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### “Transformative looks”: Practicing Citizenship Through Photography<sup>1</sup>

- This article discusses photography as a tool in critical non-formal citizenship education.
- A collective and collaborative project implemented in Bilbao, Spain, with migrant women is analysed.
- The project enabled participants to appropriate local public spaces in pursuit of recognition.
- Through collective work and photography migrant women without formal citizenship actively engaged in local citizenship from the ground.

**Purpose:** The article discusses the meanings of citizenship and citizenship education when formal citizenship is restricted by exploring the potential of photography education and practice as a tool that promotes the exercise of citizenship in the context of non-formal critical adult education. By doing it, this text aims to enhance our understanding on the ways art education can improve the achievement of the goals of citizenship education.

**Method:** This article analyses the experience of the collective and collaborative project: “Con la cámara auestas: Transformative Looks”, in Bilbao, Spain, with a group of fifteen to twenty migrant women from eight Latin American countries.

**Findings:** Citizenship as a life-long learning process involving individual as well as collective action leading to the promotion of new shared values for more inclusive communities benefits greatly from the use of artistic expressions such as photography. Because of migrant women’s marginalized position as non-*formal*-citizens, citizenship as participation effectively becomes a fundamental route of influence in the public sphere. Conceptualizing citizenship as struggle and as a critical learning process opens up possibilities for generating new shared ‘habitus’, where ‘recognition’ can be achieved leading to more inclusive societies.

#### Keywords:

Photography, participation, citizenship, lifelong learning, visibility, voice

#### 1 Introduction

Being a citizen of a given nation-state is usually the route to being granted full rights (civil, political, social), as well as responsibilities. However, neither is citizenship a fixed concept nor is the way of accessing it a historical given. Citizenship has different meanings, as it will be discussed in the first section of this paper, and has been a process as well as a ‘status’. In this article, we focus on the process: How can citizenship be exercised through claims by,

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at one point, ‘non-citizens’? We take the example of migrants, who are citizens of one state which is not their state of residence and are therefore excluded from *formal* citizenship there, at least for some time. As a result, their access to rights (and obligations) where they reside becomes constrained by the immigration regime in place. Notwithstanding, they are important members in their communities, actively engaged in ‘local citizenship’ (Neveu, 1999). We depart from this conceptual framework to develop the argument that citizenship is a life-long learning process which is also a community process. This approach brings forth the potential for social transformation at the same time as new shared meanings are generated in the communities, based on new collective understandings and mutual recognition. One crucial dimension in this process of mutual learning in diverse societies, which will be discussed in this article, is the claim for recognition put forward by migrants. Using the example of an arts education project named “Transformative looks”, we look at a group of migrant women, who, through learning and practicing photography, collectively chose how to present themselves to others in their place of residence, thereby contributing to challenge majority views on ‘migrant women’ and gaining voice through photographs. We argue that they exercised citizenship as social participation and civic engagement by gaining visibility in an urban space through art – photography – while claiming recognition in their communities.

## 2 Conceptualizing citizenship within migratory contexts

Citizenship is usually defined as a form of membership in a political and geographical community (Bloemraad, Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2008) although it has many different meanings. To begin with, citizenship may be considered both as *formal* and *substantial* (Baubock 1994). The first dimension considers the formal link to the state, i.e. nationality; the second refers to the set of rights and duties ascribed to formal citizenship such as the right to vote and be elected or the respect of laws (Mantovan, 2006). In addition, *substantial* citizenship can also be considered in two different ways: as *static*, corresponding to the possession of rights and duties, or as *dynamic*, corresponding to an effective participation in political life (Mantovan, 2006).

How citizenship is defined is also a matter of contextualizing it within particular political philosophy traditions. The two major traditions of citizenship in western thought are the liberal and the civic republican (Martin, 2000). In the liberal political thinking, citizenship is an individually ascribed political status which is exercised mainly through the ballot-box. The civic republican tradition embodies a collective construction of citizenship as a continuing, creative and open-ended process which is exercised within civil society (Keogh, 2003, p. 8). For some time, as Delanty (2003, p. 597) points out liberal views on citizenship have tended to dominate the debate, versus communitarian approaches that build on the civic republican tradition.

