

Participatory projects and their impact on immigrants'
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immigrés en France : l'empowerment par l'action
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inmigrantes en Francia: empoderar haciendo

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Résumé de l'article

Objectif : Nous nous appuyons sur la littérature relative à l'empowerment et à la participation pour comprendre comment les initiatives participantes favorisent l'intégration socioculturelle et économique des immigrants.

Méthodologie : Les données ont été collectées dans un centre d'hébergement parisien par le biais d'entretiens avec quatre sous-groupes, d'observations, de photolangage et d'analyses de documents.

Résultats et contributions : Notre recherche montre que les projets participatifs agissent sur l'empowerment psychologique des immigrants. Ils encouragent également les autres parties prenantes à modifier leurs habitudes pour mettre en oeuvre des pratiques plus inclusives. Nous soulignons l'importance des arts en tant que vecteurs de communication et moyens de renverser les relations de pouvoir. Enfin, nous présentons un modèle de processus d'empowerment par le biais d'initiatives participantes.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: We draw upon the empowerment and participatory literature to understand how participatory initiatives foster the socio-cultural and economic integration of immigrants. Our research is based on the analysis of a French housing facility located in Paris.

Methodology: Data was collected through interviews with four sub-groups, observations and document analysis.

Results and contributions: Our research show that participatory projects act on the psychological empowerment of immigrants. They also encourage other stakeholders to modify their habits to implement more inclusive practices. We highlighted the importance of arts as communication drivers and ways to reverse power relations. Finally, we present a process model of empowerment through participatory initiatives.

Keywords: Empowerment, Migrants, Participatory, Social Innovation

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Résumé

Objectif : Nous nous appuyons sur la littérature relative à l'empowerment et à la participation pour comprendre comment les initiatives participantes favorisent l'intégration socioculturelle et économique des immigrés.

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Mots-Clés : Empowerment, Migrants, Actions Participantes, Innovation sociale

Ce manuscrit fait partie du projet H2020 MERGING - projet financé par l'Union Européenne dans le cadre de la convention de subvention N° 101004535. Cet article reflète uniquement les opinions des auteurs et la Commission n'est pas responsable de l'utilisation qui pourrait être faite des informations contenues dans cet article. Les auteurs remercient la structure d'hébergement Les Cinq Toits, les entreprises sociales ainsi que toutes les personnes interrogées pour leur participation au projet de recherche. Ils adressent leurs plus chaleureux remerciements à Lauren Dixon, Romain Minod, Emily Mugel et Maïté Pinchon pour leur aide dans la collecte des données.

Resumen

Objetivo: Nos basamos en la literatura sobre empoderamiento y participación para comprender cómo las iniciativas participativas fomentan la integración sociocultural y económica de los inmigrantes. Nuestra investigación se basa en el análisis de una vivienda francesa situada en París.

Metodología: Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas con cuatro subgrupos, observaciones y análisis de documentos.

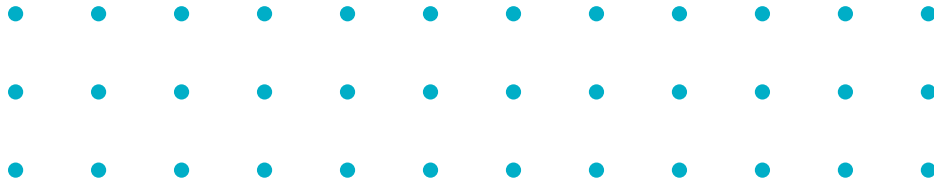
Resultados: Nuestra investigación demuestra que los proyectos participativos actúan sobre la capacitación psicológica de los inmigrantes. También animan a otras partes interesadas a modificar sus hábitos para aplicar prácticas más integradoras. Destacamos la importancia de las artes como impulsoras de la comunicación y formas de invertir las relaciones de poder. Por último, presentamos un modelo de proceso de empoderamiento a través de iniciativas participativas.

Palabras Clave: Empoderamiento, Migrantes, Participativo, Innovación Social

Este manuscrito forma parte del proyecto H2020 MERGING - proyecto que recibió financiación del programa de investigación e innovación Horizonte 2020 de la Unión Europea en virtud del acuerdo de subvención n° 101004535. Este artículo refleja únicamente las opiniones de los autores y la Comisión no se hace responsable del uso que pueda hacerse de la información contenida en el mismo. Los autores agradecen al centro de alojamiento Les Cinq Toits, a las empresas sociales y a todos los encuestados su participación en el proyecto de investigación. Los autores extienden su más sincero agradecimiento a Lauren Dixon, Romain Minod, Emily Mugel y Maïté Pinchon por su ayuda en la recopilación de datos.

