

# Political Participation of Latin American Migrants in Andalusia: Opportunities and Constraints\*

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this article is to present the results of a research project on the political participation of Latin American migrants in Andalusia (mainly in the cities of Seville and Huelva). The project uses a broad concept of what political participation constitutes, including both civic practices and activities associated with conventional politics, and adopts a transnational perspective. It is based on 45 semi-structured interviews with politically active migrants and members of political parties and other institutions. The article highlights some of the main findings of the research, including the importance of taking into account migrants' previous political experiences, as well as the role played by migrant associations in order to better understand their political practices.

*Keywords:* 1. political participation, 2. civic participation, 3. transnationalism, 4. Latin Americans, 5. Andalusia.

## Participación política de los migrantes latinoamericanos en Andalucía: Oportunidades y limitaciones

### RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los resultados de un proyecto sobre la participación política de los migrantes latinoamericanos en Andalucía (fundamentalmente en las ciudades de Sevilla y Huelva). Partiendo de una concepción amplia de lo político que incluye tanto prácticas consideradas cívicas como las asociadas a la participación política más convencional, el estudio adopta una perspectiva transnacional y se basa en el análisis de 45 entrevistas semiestructuradas a migrantes con algún grado de implicación, así como a miembros y representantes de partidos políticos y otras instituciones. Entre los resultados principales se destaca la importancia de las experiencias políticas previas de los migrantes, así como el papel que juegan las asociaciones que los agrupan a la hora de analizar la participación política de éstos.

*Palabras clave:* 1. participación política, 2. participación cívica, 3. transnacionalismo, 4. latinoamericanos, 5. Andalucía.

\* Text originally written in Spanish.

## *Introduction*

The study of international migration in Spain has advanced enormously over the past two decades, paralleling the growth of immigration. In addition to research on broader issues, such as the nature of migration flows and the main features of the most numerous nationalities, the issues generally studied are largely concerned with the socio-economic integration of migrants, in relation to their participation in the labor market for example or the educational system (Gil, 2004; Tornos and Aparicio, 2002). However, insofar as the immigration phenomenon has been conceived of as something permanent, other aspects, such as political rights of migrants and their full participation in the host society, have gained prominence. This has been true of both social movements, such as the political rights of migrants “I live here, I vote here”, and regarding the development of research on this subject linking civic-political participation and discussions on citizenship (Aparicio, 2011; De Lucas, 2007, 2011; De Lucas *et al.*, 2008; Miravent, 2006; Solanes, 2005).

However, the current context, as noted by De Lucas (2011:11), portends “Difficult times for political integration and the consideration that migrants must have access to citizenship and political rights”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as this author points out, Spain’s economic crisis, which started in 2008, has already begun to have an impact on the “integration project”, and not only in socioeconomic terms. The risk in this regard is twofold, as the current situation may not only silence the discussions that had begun to emerge from various spheres demanding the political inclusion of migrants, but could also place this issue in the background, both socially, politically and academically, given what are conceived of as “The real needs of migrants” (and citizens in general) (De Lucas, 2007:272). However, it is precisely at this time that the debates on the political participation of migrants should be given a more prominent

<sup>1</sup> All the direct quotations that were originally in another language have been translated into English.

role, since this is one of the most vulnerable groups in society and political exclusion does little to ensure that their needs are taken into account (Morales and Giugni, 2011).

The purpose of this article is to present some findings of a study on the political participation of Latin American migrants in Andalusia. Among the main questions put forward in the research are: who are the migrants participating, in which areas do they do so and how, what factors promote or hinder this participation and how are local and transnational practices linked? Given the importance of regional contexts, the research focused in Andalusia, although field work was mainly undertaken in the cities of Seville and Huelva, in recognition of the importance of the local scale in integration processes. Latin American migration<sup>2</sup> was chosen because of its numerical importance, and because of the possibility of investigating the political participation of a group that has relatively easy access to Spanish nationality, and thus to full political rights. The research was qualitative and exploratory, its main objective being to contribute to theoretical and scientific knowledge on this topic and to provide data to help design strategies and policies that foster more inclusive citizenship. The theoretical and conceptual framework is explained in the following section. This is followed by brief methodological notes and an analysis of some of the main results of the study. The text ends with a number of conclusions.

