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Community Theater and Resilience: The Case of the Greek Diasporic Community Theater in Brussels

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ABSTRACT

After 1981, with Greece's accession into the European Economic Community (EEC), as today's European Union (EU) was called at the time, the Greek diasporic phenomenon was transformed and the Greek theatrical mobility was mainly related to the recruitment of Greek officials to the EU institutions and organizations. For the next 40 years, the Greek Diasporic Community Theater (DCT) of Brussels has become a participatory field of integration and Greek troupes have begun to proliferate, influenced by the demographic, ideological, and socio-structural changes that have taken place both in Greece and Belgium in recent decades. The present paper studies and presents the causes of the artistic resilience of the Greek Diasporic Community Theater (DCT) in Brussels. The case of the Greek DCT in Brussels is such a unique case of DCT, which operates continuously and systematically from the early 1980s until today, flourishing and presenting unprecedented signs of resilience.

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Community Theater (CT)

Community Theater is built by the community for the community. The participants are usually volunteers, amateur actors, who take on a variety of responsibilities to accomplish the artistic, performing goal. The performers of the community performances and the audience develop their artistic sensibilities and acquire an active participatory role in the community by gaining a "voice" through the participatory theater. The development of dialog around the issues that are brought to the surface by Community Theater (hereafter referred to as CT) is the greatest benefit for the civil society, as Paulo Freire first mentioned (2018).

During the second half of the 20th century (Hess, 1955; Schoell, 1953; Work, 1948) and the current first two decades of the 21st century, the Community Theater is studied by a large number of scholars of the performing arts, ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and so on. Especially in recent years it has been revealed that CT strengthens various areas of human life. Information related to scientific issues and/or concerning society, such as nutrition, can be disseminated through CT (Fredland, 2010; Underwood et al., 2017) or abnormal behaviors such as bullying (Fredland, 2010), or violence (O'Connor & Colucci, 2016), hate and discrimination (McKenna, 2014). Weltsek (2019) argued that the positive effects of CT in higher education communities are related to the self-perception of the

participants, and political issues are arised (Warren, 2019) in higher education communities through theater. Sloane and Wallin (2013) proved that CT promotes the integration of refugees (Klapproth, 2014). Also CT empowers the LGBTQQ community (Wernick et al., 2014), contributes substantially to the development action of rural areas, e.g., in Nigeria (Betiang, 2010), in Argentina (Kunin, 2019), and Roy (2007) indicated how CT could enrich the life of a person with special needs. In addition, CT has been effectively utilized as a vehicle for AIDS education by the Johannesburg City Health Department (Evian, 1992) and prevented the spread of AIDS in Tanzania (Johansson, 2011; BCA 2002). It has been used not only in low-income African communities but also in Japan (Sandhu et al., 2021) or Italy (Rossi Ghiglione, 2017) as a means of promoting public health, e.g., by improving knowledge and awareness of cancer preventive health behaviors (Landa et al., 2018; Rochon et al., 2011). Additionally, CT is used as an awareness tool for environmental issues (Brown, 2014). Participation in CT offers to the participants undeniable interpersonal benefits (Moats, 2014) and new social skills (Hartigan, 2012). Van Erven (2000) measured the effects of CT and its positive community impact. With qualitative research, Forenza (2017) indicated that CT is able to promote individual (psychological empowerment) in civil society.

Also, from time to time, various methodologies and theories have been used to highlight the benefits of CT. Kramer (2005) took advantage of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and proved that the benefits of joining a Community Theater group outweigh the costs of joining the group. And when we talk about costs we mean personal time and teamwork. Forenza and Tredinnick utilized the Sense of Community (SOC) theory to prove that Community Theater facilitates social inclusion and community progress, as it generates participatory feelings, which are “a key component” of SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). They also argue that individual participation in Community Theater prevents social exclusion, expands social networks, and builds relationships (Forenza & Tredinnick, 2020).

Diasporic Community Theater (DCT)

Theater has always been a tool of cultural integration in multicultural environments for the diasporic and migrant communities (Sayles, 1993). In recent years, issues of diasporic imagination have occupied immigration studies (Nathans, 2005) and the diasporic identity is consciously enriched with cultural and esthetic features (Jones, 2005). However, the Diasporic Community Theater (hereafter referred to as DCT) studies are occasional and some indicative cases are mentioned: Dharwadker (2011) recorded India’s theatrical diasporic formations, while several scholars have studied also other theatrical diasporic Asian identities (Chambers, 2020; Chavda, 2015; Dadswell, 2009; Dadswell & Ley, 2009; Lei, 2003; Ley, 2010; Mackerras, 2005; Wang, 2015). The Italian DCT has been already studied by Aleandri (1999, 2006), Estavan (1991), Wissner (2010), and Muscio (2019). Studies on African diasporic identity have been conducted with an emphasis on the performing arts and the postcolonial drama as Matzke’s and Okagbue’s (2009), Ekumah-Asamoah’s (2015), Lee’s (1995), and Goyal’s (2010), and Dickinson’s (2002). Knowles (2009, 2012), Batchelor (2020) and Bhatia (2013) recorded DCT cases in Canada. Also, the Greek DCT lists important studies of Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou (2007, 2008), Kanarakis (2008), Spanoudes (2008), Moudatsakis (2008), and Diakoumopoulou (2008), etc. With regards

to German DCT, Haenni (2003) argued that in New York it was the model for other ethnic troupes in the United States. There are also many other modern studies which are not mentioned here; all of them compose the world stories of the diasporic theater.