Framed within nation-state boundaries, access to citizenship is based on a set of criteria that allows some people 'in' while keeping others 'out'. The two most important criteria for accessing citizenship in the modern state were being male and being adult; owning property and being white could also be added for some states (Coady, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, citizenship was, historically, deeply rooted in privilege, both in terms of having access to and benefiting from it. These criteria have been challenged over the past 200 years, by women, by indigenous populations, by slaves, and by others who had been excluded from access to *formal* citizenship (Coady 2014:1), eventually leading to more encompassing definitions or as Turner (1990, p. 191) puts it 'the expansion of the franchise'. Indeed, a broad notion of 'struggle' is a critical aspect to understand the historic growth of citizenship (Turner, 1990, p. 194).

Exclusionary criteria, necessarily, persist and define who is entitled to *formal* citizenship in every state. The large number and diverse origins of international migrants increasingly challenge long held notions of citizenship within nation-state borders (Bloemraad et al., 2008, p. 154). Migrants, who are citizens of the country where they were born or of their parents, have limited (if any) access to citizenship in the country where they come to reside after migration. Their presence in that state is regulated through immigration regimes that grant visas, permits of stay and so on, which establish their respective (limited) rights and duties in that state. For some migrants, even permits of stay or visas are difficult to obtain leading them to remain in the country

of residence without a recognized legal status. This effectively conditions migrants' actions as formal political subjects in their countries of residence, namely because they often do not have the right to vote, or be elected, or when they do it is restricted to local elections, and also limits access to social rights (social security benefits for example). Perhaps less affected is access to civil rights such as freedom of speech, rights to a fair trial and equal access to the legal system (Turner, 1990, p. 191).

In addition to this understanding of citizenship drawn from political philosophy, authors like Catherine Neveu propose that there are also more 'sociological' or 'anthropological' ways of understanding and looking at citizenship. This anthropologist proposes the introduction of concepts such as 'local citizenship' or 'citizenship from the ground', which correspond to "the multiple ways through which social actors themselves define, perceive, practice the engagement in public space" (Neveu, 1999, p.9), and which may be independent from the legal status that binds an individual to a particular nation-state. Citizenship can thus be conceived both as an active participatory practice and a set of rights, which are the object of struggle (Lister, 2007, p. 52).

Indeed, in the case of migrants, for example, exclusion from *formal* citizenship in the states where they reside does not prevent them from acting in public space or from engaging in 'local citizenship'. As members of that particular society, they may exercise 'citizenship as participation' (Turner, 1990, p. 189). This would correspond to the idea of "citizen as an active and engaged member of society" (Delanty, 2003, p. 597). Participation in the labour market or business sector, payment of taxes, participation in local schools or neighbourhood associations, raising families or other activities that make people an integral part of their communities and institutions can also be understood as participatory citizenship that allows immigrants to make 'citizenship-like' claims even in the absence of *formal* citizenship or even in the absence of a legal status (Bloemraad et al. 2008, p. 162). At the same time, they may enjoy some rights (for example economic or social protection rights deriving from their status as workers) but be in struggle for others (such as political rights, social rights or recognition).

Conceptually, this paper builds into emerging views of citizenship as embodied rather than abstract, which are also grounded in practice and contextualized in particular spaces of action, where in everyday lives people negotiate 'rights and responsibilities, belonging and participation' (Lister, 2007, p.55). This approach also takes into account the ways in which social and cultural backgrounds as well as material circumstances affect people's lives as citizens (Lister, 2007, p.55).

## 3 Citizenship as a lifelong learning process

Citizenship is a recurrent word on the discourse and practice of lifelong learning with a range of different meanings (Medel Añonuevo & Mitchell, 2003). In Western countries, the topic of citizenship has become increasingly important with many official initiatives for citizenship classes and teaching languages and civic

values to adult migrants. In this context, there is a growing complaint about the use of lifelong learning as a vehicle for assimilating migrants instead of embracing diversity (Guo, 2010).

