. CT team members have their own section with the related resources for the activities. The team members always hold daily meetings in a caravan. Every morning the team plans the activities for the day, divides the tasks and prepares activities and teaching materials such as board games, books, sensory toys, sport equipment, craft and stationary materials, and so on.

Activities last for two to three hours, six days a week. Each week the responsible for the schedule assigns five working days to each volunteer. The team uses a van to carry the materials to the four accommodation centres. Therefore, when a van is out of service it disrupts the provision of education for the children. This highlights the precarity of the service, which can be aggravated when volunteers decide to leave or in case there is not enough funding to cover fuel, materials, and housing costs for volunteers.
Fig. 7. Children Together’s section to be sorted out (Source: Francesca Nicora)
V. Accommodation Centres

In this section I describe three accommodation centres I conducted my observations in: Grande Synthe, Lille and Small-town.

Grande-Synthe

In Grande-Synthe, the centre we attended three times a week hosted mainly Kurdish families, as well as one Iraqi and one Iranian family. The place was surrounded by a green area and offered space for children to play outside. A security guide usually welcomed the team at the entrance, even though smugglers also could come in to bargain the passage with the families. The rooms were on the first floor, each family having one, while on the ground floor there was a common area. The latter was a large room with tables, and a small kitchen where families reheated the food RCK distributed every day, or the food they cooked outside when they went to the jungle to meet friends, family or smugglers. Sometimes the area was dirty and chaotic, which prevented children from focusing on the activities. There were around thirty children living there, from six months to sixteen years old. After a few
sessions, children started participating in the activities we offered, they quickly improved their English by interacting with us, and demonstrated the positive impact those activities had to their mental wellbeing. They were often stressed and sleep deprived, as they tried to enter the UK with their family on a boat or a lorry during the night.

**Lille**

The Second accommodation was a low budget hotel outside Lille. Thirty Kurdish families with approximately forty children were living there. Volunteers only had a small concrete parking for the activities, with no green spaces around. That meant that children and the team were subject to the changing weather conditions, including rain and snow. The lack of a designated space for CT, impeded the implementation of educational activities other than play.

![Fig. 9. Outside Lille accommodation. (Source: Francesca Nicora)](image)
Small-town

The third centre was in a white building-a retirement house, which had an internal courtyard children could use anytime to play. The premise hosted people who had decided to claim their asylum in France. They were assigned to that facility only for a limited amount of time, until they were moved to another centre where their asylum application would be further processed. Children were predominantly Kurdish, but there were also Chechyan, and North African. The team could use a small room for the activities with the middle children, while the common area was used for the elder children who were willing to learn French and a group of nine toddlers. The facility employed social workers who helped families, while children received two hours a week of French classes. The director always welcomed us there. He was aware children were bored as they did not have anything to do during the day.

Fig. 10. Kurdish children playing outside in Small-town. (Source: Francesca Nicora)

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9 Pseudonym used for this small rural village with 180 inhabitants, located around 50 km drive from Calais.
Fig. 11. Children playing outside in Small-town. *(Source: Francesca Nicora)*
VI. Concluding Remarks

In the last two decades Northern France has been a crossroad for people aiming to cross the English Channel. Despite the dismantlement of the Big Jungle in 2016, the situation in Northern France is still precarious. Children on the move and asylum seekers converge in Calais, Grande Synthe and Lille to find ways to cross the border or wait for their asylum claims to be processed. The former refuse to enter in an asylum and accommodation system that is hostile to them- Dublin regulation becomes a “machine infernale” (Cimade, 2018) playing a role in categorizing those who can stay and those who are rejected by the state.

Hence, people choose to live in informal camps and in provisional accommodation centres, enduring harsh living conditions and police violence, which also affects volunteers operating in the area. They lack basic needs, among which there is no educational provision by the state. CT and other organizations become educational providers for children on the move in Northern France. The next chapter addresses CT mission and volunteers’ role as providers of non-formal education and the beneficial impact this form of education has on children.
Chapter 4
Children Together: Mission, Activities and Impact

This chapter will be divided into four sections. Section I lays out CT mission, its organization structure and the activities offered. Section II explores volunteers’ role as educators. Section III focuses on the observed impact of the non-formal educational activities led by volunteers. Section IV presents concluding remarks to the chapter.

I. Mission and Structure

Mission

According to the observations and the interviews I conducted, CT centres on five principles: offering psychological support, creating a safe learning space, helping children develop their self-identity and self-esteem, improving children’s language skills, and advocating for children’s rights to play and to receive an education.

First, CT aims at offering psychological support mainly through play. A psychologist teaches volunteers how to interact with vulnerable and often traumatized children. By interacting with an adult figure other than their parents, children learn some of the formal rules in place in formal education to give children stability and create a way to peacefully interact with others. Volunteers track children’s individual progress by writing daily reports after each session. Writing reports and tracking their emotional state facilitates volunteers’ mission to plan more inclusive activities so that all children are stimulated to participate, and it is easier to individuate the causes of their emotional distress.

Second, through play the organization wants to create a safe learning space in which children can interact with other peers they have never talked or played with before. The aim is to co-create a space where children can propose activities, express themselves and learn in creative ways through art and craft, free play, sport, language lessons, and so on. During the activities children are stimulated to participate without worrying about being judged, thus encouraging their interactions, and their spirit of initiative.

A third goal is to help children develop their identity and boost their self-esteem, which is essential in keeping their self-confidence and an open mind towards learning.

‘I think the activities contribute to a sense of self-worth, self-identity and distraction, in that there is education. [...] It’s more providing them with an opportunity to express themselves, rather than with formal education’ (Lily)

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10 This chapter reflects CT and volunteers’ point of views.
The fourth goal is improving children’s language skills: English is taught to children who want to reach the UK and French to those who are asking for asylum in France. By learning the language children can overcome the language barrier and communicate with other peers and volunteers. This helps volunteers understand their demands and their emotions in unsafe circumstances, so that they can report the situation to an external psychologist, or partner organizations such as RYS and RWC to improve their situation. This is crucial when children live in hostile environments such as the jungles.11

Finally, through volunteers’ active participation, the organization aspires to take on the role of human rights advocate. Volunteers raise awareness via posting pictures and reports on social media about children’s progress and precarious living conditions in Northern France.12

Structure of the organization

After an overview of the mission, it is essential to look at CT’s structure to understand how it operates in the field and plans its activities. I individuated six major points in the structure of the organization, which are: planning and expert advice, de-briefing, communication, time allocation and time keeping, use of PEC cards, and badges.

Planning and expert advice constitute an advantage for the smooth running of the organization. The team operates six times a week. Mondays are dedicated to plan the weekly sessions, centering the activities on a theme, such as health, security, friendship, and so forth. On Wednesdays, the group participates in the “vulnerability meeting”, where each volunteer reports the names of the children they observed during the week, along with a description about their behavior during the session. For instance, there have been cases in which children did not want to get involved, they were withdrawn, violent or disengaged, consequently, reporting them as vulnerable and discussing about them with a psychologist makes a difference to understand how to help them. Also, the presence of Lily, Sophie and Hannah (34, pre-school teacher) who studied to be teachers is essential to organize activities that follow a proper plan. Therefore, expert knowledge acquires importance to implement activities that could benefit vulnerable children.