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As of 2020, 282m individuals left their country and one third joined the European soil (IMO, 2023), either to flee from geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, hunger, persecutions, etc. (Dahdah *et al.*, 2018). These migration flows challenge both home and host countries, as home countries lose important shares of young workers and host countries face difficulties in absorbing incoming immigrants. Besides the traumatic experience caused by migration journeys, many immigrants are confronted to socio-cultural barriers (Hack-Polay & Mendy, 2018) and difficulties in accessing the labor market due to the lack of social capital (Hajro *et al.*, 2021) and skills recognition (Dietz *et al.*, 2015). These barriers slow their socio-economic integration and increase their vulnerability (Bakker, Dagevos & Engbersen, 2014).

Important to cope with complex settings (D'Innocenzo, Luciano, Mathieu, Maynard & Chen, 2016), empowerment is a popular topic in management and migration studies. It articulates two dimensions: the power and the learning process to access it (Zhang & Bartoll, 2010). Often mentioned by institutional actors as a way to fight against poverty, empowerment is a key dimension of public policies, as it aims at transferring power and control relations from the most favored to the most unfavored actors. It participates in rebalancing powers and generating social cohesion as frequent interactions strengthen ties, increase familiarity and build trust among members (e.g. Dyer, Sing, & Hesterly, 2018). This is particularly important for immigrants, which often suffer from isolation and a psychological state of powerlessness.

In such context, participation has been recognized as a vector of empowerment, i.e. as a way to offer people the opportunity to live the life they want (Sen, 1989). Direct participation gives a personal and immediate connection to decision-making processes (Jo & Nabatchi, 2021). It raises the feeling of being part of a society (Hauber-Ozer & Call-Cummings, 2020), regardless the situation nor the culture, as it is designed *with* and *for* their beneficiaries (Haile *et al.*, 2020). Participatory initiatives include a wide array of activities and levels of commitment, from the co-design, to the co-innovation, co-construction, data collection and analysis, dissemination, etc. From a methodological perspective, participatory research is popular in migration studies as they reduce researchers' cognitive biases and ethical dilemmas (Bustamante Duarte *et al.*, 2018).

Drawing upon the structural and psychological empowerment literature, and taking into consideration the potential effect of participatory projects on empowerment, we ask the following question: how do participatory projects empower immigrants and foster their integration?

To answer this question, we conducted a case study on a hybrid housing facility 'Les Cinq Toits', selected for its innovativeness, from July to September 2021. We involved four main groups stakeholders in our data collection and analysis processes. We combined three data collection techniques (i.e. 5 days of non-participant observation, 30 semi-structured interviews and document analysis) to gain a deep understanding of the case and identify how this participatory project empowered actors at the individual, organizational and community levels.

Our results show that participatory projects generate empowering processes and outcomes for individuals, organizations and, to a lesser extent, communities. At the individual level, working with others' reinforced immigrants' self-esteem and confidence while providing opportunities to develop new skills. It also led professionals to question their practices to gain efficiency. At the organizational level, we show that shared responsibilities and leadership allowed a rapid deployment of the project while increasing actors' motivation to work collectively. However, our results also revealed that language and the temporary nature of the project and immigrants' stay acted as barriers to their participation in the governance of the facilities. At the community level, we highlight the importance of institutional support, social medias and professional partners on the creation of a supportive and tolerant community, while pointing at the tensions remaining in the area.

The article proceeds as follows: first, we briefly define social integration and confront the empowerment and participatory frameworks. Second, we discuss the research design, data collection and analysis methods. Third, we present the main results. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings, the main limits and perspective for future research.

Theoretical background

In this section, we start by presenting the empowerment framework before confronting it to the participatory literature.

Empowerment

Empowerment is defined as a both the process and the outcome of a change where people acquire the ability to make strategic life choices and transform those choices into desired action and outcomes to lead the life one has reason to value (Lecoutere & Wuyts, 2021). It offers people the potential to challenge existing power and control relations (Cornwall, 2016) as well as to satisfy their self-efficiency or self-determination needs (Zimmerman, 2000) by raising consciousness about situations of unquestioned acceptance of inequality or injustice, and giving people the possibility of acting and choosing differently (Cornwall, 2016). As mentioned by Lecoutere and Wuyts (2021), the empowerment process is made of three inter-related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. These dimensions, the way they are entangled and the outcomes they produce are, however, deeply influenced by contextual factors (Hall, Mitchel, Halpin & Kilanko, 2022). Regardless the context, the need to empower people becomes critical when actors feel powerless (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). When confronted to these situations, powerful actors need to identify the conditions fostering the sense of powerlessness and engage actions to make a change.

