

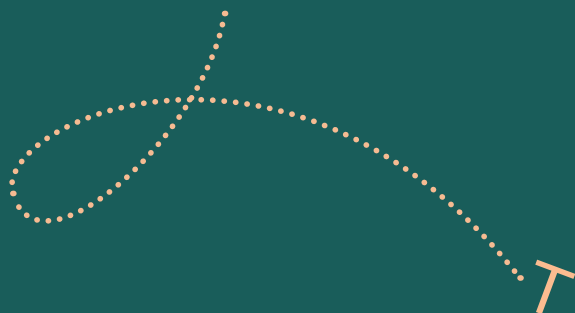
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SERENA SPITALIERI

SENSEMAKING FOR THE INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN UNIVERSITIES THROUGH THE EQPR



Roma Tre Press

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Dipartimento di Economia Aziendale

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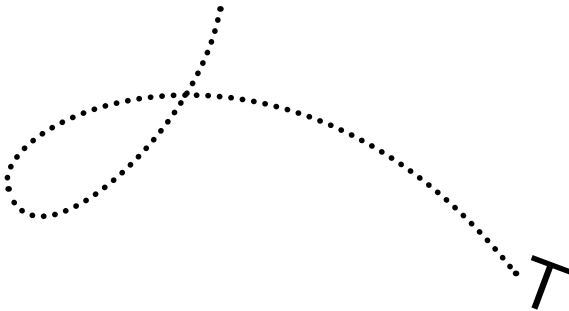
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SENSEMAKING FOR THE INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN UNIVERSITIES THROUGH THE EQPR

Lucia Marchegiani

con Federico Ceschel, Chiara Finocchietti, Plinio Limata, Serena Spitalieri*

ABSTRACT

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly called to substantiate their impact on society in terms of inclusivity and social sustainability, as prioritised in the pursuit of the “Third Mission” (TM). However, how administrative and teaching staff enact such change within the organisation to match the TM goals is under-investigated. This study explores policies and practices to support the recognition of qualifications of refugees for access to Higher Education in Italy, and in particular the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR) as an instrument to pursue the university’s TM. The study contributes to the literature by showing contradictory aspects of HEIs pursuit of the TM and sheds light on the interplay between different dimensions and grounded processes of sensemaking.

KEYWORDS: European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR); Higher Education Institutions; Third Mission; sensemaking; job crafting; organisational change.

PAROLE CHIAVE: European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR): istituzioni della formazione superiore; terza missione; sensemaking; cambiamento organizzativo.

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Introduction

As highlighted by the Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015), the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015), and its Education 2030 Framework for Action, Higher Education plays a crucial role in addressing inclusivity and diversity. In 2017, the European Union, with its “Renewed Agenda for Higher Education,” stressed that building inclusive and connected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must be a strategic priority. Indeed, including all learners and ensuring that everyone has an equal and personalised opportunity for educational progress is still a challenge in almost every country. Inclusivity in higher education has become a substantial part of HEIs’ “Third Mission” (TM).

TM has been ambiguously defined as “a contribution to society” (Abreu *et al.*, 2016; Urdari *et al.*, 2017; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020), and it encompasses at least three dimensions: academic knowledge transfer and innovation, university continuing education, and social engagement in local communities contributing to the development of human capital (Mariani *et al.*, 2018). The ambiguity of the concept may depend on three interrelated aspects: (i) the configuration of the activities carried out in a given university; (ii) the degree of its territorial embeddedness; (iii) the institutional frameworks in which the university operates (Jäger and Kopper, 2014). This last aspect seems pivotal to justify the differing degrees of TM engagement since universities are developing TM as an evolving concept (Vorley and Nelles, 2008), engaging in different degrees of organisational change processes. The literature on TM, which is vast and multidisciplinary, has clarified the need for a diversity of practices that evidence the relevance of TM and its related profound organisational change in universities (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020).

Moreover, some studies have shown resistance to the new concept of HEIs’ TM. Not all university members are actively involved in TM (Loi and Di Guardo, 2015), calling for better scrutiny of the individual’s attitude towards it. In fact, little is still known about how individuals in the organisations (administrative and academic staff) enact such organisational change and spouse the university’s TM. Managing change requires a consideration of its effects on the interpretive schemes of organisation members and understanding the action of attributing sense to a flow of circumstances (Weick, 1995). The pursuit of the TM can be therefore studied through the sensemaking approach. Sensemaking can be viewed as ‘an instrument through which circumstances are turned into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words, and that serves as a springboard into action’ [Weick *et al.*, (2005), p. 409]; it is still unclear how sensemaking processes happen

at the organisational and individual levels. To tackle inclusivity in HEIs, particular attention should be dedicated to refugees. These are considered vulnerable subjects to be included since their right and access to education are often denied. In the area of refugee integration, the EU, since 1999, has been working to create a Common European Asylum System and has developed several directives and regulations to establish high standards and stronger cooperation to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system (EC, 2018). Due to many reasons, the number of immigrants in European countries has increased rapidly in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened to disrupt the progress in programs for young newcomers and refugees (Ahad *et al.*, 2020), whose access to youth work or non-formal education opportunities has become even more challenging (Stapleton, 2020).

Data shows that the number of refugees enrolled in higher education is significantly low. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023), the refugee enrolment rate in higher education globally is around 7% in 2023, while the global average among non-refugees was 40% in 2020. This figure is significantly lower than the percentage of refugee enrolment in primary education (68%) and secondary education (34%) (UNESCO, 2022). UNHCR and its partners set a 15by30 target to ensure that 15% of young refugee women and men (approximately 500,000 individuals) can access higher education by 2030 (UNESCO, 2022; UNHCR, 2019).

The literature provides evidence of obstacles that hamper access, ranging from financial insecurity to language barriers, from lack of knowledge of the higher education system of the host country to difficulties in recognition of qualifications (Abamosa, 2021; Atesok *et al.*, 2019; Crea, 2016; Loo, 2021; Streitwieser *et al.*, 2019; Wit & Altbach, 2016).

The recognition of qualifications is a key element to support social and educational inclusion and to overcome one of the obstacles in access to higher education. This enables refugees to rebuild their lives and contribute to their host societies while maintaining and utilizing their skills (The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, 2017). Recognition can be even more challenging when educational documentation is partial or missing. To this aim, the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR), launched by the Council of Europe, is an instrument that responds to these finalities, being based on Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention on supporting recognition of refugees' qualifications even in a case such qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence (Finocchietti, 2022).

Complying with these policies related to inclusivity put pressure on universities working on the TM and consequently impacted the dimension of change management, in some cases associated with the adoption of the EQPR. When deciding to adopt the EQPR, Universities face several impacts on their established procedures. Thus, organisational change is required in terms of new competencies, new roles, and new routines. However, the institutional theory and the general change management literature are often focused on the macro dynamics with little attention to the organisational levels (meso and micro) of analysis (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014), focusing exclusively on factors of success and failure (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). Therefore, the literature in this domain does not correctly recognise the complex interplay of different roles and organisational levels that foster change in universities (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014). This contribution addresses the micro-foundations of change management through the specific case of EQPR adoption to pursue Universities TM. A theoretical sensemaking lens is adopted to shed light on the individual role of the administrative and academic staff in fostering organisational change to implement the social purpose.

The paper is structured in two sections. In the first part, the legal framework and instruments to support the recognition of refugees qualifications in Europe and Italy are described, followed by the Italian experience regarding the implementation of the EQPR.

The second part presents the adoption of the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR) as an instrument to pursue the university's TM by adopting a theoretical sensemaking approach. First, the theoretical background accounts for the well-known relations between organisational change and sensemaking while revealing the remaining gaps and consequently the proposed research question; second, the empirical setting is described, and the complex context of the EQPR adoption is explained as well as the methodology that we adopted; then the results are outlined, and discussed through the theoretical approach; last, contribution to theory and practice is clarified while recognising the limitation of this study.

SECTION I: Policy and practices to support recognition of refugees qualifications in Italy

Recognition of Refugee qualification: the regulatory framework

The main regulatory reference in Europe is represented by Article VII of the “Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region” (also called Lisbon Recognition Convention), dedicated to the procedures for recognising the qualifications of refugees and those entitled to subsidiary protection:

«Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence» (Council of Europe & UNESCO, 1997).

The Italian regulatory context regarding the recognition of refugees’ qualifications, in turn, sees a succession of legislative acts at a macro, meso and micro level.