Chiu (2019) indicated that the performances of the migrant community are a “touch on intimacy,” because, as Gilbert and Lo (2010) explained, the diaspora is a space of interaction, where memory and imagination prevail. These are the basic components of migration, but also of the theatrical action. Through theater we can identify the effects of global mobility and realize that DCT is a means of interconnectedness.

The Greek DCT, already from the end of the 19th century until the mid-20th century continuously, develops theatrical diasporic troupes in Europe, America, Africa, Australia, and Asia. In the early diasporic communities, immigrant performances were usually monocultural, extremely realistic, and their subject matter drew from the trauma of exile. After the middle of the 20th century, the Greek DCT ceases to recycle the lived experience of expatriation and, in some cases, incorporates modern documentary trends, and renews the repertoire. We need to be aware that global diasporas are not superficial but differ and have peculiarities that we must always identify and take into account; the case of the DCT in Brussels is such a unique case of DCT, which operates continuously and systematically from the early 1980s until today, flourishing and presenting unprecedented signs of resilience. The present paper studies and presents the causes of this artistic resilience.

Greeks in Brussels

Brussels, the “de facto” administrative “Capital of Europe” or the “polycentric and opportunistic capital” (Hein, 2006) is a center of power that attracts people from all over the world. The study of Brussels, the European microcosm, with ethnographic and anthropological, teatrological, etc., tools, is a scientific opportunity to understand all the socio-political European phenomena (Blainey, 2016). Citizens from other European cities come together to work mainly in the European Union institutions. This multicultural attraction has resulted in Brussels becoming a fast-growing place with a high standard of living (Buffel et al., 2014).

A total of about 18,000 Greeks lives in Brussels today, and many of them work in the European Institutions. Greek immigrants in Belgium (Ventura, 2002, 1999) (the immigrants in '50s were coal miners) have been developing cultural activities since the early 1960s with an emphasis on the performing arts. After 1981, with Greece's accession into the European Economic Community (EEC), as today's European Union (EU) was called at the time, the Greek diasporic phenomenon was transformed and the theatrical mobility was mainly related to the recruitment of Greek officials to the EU institutions and organizations. For the next 40 years, the Greek DCT of Brussels has become a participatory field (Erel et al., 2017) of integration and Greek troupes have begun to proliferate, influenced by the demographic, ideological, and socio-structural changes that have taken place both in Greece and Belgium in recent decades.

Greek Diasporic Community Theater (DCT) in Brussels

As far as Greek immigrants are concerned, this is an ideal intra-European mobility treaty. It is a unique post-migration case: the Greek immigrant employees in the Institutions of the European Union have a higher standard of living, being included in high-status prestige

professions, located only a few hours away from Greece and having a relatively low cost, “back-home” flight. The framework conditions of the Greek DCT in Belgium are a privileged artistic field, where the collective identity is constantly activated, and at the same time, the Greekness is highlighted in the multicultural environment of Brussels. The theatrical activity of the Greek-speaking community in the Belgian capital is a process of searching for and preserving the Greek identity, a demand for ethno-linguistic vitality, language enhancement, and the ability for ethnic cultural self-determination, at a time that the traditional migration education does not succeed to meet this goal alone (Cantone, 2020).

The Greek DCT in Brussels does not produce cultural events always cut off from the migration phenomenon. After all, these events are performed by people who have experienced the migration, even though under ideal conditions; the aspiration and the ability to migrate (Carling & Schewel, 2018). The Greek DCT in multicultural Brussels is mainly “Greek” and then “theater,” it plays mainly a social role and secondarily an artistic one. However, the Greek Diasporic Troupes formed a cultural policy and gained access and a significant presence in the cultural spaces of the city. Until COVID-19 ceased its theatrical activity, there were eight DCT troupes. Studying the Greek DCT, the flourishing and development of the Greek Community’s theatrical troupes in Brussels is a rare and a unique theatrical case. The ratio of spectators to the troupes is one troupe for about 2000 spectators, and this pluralism is related to the “artistic specialization” of each troupe. That is, each troupe maintained a stable share of the audience thanks to the different repertoire. The leader of each troupe had a different dramatic orientation and occupied his own “personal artistic space”.

Troupe of the “Hellenic Community” of Brussels

The systematic theatrical activity of the “Hellenic Community” troupe began in the early 1980s and thrived mainly in the 1990s. The director Dimitris Argyropoulos is also the elected president of the Greek Community. The members of the troupe often come from migrant working-class neighborhoods and “although their initial financial capital is not significant, they have managed to forge a significant cultural capital” (Costanzo & Zibouh, 2014). All other Greek troupes mainly consist of highly qualified expatriates Greeks, who work in the European Union institutions. As directors of the Theatrical Group of the Greek Community should also be mentioned Tasos Nychas, who directed Menandros’ “Epitrepontes” (“The Arbitration”) and Giannis Gavras who directed “To Fintanaki” (“The Young Girl”) by Pantelis Horn in co-production with the Macedonian Union of Belgium, produced by Aristeides Lavrentzos.