The empowerment literature is made of two main streams: (1) the structural and (2) the psychological empowerment. Structural empowerment pertains to the existence of social structures, in a given space or context, allowing individuals to achieve their goals through access to opportunities, relevant information, support and resources (Amor, Xanthopoulou, Calvo & Vazquez, 2021; Kanter, 1977). It focuses on the operational practices employed to empower actors (Baird *et al.*, 2020). Opportunities for learning include access to challenging experiences and specific training (Kanter, 1977). Resources refer to getting the help, time and support needed to perform a specific task. In the case of vulnerable populations, access to resources often constitutes a difficulty due to the linguistic barriers and the institutional complexity. Together with access to relevant information, opportunities and resources are of critical importance since they allow the development of new knowledge and skills leading to professional and/or personal growth or emancipation (e.g. Kanter, 1977).

Psychological empowerment refers to the motivational dimension of empowerment – i.e. individuals' feelings and comprises four cognitive components: sense of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Amor *et al.*, 2021; Spreitzer, 1995). Observed from a motivational perspective, empowerment is as intrinsic task motivation to perform tasks (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), reflecting a sense of self-control in relation to one's active involvement with his/her role (Seibert *et al.*, 2011). Meaning involves a fit between the requirements of a role and an individual's beliefs, values and behaviors (Lee & Koh, 2001). It refers to individuals' understanding the value of the task performed based on their standards or ideas (Spreitzer, 1995). Competence refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to perform activities with skill. Actors' ability to provide relatives with feedbacks (improve existing knowledge at the individual level) and feed-forward (explore new knowledge at the individual or team level, and institutionalize it at the organizational level) play a critical role in this process (Wiewiora, Chang & Smidt, 2020). Self-determination refers to an individual's sense of having a choice in initiating and regulating actions. Finally, impact refers to the extent to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work (Huang, Shi, Zhang, Lee & Cheung, 2006). In sum, psychological empowerment involves intrapersonal, interpersonal and behavioral components (Cyril, Smith & Renzaho, 2016).

Rather than opposing empowerment practices and motivations, Zimmerman (2000) and Lee and Koh (2001) argued that each can be conceived as the cause of and effect of empowerment (Huang *et al.*, 2006). Existing literature assumes that empowerment starts with individuals recognizing the existence of power disequilibrium and engaging actions and initiatives to solve it (processes).

Empowering processes aim at generating outcomes at three interdependent levels: individual, organizational and community (Zimmerman, 2000). Processes engaged at the individual level and designed to give power in decision-making, provide individuals with a sense of control and confidence, which in turn influence organizations and communities, encouraging activism and tolerance for diversity. Conversely, supportive communities will encourage organizations to engage transformations designed to improve members' well-being, and individuals to take initiatives and develop their human capital. Communities implement processes of interactions between individuals and organizations designed to enhance community living as a whole (Cyril *et al.*, 2016). In line with

Zimmerman (2000) and Lee and Koh (2001), we have chosen to examine how participative initiatives (a form of structural empowering practice) act on the psychological empowerment of immigrants. This decision is motivated by two elements. First, because the inherent focus on individuals' perceptions aligns with our focus on immigrants' feelings of empowerment through participatory initiatives. Second, because prior studies have shown the overall empowering and positive impact of participatory actions on socially vulnerable groups (e.g. Gibson *et al.*, 2019). Interestingly, recent streams of research also point the limits of participatory actions on these populations. Málovics, Crețan, Méreine-Berki and Tóth, (2019) showed that, in the case of highly vulnerable populations, participative actions might expose them to moral and practical dilemmas, forcing them to engage in trade-offs between empowerment and marginalization.