In line with the provisions of the Lisbon Convention, Italy has adapted its legislation on the subject of recognition of refugee qualifications through the introduction of paragraph 3 bis to art. 26 of Legislative Decree 251/2007 (“Implementation of Directive 2004/83/EC containing minimum standards on the granting, to third-country nationals or stateless persons, of the status of refugee or person otherwise in need of international protection, as well as minimum standards on the content of the recognised protection”), as amended by Legislative Decree no. 18 of 21 February 2014:

«For the recognition of professional qualifications, diplomas, certificates and other qualifications obtained abroad by holders of refugee status or subsidiary protection status, the competent administrations shall identify appropriate assessment, verification and accreditation systems which allow recognition of qualifications pursuant to article

49 of the decree of the President of the Republic of 31 August 1999, n. 394, even in the absence of certification by the State in which the qualification was obtained, where the interested party demonstrates that he cannot acquire said certification».

In terms of academic recognition, the provisions of the “Procedures for entry, residency and enrolment of international students and the respective recognition of qualifications for higher education courses in Italy” are supported, as drawn up annually on the basis of the results of the steering committee organised by the Ministry for Universities and Research, together with the Ministry of Education and Merit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of the Interior, with the aim of guiding the policies of Italian higher education institutions on the admission of international students to their courses.

The procedures (Part VI, Article 2) invite

«higher education institutions, taking into account their autonomy and in line with the possibility given by the current legislation to carry out assessments “... of the cycles and periods of study carried out abroad and of foreign qualifications, for access purposes to higher education, the continuation of university studies and the achievement of Italian university degrees” (Article 2 of Law 148/2002), to put in place all the necessary efforts in order to prepare internal procedures and mechanisms for evaluating the qualifications of refugees and holders of subsidiary protection, even in cases where all or part of the relevant documents proving the qualifications are not present. The higher education institutions, with a view to the recognition of such qualifications and for the implementation of the eventual evaluation procedures, can benefit from the experience and the certifications produced by the Italian ENIC-NARIC centre (CIMEA), of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees - EQPR and from established best practices at an international level» (Ministry for Universities and Research, 2023).

The role of the Italian ENIC-NARIC centre

The indications outlined above remained difficult to be implemented in practice till 2016, when, parallel to the European debate, many activities at the national level started with the aim of developing tools and methodologies for the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, even in cases of partial or missing documentation, to support the indications of the regulation, and to be able to implement them as accepted procedures. In 2016 Italy was chosen by the Council of Europe, together with Greece, Norway, and the United Kingdom, to launch a pilot project, the EQPR (European Qualifications Passport for Refugees), to

develop and test a rigorous, effective, and internationally shared methodology for evaluating the qualifications of refugees in cases where the documentation is not sufficient or is absent.

The Italian ENIC-NARIC centre (CIMEA)¹ has actively contributed since 2016 to promoting integration between the principles, requests, good practices and methodologies promoted at European level and the Italian system of higher education, to make them understandable, responsive to concrete needs and adopted by all the actors involved in the academic recognition procedures, both at ministerial level and with regard to the individual higher education institutions. In the following paragraphs, the role and the activities coordinated by the Italian ENIC-NARIC center are described to support recognition of refugee qualifications.

EQPR – European Qualifications Passport for Refugees

The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees is a formalised and standardised rigorous procedure for assessing the qualifications of refugees, especially in cases where it is difficult or impossible to find adequate documentation as documentary evidence of the candidate's study path. In particular circumstances refugees intending to access to higher education are not in the position to produce the necessary documentation for the evaluation of their qualifications, for reasons not imputable and not attributable to the holder himself. Furthermore, with regard to refugees and holders of international protection, requirements of confidentiality and personal protection could exclude the possibility of contacting the authorities of the country of origin in order to directly verify the authenticity of the qualifications declared and for which recognition is requested.

In this sense the EQPR is an implementation tool of Art. VII of the Lisbon Convention, drawn up as part of a project promoted by the Council of Europe which currently includes the participation of 22 Countries: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Serbia and the United Kingdom.

As for the methodology, following the request of the Council of Europe for an assessment session, each ENIC-NARIC centre selects its own experts on a voluntary basis, according to the language in which the interviews will take place (usually the language in which the candidate received her/his education) as well

¹ In Italy, CIMEA is the National Information Center on the recognition of qualifications. It is part of a network of 55 countries in the European region, the ENIC (European Network of National Information Centres) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) networks <<https://www.enic-naric.net/>>.

as the education system of the countries of the refugees. The methodology requires a knowledge of the foreign school and higher education system in which the study path being assessed took place, in order to weigh the consistency and completeness of the information shared by candidates. Refugees at first fill out a questionnaire where they are requested to provide information on their educational path. After, they meet with a team of credential evaluators for an interview (approx. 45 min) during which their qualifications are assessed. Credential evaluators are qualification experts. The interview as reported above is conducted in the native language or in the language of the candidate. In the aftermath of the interview, if the evaluators believe that the process has been concluded positively and that there is clear evidence of the qualifications obtained, the document defined as the “European Qualification Passport for Refugees” (EQPR) is usually issued ten days to three weeks later and is valid for five years. It is a document drawn up by evaluators, which contains the essential information about the holder and the qualifications in his possession, whether they are a final secondary school or post-secondary qualification, information on work experience, and language skills (Council of Europe, 2023).

Over the years, this methodology has led to a shift in the recognition paradigm, which has transferred the focus and the object of the evaluation process from the “qualification” to the learning outcomes, i.e. the aggregation of competencies, knowledge and skills acquired and expected upon completion of a given course of study.

Italy, with its ENIC-NARIC centre, has been partner of the EQPR project since the first experimental phase started in 2017, and the project sees the direct involvement of the Ministry for Universities and Research and of the CRUI - Conference of the Italian University Rectors. In this sense, from the Italian perspective, the EQPR is an important example of a systemic action, involving credential evaluation experts from the ENIC-NARIC centre partners of the project under the aegis of the Council of Europe, and the competent authorities for academic recognition at the national level. In Italy HEIs have been part of the piloting and implementation phase of the EQPR, hosting assessment sessions, HEIs the training, and as observers in the interviews.

The involvement of HEIs was the key to the effectiveness of the EQPR implementation, which has so far seen the release in Italy of as many as 195 EQPRs in HEIs. The evaluation sessions continued online in 2020 and 2021, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ad hoc sessions related to health professions were organised in 2020, enabling refugees with an academic background in health disciplines to contribute to tackling the emergency situation.

In 2020, the EQPR was mentioned for the first time in the “Call for the assignment of 100 scholarships to students with international protection for access to bachelor’s, master’s, single-cycle master’s and research doctorates without scholarship at Italian universities – A.Y. 2020/21”, published annually by the Ministry of the Interior in concert with CRUI and in collaboration with the National Association of Organisations for the Right to University Education (ANDISU) (CRUI, ANDISU, Ministry of Interior, 2022).

In the call, universities are expressly authorized to “accept the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, as proof of the candidate’s qualifications”. This indication has been re-proposed for the current year as well.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, CIMEA organised, in cooperation with the European University of Rome (UER), the first Specialisation Course for the assessment of refugee qualifications and the use of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees. For the first time in Europe, the EQPR became the subject and content of a university course. The course, aimed at the staff of Italian HEIs, “has the purpose of disseminating and teaching the evaluation methodology of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, developed by the Council of Europe in collaboration with the ENIC-NARIC network centres, for the recognition of refugees’ qualifications even in cases of partial or absent documentation, in compliance with Article VII of the Lisbon Convention for the recognition of qualifications” (UER Rectoral Decree n. 79/21)².

The contents of the Specialisation Course focused on:

- (i) knowledge of international and national legislation on the recognition of refugee qualifications;
- (ii) acquisition of the basic elements and principles of the qualification evaluation activity;
- (iii) knowledge of the EQPR project and its implementation in Italy, France, Greece and the Netherlands;
- (iv) acquisition of the evaluation methodology of the *European Qualifications Passport for Refugees*.

The study activity, with compulsory attendance, led to the recognition of 8 university credits (CFUs) equal to no less than 200 hours of total learning. 24 participants from 21 higher education institutions took part in the Specialisation Course. The course ended with the issue of the Postgraduate Diploma (“Diploma di perfezionamento”) issued by the European University of Rome and a *Micro-credential* issued by CIMEA.

² <<https://www.universitaeuropediroma.it/corso-valutazione-rifugiati-eqpr/>>.

According to the above the EQPR can be considered a game changer (Finocchietti and Bergan, 2021) since it brings a shift in the concept of qualifications, putting the spotlight on the knowledge, understanding, competencies, and abilities acquired. In the section II it will be explored if it can provide new perspectives when it comes to transforming HEIs.