*Contextualization of the Study of the Political Participation  
of Latin American Migrants in Andalusia*

This study adopts the view that migrants are “political actors”, not merely objects of study or passive recipients of public policies (Pero, 2008; Pojmann, 2008). Second, it uses a concept of

<sup>2</sup> Although the group ‘Latin American migrants’ is fairly diverse (depending on nationality, ethnicity, contexts of exit, etc.), it also shares certain key features for studying their political participation, such as the fact that most of these migrants speak the same language as the natives and that they may naturalize as Spanish citizens after a shorter residence time than other migrants (two years rather than ten).

broad, multidimensional political participation beyond the electoral arena that includes both “conventional” (formal) and “unconventional” (informal civic) participation (Barnes *et al.*, 1979; Morales, 2006, 2011; Torcal, Montero, and Teorell, 2006). Since the study was designed to explore the different ways in which migrants are involved, it was decided to record both practices related to electoral or representative politics (participation in elections and political parties, contacts with political or institutional representatives, etc.) and those that have more to do with the civic sphere or are classified as unconventional (participation in trade unions, associations, protests, etc.). The authors are also interested in both actions (voting, leading or belonging to a party or an association), and political perceptions and views. Third, to better understand the factors that help or hinder this participation, the “micro” (individual), “meso” (organizations) and “macro” (political opportunities structure) levels have been taken into account.

Lastly, a transnational perspective was adopted. This considers that migrants operate in social fields that transcend geographic, political and cultural borders (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton 1999). To do this, the research was based on studies that have dealt with the political dimension of transnationalism, and included in the analysis the political practices of migrants and their associations oriented towards both the host and origin countries and other geographical contexts (Lafleur and Martiniello, 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2009; Portes, Escobar, and Arana, 2008). Among the latter we would include not only “The various forms of direct cross-border participation” (electoral, cooperation with political parties or civil society organizations, etc.), but also “indirect participation via the political institutions of the host country or international organizations” (such as through lobbying or information campaigns) (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2009:20-21). The difference between regular and occasional practices was also considered in the description of the levels of political participation (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2003).

Socioeconomic and political differences among the different regions in Spain (the Autonomous Communities), as well as

in the migratory contexts, mean that the regional dimension in the study of the political participation of migrants is extremely important. To date, the research undertaken in this respect has focused mainly on three of the Autonomous Communities that have received the largest number of migrants, Madrid, Catalonia and Valencia (particularly in the cities of Madrid and Barcelona) (Anduiza *et al.*, 2010; González and Morales, 2006; Martín, 2004; Veredas, 2003). These studies have highlighted issues such as the importance of political contexts and local and regional public policies in understanding the political incorporation of migrants into a particular geographical sphere and the role played by migrant associations in this process. The Autonomous Community of Andalusia has attracted less attention from researchers. Although some studies about migrants in this region have dealt with the issues of migrant electoral participation (for those who can vote, which until recently included only E.U. nationals) and associationism (Arjona and Checa, 1999; Durán, Martín, and Rodríguez, 2007; Martín and Durán, 2008), these do not necessarily adopt a broad political perspective, which is why it was decided to undertake the research in this region. The field work comprised activities in several provinces, but since this was an exploratory study, interviews with migrants and representatives of institutions were mainly carried out in the cities of Seville and Huelva, although some of the organizations studied were active at the regional level and not just locally. This approach enabled the authors to analyze the influence of both the local and regional dimension and to use a comparative analysis perspective (between two different local contexts, and between Andalusia and other Autonomous Communities in Spain).

International migration to Andalusia has followed a similar pattern to the rest of Spain, growing extremely quickly in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, there are some noticeable regional particularities. Firstly, the growth of immigration in Andalusia has been slower than in other regions. Secondly, flows to this community have been quite varied, initially comprising mainly returnees, as well as retirees from northern Europe. These

flows were subsequently supplemented by the bulk of current immigration, formed mainly by economic migrants from Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe (Rinken, 2008). Data from the municipal registries (city records) show that by January 1, 2012 there were 747 110 foreign nationals living in Andalusia (about 9 % of the total population), making it the autonomous region with the fourth largest migrant population in the country (INE, 2012; OPAM, 2012). Within Andalusia, the main settlement provinces are Málaga and Almería, followed by Seville and Granada and lastly Cadiz, Huelva, Córdoba and Jaen. The foreign population is roughly equally divided between E.U. and non-E.U. nationals. In early 2012 in Andalusia, there were approximately 125 313 Latin American nationals,<sup>3</sup> just over half of whom are women, Seville being one of the provinces with the highest rate of feminization. As for the type of immigration, it is mainly labor migration, with a majority of migrants belonging to the 15-64 year age group. The data also show that these migrants have relatively high educational attainments; a majority have completed high school and a significant percentage have higher education (OPAM, 2010). Lastly, it is important to note that the two host contexts chosen, at both the provincial and local level, are quite different.<sup>4</sup>