Brooks and Holford (2009) point out some tensions within citizenship education initiatives. We focus here on the tensions between what is described as “knowledge transmission perspective” versus “learning through engagement perspective” proposed by Lawy and Biesta (2006). Each approach reflects a particular perspective that can be visualised over a vertical or horizontal axes. The first one, a vertical or “top-down” axe, reflects a traditional approach informed by policies that primarily target migrants’ citizenship (Loring, 2015). In fact, for migrants, we find in many countries ‘citizenship classes’ intended to prepare them for ‘citizenship tests’ which can give access to formal citizenship in the state of residence (provided that other requirements are fulfilled) or even just to get access to permits of stay (for a thorough revision of such courses in Europe see Jacobs and Rea, 2007; or the Special Issue on “Education for National Belonging: Imposing Borders and Boundaries on Citizenship” edited by Gordon, Long, & Fellin in 2015, which examines diverse citizenship courses in Canada, USA and the Netherlands). In general, these measures are usually framed as ‘integration courses’ but they also have an important ‘disciplinary function’ (Delanty, 2003, p. 599). The underlying assumption in this approach is that learning citizenship becomes equalized with learning the substantial dimension ascribed to formal citizenship, in the form of established rights and duties emanating from fixed and rigid conceptions of the polity as interpreted by public officials (Delanty, 2003, p.599). However, critical views emphasise that this limited approach reduces learning processes to formal learning, ignoring the importance of diversity (Abu El Haj, 2009) and risking to reinforce discriminatory practices (Banks, 2012).

By contrast, a “bottom-up” approach reflects a notion of “citizenship as practice” as an inclusive and relational concept located in a particular milieu and related to “day to day practices” (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). This interpretation reveals a dynamic notion of citizenship that includes perspectives and practices of individuals who reformulate policies through resistance and transformation (Loring, 2015). Such pedagogical perspective is highly context-bound. People learn relevant skills through actively trying to solve a problem or fulfilling a mission, rather than through organised or institutionalised processes of learning. At the same time, learning citizenship is considered as a process of learning democracy based on a dialectical and participatory education. Martin (2003) argues that this approach implies a particular kind of social purpose: “adult education of engagement”. Crucial to such discussion is the view that citizenship is not only acquired by the learning of cognitive competences but developed through a myriad of performances carried out in daily life activities and contexts. For these reasons, activist projects organised by civil society used to have long tradition in this field (Ginwright, Noguera & Cammarota, 2006).

The process of learning transformative citizenship can be narrowed down to three key factors: development process, collective learning and engagement. First, it entails a developmental process of learning. Field (2006, p. 1999) asserts that the contemporary use of lifelong learning embraces “learning everywhere and at all times and in every corner of life”. As mentioned earlier, Delanty (2003) affirms that citizenship must be an active learning process tied to discourses of recognition in order to empower people in their own self-understanding. According to this author the advantage of this approach is to put the focus on the creation of meaning and personal narratives by gaining control over the flow of information (2003, p. 602). This practice is based on the experience of everyday life to give voice to personal identities (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Secondly, regarding collective learning Martin (2003) argues that linking adult learning and citizenship invokes a tradition of social purpose, even a reconstruction of the “agora”, in a sense of critical engagement and open ended adult education articulated not only around the perception of the self but also in the perception of the relationship of self and other. Thirdly, citizenship learning is related to an action dimension. The collective learning and transformative process of citizenship is exercised within civil society, where citizens are viewed as members of both a global and a local world. This dimension entails a full interpretation of citizenship which underlines a critical understanding, reflection and participation (Martin, 2000) to engage proactively in the community.

This paper presents insights from an arts education project, in which, through photography, a group of migrant women engage in practicing citizenship locally. We consider that this approach links with a “more sophisticated understanding of citizenship” (Lawy & Biesta, 2006) and opens the door to transformative learning processes both individual and collectively.

