

Introduction

The research study *Creation and Care: Application of New Lifestyles and Interaction of Young People With Vulnerable Social Groups/Groups of People in Need* is a part of the CREATE Laudato Si' post-doc scholarship at the Faculty of Social Sciences (Angelicum). We based our research study on Pope Francis' call in the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* and on the concept of integral ecology. The principal investigator was Dr Miriam Mary Brgles and the supervisor Prof. Cristiano Colombi. The research process is divided into several phases over a period of two years, and is placed in Zagreb (Croatia) and Rome (Italy). Students of the Department of Sociology of the Croatian Catholic University (CUC) and students of the STRONG program of the Faculty of Social Sciences (Angelicum) participated in the data collection process. The students from the STRONG group who participated are: Viola Banaj, Haidee Granados Gurierrez, Ana Maria Ilagan, Oana Gabriela Iorga, Luisa Liliana Rojas Ortiz, Cecilia Salaices, Gudnar Zapata. For the STRONG group we created a new methodological course "Qualitative interview and Arts-Based Research". The main goal of the course was to discuss how to conduct field research and what are the different methods (qualitative interview and arts-based research). Students showed enthusiasm and great interest in collecting data, and their role in this project was extremely important. In particular, the role of students of the STRONG program was relevant because they were "gatekeepers". As migrants or children of migrants, they belong to a vulnerable social group and had an insider position, which is very important in qualitative research.

Insiders can strengthen their own social status, but also the status of their communities, because the research gives them the opportunity to make their "voice" heard. The positioning of the researcher depends on "the aspects of an insider researcher's self or identity which is aligned or shared with participants" (CHAVEZ, 2008, p. 475 through FLEMING, 2018, p. 312). An insider researcher could be defined as someone who shares a particular characteristic such as gender, ethnicity or culture with those being studied, whereas

the outsider researcher could be defined as someone who does not share the same characteristics mentioned above (MERCER, 2007). Historically, insider research was undertaken in ethnographic studies in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (HELLAWELL, 2006 through FLEMING, 2018, p. 312).

The first results of the project were presented on October 22, 2022 at the Angelicum. The event had a symbolic title *Create and Care: Insiders' Perspectives*. At the event, students of the STRONG group presented the research process and collected artistic data (photographs, videos, poem etc.). This way, the concept of integral ecology and the implementation of new lifestyles have been brought closer to a wider public. On the same day, the Department of Sociology of CUC gave an award to the student Lovro Knežević for participating in the research project.

1. Theoretical Framework, Research Objective and Research Questions

Apart from his direct call, the appeal for inclusion in the protection of the "common home", Pope Francis points out that the world is faced "not with two separate crises, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (LS 139). This central part of the encyclical, which talks about integral ecology, including environmental ecology, economic ecology and social ecology, as well as cultural ecology and ecology of everyday life, is the basis of the primary reflection of the research. The cognitive novelty of the social and environmental crisis can be the starting point of sociological research too. According to Goffman (1956), the actions of actors depend upon their relationships with others. Therefore, the interactionist approach can adequately serve as a theoretical basis for

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sociological research on integral ecology, since the relationship of the actor with others, as well as with the environment, is connected with his actions. The precondition for action is listening to social reality and to the state of the environment. The other sociological theory we used in this research is Beck's (cosmopolitan) risk theory. Beck (1996) argues that one should think about environmental problems as the "inner" world of society. Beck (2010, p. 267) believes that there is no longer any doubt that climate change globalizes and radicalizes social inequalities within national contexts and on a global scale, as we already stated (BRGLES et al., 2021). The goal of the Pope's call is to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and then to act. According to Pope Francis it is "time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not." (*Meditation*, p. 5) The establishment of environmentally sustainable behaviours and habits is a response to the call of Pope Francis, and when they are public or presented in everyday life, they send a clear message about the new lifestyle that has been created.

Pope Francis' methodology of integral ecology, according to Scheremeta (2020), consists of a triad: see-assess-act! Therefore, in this research, in addition to the overall goal, six research questions that follow the triad were posed, and they are related to: creation (reflections of young people, the role of young people in creating new lifestyles), and care of young people for those in need, i.e. actions and interactions between young people and vulnerable social groups/people in need.