### *Methodological Notes*

As regards methodology, a qualitative approach was chosen to allow us analyze not only migrant political practices, but also their representations, as well as perceptions and political views. Fieldwork was conducted in 2008, with a total of 45 semi-structured interviews, half of which were conducted with migrants and half

<sup>3</sup> In addition, there are 60 695 people in the municipal registry who are Spanish nationals but were born in Latin America, a large portion of whom are assumed to be naturalized immigrants.

<sup>4</sup> Seville is the capital of the region; it has a larger population and a predominantly service-based economy. When the research was conducted, its town hall was center-left. Conversely Huelva has a more agrarian and industrial base, and its town hall has been governed by the center-right Partido Popular (PP) for years.

with representatives of pro-migrant organizations, trade unions, political parties, local government and provincial administration, neighborhood associations and so on. In order to reflect the diversity of types and degrees of activism, rather than selecting a statistically representative sample, it was decided to include migrants who participated politically in some way (through political parties, migrant associations, NGOs, etc.). People were contacted using the “snowball” technique, with the help of migrant associations, institutional actors and host country organizations. Observations were also undertaken on the basis of participation in activities organized by associations and other institutions.

The profiles of the migrants interviewed are as follows:

1. Respondents were mainly of Colombian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian origin, accounting for the largest national groups within the Latin American community in Andalusia. However, Venezuelan, Peruvian, Chilean, Argentinean, Central American and Caribbean migrants were also interviewed. Many already held dual nationality or were in the process of acquiring a Spanish passport, a factor that would facilitate formal political participation (for example by voting) in the host country.
2. The sample included more men (13) than women (10); the proportion of female respondents being larger in Seville than Huelva. The age of respondents ranged from the very young (in their 20s) to 60, but most were between 30 and 50 years old and had high levels of formal education. The vast majority are married or have steady partners (in many cases the partner is Spanish) and children.
3. Length of residence varies. The sample ranged from migrants who had lived in Andalusia for over 30 years, and were therefore among the first Latin Americans to arrive, to others that are part of the larger flows that began to arrive from 2000. None had been in Spain less than two years, which is understandable since it is assumed to take some time to become active in the civic or political sphere, although this is not always the case.

4. Reasons for migration are also extremely varied. Respondents included those who came to Spain to study or join their families or partners, as tourists or in search of adventure, for professional reasons or to escape political violence. Only a few said that they had migrated to improve their financial situation, although in many cases, a combination of reasons was given.

Representatives of organizations and institutions in the host society interviewed included members of the main political parties, trade unions, neighborhood associations, consumer associations, pro-migrant organizations and government (local, provincial and regional).

*Migrants' Political Participation: Exploring  
the Micro, Meso and Macro Levels*

The type of political participation of the migrants interviewed and their degree of activism is quite varied, and includes more “formal” or “informal” local and transnational activities, conducted on a regular or sporadic basis. In many cases, the types, levels and orientation of this participation are mixed or alternate, at both the individual level and within organizations. The emphasis varies according to several factors (whether it is election time, the political context in the country of origin and/or destination, the time available and the opportunities and/or structural constraints, etc.). Sometimes there is an evolution from one type and/or level of participation to another, depending on the migrant’s life trajectory (or members of an organization), the circumstances of the host society, the opportunities that arise, or simply coincidences.

This section is not intended as an exhaustive description of the various research findings, and instead highlights some of the key elements that facilitate or constrain migrants’ political participation. It begins with an analysis of the individual dimension and emphasizes the importance of migrants’ political capital as a factor explaining participation. It then examines the meso level,

briefly exploring the associative world of migrants as a vehicle for local and transnational political incorporation. Lastly, it analyzes the constraints and opportunities that structure political participation in the countries of destination and origin.