Activation of the National Coordination on the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications (CNVQR)

In 2016 CIMEA issued a formal invitation to all Italian HEIs to participate in the birth of the National Coordination on the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications (CNVQR), an informal network of experts in the administrative sector who deal with the recognition of foreign qualifications within their respective institutions, with the main purpose of sharing evaluation practices, problematic cases, information sources and methodological practices in cases of evaluation of qualifications held by refugees, even in the absence of or with little documentation. The CNVQR has some particular and distinctive characteristics:

- participation at the institutional level on a voluntary and self-financed basis;
- involvement of the whole institution, through the involvement of the legal representative and the signing of a Protocol of Membership;
- coordination carried out by CIMEA through the creation of tools for the exchange of information between experts. In particular, holding an annual national update conference and training activities aimed at the administrative personnel involved³.

The main initiatives promoted by the CNVQR include two meetings that saw the involvement of CIMEA, the then MIUR (Ministry for Education, Universities and Research) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and all the participating universities. During these meetings, in 2017, a new tool for the recognition of refugee qualifications on a national basis was presented, the Academic Pass of Refugee Qualifications. The two key principles that led the action are the HEIs' autonomy and the cooperation and inclusivity that have always characterised the Italian higher education system. The Academic Pass of Refugee Qualifications is a background paper, as defined in a recommendation of the Lisbon Convention Committee, the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, adopted in 2001, and updated in 2010 (Council of Europe & UNESCO, 2010, par. 20). In this sense the Academic Pass is a tool which, through candidates

³ <<https://www.cimea.it/EN/pagina-cnvqr>>.

filling in a questionnaire and a candidate interview by a pair of credential evaluators, reconstructs their study path. The evaluation methodology adopted draws on the best of the experiences developed in recent years at an international level, and on the experience gained by CIMEA through the many international projects on the subject of which it has been an active part.

To date, 11 academic passes were released as part of the trials of this tool that took place over the years 2017-2018, involving 18 Italian universities.

In 2018, MIUR, together with CIMEA, won the prize “Sustainable Public Administration Award. 100 projects to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda” in the “Human capital and education” sector for the innovative methodology developed in the field of recognition of refugee qualifications.

To date, one third of the Italian institutions of the higher education system have joined the CNVQR on a voluntary and self-financed basis.

In 2022, APICE, the first Italian Professional Association dedicated to the figure of the Credential Evaluator, also became a partner of the CNVQR.

Statements of Comparability: *Diplome for Refugees*

CIMEA has guaranteed its commitment also through the direct involvement of its experts in the activities aimed at recognising and evaluating the qualifications of refugees, through the *CIS - Credential Information Service*, an information, evaluation and comparison service of foreign and Italian qualifications, as a tool of transparency and support in order to guarantee their interpretation and recognition in the national and international context. Statement of Comparability, a document providing transparent information on the qualification, support Italian in carrying out their assessments of foreign qualifications submitted by candidates who intend to apply for enrolment in their courses.

CIMEA since 2019 uses the “Diplome” service to issue its certificates, making use of the blockchain technology applied to the recognition of educational qualifications. The evaluation process, completely digitalized from the request for the service to the release of the Certificate, has been designed to guarantee maximum usability and flexibility to the international student, who can therefore request the evaluation of his/her qualification both from abroad and from Italy, within a decentralised, transparent, certified and unalterable qualifications management system.

In 2015, in line with the Lisbon Convention and in application of the aforementioned Legislative Decree 251/2007, art 26, paragraph 3 bis, CIMEA activated on its own initiative a channel dedicated to holders of refugee status or subsidiary protection status through which those entitled can request the Comparability

service on their foreign qualification free of charge. Thanks to Diplome, refugees too have the opportunity to make use of a digitalised system, in which they can find, for every education system in the world, all the information regarding the documentation necessary for the assessment of their academic or secondary school qualifications and at the end of the evaluation procedure, have their own wallet through which to share their Statement of Comparability in digital format in a free, secure, certified and immediate way with any institution in the world. CIMEA's experience in the digital transformation process contributed to the EQPR. Starting from 2021, Council of Europe has been issuing the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees in digital format using the model and tenets of the CIMEA blockchain platform, adapted to the specific needs and characteristics of the EQPR project.

Since the opening of the free service for issuing the Statement of Comparability through the CIMEA for Refugees service (2022), 827 Certificates have been issued, with a slight bias as regards the assessment of secondary school qualifications (56.3%) compared to higher education qualifications (43.7%). This balance persists, albeit to a lesser extent, in 2022, with 51% of the Certificates issued for secondary school qualifications and 49% for higher education qualifications. Concentrating the analysis only on higher education qualifications obtained in 2022, however, a marked bias is visible for the certificates issued for qualifications pertaining to the first cycle of the Bologna Process (76%), followed by qualifications from the second cycle of the Bologna Process (19%).

Number of certificates issued remained stable up to and including 2018 (with a total always slightly lower than 90 documents issued per year), a marked increase was recorded from 2019 (156), reaching 168 certificates issued in 2022.

With reference to the countries of origin of the qualifications evaluated, a total of 127 Statements of Comparability were issued for Afghan qualifications, 80 for Syrian qualifications and 62 for Venezuelan qualifications. In the Afghan case in particular there was a significant increase in requests in 2022 (81 Certificates issued compared to 14 in the previous year), following the Taliban takeover in the summer of 2021. Also in this case, we note a bias of requests received for secondary school qualifications (58%) compared to those concerning higher education qualifications (42%).

Supporting recognition of Ukrainian qualifications

The experience gained in more than 5 years of recognition of refugees qualifications and of implementation of EQPR, laid the foundations for quick and focused action in case an unexpected need would emerge.

This was the case for the war in Ukraine since the end of February 2022, and the related flow of people seeking safety towards Europe, with the number of refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe being 8.183.357 at the beginning of May 2023 (UNHCR 2023b). On 10 March 2022 CIMEA organised an online webinar entitled “Ukraine: university education system and qualifications”, mainly targeted to Italian. The main purpose was to strengthen skills and knowledge on the Ukrainian education and university system, with the awareness that access to primary and reliable sources of information and tools for verification of the authenticity of the qualifications are essential.

Starting from the experience of the national webinar, on 6 April 2022 an international webinar was organised by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission with the collaboration of CIMEA and the direct involvement of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and the Ukrainian ENIC centre. The webinar, entitled “Online Training for Fast-track Recognition of Ukrainian Academic Qualifications”, led to the publication of the “Guidelines on fast-track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications”⁴. The event was open to higher education institutions, public bodies and organisations involved in the recognition of qualifications at different levels.

CIMEA prepared on its website an ad hoc page called “Focus Ukraine”⁵, with open and free access, containing a list of reliable and first-hand sources of information, including those mentioned above, and made the SCAN-D Database section dedicated to Ukrainian qualifications available to the general public, containing more than 300 examples of qualifications. The SCAN-D database was developed as part of two projects of the same name for which CIMEA was coordinator, funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme in the period 2014-2017, whose main objective is to increase knowledge of the various higher education qualifications in order to promote the fair recognition of qualifications⁶. To date, the database has collected 4.349 qualifications from 24 countries, and is reserved exclusively for the centres of the ENIC-

⁴ <https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti-privati/GUIDELINES_UKRAINE.pdf>.

⁵ <<https://www.cimea.it/EN/pagina-focus-ucraina>>.

⁶ <<https://www.cimea.it/EN/pagina-scan-d>>.

NARIC network. With the approval of the Ukrainian authorities and to support recognition of Ukrainian qualifications, it was decided to make the above-mentioned section containing more than 300 examples of qualifications of the Ukrainian system accessible to the public. For each qualification, all the information on its main elements (level, duration, nature, workload, academic rights, etc.) and an in-depth analysis of the documents, including the “state standard” templates of each title.

As part of the EQPR project, on the initiative of the Council of Europe, a Task Force on Ukrainian qualifications was set up in March 2022 with the aim of monitoring the progress of the Ukrainian conflict and its impact on the local scholastic and higher education system. CIMEA was involved by the Council of Europe, together with the ENIC-NARIC centres of Greece, France, the Netherlands, Ukraine and the US Credential Evaluation agency ECE. The task force network of experts is currently drafting a detailed report completely dedicated to the Ukrainian scholastic and higher education system, happened in the past in response to specific emergency situations, the Council of Europe has also organised evaluation sessions for the release of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees dedicated to holders of Ukrainian qualifications. CIMEA has actively participated in various sessions, in particular the one held in Italy at the University of Turin in December 2022, and the one held in Strasbourg in March 2023, thanks to the direct involvement of its experts able to conduct the interviews in Ukrainian.