“The troupe of the Greek Community of Brussels gave the opportunity to many actors from all walks of life in Greek society in Brussels to express themselves in theatrical art with their original talent and without any unnecessary sophistication. Such is indeed the theatrical expression that reigns in the Greek Community of Brussels. Simplicity, cordiality, humor. Many of the actors then played and still play in other theatrical groups in the city. Open to all the Greek troupes of the city, the Greek Community of Brussels contributed to their creation and/or support whenever needed”.¹

Concerning repertoire (in English approximate translation), the Greek Community performed three plays: “Von Dimitrakis” by Dimitris Psathas, “Golfo” by Spyridon Peresiadis and “The Vision of Liberation,” a patriotic Greek play about Epirus, by Lambros Malamas, already at the beginning of the 1980s. In the early 90s the performances thicken: “A Liar is Needed” by Dimitris Psathas (presented in Brussels and Charleroi, in the context of the events of the Association of Epirotes), “An Italian Woman from Kypseli” by Polyvios Vassiliadis and Nikos Tsiforos, “Some Tired Guys” by Kostas Pretenteris and Asimakis Gialamas, “I Am Not Me or The Logic” by Grigorios Xenopoulos, “Miss 39 Years Old” by Alekos Sakellarios, “My Wife Went Crazy” by Polyvios Vassiliadis and Nikos Tsiforos, and the plays of Dimitris Psathas, “The Crosspatch,” “The Insatiable,” “Wake up Vassilis,” “The Card Game,” “The Thief Shouts,” “Madame Sousou,” and so on.

Atelier Théâtral Grec. Head/Director: Tasos Nychas

In February 1984, the Atelier Théâtral Grec was born in Brussels and “. . . continues to this day by Greek employees of the community institutions not only out of love for the theater but also out of a need for a more direct social relationship in the living conditions of Brussels.”² Although it consists mainly of Greek employees of community institutions, the troupe is open to anyone Greek speaker interested in theater. From 1984, with a lot of personal work and without any external financial support, with the help of only those who actively participate each time, the troupe manages to meet the requirements of a historic one that is forced to operate with several restrictions.

The first project was performed in June 1985, as it took some time for the necessary procedures to stabilize the troupe and select the appropriate play, the not presented until then of the important Greek playwright George Skourtis, who honored with his presence this first fundamental performance, “The Trial of Orpheus and Eurydice.” During the period from the first performance until today, sixty (60) plays were presented, almost exclusively from the Greek repertoire. Only A. Chekhov’s play “A Marriage Proposal” and Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” have been presented by the European theater for specific reasons: firstly in a joint performance with the work of D. Koromilas “The Death of Pericles” because of the same era, theme, and plot, secondly because they used the cheerful adaptation of the playwright Giannis Kalatzopoulos, suitable for children’s stage. These works cover almost all types of theater – from comedies (“The Civil Servant” by M. Hourmouzis) to dramas (“Unshaved Chins” by G. Tsiros), from classical (“Women at the Thesmophoria” by Aristophanes) to modern (“The Four Legs of the Table” by I. Kampanellis) and contemporary theater (“The Penalty” by G. Paloumbis), and from musical theater (“A Song for Two” by Nancy Pascal) to poetic (“. . . and loulia” by A. Dimou) and other monologues (“Adriana” by Th. Papageorgiou) as well as to documentary theater (“The History of Self-Sacrifice” by the SKROW Theater Group). An important part of the Atelier Théâtral Grec is the theater “both for children and with children.” Many generations of children from 5 to 17 years old passed from the theater stage from 1996 to 2008 “and were nurtured in the secrets of this exceptional art, enriching themselves, but also entertaining the Brussels audience”.

Y-GREC, Head/Director: Giannis Gavras

In May 1992, Giannis Gavras together with Gérard Emion and Luc Battiéu founded the theatrical group Y-GREC. The group since then consists of both French-speaking and Greek-speaking actors. Most of the troupe's performances are in French, but they attract also the Greek-speaking audience. The troupe has performed in French ancient Greek tragedies, classical European repertoire, and contemporary European playwrights (Loula Anagnostaki, Vassilis Katsikonouris, Agnès Jaoui, Jean-Pierre Bacri, etc). In 2017, the troupe received the Trophée Royal (the first prize) for the performance "Trojan Women" from the competition organized by the Ministry of Culture of Brussels for amateur teams. The remarkable repertoire of the troupe includes the plays: "Fool for Love" – Sam Sheppard (French), "Persians" – Aeschylus (French), "Pantagleize" – Michelde Ghelderode (French), "Electra" – Sophocles (French), "Antigone" – Sophocles (French), "Tonight we Improvise" – Luigi Pirandello (French), "Zorbas the Greek" – (adaptation) Nikos Kazantzakis (French), "Last Regrets Before Oblivion" – Jean-Luc Lagarce (French), "The Bacchae" – Euripides (French), "The Honorable Maid" – Carlo Goldoni (French), "Paradise Hotel" – Georges Feydeau (French), "The Tailoring Shop" – Jean-Claude Grumberg (French), "The Seagull" – Anton Chekhov (French), "Trojan Women" – Euripides (adaptation by J. P. Sartre) (French), "A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" – Tennessee Williams (French), "Les liaisons dangereuses" – Christopher Hampton (French), "The Sound of the Gun" – Loula Anagnostaki (Greek), "Un air de famille" – J. L. Bacri and Agnes Jaoui (Greek), "The Milk" – Vassilis Katsikonouris (Greek), "The Reunification of North and South Korea" – Joel Pommerat (French), "Miss Margarida's Way" – Roberto Ataynte (Greek).