After each session there is a “debriefing”, which is a moment where the team members reflect on and assess their experiences in the field. Volunteers highlight the positive and negative aspects of the sessions; they pinpoint what could be improved for the next activities and which activities should be avoided and why; they underline children’s demands for activities; they report on the progress of

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11 Look at Chapter 3 ‘Research Context’.
12 This is also a strategy to keep the organization running and attract more funding.
regression of children’s emotional regulation. During de-briefs volunteers can give an equal input in the project and take decisions together.

Communication among volunteers is crucial when dividing tasks and planning activities. Moreover, when operating in the accommodation centers, they need to respect the “buddy system”. This means that in any situation—teaching outside or inside the centers, volunteers always work with a partner and communicate to other volunteers when one of them needs to take a break or leaves the place where he/she is assigned. This is to safeguard volunteers who work in hostile environments where there can be tensions with external adults not living in the center (smugglers or adults living in the jungle), as well as for children. Therefore, it is easier to surveil children if there are more volunteers who can take care of fewer of them; volunteers are safer; and activities are not interrupted.

Time is another element that volunteers value. Allocating the right amount of time to the different tasks ensures the goals for the day are met. Additionally, timekeeping is important in the field to give structure to the session. Ten minutes are designated for circle time where children stand in circle and sing few songs along volunteers and repeat their names to the others. This represents a moment where children show their identity and feel recognized as fundamental members of the group. Then, children split into three groups according to age and each pair of volunteers explains the assigned activity, which is run for an hour. Finally, thirty minutes are dedicated to free play, where everybody has the chance to play sports together, draw, play board games, read, use lego blocks, play with dolls, or sensory objects.

The organization adopted PECS\textsuperscript{13} cards as an optimal means of praising children for positive actions such as: “good listening” or “sharing”, “sitting quietly”; or remarking the negative aspects that are not accepted within CT’s learning space: “no shouting”, no “grabbing”, “no hitting” and “no kicking”. This method goes beyond language barrier, while children learn how to remember the rules in place and how to behave according the situation.

Finally, volunteers use badges with CT’s logo on them, and their name so that children associate the volunteers with the organization. The general rule is always using the pronoun ‘we’ when stating the rules to children or when explaining games, to show that volunteers belong to the organization. This is supposed to avoid children being over attached to volunteers and prepare them to be mindful of who to trust when they are back in the jungle during the summer. As Ben states:

‘Working with the kids here is so different from the UK. Children are vulnerable, they have no real friends because they are always on the move and they do not settle down. They don’t have time to create bonds. They are either fast to accept you or it takes a long time. When it’s quick it’s dangerous: imagine creating a bond with a person that

\textsuperscript{13} Picture Exchange Communication System- cards with images normally used to facilitate communication for autistic children.
is dangerous, such as a smuggler! You can get exploited and abused. Relationships are great, but outside here it’s dangerous. Even though we have good relationships it’s scary.’ (Ben)

Therefore, giving a structure to CT facilitates the planning and running of activities and ensure volunteers and children’s safety. I will now move to describe the type of activities offered.

**II. Activities: Art, Play and Sport**

![Fig. 12. Cardboard houses made by children in Grande Synthe. (Source: Francesca Nicora)](image_url)

The activities offered are various - art and craft, games, imaginative activities, sport, and language lessons, and aim to fulfill one or more goals of CT’s mission. Activities such as art and craft are very popular among children. The creation of self-portraits, masks and puppets encourage children to acknowledge their identity and learn how to express it on paper as well as verbally after learning the vocabulary in English or French.

Games such as building structures with cardboard, tape and sticks foster children’s creativity and cooperation. In a session held in Lille ‘We decided to build a rocket in line with the “space” theme of the week. Despite not capturing everybody’s imagination, two boys who were not involved ended up making the pointy part of the rocket together’ (Fred, Field-notes, 5 March 2019).
Imaginative activities such as listening to stories or cooking with playdough stimulate imagination and sensory skills. ‘In Grande-Synthe Emma started reading a story to the toddlers’ group. It was something CT rarely did before because of the language barrier. Nevertheless, children seemed to be receptive and indicated the images on the book Emma was holding, even though they could not fully understand the meaning (Field-notes, 27 February 2019).

During the session held the 7th of March 2019, children living in the accommodation located in Small-town asked for playdough. They learned how to model the dough to create food, developing their modelling skills. Children pretended they were grocery shopping and were asking the cashier for fruit, vegetables and other food item they were creating in exchange for money, or they pretended to be at home cooking and serving food. They were recreating real life situations through play.

Additionally, sport is one of the most loved activity in the accommodation centres, with football dominating among children. For unaccompanied minors living outside, sport lets them forget for a couple of hours about the hostile conditions they live in the jungles, the continuous police harassment, or the thought of obtaining a passage to the UK.

‘Sport is one of the biggest stress relievers, and self-esteem booster. It can help create community bonds, tighten friendships, and it’s a crossover for displaced people. It removes them from the camp. When you go to a football field, you have zero thoughts about your situation- trying to smuggle on a boat or trying to get into a lorry to cross to the UK. Your thought process is to focus on a ball, it’s like freedom and a break in the mind. Just being able to have that is incredible in such situation, it keeps them mentally and physically healthy’ (Ben)

Sport is also important in accommodation centres, where children learn how to cooperate in a team and forget about their precarious situation. Furthermore, children get a sense of self-worth from it. I spoke to Kim who explained:

‘We want these boys to develop self-worth, especially when they play football and cricket they do get in the competition, but they get this sense of worth, which they do not get in the jungle, such as scoring a point’ (Kim)

Additionally, sport fosters friendship among children, pushing them to bond regardless of their nationality. This is particularly true for unaccompanied minors:

‘We get people from different countries, ethnicities and culture together so it gives them a possibility to connect and create friendship, which wouldn’t happen otherwise because the environment they live in is very hostile.’ (ibid.)
**Language Classes**

Formal education is confined to English lessons for the ones who want to reach the UK, or French classes for the ones who ask for asylum in France. This service is not constant as it depends on the learning space offered by accommodation centers and children’s level of attention.

‘At Grande-Synthe we started school again. The area we have access to is large and offers the possibility to divide children into three groups. The eldest do advanced English classes, learn complex grammar structures and revise basic daily life vocabulary. The middle group, mainly four to five children, learn the English alphabet for the first time. Toddlers do free play as they have never been to school, and do not have the patience to sit and learn letters. Each group is assigned two volunteers, with an extra one supporting the group that needs it most. Children are eager to learn, but they have a short attention span. Therefore, planning and implementing school sessions is challenging. Often, it is impossible to predict whether one can follow the schedule as everything depends on children’s emotional state and their energy level. Today the common area was crowded with parents who were having dinner, there were new clothes brought by RWC hanging around. The chaotic environment led us to convert learning the alphabet into a more interactive game to keep them engaged.’ (Field-notes, 2 March 2019)

As seen in the quote, the space where CT operates is in the common area. Often children’s psychological status, the presence of parents and items scattered in the room distracts them from the lesson and makes it hard for volunteers to keep them engaged in the activities.