Both structural and psychological empowerments are of significant importance for immigrants due to the particular challenges they face in host countries (Cakir & Guneri, 2011). Despite its relevance, the empowerment construct remains scarcely understood when it comes to migrant populations (Cakir & Guneri, 2011). While scholars explored the positive and negative outcomes of adaptation of immigrants, few studies focused on both the psychological and structural empowerment of these populations. Empirical research on empowerment conducted on immigrants (e.g. Cakir & Guneri, 2011), vulnerable (e.g. Sassetti & Thinyane, 2023) or marginalized populations (e.g. Málovics *et al.*, 2019) highlight the diverse, dynamic and contextual nature of empowerment processes, antecedents and outcomes. They point the role of digital tools (e.g. Sassetti & Thinyane, 2023), length of stay and language proficiency (e.g. Hannafi & Marouani, 2023), factors associated with a positive adaptation of migrants locally. Indeed, digital tools offer a precious access to the specific information and resources exiled populations need to cope with everyday challenges (Sassetti & Thinyane, 2023). Language proficiency and the length of stay allow individuals to interact with locals and institutions, build social networks, learn about available resources/opportunities and obtain employment. While facilitating social integration, language proficiency reduces dependency towards others and increases migrants' sense of control and confidence regarding their chances to succeed and enter the job market.

Conger and Kanungo (1988: 474) describe the empowerment process as the succession of five stages including the *“psychological state of empowering experience, its antecedent conditions and its behavioral consequences”*. It begins with 1) a diagnosis of the conditions within an organization that are responsible for feelings of powerlessness, 2) the use of empowering techniques and strategies designed to 3) remove external conditions responsible for powerlessness as well as to provide people with self-efficacy information. As a result of receiving such information, people feel empowered in Stage 4, and the behavioral effects of empowerment are noticed in the last stage. The empowerment process can happen, and generate outcomes, for individuals, organizations and communities (Zimmerman, 2000). This model presents the advantage of describing the main steps and understanding the overall empowerment process, however little is known about when and why it leads to positive outcomes (D'innocenzo *et al.*, 2016). This is particularly important in the case of migrant populations considering the challenges they face in unfamiliar environments due to the peculiarities of their statuses, the traumas experienced during the migration journey and the reluctance of local populations

- conditions leading to a psychological and structural state of powerlessness. Thus, looking for empowerment strategies allowing immigrants to take an active role in the local society is of critical importance.

Participatory actions and empowerment

Participatory actions are becoming more and more popular due to their outcomes and social expectations for more democratic processes (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). Participatory actions are initiatives involving a heterogeneous group of actors in a given decision-making process - without making distinctions on their expertise or background. They are particularly relevant to solve practical problems and improve the well-being of people suffering from enduring social inequities (Ozanne & Anderson, 2010). Indeed, actors are considered as collaborators and an equal treatment is key to the process as “*effective interventions require the consideration and respect of the social and cultural constructions of the people involved (Reason & Bradbury, 2001)*” (Ozanne & Anderson, 2010: 124). By doing so, it builds bridges between traditional experts and users, and between science and practice.

Involving actors at different steps of a project brings a meaningful input into what is being decided: it offers communities the possibility to share their knowledge related to the problems they are experiencing while giving them the opportunity to change status – from vulnerable individuals to experts. If actors can be involved at different steps of the project (creation, design, construction/implementation...), the involvement of vulnerable groups is often limited to the first stages of a project as they do not necessarily have the technical skills and expertise to evaluate the outcomes and proceed to the adjustments required (Bustamante Duarte *et al.*, 2018). In such initiatives, participation is at the same time a means and an end. It is a means to develop richer and more effective solutions to complex problems. It is also a way to provide actors with greater agency when they develop new skills and/or improve their adaptive and coping capacities (Goulding *et al.*, 2018). In sum, by involving stakeholders from the development to the operationalization of a project, participatory actions aim at reversing power relations and create solutions adapted to specific needs. Their richness lies in the fact that, by making people actors of the decision-making process, they reduce information asymmetries and encourage people to learn new skills (Ozane & Anderson, 2010).

The social information process theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) posits that individuals' attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the information shared by others. Reducing information asymmetries favors human interactions and, thus, participate in building trust, commitment, shared perceptions and values. It generates emotional attachment (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993), increases dedication (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006), fosters participation in decision-making (Aheane *et al.*, 2005) and encourages actors to collaborate to reach a final objective. For immigrants, these information asymmetries are particularly important due to the predominance of linguistic and cultural barriers, exacerbated by the traumas experienced during the migration journey.

Participatory projects can thus be considered as empowering as they tend to enhance individuals' competences and autonomy, and motivate actors to perform collectively. They create practical knowledge and reduce social differences by encouraging individuals to interact despite existing barriers.