*Latin American Migrants' Political Participation:  
Individual Factors*

At least six people were interviewed individually, three women and three men, with fairly regular active participation, either as members or with positions within several Spanish political parties<sup>5</sup> or in their countries of origin (a representative of a Colombian political party). Many other respondents declared that they were sympathizers of a particular party and that they have attended meetings or participated in election campaigns more sporadically. The rest of the migrants engaged in less conventional political practices, through pro-migrant and migrant organizations (grouping Colombian, Ecuadorian, Bolivian, Argentine, or Latin American migrants in general), unions, churches, neighborhood associations, and other public institutions as well as the local administration.

One of the main findings of the study concerns the importance of the political capital of migrants in understanding their political participation, in terms of its intensity, type and scale (local/transnational). Apart from the individual characteristics usually taken into account to explain political participation, such as gender, age, social class or educational attainment (Morales, 2001), as well as other factors affecting migrants, such as length of residence or legal status, it was found that a crucial element for understanding whether or not migrants are involved politically and how, is the political capital they bring with them, as a result of the context of origin and their previous experiences. Thus, it was found that many of the migrants had been politically involved in their country of origin, came from families with significant levels

<sup>5</sup> The top three: Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and Izquierda Unida (IU) are left-wing, while the Partido Popular (PP) is a center-right party.

of political activism or had at least been interested in politics before migrating.

This is particularly true in the case of those who had emigrated for political reasons (one Colombian and one Salvadoran respondent and a Bolivian woman). Sometimes their participation in the host country constitutes a continuation of what they had in their country of origin, such as engaging in activities to denounce or defend human rights at the transnational level. This is the case of Mario,<sup>6</sup> a Colombian man forced to leave his country because of his family's political activities, who ended up working with an organization defending human rights in Colombia from Andalusia. In other cases, once they had arrived in the host society, migrants channeled their political practices into other fields. Cristian, a Salvadoran migrant who left his home country in the mid-1970s, explained that his arrival in Spain had allowed him to move away from more formal party politics and leftist activism, which had disappointed him, into playing instead a more active role in the trade union movement where he now lived, "Fighting for a living, which I know how to do, shoulder to shoulder with the workers". In this case, skepticism about conventional politics as a result of his experiences in the country of origin, and his new position as a precarious worker in the host society, are factors that contributed to the change in orientation of his practices, although the intensity of his activism remained high.

Another striking aspect is the combination of several types of political participation among migrant women. Although the literature usually emphasizes lower levels of female political activism, and its concentration in informal or civic practices, Latin American women have considerable political capital, reflected in their practices in the host society (McIlwaine and Bermudez, 2011). This study observed how the political experiences of Latin American migrants in Andalusia are fairly varied. While participation tends to take place through associations, in some cases it

<sup>6</sup> The respondents' names are pseudonyms. In order to maintain anonymity, only key personal data that do not enable them to be identified are mentioned.

was found that their activism became more conventional and/or regular once they had settled into the country, through contact with local social and political actors. This was the case of Irene and María. Irene arrived in Huelva in the mid-1990s, and although she had occasionally collaborated with a political party and in several election campaigns in her home country, once she arrived in Spain, she initially channeled her activism into a Latin American Association. Later, as she became integrated into the work force and society, she began to participate more actively in a union and a political party, because, as she herself says, "I like politics". Conversely, in Bolivia, María had mainly restricted herself to supporting her husband's political activities, because of which they had been forced to leave the country. After passing through several Latin American destinations, she and her family arrived in Spain and ended up in Andalusia, where her husband became engaged in more cultural issues, while she became more politicized, eventually becoming an active member of a local political party: "When I met my husband, he was already a student leader and I was just finishing school when you're not quite sure what's going on ... and now he is not in politics, he is more involved in cultural issues ... and here I am in politics".

Despite the importance of political capital, as has already been pointed, the authors also found migrants who had become politically involved for the first time in the host country, as in the case of Pilar, a resident of Seville who was active in a union. From her perspective, the reasons that led her to become involved in this way were the difficulties she encountered as a migrant. To a certain extent, as in the case of Cristian, labor vulnerability became a trigger for participation and the struggle to achieve better living conditions.