In Lille, children only get to play. This is because the space allocated for the activities is a concrete area outside the Ibis hotel. The environment is not suitable to hold proper English lessons. Moreover, being the only organization offering them non-formal education, means that in instances where there are vehicle problems or suspension to the activities, they do not obtain any type education. Besides, the number of children attending activities varies significantly as they always try to cross the border.

‘Today we only had a session with ten children out of 28. Eden, a 11-year-old Kurdish boy told me that out of 30 families who were present at the centre, 18 managed to pass the border in the two weeks we did not go. Among them, Samantha, a 12-year-old girl, who translated for all the children when they did not understand English managed to pass the boarder, after two years of waiting in the accommodation centre during the winter, and the jungle during the summer. Two years of not being enrolled in school.’ (Field-notes, 26 March 2019).
In Small-town, despite the accommodation centre is run by a French charity, children only have an hour of French classes two times per week. The rest of the week they spend their time at the centre with no education. Therefore, CT started providing language classes once a week.

Overall, CT offers non-formal activities which aim at meeting its mission. The type of activities delivered depends on children’s level of attention and emotional status and the physical space available to do them. The delivery of the service is not constant as children’s number varies, it occurs on voluntary base, and relies on vehicles availability - the organization must stop operating when there are not enough volunteers, and available vehicles. Next session looks at what role volunteers acquire as providers of non-formal education.

III. Role of volunteers: white saviours, activities facilitators or experience seekers?

The role of volunteers within the organization is flexible, allowing them to share their ideas and equally take decisions as a team.

‘I guess I don’t have a very specific role because it’s such a grassroot organization. We are just starting up, so everyone is doing bits of everything. We all help planning sessions and running them. We also do awareness raising and fundraising and background charity work I suppose’ (Lily)

Yet, not allocating a designated task to each team-member, may also make them lose track of their tasks there, and what their original purpose for joining the organization was.

‘God, I don’t know. I think the co-founders call me a bit of everything, but I came here as a teacher and I intend to be an educational leader, but I haven’t been one as I have done anything else under the sun. But I want, when everything has settled a bit more, to take my position as educational leader again so I can focus more on the education children are getting.’ (Sophie)

Furthermore, not having a clear division between who teaches toddlers, middle children and older ones, may create confusion and lack of understanding of which activities and what type of approach they must apply according to each age range they deal with. For example, Hannah encountered some difficulties in the approach other volunteers where applying when planning and leading activities for toddlers.

‘I am doing the youngest children. I’m organizing activities for children from 0 to 5. I am going there and do my activities only a couple days a week. But I’d like to do trainings with you guys. I am working on one document explaining how to work with
them. It is different than what you are doing with bigger kids. So, I would like to contribute in that way as well.’ (Hannah, 34 early pre-school teacher)

Volunteers have an education background to some extent. There are English teachers, pre-school teachers and youth workers, each of them with one or more years of experience. It emerged that volunteers acquire different roles in line with their vision of education. In this section I will group volunteers according to the predominant role they embody: the white saviour, activities facilitator or experience seeker.

Fig. 13. Volunteers trying games for children in front of the warehouse (Source: Francesca Nicora)

**White Saviour**

Ben and Sophie stand out as white saviours. They base the education they provide on Western education ideals, due to their social background.

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14 See Interviewees Table 1 in chapter 2.
15 ‘Term for a white person who helps or has helped non-white people and may feel morally superior for doing or having done so’, [https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/18497/white+saviour](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/18497/white+saviour).
When I asked Ben his reasons for providing non-formal education for accompanied and unaccompanied children in Calais\(^\text{16}\) he told me:

>‘The reason why I am here is because of human rights. My problem is the abuse and violation of human rights, particularly children’s rights. I have joined this service because I feel that where my government has failed, and the French government has failed, there is not support, except these amateur organizations... I think that this is better than having no support. I am here for that and what I do within that is providing the very basic, beginning entry level of stimulating these children’s minds and encouraging them to still be children. And through activities I try to give their right back’ (Ben)

He stands out as a committed human rights advocate and activist, taking on the role of the French state, which fails to intervene to fulfill children’s rights to education. His position is the emblem of the white saviour who feels morally superior compared to the “inaction” of the state. He imposes an ideal Western notion of childhood, which corresponds to the one broadcasted in the UN CRC, disregarding that there is more than one childhood.\(^\text{17}\)

Likewise, Sophie affirms she is determined to gain access to as many children as possible to offer them the education denied by the French state. Using her personal and professional experiences imbued in Western ideas of “good education” she stresses that children on the move are not getting the kind of education that children in the UK are able to obtain, thus willing to stay in Northern France until they have access to school.

>‘[...] When you can compare what these children are getting, to what a child of the same age would get in Britain it is just so vastly different [...] Considering the amount of energy that goes into a child during a school day in the UK, the kids here are getting probably less than one percent of what British children are getting resource-wise, energy-wise, thought-wise, care-wise and educational-wise. All of these constitute different experiences that make a child develop in a healthy way. [...] I have said I won’t leave this place until these kids are getting an education. I have said that to too many people now, so I think I am going to have to stay here for a while.’ (Sophie, 27, educationalist)

\(^{16}\) Ben was also involved with RYS distributing clothes and playing sports with unaccompanied children, as well as with Human Rights Observer in Calais, assisting and protesting during evictions.

\(^{17}\) See Liebel (2012) section IV, Chapter 1.
She tends to project her experience and ideas of a proper school day in the UK onto children in Northern France using a top-down approach. Sophie recognizes that non-formal education and play are beneficial, but there is a need of ‘specialists to really make sure that the activities we are doing with the kids are as impactful and fruitful as they could be’. Both Sophie and Ben never question what children really want as they see them as highly vulnerable and traumatized.

**Facilitator**

I call *facilitators* volunteers who, despite being human rights activists, are willing to let children co-create their learning space together with them, more than imposing their preconceived views. Chiara, Paola, Kim, Suzan, Lily and Hannah belong to this group.

Chiara and Paola, the two co-founders, acknowledge the vital impact of CT for children by taking a humbler stance. When I asked them how they see themselves in realizing children’s right to education they responded:

> ‘We really like when children help us create the space. They have a sense of ownership. We also want open suggestions. We ask them to tell us about things they like, which is often difficult because of the language barrier. When we see that children are prone to create or direct an activity, we then play on to that. At times, a girl set up a game and we all did that. We struggle realizing their right to education, because of the instability of the situation. The kids would learn so much quicker if we could sit down and have English lessons every day and ask them what they would like to do the following day because we are not stretched across five different sites.’ (Paola and Chiara, co-founders)

Paola and Chiara show their willingness to be open to children’s demands, however, this is not always possible because of the language barrier or the lack of time to incorporate children’s demands when planning, as they operate across many accommodation centers with fewer volunteers.

Kim remarks the importance of proposing activities unaccompanied children asked for. Living outside the jungle they can drop in and out more easily, so it is fundamental to advance activities that keep them engaged. Susan is of the same position, willing to keep children involved, and give the positive feedback without imposing the formal education idea of learning as a duty:

> ‘We take opportunities that arise, and we make them educational safe […] I think the best form of non-formal education is that you educate them all the time, but not in an
obvious and direct way. It is just important, especially when they are young, to keep them engaged and thinking. Giving them positive feedback to their ideas, turning that into games.’ (Susan, 24, English teacher)

Lily affirms the importance of reading a child’s response in order to learn why he/she is not engaging, welcome them, ask what they like and give them the freedom of choice of participating in the activities. Hannah states that volunteers ‘are not really good at asking what they want to do, we very much do what we want to do’.