Research questions range from more general to more narrow in order to obtain in-depth data following a central research question aimed at identifying the meaning that young people attach to new lifestyles based on integral ecology, and

the statement that “everything is connected” (LS 91-92). The statement is an ethical requirement for understanding the ontological connection and interdependence of different areas of human life, including the personal, social, economic, and environmental spheres (SCHEREMETA, 2020). Therefore, the characteristics of new lifestyles and the role of young people in promoting new habits, such as using public transport or bicycles, avoiding food waste, sustainable fashion and clothing, waste separation and avoiding the use of plastic, were explored.

The overall objective of the research was to analyse and describe new youth lifestyles and interactions with vulnerable groups/people in need, based on integral ecology

2. Research Questions:

- How do young people perceive “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”, and how do they interpret it?
- What are the characteristics of new lifestyles based on integral ecology, and what is the role of young people in promoting new habits?
- What meanings do young people attach to new lifestyles?
- What forms of interaction between young and vulnerable social groups are applied, and within which context (work on projects, in associations, participation in events, continuous or one-time volunteering etc.)?
- What meanings do vulnerable groups/people in need (homeless, disabled, socially disadvantaged) attach to new lifestyles?
- How does the socioeconomic status of vulnerable social groups/people in need reflect on the implementation of activities related to environmental care?

3. Participants and the Role of Youth

In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasizes the role of youth (LS 209) while “their sensitivity to this issue inspires them to take the initiative, an initiative that should not be dismissed, but instead accompanied and encouraged” (*Journeying*, p. 40). It is therefore important to explore what interactions young people have with vulnerable social groups, and which actors and/or contexts encourage and/or inspire them to take responsibility for those in need (parish communities, family, peers, civil society organizations, volunteer communities and the like). Vulnerable social groups (migrants, socially disadvantaged, people with disabilities) were also included in the research in order to highlight their voices as well as to identify the meanings that they attach to new lifestyles based on integral ecology, and to find out how their socioeconomic status is reflected in the implementation of activities regarding environmental care. We engaged the group of young people (Croatia) and the group of migrants (Italy) and established “insider research groups”. “Insider research is said to exist on a continuum that is dependent on the closeness of the researcher to the aspect being researched” (MERCER, 2007; TROWLER, 2011 through FLEMING, 2018, p. 311). A total of 80 participants between 18 and 80 years old were recruited in Croatia and Italy.

4. Research Methodology and Ethical Considerations

An innovative methodological approach was chosen, combining qualitative research methods (semi-structured interview) with arts-based research (ABR). ABR has not yet been applied in research

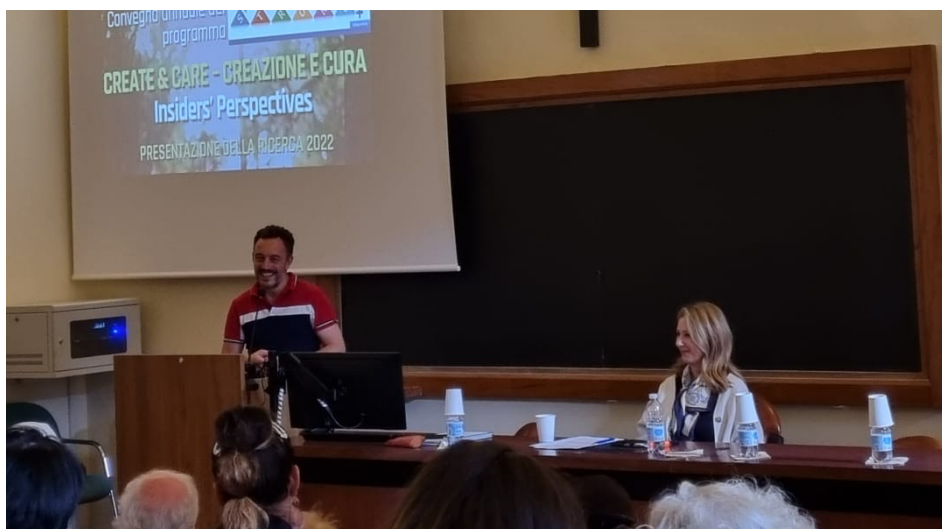
related to the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, but through previous promotional activities of *Laudato Si'*, the importance of art in articulating and solving the issues that the encyclical speaks of has been brought to light. ABR questions are generally inductive, emergent, and generative (LEAVY, 2020).