Hellenic Theater of Belgium, Head: Management board. Director: Several Directors, most often Giannis Gavras

The Hellenic Theater of Belgium (HTHB) was created in the early 90s by a group of Greeks from Brussels, who, with a love for theatrical art, motivated by offering, creating, and participating in the community, began the first theatrical events that led to the creation of Hellenic Theater of Belgium (1992). The troupe supports modern Greek drama by selecting plays mainly by modern Greek playwrights: "Poor Youth" – Pretenteris/Gialamas, "The Courtyard of Miracles" – Iakovos Kampanellis, "Karagiozis a Little Vezyris" – G. Skourtis, "Laurels and Oleanders" – D. Kechaidis/E. Xaviara, "The Red Lanterns" – A. Galanos, "The Dialogue" – Iakovos Kampanellis, "The Architect" – F. Trezou, "Klytaimnistra" – A. Staikos, "Lysistrata" – Aristophanes, "The Ceremony" – P. Matesis, "Antigoni's Arranged Marriage" – V. Ziogas, "Women Prefer the Hard Ones" – N. Tsiforos/P. Vassiliadis, "By Force from Kifissia" – D. Kehaidis/E. Xaviara, "Woe to the Young" – Ch. Giannakopoulos/A. Sakellarios, "The Vestibule" – Giovanna, "Midas has Donkey Ears" – M. Korres (co-production with the Atelier Théâtral Grec), "The Lady has Nerves" – D. Giannoukakis, "The Road Passes Through" – Iakovos Kampanellis, "The Babies are Brought by the Stork" – Th. Papathanassiou/M. Reppas, "The General Secretary" – Elias Kapetanakis (co-production with the Atelier Théâtral Grec), "Romeo and Juliet" – Bost, "The Temptation" – Grigoris Xenopoulos, "The Cassette" – Loula Anagnostaki, "Petty Bourgeois Law" – Pavlos Matesis, "Tonight we Eat at Iokasti's" – Akis Dimou, "Noises off" – Michael Frayn, "Blood Wedding" –

Federico Garcia Lorca, "Eight Women" – Robert Thomas, "Seven Reasonable Answers" – Leonidas Prousalidis, "Letter to Orestis/The Funeral Speech" – Iakovos Kampanellis, "The Life Before Us" – Romain Gary (Emile Ajar).

Theatrical troupe of the Lyceum of Greek Women in Brussels, Head: Management board, Directors: Maria Karahaliou and Giannis Economidis

The Theatrical Troupe of LEB (Lyceum of Greek Women in Brussels) was created in 1998 in the context of the cultural events of LEB, which was founded in 1992 with the aim of cultivating and promoting the Greek national cultural heritage. This theatrical troupe includes children and adults who have a special interest in artistic creation. To date, the following performances and events have taken place: "Sun, Sun and Rain" – Z. Valasi, "The Shepherdess' Lover" – D. Koromilas, "Let the Dances Keep ...," "Greek Immigration: Memories," "Half-open Window in Memory-There Polytechnio," "To Enter Through the Window in Smyrna" – M. Karahaliou/G. Economidis, "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" – B. Brecht, translated by Odysseas Elytis, "Moirai@Strofilia.com," "Cine Stars. Today Greek film" – M. Karahaliou/G. Economidis, "The Tale Without a Name" – Iak. Kampanellis, "And if You Will Be Thirsty for Water ... tribute to Nikos Gatsos" – M. Karahaliou/G. Economidis, "A Balloon Full of Secrets" – V. Papadimitraki/N. Karagianni, "Maria Pentagiotissa" – Bost, "Our Friend Aesop" – C. Negreponi, "Our Town" – Th. Wilder, translated by M. Volanakis, "The Painting of Christina" – Evg. Trivizas, "The Homeless of the Sky" – M. Karahaliou/G. Economidis, "Saint John the Reaper," "The Magic Violin" – M. Grammatikaki, "The Crucible" – Arthur Miller, "Screenings of Nikos Kazantzakis," excerpts from the play "Captain Michalis" with songs to music by Manos Hadjidakis, "The Sky Red" – L. Anagnostaki.

THESPIS Brussels (2002-today), Head: Management board, Director: Aristeidis Lavrentzos

THESPIS Brussels was founded in 2002 by members of various nationalities, as a nonprofit association. The main founders were Aristeidis Lavrentzos and Despina Saltouridou, now honorary president. The use of English and French subtitles made the performances accessible to the wider non-Greek-speaking public in Brussels. Like the Y-GREC troupe, THESPIS has attempted also French-language performances. However, the Greek-speaking performances are predominant. Until now, the following performances have taken place: "The Mother's Ring" – Giannis Kampysis (Greek), "The Star of Bethlehem" – Charis Sakellariou (Greek), "Emperor Michael" – Angelos Terzakis (Greek and French), "Behold the Bridegroom is Coming" – Dionysios Romas (Greek), "Les quatre vérités/A Few Home Truths" – Marcel Aymé (French), Christoforos Kolombos, Nikos Kazantzakis (Greek), "All's Well That Ends Well" – Shakespeare (French), "The Matchmaker" – Thornton Wilder (Greek), "An Ideal Husband" – Oscar Wilde (French), "Croque-Monsieur" – Marcel Mithois (Greek), "Les pavés de l'ours" – Georges Feydeau (French), "Les veufs" – Louis Calaferte Virton (French), "La peur des coups" – Georges Courteline (French), "Turcaret" – Alain-Réné Lesage (French), "The Cherry Orchard" – Anton Chekhov (Greek), "Alexander the Great" – Jean Racine (Greek), "Le Dindon" – Georges Feydeau (Greek), "Der Besuch der Alten Dame" – Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Greek), "Look at Them" – Marios Pontikas (Greek), "The Importance of Being Ernest" – Oscar Wilde (Greek), "La Machine Infernale" – Jean

Cocteau (Greek), "The Third Side of the Coin" – Dimos Angeloussis (Greek), "Twelfth Night or What You Will" – Shakespeare (Greek), "A Marriage Proposal" – Anton Chekhov (Greek), "Tartuffe, or The Impostor" – Molière (Greek), "Teleia.gr" – Ex Animo, Mentis, Papageorgiou (Greek), "An Ideal Husband" – Oscar Wilde (Greek).