These volunteers use an approach from below, trying to actively involve children in the activities. Nevertheless, they acknowledge they do not always listen to children when planning and offering activities. This is partially due to CT being a young organization, which lacks the infrastructure and money to financial maintain more volunteers and vehicles, which could transport people to the accommodation centers and offer a more regular service. Moreover, the hostile situation and lack of government support creates a difficult hurdle to overcome without external help.

**Experience Seeker**

Fred and Emma are experience seekers, they have been in Northern France for few months. Fred is an English teacher and Emma a Fine Arts student who had previous experience in summer camps. They both came to Calais during a period of break respectively from their work and their studies to acquire a different experience. Even though it is their first time working in such conditions, they have an open attitude to learn and adjust to the circumstances. During the interviews they highlighted the importance of including children in the activities. They are also aware of their limits: they learn new things about dealing with vulnerable children in every session they go to.

**Conclusion**

Volunteers’ role in the organization is flexible and they equally participate in decision making. I individuated three main roles volunteers fall in. Ben and Sophie embody the white savior role: they advocate for children’s rights and are attached to the Western idea of childhood and education. Chiara, Paola, Hama, Kim, Lily and Susan are the facilitators, who try to apply a bottom up approach to the activities they offer, even though this is not always possible due to lack of time, volunteers and resources. Finally, Fred and Emma are experience seekers. They came to Northern France in a period of break to have a new experience. Nevertheless, they are eager to teach children and acquire experience during every session. I now move on to the next
section which offers an overview of the impact of non-formal education as observed by volunteers.

IV. Impact of non-formal education

Fig. 14. Colouring time (Source: Francesca Nicora)
Children’s involvement

Among volunteers there seems to be a general acknowledgement that children’s willingness to learn, the waiting state they find themselves in and the sense of boredom that generates from it, and their active demands for activities enables volunteers to gain children’s attention and have them involved in the various activities offered.

Children know the time CT volunteers go to the accommodation centres and always wait for them:

‘Most of the time we do not really have to engage them because they are very keen on learning. We try to have activities that might be useful to them, to enhance their competences, their skills and we try to provide them with tools for their development and future’ (Emma)

Furthermore, children often spend their days waiting with their families for something to happen without anything else to do. Therefore, they are often bored. Consequently, any type of activity is welcomed; when that is not the case, they will not be responsive to that.

‘The majority of children are so bored because of their lives. They are very eager to do anything, and you know that when you do an activity they do not want to do, something is wrong with the activity you are doing. I think that as long as you do something bright and colorful and anything they can make or like using their hands for, they seem to really enjoy and get stuck in’ (Sophie)

The level of engagement is high even among unaccompanied minors living in the jungles, although it depends on external events, such as police violence, or the environment. As Kim states, they join the activities even if they are reluctant about them.

‘It depends on their mood, if something happened during the night and the environment. Maybe there’s people fighting next to us. […] But what I realized is that when we stopped doing activities with them, people were asking for activities, that’s when you see that you are doing something. Sometimes you have the cool kid saying ‘What is this? I don’t need to draw I just need to go and try’. Then they come and sit with you for hours coloring books very meticulously for one hour straight.’ (Kim)

In sum, volunteers affirm that children’s involvement comes naturally as they are often bored, eager to learn, and asking for activities when those are not provided.

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18 obtaining a passage or changing shelter.


**Children’s Progress**

During the interviews it stood out that through non-formal educational activities children improved significantly on many aspects of their behavior: they learned how to regulate their emotions, build confidence, express their creativity, stimulate their curiosity, acquire language skills, establish trust with volunteers, create a routine and cooperate with each other.

First, they learn how to regulate their emotions. For example, two Kurdish siblings Kaleb and Saphira, respectively of 4 and 6 years-old significantly improved how to express their emotions within a month they arrived in Grande-Synthe. They learned how to listen, respect people’s boundaries, behave with other children and volunteers, and wait for their turn during the activities. According to volunteers this improvement is useful to be able to integrate within a group of children of the same age and keep children safe in presence of unknown adults.

‘Kaleb and Saphira arrived a month ago and they were clingy, they tried to hug us, they didn’t really know how to play with other kids and have fun with them. Now they are playing, they are using PECs cards to tell the others they need to share the space and our resources. When they need affection, they are more respectful of our boundaries and theirs’ (Emma)

Moreover, children who have been consistently joining the activities built confidence, they learned how to express their thoughts and even changed in appearance.

‘Some of the kids I have seen in the jungle since last summer changed physical appearance. Their faces look so much alive. There are children who I have never heard speaking, are now speaking. Kids who would never look at you in the eye, are now looking at you in the eye. There are those who openly give their opinion about something ‘I like this, I like that’. It’s helping reinforce their sense of self and identity, their likes, their dislikes. All this is important to create a fully formed human.’ (Paola).

Furthermore, they learn different ways to express their creativity and stimulate their curiosity.

‘We give them a way to express their creativity such as painting, drawing, creating stuff so they can talk about what they want and what they hope. They have adults listening to them and letting them know that they are important and that they are valued. We can really see the change’ (Emma)
Some of them, especially those in Grande-Synthe where CT went more regularly, improved their English within two months. Non-formal education helps create a safe space to interact with volunteers, this way children feel confident in telling them about their lives. The 25th March 2019, one of my colleagues reported that two Iraqi sisters - Shaina and Maya, 11 and 10, built confidence and narrated their long journey from Iraq. They narrated how they moved from Bosnia to Italy without food or water, and then moved to France. Narrating is a healing process for traumatic experiences.

Additionally, non-formal educational activities contribute to the goal of giving structure to their daily lives. In fact, children learned the circle games, the activities and the free play options CT and its volunteers brought along, as well as rules using PECs cards.

\[\text{‘Having comfort in the idea we come back, even if they do not know what their life is going to be next day, they still rely on the fact that CT next Saturday will be there again. And that’s really important to give them structure in their timetable.’ (Emma)}\]

Finally, during school time they learn how to help each other and cooperate, rather than being competitive.

\[\text{‘School is a positive influence. They were quick at learning and kind to each other as well. As a rule, we try and make activities not competitive, but some of them have a competitive element in it. They are helping each other, accepting what’s going on and eager to get involved.’ (Susan)}\]

V. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I explored CT’s mission: it is an organization advocating for children’s right to play and to receive an education. Its main objectives are to provide psychological support to children, create a safe learning space, and enable children to develop their self-identity and self-esteem. Also, learning English or French proves vital for children to communicate their needs to volunteers. The provision of non-formal education in hostile conditions such as those in Northern France, means that the structure of the organization is fundamental to maintain the service active. Therefore, planning and expert advice, de-briefing, communication, time allocation and time keeping, the use of PECs cards and badges prove useful to operate in the field, improve and keep the service available, ensure the safety of volunteers and children, and ease communication between the two groups.