Lastly, migrants' political participation at the individual level not only involves the country of residence; in some cases it is transnational and both orientations are usually combined. Mario, mentioned above, for example, fought for human rights in Colombia, but also worked with pro-migrant and migrant associations locally. Migrants with dual citizenship (at least eleven

of the respondents had Spanish nationality or had requested it) and who could also vote from abroad in their home country elections,<sup>7</sup> said in many cases they participated in the electoral processes both at origin and destination.

*Migrant Associations and Latin Americans'  
Political Participation in Andalusia*

As studies have indicated, institutions and social organizations play an important role in promoting political participation, as they can provide the resources for participating in addition to allowing individuals to accumulate the necessary knowledge, confidence and experience (De Rooij, 2012). Although some authors regard migrant associations as “apolitical” or even obstacles to full integration (since they encourage “segregation”), other research shows how they can contribute to migrants’ political incorporation (Landolt, Goldring, and Bernhard, 2009; Martín, 2004; Moraes, Bermúdez, and Escrivá, 2013).

Among the migrant associations in which Latin Americans participated in Huelva and Seville there were some that grouped several nationalities together and others that were ethno-national (comprising Colombians, Ecuadorians, Bolivians or Argentinians). Both types of associations mainly offered services involving settlement and integration into the host society, including legal and labor advice, and cultural and leisure activities. Some of these included activities associated with the country of origin, such as cultural activities designed to maintain traditions, or were clearly transnational, as in the case of a group that defends human rights in Colombia. In principle, a broad majority of these organizations were defined as apolitical, emphasizing their “social rather than political nature”, as explained by the representative of an Ecuadorian association. However, the everyday work of these organizations and the repercussions of their activities also involved political

<sup>7</sup> Several Latin American countries allow their nationals the right to vote in the country’s elections from abroad (Moraes *et al.*, 2009).

aspects. A good example of this is an association of Ecuadorian migrants contacted in Seville. The focus of its activities was to provide legal and social assistance to its members or others who approached the association and to organize recreational and cultural activities, especially for younger members. However, as its director explained, the work of the association involved being in regular contact with political parties, the town hall or the provincial council, “to make oneself known, obtain information ... and apply for subsidies”, as well as solving problems in the neighborhood.

Studies in other migratory contexts both inside and outside Europe also highlight the fact that migrant associations, regardless of their orientation, “Create spaces where migrants can engage in political activity and work oriented towards social change” (Landolt, Goldring, and Bernhard, 2009:204). Mobilization, whether cultural or social as Bolzman (2009) states, can sometimes accumulate resources that can then be used more politically. Thus, it is not uncommon, for example, for some leaders of associations to end up actively participating in more formal politics through political parties or even representing them in local or national elections. Among the representatives of migrant associations interviewed, at least one of the women respondents, the leader of one of the associations, told us that she had received offers from several local parties to participate more actively in formal politics, but that she had chosen not to commit herself to any of them in order to be freer to continue fighting for her community. This raises one of the difficulties sometimes faced by migrant associations in Spain, especially the most successful ones, namely politicization.

The authors’ research found that, in line with the findings of other studies in Spain (Aparicio and Tornos, 2010; Toral, 2010; Veredas, 2003), the world of migrant associations is fraught with difficulties and limitations. Compared with the research findings on other Autonomous Communities such as Madrid and Catalonia, the Andalusian case, or at least the Latin American migrant associations in Seville and Huelva, have a number of distinctive features (Bermúdez, 2011a). The main difference is that in general,

the associations studied in these two cities had a weaker, less established presence and were more precarious. Most were recently created and/or operated with many difficulties. They were mainly devoted to organizing social and cultural events and acting as a fairly informal mechanism for mutual assistance. This was partly due to the orientation their leaders had sometimes given the association, but also to the lack of resources. Some operated without a physical location or budget, or in extremely precarious conditions and were largely staffed by volunteers. This contrasts with the Latin American associations in Madrid, some of which already have a national (or even transnational) presence, as is the case of América, España, Solidaridad y Cooperación (Aesco) or Asociación Sociocultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica (Aculco), and other longer-running, ethno-national organizations such as the Asociación de Uruguayos en Catalunya (AUC).