Nóta Théâtrale (2012-today), Head/Director: Voula Kayasa

The Nota Théâtrale troupe was founded in September 2012 at the initiative of a group of young people. Their goal was "to create a melting pot of artistic concerns and a means of expression and creativity based on the source of the need for meeting on a spiritual, cultural, and human level." The performances are accompanied by subtitles in French, thus contributing to the cultural interaction between Greek culture and those brought by those living in the city of Brussels. The range of activities of the association in Belgium and Greece, in addition to theatrical performances, also includes the organization of seminars by professionals, book presentations, concerts, exhibitions, artistic and sporting events, as well as workshops related to educational and scientific issues. The participants in the activities of the association and its subscriber members also contribute to the charitable work, as the proceeds are used for the financial support of institutions and the support of initiatives (Efthimio Corinth Center, Association of Volunteers against Cancer of Kavala Prefecture, Child Protection Unit of Kavala, Initiative of the Free University of Brussels ULB, "Urgences Grèce 2016"). To date, the troupe has presented the following performances: "Skirt-Blouse" – Th. Reppas/M. Papathanassiou, "How to Rob a Bank" – Sami Fayad, "Antigone" – Jean Anouilh, "Crave" – Sarah Kane, "Nothing" – Evdokimos Tsolakidis, "TroubleX"- Voula Kayasa.

Alma (2017-today), Head/Directors: Kyprianos Moutevelis and Chrysa Baltzaki

Alma is the newest troupe and was born in 2017 "driven by a love of theater, when our personal need for creation became a collective expression of a group of young people, when the common vision of the two directors of the group became a common vision of seven, then 11 and today more than 30 members." Alma is a group of young people (often in age, always at heart). In Alma, the rehearsal process includes – in addition to the established text analysis, the learning of roles and the setting up of the show – theatrical exercises and games, moments of creativeness, togetherness, relaxation, and joy. The ultimate goal is the theatrical enjoyment for both the audience and the group itself. To this end, both the directors and several members of the group participate in different acting workshops and seminars on every occasion (most notably in the seminar of textual analysis of Andreas Manolikakis, as well as four consecutive years in the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA) summer school in the UK. A seminar with Yorgos Karamichos was organized for Alma members in Brussels in early 2020).

So far, the troupe has presented the following plays (which were all presented for the first time in Brussels): "I want a country" – Andreas Flourakis (with subtitles in English and in French), "Every Brilliant Thing" – Duncan Macmillan, which had the originality to be played simultaneously in two languages, Greek and English, expanding the opening of the group to the wider theatrical community of Brussels (the Greek version of the play participated in the 9th Panhellenic festival of amateur theater in Ierapetra and won two awards), "I want a different country," a composition based on the play by Andreas

Flourakis, and “Alone” – Sakis Serefas (with subtitles in English). This play had never been performed on stage before, and the performances were attended by the playwright, at the troupe’s invitation.

The two projects that were under preparation before the Covid-19 pandemic (“Zoi meta hamilon ptiseon” – Arkas, and a Broadway musical medley for the World Theater Day) are now scheduled to be performed in early 2022. Part of the proceeds of all Alma performances are donated to charitable causes.

Resilience and Theater

The study conditions of resilience are constantly changing, depending on the social context. Definitions of resilience vary slightly, depending on whether we are studying a community, a small group, or even an individual. The variables of understanding resilience are always economic, political, social, and cultural. However, trying to formulate a definition where many common concepts converge, we would say that resilience is a positive function that arises in the long run and involves resilience and adaptability, usually in the face of adverse conditions (Southwick et al., 2014).

The concept of resilience was first formulated for ecological issues and then used within systems ecology in the 1970s. Subsequently, in the decades that followed, resilience was adopted in areas such as economic, civil, and environmental security. According to Walker and Cooper (2011), the transition to the field of political theory was an opportunity to understand the possibilities of adaptability in the face of unforeseen challenges.

Lax (2021) disputes the term “resilience” and explains that this concept is relevant, citing as examples cases of theatrical/artistic groups that go beyond adversity, such as the ASHTAR theater, of the artistic community of the West Bank, that does not receive any government subsidy. In addition, the concept of resilience is tested in social conditions of extreme poverty or situations of political prohibition (Gallagher et al., 2017). Lazaroo (2021) pointed out that in Singapore resilience tends to become a cultural policy, while in Britain the term resilience had been used in cultural policy since 2010, in response to the financial crisis (Gupta & Gupta, 2019). The processes of resilience, endurance, and adaptability are correlated with dynamics that develop in the spaces of CT, applied performing arts (Ames & Greer, 2021; Jennings et al., 2017) and visual arts (Pasquinelli & Sjöholm, 2015), e.g., thanks to Andrews and Duggan (2021), the remarkable case of Performing City Resilience came to light, the collaborative research project that investigates interrelations between theories and practices in New Orleans, which are related to resilience and performance. In the case of “ideal expatriation” of Greeks in Brussels, the resilience of the Greek DCT almost without any financial support, either from the host country or from the origin country, for more than 40 years is remarkable. Especially now, from the period of March 2020, when COVID-19 brought objective adversities to the fore, resilience, adaptability, and ingenuity emerge as a proof of survival.

Methods and research questions

Eight Greek-speaking troupes in a French-Dutch-English speaking environment. What are the mechanisms of the resilience of these troupes? How did they manage to survive for four decades? What exactly happened and the Greek Community Theater in Brussels

flourished? Also, why have the troupes increased in recent years? Why are the performances so numerous? Why are more and more Greeks in Brussels getting involved in Greek troupes? Even during the COVID-19?