The type of activities delivered depends on children’s level of attention and emotional status and the physical space available to do them. This service is not regular as it is on voluntary base - meaning that the organization must stop operating when there are not enough volunteers, and there are often unavailable vehicles. Additionally, the number of children is not constant.
The role of volunteers as educationalists varies. Some of them play the white saviour role, or they see themselves as facilitators, while others are experience seeking, thus applying different approaches to non-formal education, from top down to bottom up. Overall, there is a mutual agreement among volunteers that children participate actively to the activities and they are keen on learning.

According to them non-formal education helps children regulate their emotions and cope with their trauma. It builds their confidence and gives them a means to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Moreover, it nurtures their creativity and stimulates their curiosity to learn new things; it gives a structure to their lives and teaches them how to cooperate and help each other in their daily life. This chapter dealt with non-formal education from the perspective of CT and its volunteers. Next chapter depicts children’s perceptions and demands of their living rights to education, an assessment of non-formal education and some aspects to take into consideration for the continuation of this service.
Chapter 5

Living Rights at Play:
Children’s Perceptions and Actions upon their Living right to Education

Fig. 15. Children involved in a craft activity in Grande-Synthe. (Source: Children Together19)

This chapter examines findings regarding children’s perceptions and actions upon their living right to education in Northern France. It combines findings from the interviews20, observations and informal conversations with three children: Arun, Kaya and Liiza living in three different accommodation centers. Therefore, section I deals with children’s perceptions on their living right to education. Section II shows the point of views of Arun, Kaya and Liiza. Section III offers an overview of children’s demands. Section IV discusses whether CT includes children’s experiences and opinions in its mission. Section V lists the shortcomings of non-formal education in Northern France. Section VI concludes the chapter.

19 The photo belongs to the organization, but for confidential reasons, the original source cannot be disclosed.
20 I selected quotes from the interviews that coincided with my observations on the field.
I. Children’s Perceptions of their Living Right to Education

Children on the move’s perceptions of their living right to education depend on several factors: age and level of education, curiosity and willingness to learn, their opinion about education, their tendency to associate education with formal education and the destination they want to reach.

First, children’s age and whether they attended school before their journey influence significantly their perceptions about education and their engagement in the activities during their stay at the accommodation centers.

‘I think it probably depends on age and whether they were in school before, because the youngest ones probably were never in formal education, and this has been their life: travelling on the road. So, they don’t have a reference point to what is a normal life for a child. The older ones are aware they are missing out something that sets them apart from children their age.’ (Lily)

Consequently, when they lack a comparative reference, they do not feel they are missing something vital for their future. ‘They don’t think it’s their right to go to school, since they are not provided with that right, there is no sense of injustice’ (Paola). Older children, aged between 14 and 16, have a strong opinion about getting an education, because they have attended school before, and they are currently surrounded by adults who talk about their legal rights and asylum claims (Ben). Therefore, those children start thinking about their rights too. Likewise, Kim, states that children’s opinion about education depends on the level of education they have received in the countries of origins.

Second, I observed children show curiosity and willingness to learn while they are attending non-formal educational activities and language classes the organization offers. Children want to learn, or they are keen on school, and demand activities.

‘The majority have a hunger to; they all have that childish inquisitiveness of a child working stuff out. They want school. In a center we go on Thursdays (Small-town) they are desperate for it!’ (Sophie)

In Small-town children are applying for asylum in France and they are continuously asking to go to school. They receive two French classes of an hour each per week, while they are bored for the rest of the time they spend there. Consequently, children do not only perceive education as fundamental for their future, but they are also actively asking for it.

21 Literal word they use when I asked them during the sessions.
'Yes, 100%. I heard parents telling me their children cry because they do not go to school. Some of them have been stuck in the centre for 8 months and the state isn’t letting them. They want education.’ (Paola)

The director of Small-town came to introduce himself and speak with me. He apologised he could not meet with one RWC volunteer who wanted to talk to him to find out ways to send children to school.

‘He underlined that sending children to school would not be possible as they are there only for few months and then they will be sent somewhere else according to their asylum application. This is a paradox, as children are supposed to stay in a centre for a couple of months, instead, they stay longer.’ (Field-notes, 7 March 2019).

Third, many children neither know that they have the right to education, nor that they are entitled to receive more. That is because of the hardship they endured and the little opportunities they had in their country of origin. ‘Life taught them they are not deserving anything and now they believe it’ (Emma).

Fourth, often they associate access to education with formal education and their intended place of destination, which for most of the children in accommodation centers is the UK- except for those requesting asylum in France. Consequently, Lily, Sophie and Susan stress that children live with that idea in mind and forget that they can continue learning before they reach their aimed destinations or when they are waiting for their asylum demand to be processed. The informal conversations with Arun, Kaya and Liiza offer an example of these latter aspects.
II. Informal Conversations with Arun, Kaya and Liiza

During my research I had informal conversations that occurred spontaneously as I was facilitating the activities for children. Among them I selected three significant ones I had with Arun, Kaya and Liiza living in the three accommodation centres. During these conversations we talked about school and what they thought about education.

Fig. 16. Arun, Grande-Synthe, March 2019. (Source: Children Together)

Arun

Arun is a tall, athletic and cheeky 14-year-old Iraqi boy who came together with his sisters, nephews and nieces to Northern France. They walked from Iraq to Europe, crossing through Bosnia and Croatia where they encountered police resistance and were left without food and water for days. His eldest sister taught them English before departure and during their journeys, so that they could communicate in case
of need. They have been living in Grande-Synthe for several months, having to face tensions with other Kurdish families in the accommodation centre (Field-notes, 18 February 2019).

Arun likes meeting new people and joking with them and taking care of his little nephews and niece and play with them. He enjoys playing football where he can express his talent and connect with volunteers. During a session held the 18th of February, he refused to join the older group in an activity about what makes children happy in life. It took a long time to get him involved. Therefore, I asked him whether he liked learning and what he thought about school. He looked at me thoughtful for a couple of minutes. He replied he would love school only when he reached the UK. I asked him why he wanted to wait until he reached the UK to learn. He immediately replied that the UK is better, and he wanted to live there. Likewise, when he was asked to complete the emotions charts at the end of the session, he marked a sad and a happy face. He explained he felt happy because of the volunteers and the activities, but sad because he wanted to reach the UK as soon as possible.

Therefore, he was aware that he was missing school, but he associated education with formal education. Ultimately, building on expectations, he linked school enrolment to the UK- the place of destination.

**Kaya**

The following day, I was in Lille, engaging with children who were colouring and drawing (Field-notes, 19th February 2019). Around twelve children from two to 12 years old were sitting around me and showing me their work. On a corner I noticed Kaya, a girl who looked older than the other children. She was 17-year-old coming from Kurdistan 22. She had some difficulties to communicate in English but was willing to have a conversation with me. I asked her what she thought about education. She told me she liked school and her goal was to finish her studies in the UK. I asked her why she preferred the UK and she replied that education is of good quality, that is why she was looking forward to go there. She stayed close to me for the rest of the session, saying few words from time to time, and interacting with other children.

**Liiza**

The 28th February 2019, I was in Small-town to run a CT session on “self-identity” with Sophie, Fred and Emma. During the activity children were involved in personalizing paper puppets and making them look like themselves. They also learned adjectives in French describing positive qualities they could use to describe their personality. In that room I noticed Liiza, a 13-year-old girl from Chechnya. She

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22 She could not tell me which part of Kurdistan she was coming from.
was wearing a long braid all the time. It was the second time she joined us and was happy to participate in the activity.