Despite this greater degree of precariousness, there are indications that most associations in Seville and Huelva served, or their representatives regarded themselves, as activists, enhancing the presence of the collective group at the local level, denouncing their problems or negotiating with political representatives and government. In addition to the aforementioned Ecuadorian Association, another example of this are the reflections of the president of an association of Bolivian migrants. Although it had been founded by a small group of people who met regularly and had seen “The need to create an association ... [to] collaborate with each other”, in the year or so it had been formally operating, it had established links with an association of Ecuadorians and was trying to organize a federation of Bolivians in Andalusia. It had also scheduled discussions on current political issues, not just at the local or regional but also at the national and supranational level, as their leader explained: “Our associations are getting together to study the measures taken by the E.U., not only the government of Spain but the E.U. ... we have a meeting in Seville to discuss the subject of voluntary return, see the possibilities and the advantages and whether or not it is in our interest”.

*The Context in the Countries of Origin and Destination:  
Opportunities and Constraints*

Despite the various types of political participation mentioned in the preceding pages, the prevailing opinion among most of the migrants interviewed that this was still low was apparently shared by the representatives of political parties, trade unions and other institutions or indigenous organizations contacted. For the latter, the low level of political participation was due to factors such as: the level of precariousness that still existed within this population, in terms of the need to begin by dealing with administrative, employment or housing issues; the lack of time, due to having to work long hours to make ends meet and send remittances; and the scant interest shown by certain migrants, who were mainly concerned with improving their socioeconomic conditions. Another argument present in the interpretations of the representatives of these indigenous institutions or organizations involved the alleged lack of experience or political resources of the migrants. A representative of a regional consumer organization, for example, told us that migrants rarely used their services, since many did not know about the work they did or did not dare lodge complaints. The director of immigration of a Seville trade union argued that the lack of integration of migrants into the labor movement was due to the fact that, "When they arrive, many of them are extremely suspicious, very scared and a little confused in the workplace". Although he said that this affected the Latin American group less, he remarked that migrants were usually unaware of their labor rights and responsibilities, and that cultural differences also played a role. To remedy this, the union leader argued that strategies were being implemented to work with migrants through their associations. This was helping to increase membership rather than "Real, active militancy".

The response of political parties in Andalusia to migrants' formal participation, at least in the time when the fieldwork was undertaken, was even less hopeful. During a visit to the provincial offices of one of the main Spanish political parties to explain

our study and secure their cooperation, the authors of this article were informed that they had no information on the subject and that they did not think that there was any participation by the migrants in the parties, or that it was an important issue, since the migratory phenomenon was still very recent. This position has changed significantly since then, particularly after the municipal elections of 2011, which paved the way for the electoral participation of a large number of migrants in Spain, not only those who are nationalized; so much that some migrant associations began to complain of their increasing utilization by political parties (Bermúdez, 2011a; FISI, 2011; Morales and San Martín, 2011; Veredas, 2003).

For their part, the migrants interviewed identified the limitations on the political opportunity structures that hindered or prevented their full participation, both locally and transnationally. These constraints were not only linked to their social and labor status, but also to the institutional opportunities offered by the contexts for their participation. In some cases, they reported that there was a noticeable lack of interest and rapprochement by institutions and political powers, whether in relation to the country of origin or the host country. This was pointed out by Jacinto, who had been quite active politically in Colombia, but on arrival in Seville was only able to become involved in civic issues, because, "There are no opportunities, no political group to accommodate immigrants". He also criticized the fact that although he continued voting in elections in his home country, it was difficult to become more involved in Colombian political campaigns since in Seville, "Not much happens, it is not like in Madrid". This argument highlights the importance of the local dimension in the analysis of the political opportunities structure from a transnational perspective. Even states that implement initiatives and transnational liaison policies with migrants, providing more open opportunity structures (as in the case of Colombia), fail to reach the whole diaspora in the same way, due primarily to factors such as the different locations of the diaspora and the size and characteristics of each migrant community.

Another common criticism among migrant associations in Seville and Huelva was the lack of funding and attention they received in comparison with the stronger, better-known pro-immigrant organizations, which appropriated the available resources and legitimacy for addressing immigration issues at the official level. This situation emerged, for example, during a press conference organized in Seville to present a platform against the European return policy, in which no migrant organization was involved. In response to this, migrant associations demanded to be allowed to act as valid interlocutors with the government. At the local government level, attempts were being made to meet this demand, for example, through initiatives such as the creation of the Municipal Council for Migrant Participation in Seville, an advisory body created in 2008 to provide a forum for discussion and participation. Its director explained that one of its aims was for migrant associations to interact directly with the authorities.