SECTION II: Inclusion of refugees in Universities. A sensemaking approach Theoretical Background

Nowadays, HEIs face relevant competition (Gioia and Thomas, 1996) and growing institutional pressure to foster inclusion and pursue the so-called third mission (TM) (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). Loi and Di Guardo (2015) have discussed the different organisational orientations that exist in supporting the paradigm of the TM, showing a potential incongruence between the values of the staff members and the top management or causing ambiguity towards the TM. From a theoretical point of view, it is well-known that organisational change is about finding new or better ways of using resources and abilities to increase an organisation's capacity to generate value and returns for its stakeholders (Stuart, 1998). However, studies referring to the public sector often present limits duly highlighted by well-known literature reviews: 1) the institutional theory and the general change management literature prevalently study change dynamics at a macro level (reforms and new policies) with little attention paid to the organisational level of analysis and to the behavioural implications of organisational actors (meso and micro levels) (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014); 2) concerning the implementation process, the debate seems to revolve exclusively around factors of success or failure (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). Consequently, the literature seems to fall short of fully understanding the complex interplay of different roles and organisational levels that foster change in public sector organisations (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014).

More specifically, the change management literature poorly recognises the importance of how change is interpreted at all levels and how sensemaking processes guide the implementation of change. Instead, organisational actors create meanings and construct realities that shape actions and that foster change (Eckel and Kezar, 2003) through actions and decisions in ongoing meaning-making (Weick, 1995). Managing such a change also impacts the interpretive schemes of organisation members (Ranson *et al.*, 1980; Bartunek, 1984). Moreover, internal factors may also determine new interpretive schemes that alter the perception of identity and the sensemaking processes enacted by individuals in performing their roles (e.g., administrative, teaching staff, etc.) (Gioia and Thomas, 1996).

In a context of disruptive and unexpected change, organisations rely more and more on employees that are proactive, resilient, and self-managing (e.g., Weick and Quinn, 1999). The core ability of driving organisational change has become that of easing the internalisation of the change by individual employees (O'Hara

and Sayers, 1996), and the determinants of change success or failure in terms of individual behaviour and attitudes towards change are still unclear (Armenakis and Harris, 2009). In line with Wrzesniewski *et al.* (2003), we view the micro-foundations of organisational change on the meaning that individual employees give to change and to their work (Gover and Duxbury, 2017).

Sense-making is a multidimensional process that individuals engage in while performing their job. Through their wide-ranging critical review of relevant publications in the field of organisational studies, Sandberg and Tsoukas [(2015), p. 26] identified and articulated five different essential constituents of the sense-making perspective, such as: ‘sensemaking (i) is confined to specific episodes, (ii) is triggered by ambiguous events, (iii) occurs through specific processes, (iv) generates particular outcomes, and (v) is influenced by specific situational factors.’ In 1991, Gioia and Chittipeddi clarified the multidimensional nature of sense-making by introducing sense-giving, which was later discussed as a sensemaking variant undertaken to create meanings for a target audience (Weick *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, a certain ambiguity may pervade sense-giving processes, as the individual may exert an intentional effort to persuade others. Still, the effects of sense-giving largely depend on the receivers’ attitude and the complex sensemaking environment (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Leaders and top managers may exert a significant role in facilitating grounded processes of sensemaking and sense-giving (Smerek, 2011). In the attempt to advance the understanding of such processes, the subsequent sensemaking literature has enriched the framework by distinguishing between different processes of sensemaking: i) sense-breaking, a process of disconnecting from previous sensemaking narratives (Aula and Mantere, 2013); ii) sense-giving, in the attempt to influence other people’s narratives (Fiss and Zajac, 2006; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007); and iii) sense-taking, i.e., interpreting or evaluating the sense-making narratives of others (Huemer, 2012). In the context of education, when sense-breaking, sense-giving, and sense-taking are successful, sensemaking favours identity construction, and teachers construct a meaningful conception of self (Pratt, 2000; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006).

Nevertheless, the interplay between such diverse yet complementary processes may have controversial results in pursuing the TM of Universities. Different individuals may perceive TM differently, and institutional pressures may influence the sensemaking processes, both at the individual and organisational levels. As such, a dialogic perspective of organisational change should consider all sense-making dimensions.

Moreover, the social context in which the work is carried out provides crucial

elements for the construction of work meaning, the interpersonal sensemaking at work (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 2003) can contribute to organisational change by changing the content of the jobs, the practices, the perception of the selves and the roles. From this perspective, we claim that a micro-foundation of organisational change in the pursuit of the TM is provided by job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Oldham and Fried, 2016) that is related to sensemaking. Petrou *et al.* (2018) show that employees respond to organisational change communication via job crafting behaviours. Demerouti *et al.* (2021) partially confirmed that job crafting behaviour could be an effective way to adapt to organisational change successfully. Nevertheless, these studies have focused on a cognition-based approach to job crafting, whereas we aim to provide a better understanding of the relationship between sensemaking and job crafting in organisational change.

Thus, the aims to answer the following RQ: what are the micro-foundations of change due to the EQPR adoption in terms of change and innovation in jobs, inclusive practices, and procedures through sensemaking and job crafting processes?

Method

Following the Gioia Methodology (Gioia and Thomas, 1996), we have adopted a qualitative, explorative approach in our research. We chose to engage with EQPR managers and scholars of Italian universities, considered knowledgeable experts (Gioia *et al.*, 2013), in order to gain in-depth insights into their personal experiences to understand “the processes by which organising and organisation unfold.” Because experts’ mental models tend to be richer in terms of having greater variety, finer differentiation, and more comprehensive coverage of phenomena, their comments tend to be more profound, more plausible, and more sensible to context (Klein *et al.*, 2007). Experts also tend to show much more anticipatory sensemaking and identify actions that must be taken (Rudolph *et al.*, 2009).

From the point of view of the research protocol, in line with the Gioia Methodology, we first conducted six in-depth interviews with the key actors involved in adopting the EQPR in five different universities. This allowed us to address the topic going in depth and identify the first and second order concepts to be synthesised into aggregate dimensions. Afterwards, to confirm the results obtained from the qualitative interviews and broaden the number of administrative professionals involved in the research, an online survey was sent to all the universities involved in the EQPR project. This was justified by the use of “Triangulation”

(Carter *et al.*, 2014; Patton, 1999), viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources and to increase validity and reduce subjectivity in qualitative studies (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). In particular, we refer to method triangulation – which involves the use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon (Polit and Beck, 2012) – and data source triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Patton (1999) involves collecting data from different types of people, including individuals, groups, families, and communities, to gain multiple perspectives and data validation (Carter *et al.*, 2014). This process was carried on for three reasons: 1) to eliminate or reduce biases and increase the reliability and validity of the study (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009); 2) to increase the comprehensiveness of a study (Greene *et al.*, 1989); and 3) to reach increased confidence regarding results that triangulation brings to the researchers (Jick, 1979). Therefore, we adopted in-depth interviews as our primary data collection method in the first part of the research. Expert interviews are an effective data collection technique, especially when researchers explore a new, emerging, or under-investigated field (Bogner *et al.*, 2009; Littig and Pochhacker, 2014). The in-depth interviews were developed, first identifying three levels of analysis: 1) Macro/institutional; 2) Meso/organisational; 3) Micro/individual. They lasted almost 45 minutes each, and the timeframe was adequate to properly address and develop the three levels of discussion.

The authors' team is directly connected with the Italian ENIC / NARIC centre (CIMEA). This allows access to experts and scholars representing a significant sample in terms of territorial distribution, size, and organisational complexity of the Italian universities participating in the EQPR project. This first phase of the investigation ended in February 2022.

Our data analysis followed an iterative process of moving back and forth between the collected data, the change management literature, and the sensemaking framework. We began by writing a high-level summary of each participant's response to our questions, which gave us a holistic sense of how individual informants perceived the EQPR process in their organisations. We then performed a more detailed "open coding" analysis of the transcriptions. All authors independently coded the first few transcripts. A considerable number of informant terms, codes, and categories emerged in this process phase, so in looking for similarities and differences, they were synthesised, creating a 1st order list of categories that could adhere to the information provided by the interviewees. As suggested by Gioia *et al.* (2013), the labels were then used to reflect, as knowledgeable agents, on the possible theoretical dimensions and themes that could be connected to the 1st order concepts obtained that could be representative of the several dimensions

addressed in the literature. Furthermore, following the same line of reasoning, the discourse was pushed further, connecting and aggregating the 2nd order concepts into Aggregate dimensions.