In the period January–August 2021, a qualitative descriptive research was carried out by the author. The data collection was based on a sample of 20 participants who gave 60 interviews at different times during the aforementioned nine-month period. Each conversation lasted an average of 60 min. The 20 participants – 5 women and 15 men – were active members of all eight troupes of the Greek DCT in Brussels, holding different responsibilities: directors, writers, actors, etc. Their average age was 52 years old, 17 of them were highly qualified expatriates and the three of them low-qualified immigrants. Some of the participants did not belong permanently to a community troupe but had a stable presence in the Greek DCT. The interviews were conducted through a teleworking platform, phone calls and more rarely with a physical presence.

The qualitative research, apart from the interviews, was enriched by watching 40 streaming performances of the Greek Community Theater and the parallel studying 800 publications in the press of the Greek Community in Brussels and mainly by the Greek-language Belgian informative website *Newsville*. The methodology of data analysis was initially quantitative and then qualitative, and the present descriptive research sought the causes of the resilience and flourishing of the Greek DCT in Brussels. All these tools of research and observation helped out to be understood the Community Greek theatrical phenomenon (Elliott & Timulak, 2021).

Findings. The reasons of resilience

The educational level

Most of the troupes are made up of Greek officials in the European Union institutions. In Belgium, these highly qualified immigrants (Ardittis, 1992) are called expatriates, a term that often needs clarification (McNulty & Brewster, 2017), and they belong to the expat community. Greeks working in the European Union do not identify themselves as immigrants but as European officials or expatriates. This finding concerns not only the Greeks of Brussels but also the other expatriates from other highly specialized ethnic groups, as Indians (Roos, 2017), who also do not identify themselves as immigrants. The expatriates, either Greeks or of another ethnicity, mainly coming from families of middle or high educational and upper financial level, are usually multilingual, searching for higher career opportunities, hit by the international financial crisis (Labrianidis & Vogiatzis, 2013). However, for the low-skilled immigrants, expatriation is not an option but possibly the only way out, and the mobility of traditional migration is often trapped in stereotypes and it is a xenophobic target, mainly for the undocumented migrants in Brussels (Leman, 1997) and the refugees. The highly skilled expatriated are assimilated more smoothly. Also, to a large extent, highly skilled expats are literate and seek to acquire new skills. Besides, the leaders of the troupes and the actors are constantly enriching their theatrical education with acting and directing courses/seminars. The Greek expatriates and immigrants do not have a special relationship and connection and have formed a completely different perception of Brussels and the prospects they have there. Human resilience is distributed across many systems of interaction, and one of these systems is adaptability. Masten (2015) argued

that the motivation for developing a skill is a powerful driver of resilience. This does not only apply to the Greeks of Brussels but all the Brussels-based national teams, for example, the Spanish immigrants and Spanish Euro-officials. These differences are related also to the uneven development in inner-city of the Brussels Canal Area (De Boeck et al., 2017). In recent years, young Greek immigrants moved to Brussels due to the economic crisis in the European south, and especially the Greek crisis (Tsebelis, 2016), and they have also joined the theatrical troupes. Greece suffers from migration of its professionals (Labrianidis, 2014) and most of the new expatriated generation are highly educated and absorbed in the private sector. The enrichment of private companies is also related to the Brussels Diversity Plan, a policy instrument launched in 2007 by the Government of the Region of the City of Brussels, in which public authorities offered support to companies in order to develop new policies by including staff with a migration background (Tandé, 2017). Population's mobility is a global phenomenon and the creation of an immigrant-friendly society is a necessity for global coexistence (Nukpezah, 2017).

The extended stay

While some employees often have a limited, "temporary" (Geddes, 2015) stay in Brussels, most of troupe leaders have been there for almost four decades. Thus, mechanisms creating permanent theatrical scenes were developed. It is no coincidence that many of them have retired but have not been repatriated because the institutional ways of returning to the country of origin have not been planned (Saar, 2018) and the smooth repatriation procedure is a critical issue (Peltonen, 1997). Nevertheless, Feldman et al. (2011) have proven that CT promotes healthy aging of retirees. The DCT participants realized early that their settlement in Brussels was not a temporary experience and created socialization opportunities investing emotionally in interpersonal relationships. Fox and Dickie (2010), too, in their ethnographic study, pointed out the addictive power of participation in a theater troupe.

Feeling of belonging

The participants in the troupes develop feelings of collectivity, their expectations increase, and they become self-determining. For the highly skilled Greeks in Brussels may be more easily assimilated and accepted than the low-skilled immigrants, but there are cases that Belgians treat European officials as privileged public officials, often referring to them with a negative connotation as "Eurocrats." However, for Belgium, it has become a political priority to change the image of Brussels in relation to the reception of expatriates. Bourgeois ideologies have created national beliefs, which political marketing seeks to overturn (Verhoest et al., 2020). In this context, CT builds a collective identity (McCarthy et al., 2001) while meeting collective needs provide a way for community members to develop new ways of expressing themselves (Schoell, 1953).

Common workplace and the urban environment of the city of Brussels

Fifteen of the participants cited their professional proximity as an important reason for their involvement in DCT. Expats, working mainly in the numerous buildings of Commission, often meet in the workplace and can update and resolve issues with their

troupes. Theater becomes an integral part of everyday life (Walcon & Nicholson, 2017). As a female director pointed out, “the distances in Brussels are short, which favors rehearsal meetings. Also, the weather usually is not in favor, so staying inside together with a group and participating in a creative project, such as theater, is what one prefers doing”.