#### 4 Arts and citizenship education

Since 1960 many organizations have used arts or artistic activities to provide forms of self-expression and to foster civic engagement by creating opportunities for interactions among groups (Barragan & Moreno, 2004). The emerging literature in the field of arts and citizenship has predominantly focused on understanding the learning opportunities and outcomes of the arts. In this sense they are considered as a medium for engaging citizens as active participants in democratic societies (Abu El Haj, 2009;; Lawy, Biesta, Mc Donnell, Lawy, & Reeves, 2010; Moon, y otros, 2013 ). We point out that citizenship projects based on arts not only offer the opportunity to experience creativity but they also provide an opportunity for experimentation based on civic and democratic learning. We are working from what Kuttner (2015, p. 70) calls “arts education” that includes a “variety of forms of symbolic creativity” including a range of activities from theater to documentary film courses, photography and community art festivals. Artistic process are related, in this approach, to the dynamics of everyday public life, which also include opportunities to participate in the



production and consumption of artistic practices. Consequently, we consider that arts education constitutes an appropriate field to achieve one important aim of citizenship education: "to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens" (Levinson, 2005, p.336).

It is widely agreed that education through arts can be a forum to develop critical analysis of power and an opportunity to explore systems of power. Consequently, many educators use the arts to develop critical analysis and support practices related to education and activism (Ginwright, Noguera and Cammarota, 2006). For some groups who do not enjoy full citizenship to be heard is particularly relevant. Arts projects provide a venue to enhance visibility and to turn the "experience into voice" (Stuiver, Van der Jagt, van Erven, & Hoving, 2012). As DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly (2015) argue creative expression of the arts can deepen our understanding of why "immigrants resort to aesthetic means (...) to communicate with the wider society".

Crucial to this view of artistic practices and citizenship is the concept of narratives. In our paper, narratives are understood as "subjective representations of a series of events that involve problem definition, worldviews and aspects of social reality" (Stuiver, Van der Jagt, van Erven & Hoving, 2012, p. 298). In addition, narratives "enabled people to find their voices to step into a gargantuan field of possibilities" (Moon, et al, 2013, p.229). From this point of view, narratives are not considered neutral representations as they incorporate worldviews and problem definitions. According to O'Neill (2008) art is capable of making explicit narratives related to life experiences because through art, ideas and hopes become visible to others. The combination of biography/narrative and art becomes a "potential space" for transformative possibilities.

Photography is a powerful resource to tell stories. At the same time, the use of digital photography has become an immediate practice to record daily life. In Social Sciences photography has a longstanding history of illuminating the needs of disenfranchised and displaced groups (Green & Kloos, 2009). This article explores the project "Transformative Looks" based on photography. Inspired by photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) photography facilitated personal reflection and group discussion among a group of migrant women while simultaneously giving visibility – and voice – to the questions that affect them. Photovoice is a type of participatory action research in which participants photograph daily life, discuss the images in small groups to reflect on community strengths and weaknesses, and appeal to policymakers in the interest of social change (Kenney, 2009). It is a flexible method that can be adapted to different contexts and populations. Developed in the USA by Wang & Burris (1997), the theoretical framework of photovoice is inspired by Freire's theory. In this approach one essential idea is that disadvantaged people explore and document their own issues by constructing their own narratives. Looking at different projects conducted with migrants we see that distinct narratives are

elicited as a result of diverse life experiences: O'Neill (2008) reports how Bosnian refugees in the UK produced artistic text related to their experience of exile and the process of emplacement while Afghan refugees highlighted the process of agency and resistance. In both cases artists facilitated the production of texts, objects and images. In Uganda photographs taken by youth refugees in a camp combine images of poverty and idleness with other images that reflect working activities (Green & Kloos, 2009). An arts initiative among Liberian in the Diaspora reflects the main challenges that older refugees face in US (Chaudry, 2008). In the next section we analyse our project "Transformative Looks".

### **5 Practising citizenship: "Transformative Looks"**

In 2015 the Human Rights Institute of the University of Deusto in collaboration with the Foundation Ellacuría and the local branch of the NGO Doctors of the World, with technical support from a local association of photography, Zuri-Beltza, conducted in the Spanish city of Bilbao the collective project: "Con la cámara a cuestas: Transformative Looks"<sup>2</sup>. The project built on a smaller but similar project which ran in 2014. "Transformative Looks" ran through ten sessions on Saturday afternoons, from January to June 2015. The project had four major overall aims. The first one was to facilitate access to local cultural spaces and to promote and raise awareness of contemporary art, particularly regarding photography. Secondly, it aimed to explore the ability of photography to narrate personal accounts. Thirdly, the project wanted to encourage personal reflection and group discussion in visits, workshops and to fuel personal creativity around issues relevant for the participants themselves. The final aim was to give voice to those who are often spoken of, as well as to provide them with a space – in the form of a photo exhibition - to show to a wide audience their own way of looking at what is important for them.