The most significant elements that emerged during the interviews showed an overall impact on the administrative processes related to the EQPR adoption. On these bases, the research's second phase consisted of an online survey focusing specifically on the administrative units of the entire universe of the Italian universities participating in the EQPR project. The survey aimed to broaden the number of administrative professionals involved in the research and confirm the evidence from the qualitative interviews.

To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, a questionnaire containing 26 Likert scale questions (using a scale of 1 to 7) and five open questions was validated by experts. The questionnaire was sent out to all the Universities in the CNVQR network (n=33) between March and April 2022. 19 answers were returned, accounting for a 60% response rate. The answers were anonymised, and all the data collected were treated in full compliance with the privacy regulation. The next phase of data analysis involved all the researchers in analysing and comparing all the information collected and in the definitive compilation of all the codes. Cognitive mapping was deployed as a data analysis technique to aid our understanding and evaluation of people's cognitive complexity in making sense of the EQPR process. This collective analytical effort allowed us to build a data set structured in first-order concept, second-order theme, and Aggregate dimensions, capable of highlighting the dynamic relations among the different layers of analysis.

Results

The text and quotes identified during the in-depth interviews were extrapolated and then compared, looking for similarities and differences to be divided into units of meaning successively (1st order concept) (Table 1) that later led to the identification of 2nd order themes and the following aggregate dimensions (Figure 1).

Table 1. Quotes identified during the in-depth interviews and related first-order concepts.

| No | Quotes | 1 st Order concepts |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | <p>Interviewee 5: “the sizeable migratory wave of 2015 brought many refugees to Italy. Some requests have started to arrive at the university from these students in this context. At the time, there was rigidity on the part of the university in requesting documents”.</p> <p>“The university's first difficulty was: how can we evaluate their requests?”</p> | Pressure from constant increase of migratory flows |
| 2 | <p>Interviewee 2: “there had been a period of a great influx of refugees, migrants even our region ... there was actually a strong presence”. “If one believes to have in the local reality the presence of a certain number of migrants, it is undoubtedly a stimulus for the university to work on inclusion, to work on the territory and support the integration of these young people, also comparing them with the other students to make a journey together ... the university grows with these things”.</p> | |
| 3 | <p>Interviewee 6: “in our region, we have a very low population density; we have problems related to abandonment, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The demographic decline is very marked, and every student is essential to us”.</p> | Demographic decline |
| 4 | <p>Interviewee 1: “it is a recent activity; we had the first cases in 2019. The question emerged precisely that year because a refugee winner of one of our scholarships did not even have the documents. I was already in contact with CIMEA, and I contacted them to find out how to manage this candidate”.</p> | Explicit requests for recognition / enrollment by migrants |
| 5 | <p>Interviewee 3: “it was precisely the request that came from the students. Most of them write to us: I have a desire, I want to study at university, I want to complete my interrupted course of study”.</p> | |
| 6 | <p>Interviewee 4: “as a university, the problem arose when three young people who were here without documentation came to the office to find out if they had the opportunity to continue their studies”.</p> | |
| 7 | <p>Interviewee 3: “there was Law 148 and the ratification of the Lisbon Convention, and from there the process began”.</p> | Legislative framework |
| 8 | <p>Interviewee 2: “we have been participating for two years in university corridors with UNHCR, and we have signed the Manifesto of the inclusive university”.</p> | Universities as a “shelter” |
| 9 | <p>Interviewee 4: “we have always worked with CIMEA for the recognition of qualifications ... even when the network for the evaluation of refugee qualifications was launched at national level.”</p> | Participation in pilot projects / experiments promoted by the Council of Europe or by CIMEA |

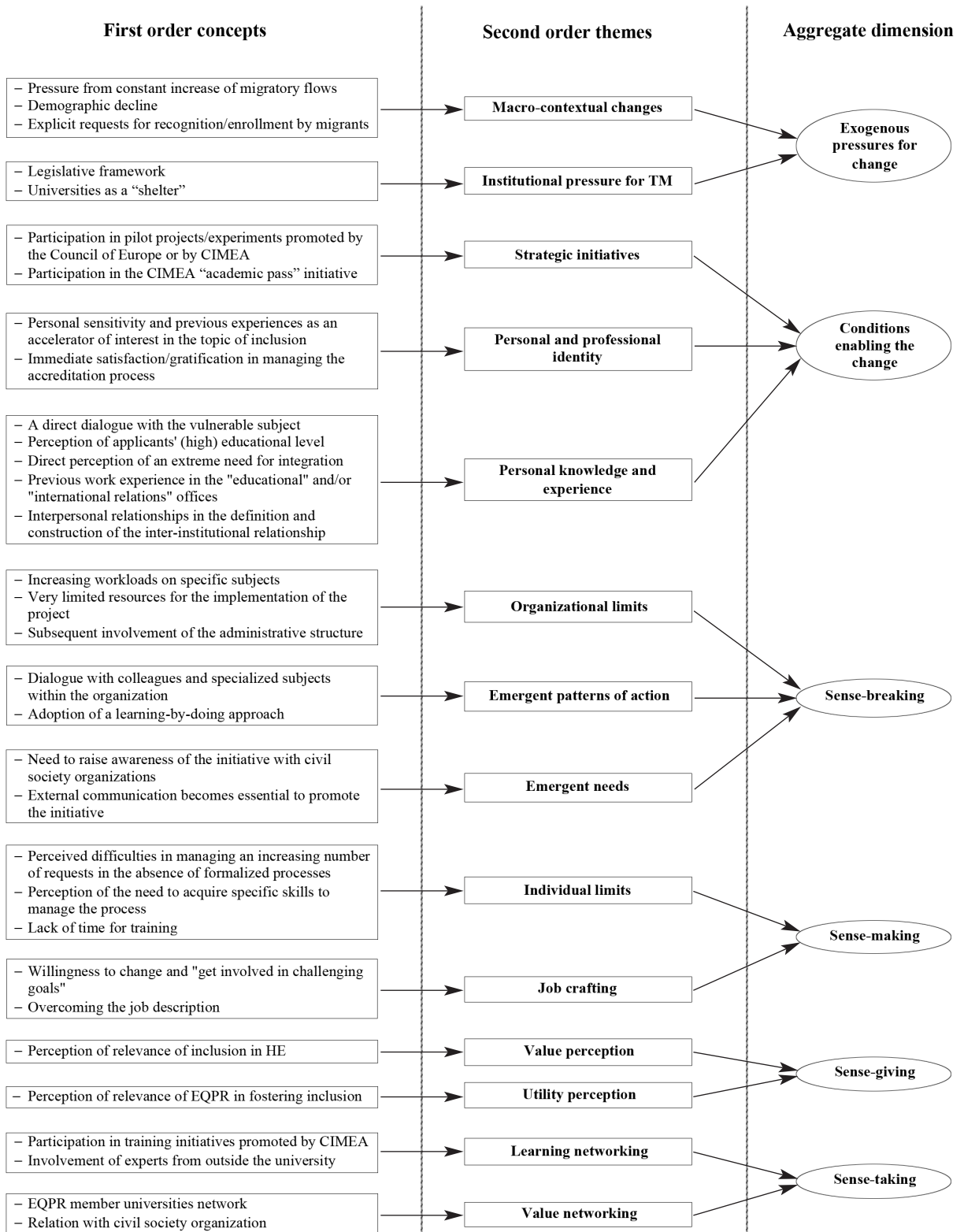
| | | |
|----|--|---|
| 10 | Interview 2: “at the request of CIMEA, we had joined what CIMEA calls the Academic Pass ... first to the CNVQR working group (the national coordination for the evaluation of refugee qualifications) and then to the experimentation of the Academic Pass”. | Participation in the CIMEA “academic pass” initiative |
| 11 | Interview 3: “the development of the work was mainly in the year 2016-17 with the CNVQR, then with the Academic Pass to the EQPR”. | |
| 12 | Interview 4: “we joined, and given my role at the university, I was appointed as a University Evaluator, and then I took part in those activities that made the first experimentation with the academic pass”. | |
| 13 | Interview 2: “the initiative was born from my sensitivity to the theme of inclusion, a sensitivity that is absolutely shared by the previous director and also the current one”. | Personal sensitivity and previous experiences as an accelerator of interest in the topic of inclusion |
| 14 | Interview 1: “the refugee topic has always been close to my heart; I cannot give you an objective explanation ...”. “There was a good sensitivity in the teaching staff, but the initiative also emerged for my sensitivity towards these issues”. | |
| 15 | Interview 4: “the return is low ... but also the single student who had the EQPR and then graduated and is now thinking of doing a doctorate ... it is a satisfaction both for the University and for myself”. | Immediate satisfaction / gratification in managing the accreditation process |
| 16 | Interview 1: “the university is directly involved in the pre and post-evaluation phase of the candidate”. | Direct and continuous dialogue with vulnerable subject |
| 17 | Interview 3: “it is normal for relationships to intertwine”. “The human relationship exists and is complementary. The technical aspect can help, facilitate and speed up the process, but the human side must always be there”. “I care personally ... it is a process that impacts and if you see certain subjects”. | |
| 18 | Interview 4: “many have made absolutely valid university paths ... when you talk to these people, you realize the culture they have”. “I remember the case of this person who was a teacher in his country with a doctorate and was also an imam, therefore a person of an incredible culture. He, however, did not have the documentation of everything he had done because he had fled from his own country. So certainly, giving him the opportunity to integrate by recognizing his course of study also becomes an element of growth in the country of arrival ... it is a tool that, from my point of view, has proved to be useful”. | Direct perception of applicants (high) educational level |
| 19 | Interview 3: “for example, now I'm taking care of the Afghans, I honestly don't know how to help him. He is certainly a specialized medical professional, he has qualifications, but he was able to take only part of the relative documentation with him”. | Direct perception of an extreme need of integration |
| 20 | Interview 6: “I have been working with refugee centers since 2015, relationships have changed over time ... my personal research has shifted, I have been intrigued by the experiences and needs of these young people, we have opened channels for dialogue thanks to our public engagement initiatives”. | |
| 21 | Interview 4: “the first need they have is to settle both from a regulatory and work point of view, for maintenance which is followed by obtaining the EQPR”. | |

