

Section I

(b) Our project goal was simple: to help shed light and increase awareness about the catastrophic situation of migration into Greece both among Greeks and among others outside the country interested in the issue through two photo exhibitions and a series of articles on a news website. Over the last decade Greece has become one of the largest recipient countries of destitute migrants from the world's poorest places, which has created an unsustainable situation of poverty, joblessness, crime and violence in downtown Athens. As a journalism student at Columbia (my partner recently graduated from film school in Toronto), I wanted to do a project that was related to my field and one that I feel was able to reach and educate the most people on this topic.

(c) Other fund raising efforts, beyond the Davis grant, did not contribute to this project. However, I remained in Greece for the entirety of the summer using my personal funds while continuing to work on the project without my partner.

(d) As usual, the project did not always go as it had been originally planned. In many ways it worked out better than I had hoped. Our initial goal was to hold two photo exhibitions; the first to be held in Athens and the next in Greektown Toronto and to have a video and written materials posted on a news website.

We did not, however, hold two exhibitions due both to time and money constraints and also due to the excellent location that we found for the first exhibition. Second, the online portion of the project has grown larger than I expected and the website (www.greekreporter.com) has agreed to host videos, interviews and a weekly series of my work from mid-September to mid-October which was not initially planned.

The most prominent difficulty we faced was safety. There were numerous occasions for excellent photos and interviews but they were missed, as our safety may have been in jeopardy. Many of the people we sought to interview had been through very difficult times and lived in extremely dangerous neighborhoods where robbery and violence are an everyday occurrence. For instance, most migrants in Greece are found in central Athens near Omonia Square. The side streets are very dangerous and many times even police warned us not to enter during the day or night. We held several interviews there but did not always feel safe enough to return. Similarly, in Igoumenitsa, outdoor migrant camps are highly unsanitary and the situation inside is very unpredictable. To make matters worse we were often carrying more than \$5000 worth of equipment.

Trust was also an issue. Most migrants are in the country illegally and are constantly harassed by police. They feel threatened and are nervous speaking to foreigners. This meant that my partner and I had to take time (sometimes weeks) to build relationships with people. For instance, one Mauritanian boy needed approximately six meetings (and a promise to make him a rap video – he was a budding musician) before he would tell me his story.

As to how many will benefit and whom, I believe that simply the kindness and understanding we showed has already provided at least some respite to a few dozen

migrants that we had contact with. More concretely, however, I think there are countless people who benefited from gaining knowledge of this situation whether through our exhibition or through the website.

The exhibition, having lasted three weeks (before it was torn down likely by those who do not sympathize with the migrants to put it politely) was in a busy part of Athens near several university departments. Each day I would see dozens of students reading the boards we created and looking at the photos. It is difficult to assess the feelings of those who saw the project but I believe that it had a positive impact, particularly as anger and resentment grows in Greece during bad financial times.

The website, I believe, will further contribute to this understanding by making our reporting public and also make sure our contribution lasts longer than just a few weeks.

Section II

(a) As I stated in the initial project proposal, peace is not simply the absence of war. Nor is it simply a grudging tolerance of the other – an agreement to disagree. Rather, peace is an enduring sentiment of the equal worth of every human being. It is also a day-to-day commitment to understanding, compromise and compassion.

In this way, our project contributed to peace by making individuals in Greece and elsewhere reflect, on tolerance and empathy to fellow human beings. It has also told stories of individual migrants in Greece, thereby humanizing their struggles during a time when they are simply referred to as “illegals.”

As to what I learned from this project, I believe that it has further confirmed my feelings that very little in this world is black and white – rather issues are defined by shades of gray.

Regarding the situation of migrants in Greece there are clearly two narratives: first, migrants are living in deplorable conditions trapped in limbo, often escaping war and poverty. However, Greeks are understandably concerned (and often angry) about skyrocketing crime, poverty and unsafe streets. More than 60% of the prison population are not citizens of Greece and the Greek economy can no longer provide jobs for unskilled labor – at this point the economy cannot provide jobs for anyone in the country. This has created an unsustainable situation that needs creative thinking (and a large uptick in the economy) to solve.

(b) My project reporting on the critical situation of migrants from the poorest parts of the earth entering Greece has taught me that empathy is most needed during times of crisis and tumult. The project was valuable and necessary because the dire situation facing Greece currently has meant that empathy and compassion for those escaping despair is fading fast and needs to be revived if the country is to find a path to a sustainable future.

Where Do We Go From Here?: Building Understanding in Europe's Migrant Gateway
Greece

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