



# RITSONA REFUGEE CAMP

## Female Friendly Space

Maki Usui

University of Michigan School of Social Work



### COUNTRY & CITY

- ◆ **GREECE** is a country in southeastern Europe with thousands of islands throughout the Aegean, Ionian, and Mediterranean seas. It is the crossroad between Europe, Africa and the Middle East.
- ◆ **CHALKIDA** is a quiet yet vibrant city an hour away from Athens, located on Evia, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest islands in Greece.
- ◆ **GREECE & REFUGEES:** At its peak (2015-2016), over 1 million refugees and migrants arrived to Greek islands from Turkey via boats. Despite the economic crisis, Greeks have come together to assist the refugees to provide the basic needs, and the assistance is ongoing. Though the peak has passed, there are new arrivals every day to this day.

### FIELD PLACEMENT

#### RITSONA REFUGEE CAMP:

- ◆ **LOCATION:** A former air force base, 20 min from Chalkida.
- ◆ **RESIDENTS:** Approx 900 residents. Majority Arab and Kurdish communities from Syria, Iraq, Turkey, etc. Some African communities from Somalia, DRC, Cameroon, etc.
- ◆ **LANGUAGES:** Arabic, Kurdish, French, Greek, English

### PROJECTS & OUTCOMES

#### PROJECTS:

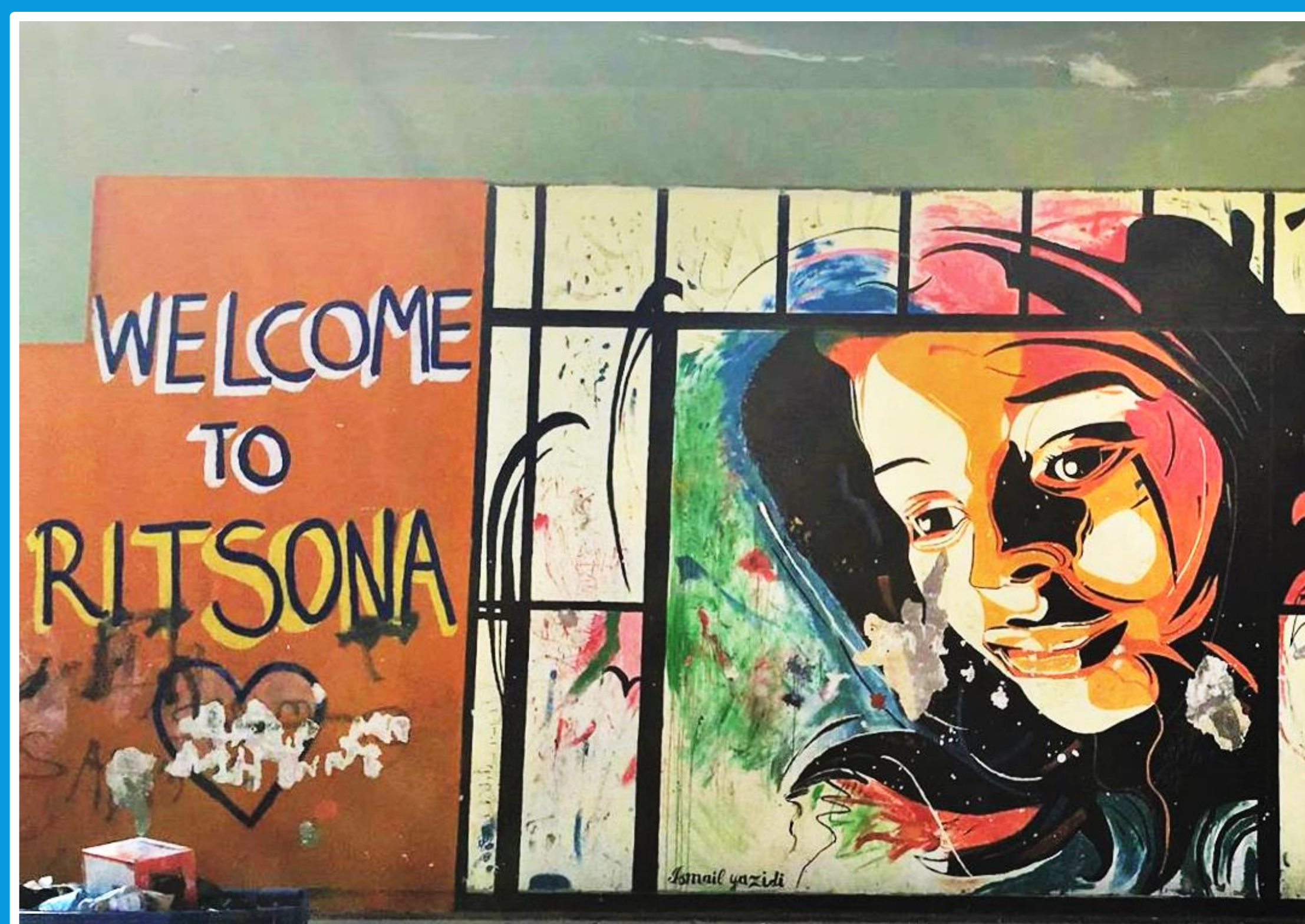
- ◆ Co-facilitated the **Female Friendly Space (FFS)** with counterpart. Organized sustainable activities to empower the female residents. Activities include; discussion groups, info sessions, yoga, fitness, dance, self-defense, pot-luck, open mic, beauty workshops, language, arts/crafts/music.