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| 22 | Interview 4: "I deal with non-EU students and with all the procedures for university enrollment". "These are extra commitments that require different attention and procedures, which ultimately fall within the office duties". | Previous work experience in the educational and/or international relations offices |
| 23 | Interview 3: "I entered the Office which was called Student Secretariat Coordination ... now my current office is called Student Secretariat and training offer ... so when I entered, I learned the part relating to teaching". | |
| 24 | Interview 4: "the support network arises from interpersonal relationships ... both me and the colleague who is a university mediator, we are interested in volunteering ... we had a series of contacts and when the opportunity arose to join the Academic pass first and then the EQPR we contacted the various subjects to understand what kind of users they had, and if anyone could be interested in our experience". | Interpersonal relationships in the definition and construction of inter-institutional relationships |
| 25 | Interview 2: "we were lucky enough to have a person who is particularly expert on the subject, he is a cultural mediator, and who has always collaborated with us as well as with the region and with the police headquarters, so he also knows the procedures for obtaining residence permits. He can support the students and having him keep track of relationships a little helped us a lot. Indeed, in the absence of such a person ... the problem may exist". "On EQPR, the workload increased when we set up the first session, the network had to be organized and created, we had to reach the refugee centers to identify possible candidates". | Increasing workloads on specific subjects |
| 26 | Interview 3: "the impact is strong; it meant more work for me because at the moment I'm taking care of everything". | |
| 27 | Interview 1: "the numbers have been increasing and I have reported the need to activate a specific unit with specific skills". | |
| 28 | Interview 4: "the workload has grown, also due to the choice of the university to adopt an internationalization policy". | |
| 29 | Interview 4: "we are still very understaffed". | Very limited resources for the implementation of the project |
| 30 | Interview 5: "they need legal support, psychological support, they have particular needs compared to other students. In this sense the university must involve different resources". | Subsequent involvement of the administrative structure |
| 31 | Interview 5: "there are other types of problems that we are not able to solve directly, we rely on a professor of international law who is an expert in the field. To help students, we would need skills that we do not have in the office". | Interlocution with colleagues and specialized subjects within the organization |

| | | |
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| 32 | <p>Interviewee 2: “we had changed our student fee regulations to ensure that these students, coming from countries at war, refugees, etc. ... could be exempt from taxes”.</p> <p>“The EQPR is for those who already have refugee status ... but we had very few who already had refugee status, some had humanitarian protection, and most were asylum seekers. We convinced CIMEA and the Council of Europe that it could be useful to give asylum seekers a chance to take advantage of this time to study, etc. ... they accepted. Then we made the assessment also of asylum seekers”.</p> | Adoption of a learning by-doing approach |
| 33 | <p>Interviewee 4: “there is certainly sensitivity on the issue. If necessary, the Rector and Vice-Rector for Internationalization have always acted. As a university, we have approved the tax exemption, which is now automatic when the student submits the request for the EQPR”.</p> | |
| 34 | <p>Interview 6: “widespread leadership must emerge with all those involved, there must be figures who build a network around these initiatives”.</p> <p>“It is necessary to build a relationship with civil society to make the initiative known to the recipients”.</p> | Need of raising awareness of the initiative with civil society organizations |
| 35 | <p>Interviewee 4: “the project is still little known, and I am aware of it having relationships with non-profit organizations for the reception of refugees”.</p> <p>“Definitely a useful tool that we should spread more”.</p> | |
| 36 | <p>Interviewee 6: “communication is important. At that time, we had also published articles in the newspapers that allowed the dissemination of this information, and the most attentive cultural mediators contacted us immediately”.</p> | External communication becomes essential to promote initiative |
| 37 | <p>Interviewee 3: “it would be nice. For the moment, we don't have the right structures in the office ... we only have a personal word of mouth”.</p> | |
| 38 | <p>Interviewee 1: “the proposal was to formalize the procedure; it is useless to entrust the initiative to individual people. If you decide to take a path (administrative or training), it is necessary to formalize it”.</p> | Perceived difficulties in managing an increasing number of requests in the absence of formalized processes |
| 39 | <p>Interviewee 3: “there is a need for different and specific skills ... there is the linguistic theme that is essential, depending on the students you must relate to you must know their language and it is not always English. Knowledge of teaching, legislation and above all having a Credential Evaluator perspective to verify the qualifications presented also because at this stage they are constantly updated”.</p> <p>“Certain personal characteristics must be present. Sensitivity towards the theme of inclusion for example ... without knowing certain themes, the person cannot relate to refugees because he risks having a negative impact on the various subjects. The person should have some good psychological skills”.</p> | |
| 40 | <p>Interviewee 1: “I asked the university to attend training courses to overcome the skills gaps highlighted in the previous period”.</p> | Perception of the need to acquire specific skills to manage the process |
| 41 | <p>Interviewee 5: “unfortunately, the time for training is short, we are overwhelmed by daily activities ...”.</p> <p>“Now fortunately we have access to online courses offered by UNHCR”.</p> | Lack of time for training |

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| 42 | Interviewee 2: "I am someone who has always moved, in the sense that if there are things that are wrong here [in the office], if you want to achieve results, you have to try to change something". | Willingness to change and "get involved in challenging goals" |
| 43 | Interviewee 3: "the adoption of the EQPR forced us to adopt new activities and take on new responsibilities. Our role expectations have inevitably changed". | Overcoming the job description |
| 44 | Interviewee 2: "this is a project that effectively allows students to integrate into university and even local life". | Perception of relevance of inclusion in HE |
| 45 | Interviewee 3: "many of these students have chosen architecture or planning as their courses, so in the end, they have greatly enriched the course of study. Since then, we have activated degrees in English that have involved both our students and other students of other nationalities. This obviously enriches and also leads to inclusion". | |
| 46 | Interviewee 6: "thanks to the EQPR we were able to involve about 18 young people [from the refugee centers] who needed to understand the perspectives offered [by the EQPR]". | Perception of relevance of EQPR in fostering inclusion |
| 47 | Interviewee 2: "some employees in the student secretariat were trained in the training day organized by CIMEA on the occasion of the first evaluation session". | Participation in training initiatives promoted by CIMEA |
| 48 | Interviewee 3: "I have followed all the courses carried out by CIMEA, and recently I have taken the course relating to the Credential Evaluator". "CIMEA is giving us a hand in this ... I did a course as a Credential Evaluator and a specific course on refugees". | |
| 49 | Interviewee 4: "I followed all the various courses organized by CIMEA on EQPR certification ... the path allows for a continuous exchange of ideas and stimuli". | |
| 50 | Interviewee 6: "cultural mediators can promote this initiative. So, the university works together with the mediators, or the university has a real cultural mediator". | Involvement of experts from outside the university |
| 51 | Interviewee 3: "it would be ideal to have a strengthened structure ... one or two people to take care of them ... we also do the foundation course, and for this project we had to call two people on contract. It is important to have the support of other professionals". | |
| 52 | Interviewee 5: "unfortunately, there is no coordination that we would need. I pointed out the need for this continuous support as well as the need to involve other universities which are very active and have proposed excellent projects". "It is really difficult to coordinate with other universities". | EQPR member universities network |
| 53 | Interviewee 6: "there are universities that called us after the first experience, we gave some information to help them develop their project". | |
| 54 | Interviewee 2: "we contacted the various refugee centers in the area to find out if they had any cases of people potentially affected". "We expanded the network, we had the support of the Region which at the time had an office that managed contacts with refugee centers ... we also made initiatives with them". "We have been contacted about refugee centers following the arrival of Afghan refugees". | Relation with civil society organization |
| 55 | Interviewee 3: "bring the university, the prefecture, and the police headquarters together and start activating the institutions present in the area. I know that there are also other projects on public engagement related to other sectors". | |
| 56 | Interviewee 6: "the network of actors outside the university mobilized to promote the project, we alone as a university would not have made it". | |