High professional status

The troupe leaders are, or used to be, professionals at critical career positions. They are competitive (App et al., 2012), aiming for efficiency, thus investing time and money in their performances. The result of the polyphony was to increase the troupes and the choices of the spectators. Older dominant troupes keep ticket prices low and increase accessibility to new spectators. The competitive business environment becomes a way of life (Brown et al., 1998) and the survival of the troupes tended to be a matter of prestige. What is really paradoxical is the fact that the Greek Community Troupes in Brussels are nonprofit, at a time when such troupes are constantly in short supply (Royne Stafford & Tripp, 2001). Nevertheless, they are extremely competitive. Audience often cannot recall the names of the Community Troupes but the names of their leaders. The way the leader operates and behaves in the Community Theater is crucial for the success of the troupe (Kramer, 2006).

Financial comfort

In general, all the troupes could finance their performances based not only on receipts from ticket sales but sometimes also on donations and contributions from the troupe members themselves. If needed, the leaders of the troupes could “put their hands in their pockets,” as a leader of a troupe said, to carry out the theatrical activity of their troupes without any major compromise. Greek troupes acted autonomously and rarely joined, in the past, cultural support programs. However, they always managed to face the difficulties they encountered due to the lack of government support.

The theater is an element of expats identity

Greek expatriates share the Greek theatrical experience with the French- and English-speaking public. The use of subtitles is now widespread in troupes. The theater is a treaty in which the “existing” European Community is realized in part and promotes multi-cultural (Rea, 2013) dialogs between communities. They are not an international but rather a national community, which theater sometimes brings together, creating multi-cultural moods. After all, for some it is not correct to talk about expatriates, because the distances between the countries are small and the cultural differences are not intense. Also, some consider themselves neither expatriates nor immigrants, but Europeans, who have developed a European identity (Haller, 2000), although the European narrative does not seem to take place in Brussels to the desired degree, and this has to do with the low emotional attachment of expatriates to the city (Perchoc, 2017). Especially after the bloody terrorist attacks, Brussels tried to rebuild its multilingual (O’Donnell & Toebosch, 2008) and multicultural structure. An intercultural agenda was set with the main goal of a pluralistic European future (Bousetta et al., 2018). Culture is redefined and the

participatory, multicultural processes tend to take root in Belgian society, but it does not mean that there are no social groups that want to eliminate the diversity (Baeten, 2001). Mainly, with the advent of the 21st century, a number of Intercultural Programs have strengthened collaborative efforts. Greek troupes rarely became involved in Intercultural Programs because they did not seek recognition as Bruxellois artists and they chose an autonomous artistic path. Greek artists who address the Greek-speaking public do not carry the “immigrant artistic burden” but are artists who pursue cultural policy in the community rarely claiming to be part of Belgian cultural society. These are more intra-cultural, aspects of “urban togetherness” (Reyskens & Vandenabeele, 2016), spatial encounters (Hanquinet et al., 2012) and less intercultural. However, the Belgian authorities of culture do not seem to recognize an important cultural contribution of the Greek-language theater in Brussels and the autonomy is confused with the self-isolation.

Interaction with the Greek community

The most important reason for the resilience of the troupes is the interaction with the Greek community. Greek troupes, self-identified as amateurs, owe their existence to the Greek community in Brussels, which gives them feedback, either as an audience or as new members, actors, and so on. The Community Theater is based mainly on amateur volunteers and is aimed at a local, specific audience (Gard & Burley, 1959). For the leaders of the troupes, the production process of a performance is always a feat, a temporary system, which each time combines diverse people, strict space, time constraints, and low financial resources (Goodman & Goodman, 1972). Sometimes, the lack of available time by the members of the troupe and the lack of coordinated actions cause irritation and frustration. However, as Kramer (2005) proved by studying two Community Theater groups at Midwestern: “By far the most common positive benefit from participating was meeting people and making friends (75%) and the typical responses were as follows: ‘The best part was just getting to know various people’”. Exactly the same conclusion emerges from all the participants of the present research (75%). The members of the troupes feel that they make creative use of their free time and enrich their lives with new friends.

Sometimes, when satisfactory relationships do not develop between the members of a troupe, then there is the alternative of transferring to another Greek-speaking troupe. In previous years such “movements” were not frequent, they are now more common. The concept of satisfaction has to do with the performance in which an amateur actor participates. In other words, the amateur actors collaborated exclusively and steadily with a single troupe, developing a relationship of high commitment and prioritize their membership in the troupe over other groups for a short period of their lives (Kramer, 2002). Amateur actors are not always satisfied with the performance in which they participate (Kramer, 2004). This binding character of collaboration has now moderated to a great extent.

In recent years, there has been constructive communication and cooperation between Greek community troupes in Brussels. Sympathy enhances the recognition and participation of each troupe in the Greek theatrical net of the city. Also, the members of most troupes have supported the others’ efforts with their presence. In 2018 and 2019, all the troupes performed together, on March 27, in the World Theater Day. This happened due to the actions and determination of Tasos Nychas, Head and Director of the Atelier

Théâtral Grec in Brussels, whose initiative was immediately followed by the active participation of all the troupes. All the performances, of all eight community troupes, have become fantastic occasions for the Greeks living in Brussels to meet. Opportunities for social interaction benefit the community.

Greek expatriates and immigrants in Brussels, the Greek audience, make CT resilient. The positive feedback from the audience provides strength and motivation to the troupes and the actors. The demanding highly educated audience creates decent performances. Decent performances, in turn, produce sustainable troupes. The reactions of the audience determine whether it is worth continuing an effort (Gooch, 1984). Also, troupes are constantly fed back by the audience. Every Greek newcomer to Brussels is potentially a member of a troupe.