The participants were a group of fifteen to twenty adult migrant women born in eight different Latin American countries and currently living in Bilbao metropolitan area. The total number of participants fluctuated as women's work and family commitments made it difficult for them to attend every session. Small group size and non-sustained participation are features shared by most projects of this kind (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Participants were in a situation of high vulnerability, working as domestic workers in low-paid jobs in the informal care sector in precarious social and legal conditions. None of them held formal Spanish citizenship, and some of them were not even entitled to work legally in Spain. Trust was key for the success of the whole project. It built on existing relationships, which had been previously forged by the women through their participation on the activities and courses provided by the associations.

Transformative Looks started with a guided group visit to a photo exhibition in the public local art gallery *Sala Rekalde*. The selected exhibition was a retrospective by the American-Canadian photographer Lynne Cohen. Cohen's unique look clearly signals the potential of photography to create critical narratives anchored in the

everyday. Following the visit, basic training in photography was provided by a Bilbao-based photography association. The two-session training focused on the technical aspects of taking pictures as well as on the power of photography to create and communicate narratives.

In the previous 2014 project, the involved women photographed aspects of their everyday lives in relation to their jobs - many worked long hours as domestic workers -, their free time, their family life - in many cases how to deal with physical separation - and their social involvement. Unlike the 2014 edition, in the 2015 project the topic selection was determined by the women themselves. They took, shared and showed photographs around a common topic they identified as important in their lives - *superación*. The process through which the women made decisions was participant-driven: the participants defined the topics around which they would take photographs and guided decisions about the organization of the exhibition as well as the presentations. The word *superación* does not translate well into English. It means spirit of achievement, but also personal growth and desire to improve, and fits perfectly in a frame that understands citizenship as an on-going struggle for local participation and recognition. The complexity associated to an abstract topic such as *superación* generated bottlenecks that complicated the flow of the project. At those moments when difficulties arose we went back to discuss the different visions and possibilities to transform the ideas and feelings into images/photographs or texts. The collaborative work among women allowed contrasting ideas and proposing new focus not only to take new pictures but also to analyze the issue. Sharing doubts and difficulties in a collaborative way enabled the participants to find their own voices. Reflecting on personal processes of *superación* triggered strong emotions and unsettling feelings among participants. It is not surprising then that a minority of women found it difficult to make sense of this process and decided to leave the project. In those cases, the NGOs co-facilitators contacted and spoke personally with those women. Again, we would like to emphasize that the quality of the interpersonal relations between the NGO workers and the women was a key factor to the continuity of the project and the deep dialogues raised.

The project also comprised time to take pictures, as well as sessions to share the photographs and discuss their meaning. The process was loosely guided by Jungk and Müller (1997) methodology on desirable futures and its three stages: diagnosis, dream and change regarding participant women's situation of *superación*. Collective narratives emerged from the participants' dialogic engagement in these reflective sessions. The sessions were appropriated by the women, turning them into a nurturing and safe space to share the photos and narratives. While narrating women's experiences of *superación*, their photos became triggers for critical thinking of their past and present social positioning. Due to migration, participants have experienced simultaneous processes of upward economic mobility and downward

social mobility. Non-professional recognition and deskilling was a poignant consequence of their migration to Spain<sup>3</sup>.