A common method of data collection in insider research involves interviews. However, the insider researcher must be aware of the potential for “informant bias and they need to be ‘wise’ to the impact their position, as an insider, has on the interview process and prepare and plan appropriately to ensure that any bias is minimized” (FIELDING, 2018, pp. 313-314). In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument who can jeopardize the validity of the research. However, when researchers are actively involved participants in the field, a strengthened validity can be achieved because the symbolic “power” of the researcher is reduced. The phrase *researcher-as-instrument* refers to the researcher as an active respondent in the research process (HAMMERSLEY – ATKINSON, 1995). Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (CRESWELL – MILLER, 2000, through CRESWELL, 2014).

All participants were introduced to the purpose and goal of the research and signed an informed consent form. They were able to cancel their participation in the research at any time and to withdraw the data submitted to the researcher until the final report was written and the final event organized. The research study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Croatia.

Arts-based research methods can be flexibly applied in a variety of contexts and can serve as an effective bridge between generations, cultures, socioeconomic classes and people who are divided along habitual lines (VAART et al., 2018). Arts-based practices can also promote dialogue, which is critical to cultivating understanding. (LEAVY, 2020, p. 53)

According to the classification of arts-based research by Wang et al. (2017), we used the *Art in research* method, which implies that art is actively used by participants in one or more phases of a research process. Arts-based research implies participatory research: active participation in which participants are equal to the researcher, i.e. they are conducting the re-



search alongside the researcher (WANG et al. 2017), and a relationship of trust is established. In this way, we will be able to obtain deep data, which reveals which meanings the participants attach to new lifestyles. Also, it facilitates richer reflection and dialogue, and enables participants to better articulate participants' unique experiences (WANG et al. 2017).

Outcomes and Next Steps

The first task was a literature review that provides context (i.e. literature and theory relevant to the study) and a justification for the research questions. Then we prepared a final work plan, informed consents, an interview protocol and documentation for the Ethics Committee. After the confirmation received from the Ethics Committee, we translated the documents and started implementing the field study. We made a sample selection and talked with the community during which we collected the informed consents. The field research was conducted in a natural setting in Italy and Croatia because in a natural environment participants feel more relaxed and are not induced to give socially desirable answers. During the first year we conducted 69 interviews in Croatia and 11 interviews in Italy and collected 36 ABR products in various forms (drawings, photos, videos, collage, poem, fiction and memes etc.) in Croatia and 6 ABR (videos, photo elicitation, poem, autoethnography, photos) in Italy. We presented the paper *The Virtues and Power of Researchers in Arts-Based Research* at the 5th International Scientific Conference European Realities – Power in Osijek (the co-organizer and publisher was Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts)¹ and submitted the manuscript for a conference proceedings. We made a transcription of all interviews, carried out data validation and started data analysis (coding). As we stated in the Introduction, the first results of the study were presented on October 22, 2022 at the event *Create and Care: Insiders' Perspectives*. The event was held in the very well-known Aula 11 on Angelicum, where the Saint Pope John Paul II defended his doctoral thesis. Students showed innovative lifestyles and values of a wide range of people with a migration background (such as first and second generation migrants), highlighting the richness produced by multicultural experiences. In Zagreb, we have visited the Caritas Soup Kitchen and started collaboration with Fr Vladimir Vidović, Head of the Kitchen. With him we will organize the donation dinner in June 2023 in Zagreb and present

the ABR results to the audience. We believe that ABR as used in our study can help our audience (not just the academic one!) to better understand the cry of the Earth and cry of the poor. 'Receivers' of the message will acquire new knowledge, while ABR helps in sharing knowledge through art; knowledge disseminated in this way often enables a more empathetic participation of the viewers, stimulates new forms of public dialogue and may advocate social changes (COLANTONIO et al., 2008; GERGEN – GERGEN, 2011, through WANG, et al. 2017).

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1. <http://www.uaos.unios.hr/eng/5th-international-scientific-conference-european-realities-power/> (last accessed 06.12.22).