After an hour, I was making bracelets with the older children and she sat next to me. I asked her who she came here with. She told me she came to Northern France with her family to have better opportunities. I asked her what her experience was like living in Small-town. She affirmed she did not want to live there anymore as it is a small village with a couple of hundreds of inhabitants. There is no school, no shops, nothing.

Liiza was happy to talk to someone: she spent most of her days being bored or trying to improve her French skills. She wanted to stay in France and learn French to communicate with people when she would go to school, as well as in her daily life. She was disappointed that children living there only received two French classes a week, for an hour: it was too little for her to learn the language as the rest of the day she spoke English with the other children. She showed me the only notebook she had, and she shared with her brother. They were not given school supplies, and she asked me whether she could keep the pen she was using.

The following week, 7 March 2019, the team decided to offer French classes to the older group of children. They all joined Emma, enthusiast they could practice the language with a local person. At the end of the session Liiza came to greet me. I asked her how the class went. She gave me a bright smile and told me she was satisfied by the French class and asked me whether we would go the following week to give French classes again.

**Unaccompanied minors**

I asked Kim, whether unaccompanied minors demand education. She told me it is not their first thought in their minds. They often think about crossing so that they could obtain a job and send the money to their families back home. ‘These children are sent by their parents to get to the UK and send money. That’s what they are thinking about trying every day to get to the UK, earn some money and send it back home.’ (kim).

**Conclusion**

In these informal conversations Arun and Kaya were aware of the importance of school, however, their priority was crossing the border to reach the UK and start school there, rather than being fully involved in the non-formal activities taking place at the accommodation centres. British school is idealized in their minds and taken as a goal to pursue.
Liiza instead, wanted to stay in France and be enrolled in school. She expressed her disappointment about living in Small-town where there was nothing to do and children could not attend school. She was aware that learning French would be useful when she went to school, that is why she actively asked for more French classes.

These conversations confirm that elder children are aware of the situation they live in and that they are missing years of school. Their opinion about education varies according to whether they want to reach the UK, or whether they want to settle down in France. Education is a second priority for those on the move to the UK; a priority for those staying in France and a matter of last concern for unaccompanied minors who mainly would like to find a job to send money back home.

III. Children’s Demands on their Living Right to Education

Fig. 17. Arun’s niece, Grande-Synthe, March 2019 (Source: Children Together)
In the past chapter, volunteers remarked that non-formal educational activities stimulate children’s confidence, creativity, cooperation and curiosity. I observed that within two months of fieldwork they went from being withdrawn or not being able to speak English, to being outgoing and having better language skills to claim their rights and assert their thoughts and opinions, as seen in the conversations with Arun, Kaya and Liiza. Non-formal education activities played a significant role, conferring children critical thinking skills and stimulating their inquisitive curiosity. Children learned how to communicate their demands for activities they would like to do, or to repeat. ‘Definitely, they ask for activities on a regular basis. Maybe activities we brought up before, and we do not offer, they say like ‘we want to do this’ (Ben).

Children ask for circle games or songs who have been previously done, but also for materials such as playdough, colouring books, bracelets kits or stationary materials, books, language classes or school in general.

Children remember games, or materials used previously so that, once they do not see them, they ask for them.

‘When we play games, they remember it. Outside people come to play specific games, and when they see them again, they are happy and want to play again. They are starting to know the games, so they ask for them. ‘Why don’t you have the babies today?’ (Emma)

Moreover, there is a high demand for books. In Grande Synthe some Iraqi children asked for Harry Potter books in Arabic so that they could read it to the family. ‘I asked Arun’s sister, Maya (10 years old) whether her family and her read the books we gave them. She replied that every evening the eldest sister read a chapter to the rest of the family and they already finished it (Field notes, 6 April 2019).’ In Small-town Mara, a 12-year-old Kurdish girl always asked to borrow an English book from the “travelling library” since it was easier for her to understand English rather than French. She would read it in a week and meticulously return it the next session.

After introducing school time in two centers23 children started asking when we held language classes again. In Grande-Synthe where we provided classes on Saturdays, we found children actively asking for school.

‘Some of the children involved in the school session asked whether we would be doing them again, which is great. We often take worksheets out, so sometimes there’s a couple

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23 Grande-Synthe and Small-town.
of children I can think of who always ask for worksheets and really love completing those and they are very proud.’ (Lily)

In Small-town, children, including Liiza, tried to get access to school together with their parents. A volunteer from RWC informed us that parents at the centre were asking for their children to go to school because they did not want them to be around all day and listen to their conversations. A week later, Emma started classes with the eldest children (11-13 years old). The same day the director of the accommodation came to introduce himself. He thanked me for the activities CT was organizing of the children as they kept them busy. He also added that it would be hard to put children into school as they usually stay in the accommodation centre for only a few months and then are sent to others according to their asylum application status. This constitutes a paradox, as even children asking for asylum in France are not offered formal education because of the asylum procedure; yet, when they have non-formal education, it is still not a constant service and not enough to cover their right to education. As a result, children are bored, they demand to have language classes with CT’s volunteers and look forward to seeing them again, even if it is only once per week.

IV. Assessment

Does the Organization Take into Consideration Children’s Living Right to Education?

As shown in chapter 4, non-formal education seems to have a positive effect on children as it helps them regulate their emotions and cope with their trauma. It builds their confidence, nurtures their creativity and stimulates their curiosity to learn new things; it gives a structure to their lives and teach them how to cooperate and help each other in daily life.

Here we saw that non-formal education also stimulates children’s perceptions and demands about education. Arun, Kaya, Liiza are conscious about their living right
to education and often show their thoughts about the activities and voice their demands, asking for other activities or to go to school.

Nevertheless, the organization inclusion of children’s opinions and demands on education is limited. In fact, despite the facilitators’ good intention to use a bottom up approach to co-create the activities, often children’s views are not considered when planning them. Moreover, the living rights approach as explained in the literature, is about considering what children want and experience in their daily life, in this case is how they are experiencing their living right to education. When children are not addressed, there is a tension between the legal notion of right to education enshrined in CT mission and children’s living right to education. This is due to several reasons.

First, there is a dynamic consolidated among volunteers where the idea of a child being highly traumatized from their experiences prevails and hinders volunteers from asking children about their opinions concerning the activities, the kind of education they would like to have or their experiences during their journeys or in the accommodation centers.

Second, volunteers often do not make enough time to ask children for their feedback for the activities, prioritizing the fulfillment of CT’s mission, thus limiting their service to planning and delivering the activities.

Third, volunteers usually base their understanding of children’s living right to education on positive or negative responses to the activities, or participation rates as indicators to understand whether children enjoy the activities or not. However, as Hannah pointed out earlier, they are not good at asking children which activities they want to do.

Fourth, when I asked volunteers whether they think children are conscious about their living right to education, it seemed that they have the static notion of right to education as present in international law in mind, while they rarely considered asking them what they think about education or what they want from their educational service.

Fifth, the use of emotions charts functions as a reference to track children’s vulnerability and prove the impact the organization has on children to obtain more funds, rather than listening to their ideas. Moreover, it also contributes to victimize children, omitting the fact that children can be both victims and agents of their own life. 24This is linked to the idea that there is only one kind of childhood that sees children as powerless individuals to be protected.