Figure 1. First-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions.



The obtained results show a picture in which some elements are definitely explicit and weigh more than others. Hereinafter we present the main findings of the in-depth interviews.

Exogenous pressures for change

Macro-contextual factors, such as the increase of migration flows, the demographic decline of the areas where the universities are located, and explicit requests for enrollment presented by migrants and refugees in particular, were indeed important factors to be considered and found a fertile ground where the sensitivity of those operating towards these issues was more developed. In addition to that, the presence of regulatory precepts, such as Law 148/2011 with the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications relating to higher education in the European Region (1997), and strategic choices of the organisation towards the internationalisation and/or the achievement of the TM, which is recognised as an institutional mission of universities, alongside the traditional teaching and research missions by the Legislative Decree 19/2012 played an essential role in carrying out the processes.

Conditions enabling the change

Being involved in the EQPR process was often the result of strategic initiatives that saw the university participating in pilot projects and experimentations promoted by the Council of Europe and by the Italian ENIC-NARIC centre. However, personal sensitivity and previous experiences, unified with gratification for managing the process, were the first step at the individual level generally needed to start the process institutionally. This is confirmed by the importance that personal knowledge, such as previous work experiences in educational and international relations offices, can play and the direct dialogue needed to accompany vulnerable subjects with an extreme need for integration. Also, the construction of external networks and inter-institutional relationships to accomplish the program was generally started based on the personal relationships these professionals had with local institutions in which they were volunteering in some cases.

Sense-breaking

The will of those operating often has to confront organisational limits such as increasing workloads and limited resources for the project implementation. Furthermore, to overcome organisational limitations, emergent patterns of actions emerge due to the necessary interlocution with colleagues and specialised subjects (e.g., cultural mediators) that already work within the organisation. This

process has often led to a “Learning by doing approach” to manage the procedures correctly, solve problems (e.g., the exemption from taxes or the possibility of enrolling in courses while awaiting refugee status), and address emergent needs (e.g., the need to highlight awareness of the initiative, also with external stakeholders) to facilitate the beneficiaries.

Sensemaking

However, beyond the will of individuals to complete the processes, the tasks can unlikely be carried out by a single worker/office or without the involvement of the administrative structure. The limits are not just organisational but also individual limits. The need to acquire new and specific skills to run the program properly for those involved is of great importance. Nonetheless, the operators’ lack of time for training does not have to be underestimated, in light of the above-mentioned increased workload and the habit of overcoming their job description (Job crafting).

Sense-giving

The Value perception of the relevance of the process of inclusion in HE (e.g., the idea of being able to help someone) and the Utility Perception of the EQPR as an instrument of inclusion and integration of the applicants are certainly strong motivations that accompanied the operators in their daily work, nevertheless of the above mentioned organisational and individual limits to be faced.

Sense-taking

Of great importance has resulted the participation in training initiatives held by the Italian ENIC-NARIC centre, and the involvement of external experts confirms the importance of being involved in a Learning network that can foster and add value to these kinds of processes. At the same time, what constitutes Value Networking is the participation and confrontation with other universities participating in the EQPR network and the relations with Civil Society Organizations - CSO that can enrich both the institution and the individuals with exchanges of information and dialogue.

Results from the survey

As anticipated in the previous paragraph, we tested the model emerging from this qualitative framework, building a survey presented to the entire universe of the Italian universities participating in the EQPR project.

The first significant element highlighted by the analysis of the questionnaires is certainly the confirmation of the model previously described; all the questions proposed have generally collected positive responses. Naturally, the advantage deriving from the use of closed questions with a Likert scale is obtaining a more articulated and comprehensive evaluation of the elements making up the model itself and recognising which ones are of more significant relative agreement.

Going into more detail, the survey confirmed the concomitance of various exogenous pressures for change at the basis of the adoption of the EQPR, particularly macro-contextual changes such as the pressure deriving on the territories from migratory flows (average value 5,22).

Regarding the factors enabling these processes of change, it cannot be emphasised that one of the most relevant elements is undoubtedly the previous personal experience as well as the personal sensitivity of the organisational actors involved relating to issues such as the social inclusion of migrants (average value 6,13). On the contrary, the (relative) low importance is surprisingly attributed to the immediate and recognisable gratification deriving from the work done (average value 4,44).

Certainly, a clear trend emerges in perceiving the university as an institution that has to deal with the inclusion of disadvantaged people (average value 6.61), thus attributing a very significant utility to the EQPR process (average value 6,13) with a positive impact on the reputation of the same university that adopts it (average value 6,30). At the same level of macro analysis, the importance of participation in the university network and the ongoing relationships with civil society organisations is crucial to giving value to the experience (average value 5,13).

Even though the respondents slightly consider the organisational limits, adopting the EQPR does not seem to have unsustainably increased the workloads in the offices (average value 4,48) nor required the activation of specific skills in other offices those of respondents (mean value 4,40). However, adopting the EQPR was a learning-by-doing process (average value 5,04) since no prior procedures were formalised, highlighting personal shortcomings in the skills necessary for carrying out their role in the EQPR process.

Consistently, the personal lack of skills has steadily shown a continuing need for professional training (average value 5,52) which was partially satisfied by the provision of training courses activated in a timely and effective manner (average value 5). Another element of great interest is the willingness of the interviewees to go beyond their job description (average value 5.83), highlighting their willingness to go beyond their ordinary job duties (average value 5.78).

Discussion

Our study analyses the change management required by the EQPR adoption using the lenses of sensemaking and job crafting to shed light on how individuals enact the change through their job beyond the formal organisational requirements.

The reference offered by Sandberg and Tsoukas's (2015) conceptualisation of sensemaking constituencies has allowed us to reinterpret critically the elements that emerged and were highlighted by our research. Although the framework used focuses on 'organisational activities that are interrupted until they are satisfactorily restored (or in some cases permanently interrupted)' (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015, p. 36), our research takes a slightly different approach focusing on emergent activities modelled by a job crafting process justified by the occurrence of hybrid events (major and minor, planned and unplanned), leaving apart the 'disruptive ambiguity' (Weick *et al.*, 2005, p. 413) which are generally considered the rationale for the inception of an organisational sensemaking. This has led us to a different interpretation of the other foundational dimensions identified, such as the processes of the sensemaking efforts and the outcomes, due to the emergence of a job crafting process that shaped the definition of new activities and the interpretation of the role as previously understood by the organisational actors. The narrative is different when it comes to the factors influencing those processes since the results of our approach confirm the importance of those already mentioned with no need for new interpretations.

To recap what emerges from our research, we are in the presence of hybrid events justified by the specific episode of the EQPR introduction, to which major and minor, planned and unplanned events followed, playing a significant role. Although major events are generally considered, as Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015, p. 36) highlight, 'fewer studies have utilised sensemaking perspective to study sensemaking in episodes triggered by minor planned or unplanned events.' In our case, while major planned events are related to institutional pressure to reach TM goals, major unplanned events are linked to macro-contextual factors, such as pressure from the constant increase of migration flows. Bearing in mind the underestimated importance of minor events, we identified both planned and unplanned minor events.