Pleasant company

Many and different professionals shape the diverse community troupes (engineers, lawyers, economists, etc.), which are enriched by their families and friends. The heads of all the troupes confessed that the troupes usually have a stable group, which consists mainly of people who are connected by friendship in addition to collaboration and love for the theater. Therefore, there is a common path of cooperation and mutual assistance with the common goal of creating.

The constant entertainment of the Greeks

Each Greek theatrical troupe maintains to a large extent its audience. Theater is a way of socialization for the Greek "Bruxpats" and integrates the expatriated into the communal spirit. Also, for the other communities in Brussels, the ethnic theater is a constant form of entertainment and integration. For the Greeks of Brussels, the theatrical output is an important form of entertainment.

Resilience and Greek Diasporic Community Theater in Brussels during Covid 19

But how did the Greek DCT troupes deal with COVID-19? What forms of resistance did the Greek troupes develop against the pandemic? The aforementioned reasons consolidated the older troupes and created new ensembles of artists until COVID-19's coming. According to the data, the expats of Brussels were "hit" disproportionately by the health crisis. The effects of the pandemic on public action and performing arts are similar worldwide. The Greek performances in Belgium have been canceled or postponed from March 2020 until the end of the year 2021. The first cancellation was a performance scheduled for the beginning of March 2020 by the Atelier Théâtral Grec followed by the common celebration for World Theater Day in 2020, which was also canceled in 2021. In the meantime, some of the troupes tried to unite and look for ways to express their creativity. The Greek artists in Brussels had to use new ways of artistic expression to survive but also to maintain the interest of the public.

The solution of artistic survival and resilience that prevailed was streaming. Some examples are given of artistic intervention expanding the concept of resilience, even in the context of Covid-19. A) The actor and theater writer Dimitris Stasinopoulos directs and stars in a short youtube video in double role: "Mitsoulas" asks "Papasifounas" for savoir vivre advice. What are the rules of savoir vivre on quarantine balconies? How do we applaud? How do we cheer? What should we wear? etc. B) Tasos Nychas, the Head and Director of the Atelier Théâtral Grec Troupe, uploaded in December 2020 to the platform Vimeo, the dramatized Christmas short-story reading by the influential Greek writer Alexandros Papadiamantis, entitled: "The Lady's House." C) The creation of website of LEB (Lyceum of Greek Women in Brussels) (www.lykeioellinidonbrussels.com), and so on. These experiences of Greek resilience in Brussels aim at strengthening the artistic voice during the pandemic and the audience responded to the streaming events. Also, the streaming interventions are directly related to the time and the local context that have been created: confinement, quarantine, fear, far from home, Greece, which for the first time was inaccessible and distant for the expatriates. We could call these streaming experiences "moments of persistence or resistance," where the Greek expatriates, in defiance of the times, want to express themselves artistically. And, finally, all these moments build the cohesive community of expatriates.

Discussion

This paper was based on theories of Resilience and Community Theater to examine the longevity of Greek DCT in Brussels. Also, it is the first to be conducted purely for the Diasporic Community Theater and introduces the term DCT. The prosperity of the troupes is due to the prolonged stay, the high educational level, the cultivation of the sense of belonging, the competition produced by the high professional status, the financial comfort, the constantly increase of Greeks in the city, the way of life in the city, the good relations among the troupes, the expats' lifestyle in Brussels, but mainly the unique interaction that exists with the Greek community of expatriates that may further help participants to self-actualize and augment their individual identity in a way that is healthy, pro-social, and in-sync with one's intrinsic values, artistry, and communitarianism (Forenza & Tredinnick, 2020).

Some negative testimonies were made, which had to do with some "despotic" troupe leaders, but "at the end of the day" the attitudes were eliminated and the positive emotions of the collective experience prevailed. The most serious problem for most troupes that emerged from the research is the complete lack of funding and difficulties in finding resources to create the performances. Especially after the 2-year forced artistic set-aside, the community troupes need resources to continue to exist and survive. These are DCT troupes that immerse the lives of Greeks in Brussels and the commitment of the participants in them is satisfying, since the participation is voluntary. The many aforementioned benefits of socialization offset the economic hardship. However, systematic and state funding can provide a new sustainable perspective. The socio-cultural authorities must integrate the Greek DCT in Brussels into the cultural policy. Belgian and Greek cultural institutions must recognize in practice the long-term contribution to both the Greek diaspora and Belgian cultural life.

Limitations

One cannot predict if all these Community Theater troupes will be viable the next day, after the arrival of the infectious disease that has struck the planet. However, the benefits that strengthened and created the Greek Diasporic Community Theater in Brussels resilient are numerous and established this unprecedented theatrical phenomenon as a long-lived artistic institution in the heart of Europe.

A second limitation to be noted is related to sampling. This is a cross-sectional study that brings together self-referential perceptual experiences in a specific place (Brussels), at a specific time (the first half of 2021), referring to a specific social group (Expatriated Greeks in Brussels). However, the sample, although limited (20 people), includes members from all Greek Community Theater groups, who, in fact, interact in various ways with each other. The result is that their testimonies are complex cumulative experiences and reflect to a large extent all the members of the Greek Community Theater in Brussels.

Notes

1. Program for the Common Celebration by all Brussels Troupes of the 2019 World Theater Day, Brussels 27 Mars 2019 (unpublished document at the disposal of the author).
2. Ibid.

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