24 See the literature used in the “Living Rights Approach” in chapter I section IV.
Sixth, there is a language barrier, especially with the younger ones, impeding volunteers from having extensive conversations with children.

Seventh, based on my observations, volunteers rarely make time to have conversations with children’s parents regarding their children’s previous education and their opinions on the activities offered.

Finally, local authorities’ intervention is spoken of negatively, while positive interventions, such as the story of the Albanian girl Lily cited during her interview who was enrolled in school thanks to the intervention of the local community, are not mentioned. Moreover, Children Together does not seem to forge connections with the local community, which would be beneficial to help the organization advocate for children’s rights to education and facilitate partnerships with local schools, which would ease their access to formal education.

In conclusion, there is a necessity that CT puts its agenda and the tendency of victimizing children on the side, thus starting directly asking children about their demands and recognizing that children are conscious about the world they live in and can have agency upon their lives.

**Non-formal Education in Northern France: Difficulties Observed**

While conducting my fieldwork I observed that, despite the positive outcomes of non-formal education for young migrants in Northern France – besides CT’s lack of inclusion of children’s living right to education, the sustainability of grassroot services such this one would not be possible in the long-run. This is due to the precarious environment conditions in Northern France, the lack of constancy in the service provision, the lack of funds, the lack of trained staff, and the lack of government intervention.

First, the environment conditions are changing. The fact that winter accommodation centers are closing for the summer, means that there will be a change of environment from centers to the “jungles”\(^{25}\). During a planning session the 25\(^{th}\) March 2019, the co-founders highlighted that this meant that the activities would not run as smoothly as in the centers: they would be subject to the weather conditions and there would not be a designated area for children to participate in the activities. Moreover, children will not have the same perception of time, their routines will be unstable, and they will live in a far less safe space. ‘The fact that we are doing that next to their tents, they are not forgetting, they see the space next to them, they know they will take a lorry next day.’ (Paola and Chiara)

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\(^{25}\) The informal settlements, children and families must move to after winter.
Furthermore, the service provided is not persistent. Therefore, non-formal education impact is weakened. Ben affirms ‘Our service is not a structured tool, even if we have good teachers, it’s not regular enough to say it’s adequately meeting their right to education’.

Additionally, when the service stops, children do not receive education. For instance, from the 18\textsuperscript{th} until the 25\textsuperscript{th} of March 2019 CT suspended the activities as some volunteers needed a break and there were some problems with vehicles. This meant that children did not receive schooling or play, except for some activities with RWC. In Lille they did not receive anything at all.

Another problem is the lack of funds. Funds are necessary to pay accommodations for volunteers, transportation back and forth to the accommodation centres and jungles in the future, and more resources for children. Paola affirms that a lack of funds means a lack of infrastructure and volunteers, which impedes the offer of a reliable service.

Volunteers are not professionally trained to work with vulnerable children living in precarious conditions. Some of them lack the expertise to create a curriculum tailored for each age group or they are not trained to teach a language class properly, resulting in few people doing the work for the whole team.

There is a need of government intervention for the sustainability of the project and the offer of educational services. Non-formal education is an initial step to offer children an education. Nevertheless, without government support the continuous provision of these services will not be possible, especially for such a young organization as CT.
There is also a general concern that by providing this non-governmental type of service, the government is less pushed to intervene in this situation, thus absolving the state from its responsibilities.

‘One of the reasons why the state wouldn’t provide food for people was because we were providing food for people. So, they were like ‘oh people are eating, so we do not need to do that. So, like, maybe if we weren’t here doing anything there would be more ways to put pressure on them, we would be like children are not offered anything and we need to be there.’ (Hannah)

Nonetheless, it is necessary to incur some risks to contribute to children’s living right to education and raise awareness of the circumstances children live in, in a country that claims to be the pioneer of human rights.

V. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter findings showed that non-formal educational activities stimulate children’s perceptions and demands about education. Perceptions about education depend on children’s age and previous education; their level of curiosity and willingness to learn, their own idea about education, and their tendency to associate education with formal education in schools and their connection with the destination they want to reach.

On one hand Arun and Kaya wanted to reach the UK and start school there, idealizing British education in their minds and establishing it as a goal to pursue. On the other, Liiza, was aware that learning French would be useful when she would go to school, that is why she actively asked for more French classes and together with other children and their parents asked to be enrolled in schools. Most unaccompanied minors, instead, aimed at reaching the UK and find a job, rather than studying.

Furthermore, from my observations I found out that children actively demand certain activities they like, they ask for new resources, books to read and language classes and in the case of Small-town to be enrolled in school.

Despite, non-formal education positive outcomes, CT’s understanding and inclusion of children’s opinions and demands on education is limited for several factors. Volunteers do not directly ask for children’s point of views as they see them as victims suffering from trauma, they are refrained by the language barrier, or simply they do not make enough time to listen to them. Moreover, the use of positive/negative responses and emotions charts for the activities do not constitute reliable indicators to
understand children’s perceptions and demands. Finally, volunteers’ conversations with parents, links with local authorities and partnerships with schools are limited or inexistent.

Additionally, despite its benefits for young migrants, non-formal education provision may not be sustainable in the long run due to the precarious environment conditions in Northern France, the lack of constancy in the service provision, the lack of funds, the lack of trained staff, and the lack of government intervention.
Chapter 6
Conclusions and Recommendations

Hereby, I start summarizing the chapters and linking them together to obtain a complete overview of the research and answer the main research question and sub-questions. Afterwards, I will provide suggestions on further research and policy recommendation.

I. Theoretical Reflection and Chapter Summaries

In the first chapter I introduced the notion of children on the move as a more inclusive concept, to put the focus on children, rather than their categories (Reale, 2013: 65-66). As seen in the literature, in Europe despite international legal frameworks ratified by member states, states often have the power to freely interpret children’s rights (Bhabha, 2009). As a result, children have unequal access to education. In France, the right to education is often not implemented, especially in Northern France where children live in precarious conditions lacking basic needs and are prevented to enroll in schools, often by local mayors. Therefore, NGOs and their services become alternatives to formal education. Recognizing that children are not only passive victims of government inactions, but also agents upon their lives, thus communicating their demands and expectation even in such precarious circumstances (see Dottrige, 2017; Heidbrink, 2012; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 201; Liebel, 2012; Manzo,2008; Stammers, 2013), I chose to use a living rights approach as lens of analysis of my research to go beyond an assessment of the UNCRC implementation, and understand how non-formal education can contribute to children’s living right to education. This was to fill the gap in research regarding the provision of education in Northern France, evaluate non-formal education as an alternative option to formal education, and contribute to the living rights literature.

In chapter 2, due to the exploratory nature of my research, I extensively elaborated on the methodology and ethical considerations used while conducting my research, which ensured I did not cause any harm to the subjects of my study and respected their privacy. Despite several limitations and challenges encountered, I immersed myself in the reality of Northern France, becoming a full member of the team and gathering useful information about Children Together’s activities and children’s perceptions and demands about education.