The project also comprised sessions to prepare and set up a photo exhibition. Photographs along explanative texts were set up in an exhibition which was shown at different venues, including an academic seminar to explore the academic and methodological implications of photography for social research and the development of intervention actions, and a workshop on participatory photography. The participants were always invited to act as guides for the visitors at all local venues the exhibition was shown. Due to their work requirements most women could not take advantage of this, and the better-off ones informally became representatives for the group experience. The exhibition was entitled *Superación*. The photos in the exhibition were grouped under different senses around the idea of improvement. The three main thematic headings are:

1) Family and personal domain. Photos in this axis present women's views on how to build and transform their *superación* as a dynamic process. Some of the photos under this heading condensed the process of change undergone by these women. In many cases the change was heavily related to their migratory experiences, but the process did not always start or end with their actual physical migration. They also reflect on their pressing needs to manage physically separated family lives, with family members living in different continents and time zones. However, they also show photos on *superación* as a process of enjoyment, and how they try to make the most out of their current hard living conditions and family arrangements. Their powerful message being that improvement also needs to mean enjoying and adapting to external changing situations. It does not have to be all about suffering.

2) Work and training domain. Given their hard current working conditions many of the women had entrepreneurial expectations - whether in Spain in the future or back in their places of origin. Some of their photos and texts express feelings of unfairness due to the professional deskilling suffered by many of them. Their skills - formal or informal ones - remained unrecognized in Europe forcing them to work in jobs they are over-qualified for. Still they foresee training and education as engines of *superación*, quite often through their children.

3) Collective domain. Women were also highly motivated to engage in collective projects, showing a women-wide idea of *superación*. As most participant women were involved with two local organizations, they were self-selected and this activist collective approach is therefore not surprising.

## 6 Discussion

Transformative Looks was simultaneously training and learning process as well as a tool to enhance the exercise of citizenship among a group of women faced with limitations for political participation that derive from the restrictions of their status as foreign residents in Spain. In the line offered by the photovoice rationale (Wang & Burris, 1997), photography allowed personal reflection and group discussion among the participants about questions that affect them as women, domestic workers and foreign citizens in Spain. Most participants endure

situations of high vulnerability, working as domestic workers in precarious social and legal conditions (as mentioned some of them did not even have a work permit in Spain). It also gave them voice by enabling the visibility of the topics which are important for them.

The project took place in a hybrid of scholar/activist process. The two social organizations involved share a vision of placing women's learning and participation within a social and political context. In particular, these organizations put the emphasis on the concept of participation, which denotes democratic notions of access, agency and change. Empowerment is understood as a process through which people become aware of their capabilities to facilitate both self-transformation and the transformation of their contexts (Torres, 2009, p. 92). The emphasis of both organizations on empowerment as a collective participatory process stems from practices of critical adult learning, and calls to substantial and dynamic understandings of citizenship. It also links with the emphasis on dialogical methods to identify issues and produce comments about the experience of improvement which has been crucial in the project.

"Transformative Looks" became a collective learning process with a twofold effect. Inwards, the women appropriated the sessions creating a nurturing safe space where they created relations and shared common concerns. This fed back helping to reinforce previous links and strengthening the struggle capacity of the group. As other authors (eg. Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Lawy et al., 2010; O'Neill, 2008) have pointed out this experience highlights the crucial role of relationship and trust. Outwards, the project enabled participants to appropriate local public spaces in pursuit of recognition as active players in the social fabric of the city. In the case of domestic migrant women, whose work and living conditions remains largely unacknowledged, to overcome mis-representations and invisibility is central in the process to achieve recognition. Recognition was a particularly poignant issue as most women have suffered processes of deskilling because their professional qualifications and experiences prior to migration are not recognized in Spain. This over-qualification is a feature of most Latin American female migrants in Spain (Parella, 2015, p. 82). The possibility of self-representation was therefore a crucial aspect of the project. Through the project women accessed spaces to show to a wide audience their own way of looking at their daily lives and their experiences as working migrant women without formal citizenship but who actively engage in citizenship practices from the ground. The photo exhibition and the events organized around it allowed participants' voices to actively engage in public space often beyond their social reach.