#### OUTCOMES:

- ◆ The number and the diversity of the FFS users increased
- ◆ The relationships between different communities improved
- ◆ Cross-agency communication/collaboration enhanced
- ◆ FFS activity/event schedules created based on needs

### AGENCY/COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- ◆ **CROSS-CULTURAL SOLUTIONS (CCS):** Host organization. US-based not-for-profit international organization. Runs the shop, distribution center, laundry room, and the FFS.
- ◆ **SOLIDARITY NOW:** Greek NGO with interdisciplinary team (social workers, psychologists, anthropologists, lawyers, etc.) funded by UNICEF. The agency of the counterpart and runs the FFS.
- ◆ **OTHER ACTORS ON SITE:** IOM, I AM YOU, Light House Relief, Keelpno, Global Brigades, UNICEF, Cafe Rits, etc.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ◆ Thank you to the Office of Global Activities for the support throughout the process, and GASP, Alumni Board of Governors, and International Institute for financial support. Big thank you to CCS, Solidarity Now, IOM, and all the residents and actors at Ritsona Refugee Camp for providing me with this invaluable learning opportunity.

### CONNECTIONS

#### CLASSROOM:

- ◆ **SW 657 MULTICULTURAL, MULTILINGUAL ORGANIZING** focuses on multicultural, multilingual organizing as a process of promoting intergroup relations and social development at the community level. The class prepared me well to serve in a heterogenous community.
- ◆ **FR 101 ELEMENTARY FRENCH** provided me with basic French knowledge that assisted in communication and rapport building with the French speaking community. If possible, I would recommend learning Arabic.

#### CAREER:

- ◆ You will learn and practice grassroots global community organization serving multicultural/multilingual populations, but also IP skills on a daily basis. You will also connect and possibly collaborate with UN agencies such as IOM.

### SKILLS DEVELOPED & LESSONS LEARNED

- ◆ Multi-cultural, multi-lingual organization skills
- ◆ Female and youth empowerment programming skills
- ◆ Community organization and facilitation skills
- ◆ Communication and collaboration with multiple actors can lead to long-lasting positive impact
- ◆ When working globally, know the safety precautions, the evacuation routes, and the procedures when "Code Red"
- ◆ Meeting the needs of the camp residents while setting boundaries to provide organized and equitable services to all community members is at times difficult but crucial

### ADVICE

- ◆ Always think about project sustainability when practicing community organization
- ◆ Patience, flexibility, and adaptability are keys to working in a global setting. Learn from the community