This study explores the role of participatory housing initiatives on the empowerment of migrant populations. Housing is a particularly important concern for vulnerable groups, notably for immigrants, as it is the pre-requisite of any integration process and allows for social encounters (Killemsetty *et al.*, 2022). Accessing to housing provides migrant populations with security, safety and feelings of self-worth (Coltman *et al.*, 2015). It remains, however, a long and difficult process due to the lack of affordable solution in European cities.

Recent research linked participatory actions and housing in the case of vulnerable groups. Killemsetty *et al.* (2022) conducted a community-based participatory research to find solutions to slum housing challenges in India. Focusing on slum dwellers, they showed that participatory actions turn vulnerable community to experts, amplify voices of the poor and allow them to overcome the challenges they face when individually advocating for their needs. Figure 1 links the three levels of empowerment identified in the literature to participatory initiatives, highlighting the interactions and expected outcomes related to such projects.

We differ from Killemsetty *et al.* (2022) by focusing not only on immigrants, but by integrating also a wide array of stakeholders involved in a housing project. Our study is, to our knowledge, one of the first to link participatory housing projects with the empowerment of immigrants (notably in the French context). We aim to contribute to a nascent but growing body of literature using participatory approaches in mature economies context, where the challenge of immigrant integration still waits for solutions.

Methodology

The objective of this research is to understand how participatory projects can foster immigrants' empowerment and integration (Yin, 2013). We anchored our research in the constructivist paradigm (Thiertart *et al.*, 2014) and adopted a multilevel perspective to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon studied (Adla, 2021) through the active participation of our subjects in the data collection and interpretation processes. The Parisian temporary housing facility “Les Cinq Toits” appeared to be a relevant case as it allowed researchers to conduct analyses at the individual and collective levels, collecting data with a wide diversity of internal and external stakeholders. Our embedded single case-study (Yin, 2013) was, moreover, selected for its innovativeness and mixed (social and economic) purpose.

Data collection took place from June to September 2021, and relies on several sources: semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis. 30 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with five sub-groups: residents (immigrants), NGO managers, social workers, companies and external stakeholders. The interview guides have been established based on our literature review and prior informal discussions with social, institutional and academic experts. The interviews lasted between 9 min and 1h30. Interviewees were asked a set of questions concerning their personal background, their commitment and feeling about the place, the main issues faced, the solutions found and their perspectives for the future. Jointly, we conducted 5 days of non-participant observation. Table 1 presents a synthesis of our data collection process (actors, type and volume of data, objective).

TABLE 1
Presentation of our respondents and data structure

Period	Data collection	Volume	Data source	Objective
Creation of the facilities	Semi-structured interviews	2h30	Facility founders NGO Director	Understand how the facilities were built: identify the participatory actions implemented (and the reasons of their apparition), the barriers faced and the strategies adopted to overcome them.
During the project	Semi-structured interviews	6h30	Residents (immigrants)	Understand their life paths and migration journeys, identify the difficulties faced and the importance of housing and participatory initiatives organised in the facilities.
		4h	Social workers	Understand their role and identify the difficulties faced each day.
		6h35	Entrepreneurs incubated in the facilities	Identify their motivations and perception about the facilities (and their impact on the integration of immigrants)
		2h15	NGO managers	Understand how their practices and actions evolved since the beginning of the project.
		1h45	Neighbours	Understand how close neighbours (merchants or not) perceive the facilities as well as their motivations to attend (or not) to the initiatives organised by and in the facilities.
	Documents & News	1300 posts	NGOs' social medias	Observe the activities organised within the facilities across the months
	Non-participant observations	5 days	Researchers	Site visits to observe the structure and dynamics in presence within the facilities
	Photovoice	14 pictures	Residents (Immigrants)	Understand the symbolic and importance of housing while overcoming linguistic barriers

Drawing upon Zimmerman (2000)'s levels of empowerment we analyzed our data through a multilevel qualitative analysis. The objective is to provide a more encompassing picture of the interaction between the individual, organizational and community mechanisms impacting immigrants' experiences of and perspectives on integration. We adopted Fujimoto and Uddin's (2022) approach for analyzing empowerment related data: we visited the empowerment literature and identified its main components at the individual (Spreitzer, 1995), organizational and community levels (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000) as an overarching guiding dictionary for further data analysis. We identified elements related to 1) participants' sense of self-worth, competence, self-determination, impact and shared meaning (*individual empowerment*) (Fujimoto & Uddin, 2022), 2) intra- and inter-organizational cooperation/alliance (*organizational empowerment*) (Rothman *et al.*, 2019) and 3) efforts engaged by citizens and policy makers to improve a community's life and encourage tolerance for diversity (*community empowerment*) (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). We analyzed interviewees' discourses to identify elements related to empowerment processes and/or outcomes, based on words such as "self-confidence", "autonomy", "positive results/effects", etc. expressed by participants. Subsequently, we agreed that the overall empowering nature of the participatory project was primarily driven by stakeholders' approach in supporting, nurturing and governing immigrants' capability development.