Understanding citizenship as both participation and local civic engagement allows us to move beyond fixed and static notions of citizenship as they are defined in any given time and space (nation-state level). Conceptualizing citizenship as struggle and as a critical learning process opens up possibilities for generating new shared 'habitus', where 'recognition' can be achieved leading to

more inclusive societies. This exercise of citizenship contributes to raise consciousness of one's own position in any given society or state at the same time as it contributes to contest it. In a project similar to *Con la Cámara a Cuestas* that sought to 'give voice' to the poor, the authors clearly write about their purpose: "... to give people the opportunity to define and present themselves on their own terms... Our aim, the same then as it is today, was to counter stereotypes about people living in poverty and social exclusion by presenting honest, personal accounts of daily life and personal aspiration." (Sajovic, 2015, p. 6) In such processes art is a powerful tool to represent and share representations to wider audiences. This way citizenship as a life-long learning process involving individual as well as collective action leading to the promotion of new shared values for more inclusive communities benefits greatly from the use of artistic expressions such as photography.

For the women involved in the project *Con la Cámara a Cuestas*, photography was a familiar means of both accessing the representations of others as well as of representing themselves and share those representations. Additional written accounts of their personal histories and experiences that accompanied the photos was an important way of attributing specific meanings to what the images represented. Thinking on 'what' to represent and 'how' to do it through photo-graphs involved important debates and awareness raising of how they are situated in particular space and time contexts: 'who I am here' – in the current place of residence in Bilbao, as well as 'who I was there' – in the place of origin, with which the participants are still engaged through various contacts, projects and imaginations, as well as 'who I would like to become' here and there, involving important recognition issues in the *formal* dimension, as franchised and subjects of rights as well as obligations, in the work-sphere, as re-cognized workers with particular competences, as well as in the social-affective dimension. All these are constitutive of citizenship as we have conceptualized it. As active agents engaged in the production of discourses and an understanding of what it is like to be a Latin American (from specific local contexts) immigrant woman in Bilbao, Spain, these women become citizens in their communities. By seeking recognition and to change widespread ill-informed majority views that tend to stigmatize 'immigrant women' they challenge existing socio-cultural understandings of the 'other' and contribute to citizenship as learning social processes within those communities. Because of their marginalized position as non-*formal*-citizens – with only limited voting rights at best or without any political rights for those that do not even hold a residence permit – citizenship as participation effectively becomes a fundamental route of influence in the public sphere.

In addition, how to present and represent those ideas to others, to fulfill these purpose, of contesting majority views, assumed also a fundamental role. Learning about photography both in its technical as well as esthetic



dimensions was key to the whole process. Art education became then a crucial element of citizenship education.

### 8 Concluding remarks

By examining the experience of the project “*Con la Cámara a Cuestas: Transformative Looks*”, involving three different institutions (two civil society organisations with different mandates, and a research and higher education institute) and a group of women from Latin American countries residing in Bilbao, we have sought to discuss the exercise of citizenship as local level participation. We have shown how art education – photography, in our case – can be instrumental in processes of adult education that promote citizenship. Citizenship as a contested space, encompassing struggles and claims for recognition by those excluded from formal citizenship and whose rights become constrained by limited (or lack of) legal status. In the perspective put forward in our analysis, understanding citizenship as a life-long learning process is also about understanding its transformative dimension for both the individuals involved as well as for their communities, where new meanings of citizenship may be forged. The narrative potential of photographs, which simultaneously document and represent lives and stories, is a powerful tool to engage others. Photographs evoke immediate emotions and in that resides their strength as well as their weakness (Freund, 1993, p. 185). From the perspective of education, photography opens the path to new dynamic pedagogies. In this respect, as the project analysed here has shown, art education – for example through photography - and citizenship learning can be important allies for the promotion of social transformation and more inclusive communities.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> The project relied heavily on informal networks. Keeping the balance between institutional demands and personal relations was not always easy. Due to the diversity of the involved partners, one of the project challenges was to learn how to cope with different interests, timings, needs, and communication codes. Different stages of the project had received minimal financial support from the EU-funded research network INTEGRIM (to print the photos for the exhibition), and from Bilbao city hall (for a workshop on participatory photography).

<sup>3</sup> On top of the emancipator power of open participatory methodologies, they are also important in more traditional research approaches as exploratory techniques to identify relevant research topics of interest for the subjects involved. In this case, deskilling processes derived from migration and the related brain waste featured as a potential research topic of interest both for the women themselves and for the academics involved. Although brain drain has been relatively well researched (Ozden & Schiff, 2006), deskilling and its macro equivalent 'brain waste' has received almost no academic attention.