The adoption of the new legislative framework provided by the EQPR introduction and the consequent strategic initiative put in place by the involved institutions, such as the participation in pilot projects and experiments promoted by the Council of Europe or other initiatives by CIMEA, led to the creation of value networking composed by those universities taking part into the EQPR program and the ongoing relationship and debate with Civil Society

Organizations (CSOs) have been read as a minor planned event. As unplanned minor events, we identified both organisational (i.e., increasing workloads on specific subjects and minimal resources to carry out activities) and individual limits (i.e., perceived difficulty in managing an increasing number of requests in the absence of formalised processes, the perception of the need to acquire specific skills to manage the process, and lack of time for training).

Our results contribute to the understanding of these events as trigger events that raised the necessity to create a new approach to sensemaking rooted in a job crafting process that highlighted the willingness of those actors to assume responsibilities and change and get involved in challenging goals, overcoming the personal job description, leading to the creation of new organisational processes. Other elements that permitted shaping the job crafting process were justified and enhanced by the dialogue with colleagues and specialised subjects within the organisation and the adoption of a learning-by-doing approach.

In contrast with Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015), outcomes are not interpreted following their schematism since there are no restored (and non-restored as well) sense and action but the emergence of a new sense and meaning of the job executed, reached thanks to the individual job crafting processes.

On the contrary, our results confirm that some situational factors may influence sense-making processes and outcomes. Regarding the context, demographic decline is strictly linked to the territorial efforts played by universities in light of their TM, where the recognition of the explicit request for enrollment by migrants plays a significant role at the same time, justifying the need to raise awareness of the initiatives carried out with CSOs. The dimension of language emerges in the background of the carried-out interviews, being linked to the narrative of inclusions of vulnerable subjects, being connected simultaneously with several elements related to the identity of the subject involved.

Although in literature identity has not often been explicitly addressed looking at how identities influence sensemaking (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015), our research shows that elements of identity such as personal sensitivity, knowledge, and previous experiences strongly influence the sensemaking processes and the cognitive framework as well (Sheprow and Harrison, 2022). The perception of the relevance of inclusion in HE and the EQPR as an instrument fostering inclusion clearly emerges from the interviews leading to the creation of a specific pattern of actions that are developed in the day-by-day activities, contributing to the enrichment of the organisation's (tacit) knowledge.

Contrary to what has always been highlighted in the literature looking at negative emotions' role in these processes, our results show the importance of positive

and bidirectional (i.e., expresser \rightleftarrows perceiver) emotions in sustaining the sensemaking process (Yu *et al.*, 2021). Interpersonal relationships, direct and continuous dialogue with vulnerable subjects, the perception of their extreme need for integration, as well as the perceptions of the high educational level of applicants shape the actions carried out by organisational actors.

Technology emerges in the background and plays an essential role as a facilitator of these processes, especially in communication between public institutions and migrants, especially during the Covid19 pandemic, where procedures were entirely online. Moreover, several developments connected to the implementation of blockchain technology as a shared database among European institutions have opened the door to new possibilities that have not been fully explored yet.

Conclusions

Guided by a sensemaking theoretical perspective, our study contributes theoretically to the literature on change management in HEIs by discussing the processes that enable them to embrace the challenge of social inclusivity and to give proper space to diverse communities of students. The interplay between sense-taking, sense-breaking, and sensemaking (Rom and Eyal, 2019) allows the enactment of change in this context, allowing both to take the specificity of refugee students into full account and give space to the individual interpretation of meanings within the organisation towards inclusivity.

Our study offers meaningful insights into the role of individuals, their occupational roles, and associated values in pursuing the social mission of refugees' inclusion in the organisational life of universities and, more in general, the University TM. Our theoretical contribution is twofold. First, we contribute to the literature on HE and HEIs, by showing contradictory aspects of the pursuit of the TM concerning the aim of social inclusion. Second, we contribute to the literature on sensemaking by shedding light on the interplay between the different dimensions and the grounded processes of sensemaking, intended as sense-taking, sense-breaking, and sense-giving both at the individual and organisational levels. Also, we contribute to a better understanding of the constituencies of the sensemaking processes, adding up to Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015).

First, the results from the in-depth interviews show how the “emergent” approach to change seems to better represent, through their dialogic organisational development, the current responses of universities to the demands of their external stakeholders, particularly refugees. The emergent approach sees organisational change as a bottom-up, non-linear, and difficult-to-predict phenomenon, therefore non-programmable. In the emerging perspective, the change occurs

through a continuous interplay of individual events and experiments, often unpredictable and provoked by shifting interests and relationships between different actors and contextual factors.

While the interviewees recall the role of macro and contextual factors as underlying exogenous conditions of change, it is only the role of individuals, and their sensemaking processes, that allow the change to produce organisational change that can lead to positive social impacts. The observed change processes are influenced by a high degree of complexity in terms of environmental factors or components on which the organisation depends. This inevitably reduces the possibility that the public organisation adopts a “planned” approach to change. Secondly, the interviews reveal the importance of individual perceptions and experiences as conditions through which the process of organisational change, and its effectiveness and persistence over time, can be enabled. Within this perspective, the individual perceptions and sensemaking activities in managing organisational change suggest specific actions useful to create convergent interpretations regarding proper individual courses of action. Furthermore, personal-psychological attitudes and considerations impact change management processes and subjects’ commitment.

Although the social goals may not be a central focus of their job, people enact a sense-breaking process to confer new meaning to their job and embed the social mission of inclusion in the organisation. Moreover, job crafting constitutes a way to enact sensemaking, by which administrative roles and academics stretch the boundaries of their duties to reach out to marginalised students, help them navigate the academic system, and smooth the EQPR process. Finally, by accessing a network of other mission-driven institutions, individuals may unlock sense-taking opportunities that reinforce the perception of values and social purpose embedded in the organisational change.

Practical Implications

The EQPR is a game changer for institutions because it allows, through a rigorous and well-tested methodology, to assess qualifications even in case educational documentation is missing. This is a pretty relevant shift in the daily tasks of professionals, being their job assessing credentials. Also, identifying best practices for implementing the EQPR process will help inform other Universities that are not yet part of the process, despite the existing regulatory obligation. Typically, assessing credentials is a research-based work that involves verifying that the core elements of a qualification satisfy the needed requisites and are in line with international and national conventions and legislation concerning the

topic. In the case of the EQPR, instead, as documents are missing, HEIs enrol a candidate by accepting a document that verifies the candidate's declaration, with partial or totally missing supporting documents. It implies a radical change in the perspective of credential evaluators as the research is no longer carried out on paper, but the candidate interviewed is the source of the needed information. What allowed this change in perspective and, therefore, the use of the EQPR by admission officers is the trust in the procedure that has been developed together with the confidence in the ones who have been involved in developing it (the Council of Europe and the ENIC-NARIC centres) but also their participation in the Italian interview sessions. Italian admission officers have been participating in the training provided by the Council of Europe and the more experienced centres to the credential evaluator of ENIC-NARIC centres that had to implement it and the possibility to participate as observers in the interviews, testing for themselves the accuracy of the procedure. The present research shows how innovation in the process makes it possible, on the one hand, to overcome a substantial gap, i.e., assess the qualifications of refugees even in case their educational documentation is partially or totally missing, and on the other how it impacts the whole institution, supporting its capacity to be inclusive and to reinforce its third-mission effort.

Limitations

The number of in-depth interviews and the collected questionnaires gave us a comprehensive view of the process of refugees' inclusion in the Italian Higher Education system, as we collected evidence from almost all Universities participating in the National Coordination for the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications (CNVQR). Nevertheless, the empirical representation can be considered limited in two aspects. First, unheard voices from the remaining Universities should also be included. Second, our survey focused on the voices of administrative staff based on the evidence emerging from the first phase of the empirical analysis. Though, further data collection could complement the present one from the perspective of Universities' top management. Including the perspective of the refugees and other students in the sample could be problematic due to language barriers and potential cultural issues on one side and the numerosity of the sample on the other. Additionally, we would encourage an international comparison, at least at the European level. Nevertheless, a panel of experts had advised us not to do so, as the national legislators have decided very differently on how to adopt the EQPR, leading to problematic heterogeneity and potential causal ambiguity in the analysis.

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Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are increasingly deemed responsible for their impact on society in terms of inclusiveness and social sustainability as a priority in pursuing the “Third Mission” (TM). However, little has been studied on how administrative and teaching staff implement such change within the organization. This study explores policies and practices supporting the recognition of refugee qualifications for access to higher education in Italy, particularly the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR), as a tool to pursue the university’s TM. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting contradictory aspects of HEI’s pursuit of the TM and sheds light on the interplay between different dimensions and grounded sense-making processes.

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