Chapter 3 provided the context of my research, which is essential to understand how the circa 70 accompanied and 350 unaccompanied children live in Northern France. There, despite the dismantlement of the Big Jungle in 2016, the situation is still precarious. The inhospitality and lack of basic services of French accommodation centres, as well as the Dublin III regulation pushes children on the move and exiles to converge in Calais, Grande Synthe and Lille to find ways to cross the border.
or wait for their asylum claims to be processed. Consequently, people living in jungles or in provisional accommodation centres[,] suffer police mistreatment and lack basic needs, among which education: a tactic France adopts to discourage people to come to Northern France. In this context, CT is the provider of non-formal educational services, together with other organizations such as RWC and RYS.

In Chapter 4 I asked: *How do NGOs and their volunteers see their role in realizing the right to education and how do they involve children in their policies?* Children Together’s main goals are to provide psychological support to children, create a safe learning space, and enable children to develop their self-identity and self-esteem and acquire English or French language skills. Working in such hostile environment means that the structure of the organization is fundamental to plan and implement the activities on the ground. Activities such as art, craft, sport and language classes vary according to children’s level of attention and engagement. The delivery of activities is not continuous as children’s number varies and the service is on voluntary base - meaning that the organization stops operating when there are not enough volunteers, or unavailable vehicles.

I noticed that some of the volunteers such as Sophie and Ben play the white saviours role, others such as Chiara, Paola, Kim, Lily, Susan and Hannah are facilitators, while others are experience seekers, thus applying different approaches to non-formal education, from top-down to bottom-up.

According to volunteers non-formal education helps children regulate their emotions and cope with their trauma. It builds their confidence and gives them a means to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Moreover, it nurtures their creativity and stimulates their curiosity to learn new things; it gives a structure to their lives and teaches them how to cooperate and help each other in daily life.

Within CT there is a mutual agreement that children participate actively to the activities and they are keen on learning, although its volunteers are not fully addressing children’s living right to education as I explain in chapter 5.

Chapter 5 asked the question: *How do children on the move perceive and act upon their living right to education? Are there tensions between NGOs mission and their views about non-formal education and children living right to education?* To answer this question, I used observations and informal conversations with children I worked with as well as parts of interviews that reflected what I have observed on the ground. Findings illustrated that non-formal educational activities stimulate children’s perceptions and demands about education. They want to learn and participate, although involvement is not always constant. Children such as Arun and Kaya were planning to move to the UK and associated education with the formal education they expected to get there, thus getting less engaged in the activities. In Small-town, children such as Liiza, actively asked volunteers for French classes, and participated in the activities. Together with their parents, they asked to be enrolled in local schools.
Furthermore, they requested new resources, books and language classes. This shows that children are active agents with regards to their living right to education. However, I observed that Children Together, despite most of the volunteers were trying to use a bottom-up approach in planning and delivering the activities, had a limited understanding and inclusion of children’s opinions and demands. The reason is that they view children as vulnerable and traumatized; hence they rarely ask them what they want or need from the educational activities offered. Finally, despite its benefits for young migrants, non-formal education may not be sustainable in the long run due to the precarious environment conditions in Northern France, the lack of constancy in the service provision, the lack of funds, the lack of trained staff and the lack of government intervention.

In sum, through an exploratory journey, I sought to understand how non-formal education substitutes formal education and can contribute to children’s living rights to education in a hostile context such as Northern France. Findings suggested that non-formal education is beneficial to children’s psychological well-being, stimulates their curiosity, fosters cooperation as well as helping them learn a new language. Moreover, non-formal education stimulates children’s perceptions and demands about education, thus contributing to their living right to education and proving that children can also have agency upon their lives. Nevertheless, non-formal education will not fully contribute to children’s living right to education until NGOs, such as Children Together\textsuperscript{26} understand that children’s points of views should be taken into account. The common preconception also found in the literature that children are only passive victims, confines them to a static image of childhood where children are vulnerable and dependent on adults. Nevertheless, as chapter 5 demonstrated especially through Arun, Kaya and Liiza’a accounts, children too have agency and are conscious about their living right to education. Volunteers do not always ask them direct questions, however, by asking them what they want and which activities they need, NGOs can model programs that are meaningful for children’s development and growth (Dottridge, 2013:8). Talking with parents and fostering links with government, local actors and schools may be beneficial for enrolling children in schools and organizing exchange of experiences with local children. Yet, to ensure non-formal education effectiveness as an alternative to formal schooling, there is a need of government intervention. This is to enable access to schools, or if that is not possible for bureaucratic reasons, it should fund NGOs programs to recruit trained staff and offer a regular education provision. This latter can be possible by offering basic needs to people and ensuring a peaceful environment, without the involvement of police forces. Only in this way can NGOs fulfill children’s living right to education and France adhere to international law and the right to education.

\textsuperscript{26} Deemed to be grassroot ones.
II. Further Research Recommendation

This research attempted to include children’s perspectives. Nevertheless, CT pre-conception that children are traumatized and victims, prevented me to conduct official in-dept interviews with them, thus limiting my data to observations and informal conversations. Therefore, I suggest that a similar research should be replicated, directly interviewing children.

Moreover, research using participatory methods could be useful to further understand children’s living right to education. Another idea for research would be to maintain contact with children and ask them about their wants and needs after their arrival to the UK, to understand whether their living right to education has changed after school enrollment.

Furthermore, including perspectives of schoolteachers and government officials, may be helpful to understand the situation, and further explain why France, despite adhering to human rights law, does not respect the right to education and find solutions to enroll children in schools. The erratic situation for migrants in Northern France, willing to cross the Channel to the UK is like the one in Bosnia and Serbia, as well as Ventimiglia, Italy. Therefore, a comparative study, applying a living right approach to education and including children’s views and demands would be useful to understand how to solve a lack of compliance to human rights law in these states, and Europe in general.

III. Policy Recommendation

Despite non-formal education positive outcomes, it is not sustainable in the long run: it is not regularly provided and does not fully contribute to children’s living right to education: children want to be enrolled in regular schools. Therefore, government intervention is needed. France should consider upholding the right to education as ratified in the international law documents it has signed, by allowing asylum seeking children in France to be enrolled in schools or alternatively, paying teachers to offer regular classes in accommodation centers; providing funds and facilitating non-formal education provision for those willing to reach the UK. As I contend in the context chapter, police violence does not prevent migrants from converging to Calais, Grande-Synthe and Lille. Therefore, the French government should consider stopping police violence against migrants, including accompanied and unaccompanied children and create a more peaceful environment for their well-being and for volunteers to operate safely on the ground.

Although CT’s non-formal activities stimulate children’s perceptions and demands about education, they are mainly seen as victims and traumatized individuals. Therefore, the organization should recognize children’s agency and adopt a more bottom-up approach to its practices, putting its goals on the side and asking children what they really want from the activities as well as their past experiences. Only in this way programs such as this can have a meaningful impact for children.
Additionally, I noticed volunteers did not seek cooperation with local people, authorities or schools in its mission. Seeking cooperation with those actors is fundamental to enable children to be enrolled in schools, or alternatively, receive funds from local municipalities to make their programmes sustainable. Partnerships with schools would allow children to experience formal educational activities and eventually be enrolled in schools, and raise French children’s awareness about the situation in which their peers live in.
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Annex. Table 2 – Children mentioned in the study.

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