Lastly, for other migrants, low levels of activism were also associated with the general lack of social, civic or political participation that existed in the local contexts where they lived. This is the case of Aurelio, for example, an Ecuadorian father resident in Huelva who complained about how little Spanish parents participated in schools' parent associations: "... we have noticed that local parents do not get involved ... in education ... we may come from what they call third world countries, but we have a very different culture as regards education, a culture of participation".

### *By Way of a Conclusion*

The research carried out has highlighted some key aspects that are often overlooked in studies on migration and political participation in Spain. Although research on migrant associations in the country has received greater attention, it has not been addressed using a broad political perspective. Work on migrants' levels of political participation has also tended to stress their low participation, while failing to incorporate a broader conception of this participation, which would include voting or representative

practices, and civic or less conventional types of participation, as well as involvement with a transnational perspective. If this broad approach is adopted, as has been done in studies in other geographical contexts, as Martiniello (2005:5) argues, it is clear that migrants “have always been involved in politics either outside or at the margins of the political systems of both their country of origin and of residence”. As they acquire the political rights needed to participate, they become increasingly involved in conventional politics (Martiniello, 2005). This study shows how this is visible at both the individual and the associative level.

On the other hand, the various types of activism in which migrants engage reflect, as happens with the Spanish-born population, both a degree of specialization and diversity (Font, Montero, and Torcal, 2006). This diversity includes the cases of local-transnational participation found in the research for this article, such as dual nationality migrants voting in the elections of the host country and the country of origin, and organizations that promoted activities related to the social and political integration of migrants in the local context, which also sought, for example, to defend human rights in the country of origin. These examples reinforce the findings of other studies in Spain and other migratory contexts, since they show that the two spheres can be combined without compromising either, while transnational participation often contributes to integration in the country of destination (Bermúdez, 2010; Escrivá, 2013; Portes and Rumbaut, 2010; Portes, Escobar, and Arana, 2008).

Third, the theory of political opportunity structures, although relevant, does not fully explain migrants’ political mobilization. Other factors that must be considered include: migrants’ political socialization and previous experiences and political values, the living conditions they encountered in their societies of destination, the social networks they form and the social capital they amass as well as their migration projects (Pero and Solomos, 2009). Among these factors, this article has highlighted the importance of certain issues that have received less attention. One is the need to acknowledge migrants’ political capital and the way

this changes or evolves through migration (Bermúdez, 2011b). Another is the importance of detecting the integrative, political role migrant associations can play, whether they are defined as social or cultural or focus their activities on the country of origin (Moraes, Bermúdez, and Escrivá, 2013). Lastly, there is the need to take into account not only the opportunities but also the constraints encountered.

At this stage, it would be worth examining the transformations undertaken by migrants' political practices and their views and representations of "the political" since this research was completed, and particularly at this time of crisis. On the one hand, in recent years there has been a relative opening up of opportunities to participate, through, for example, the possibility that migrants from certain Latin American countries can vote in Spanish local elections and the increase in the number of countries of origin allowing their citizens to vote from abroad. It is also important to highlight the possible increase in networks and social and political capital among migrants resulting from longer residence in Spain. At the same time, the crisis is producing a return to similarly vulnerable conditions to those experienced by migrants during their early years in Spain, which could exert an influence, either by encouraging or delaying their participation or redirecting it, for example, into associations or new movements such as the 15M<sup>8</sup> (Escrivá, 2013). The crisis might have further weakened migrant associations, not only because of the increasingly precarious status of their members and the organization, or because some opt for another type of participation, but also because some of their leaders or members have opted to return.

This topic is certainly not lacking in social and scientific interest. On the contrary, it acquires a new meaning in the present. It would be important to analyze the impact the crisis is having on migrants' political integration, particularly the new constraints emerging in local contexts, in order to create the

<sup>8</sup> The 15M is a loosely-organised movement not connected to any political party that started in Spain in 2011 to protest against some of the things happening in the political, economic and social spheres and to demand "real democracy".

necessary measures to offset them and to resituate the debates on citizenship, now more than ever, at the heart of the debate.

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