Coding

Following Adla (2021) approach for multi-level analysis, we started by processing our data through a thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). The coding helped us to establish a first category that corresponds to the three levels of empowerment processes. The second category refers to the outcomes generated by the actions engaged

at the individual, organizational and community levels. In a second step, open coding was carried out to identify difficulties encountered during the participatory project. Table 2 presents a summary of our coding.

Presentation of the empirical framework

Created in 2018, the Cinq Toits is a temporary hybrid facility located in the 16th district of Paris. The facility combines social and economic activities: it is a housing center for 200 migrants from different origins and 150 vulnerable individuals, as well as 35 social enterprises attracted by the hybrid nature and the affordable rents. The project is run by an NGO specialized in social insertion of highly vulnerable people for 5 years (the facilities being rented by the city hall to the NGO while waiting for the transformation of the building into social housings).

The announcement of the arrival a temporary housing center generated tensions in the neighborhood. Even if citizens trusted the managing NGO in respect of their experience in creating and managing temporary housing solutions, resistances were high. Indeed, the project was implemented in a former gendarme barracks owned by the municipality and temporarily entrusted to the NGO before being transformed into social housing, giving neighbors the perception that gendarmes had been replaced by undocumented immigrants. Local citizens were not used to have social facilities in the area and claimed to be afraid about criminal issues and potential consequences of this project on the value of their real estate.

Reinsuring people was complex, due to the constitution of an anonymous collective of citizens opposed to the project. Several meetings have been organized in a short period of time with main stakeholders to avoid misunderstandings. The participation

TABLE 2
Coding structure

Agregate level	2 nd order codes	1 st order codes
Empowerment processes	Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with others [I-EMPP1] - Identifying resources [I-EMPP2] - Accessing to information [I-EMPP3]
	Organizational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forming teams [O-EMPP1] - Encouraging initiatives [O-EMPP2] - Sharing leadership [O-EMPP3] - Sharing responsibilities [O-EMPP4] - Changing power relations [O-EMPP5] - Developing communication tools [O-EMPP6] - Shared governance O-EMPP7]
	Community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forming coalition with external actors [C-EMPP1] - Communicating on social medias [C-EMPP2] - Attracting citizens in the facilities [C-EMPP3]
Empowering outcomes	Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of manual skills [I-EMPO1] - Development of linguistic skills [I-EMPO2] - Revealing talents [I-EMPO3] - Understanding of local norms and values [I-EMPO4] - Improvement of practices [I-EMPO5]
	Organizational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved participation of members in construction activities [O-EMPO1] - Participation of stakeholders in decision-making O-EMPO2] - Horizontalization of power relations [O-EMPO3]
	Community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced tensions with citizens [C-EMPO1] - Changed perception on migration [C-EMPO2] - Creation of a supportive network with local actors [C-EMPO3] - Higher activism among local citizens [C-EMPO4]
Challenges	Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language barrier [I-CHAL1] - Temporary presence on site [I-CHAL2] - Understanding social codes [I-CHAL3] - Overcoming personal traumas [I-CHAL4] - Emotional attachment to the place [I-CHAL5]
	Organisational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging immigrants in governance [O-CHAL1] - Time constraints [O-CHAL2]
	Community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing tensions with the neighbourhood [C-CHAL1] - Engaging local medias [C-CHAL2]

of representants of local and national authorities reduced tensions and gave the NGO the legitimacy needed to build the project.

The project started with a participative workcamp, in which different types of actors (professionals, volunteers, immigrants, artists, etc.) took part in the renovation of the facilities. The decision to organize this participative action resulted more from the need to find rapid solutions than from an initial plan to engage stakeholders. One of the founders explained that *“the discussions with the prefecture and the town hall started in the spring-summer of 2018, the barracks were vacant at the end of August and it was planned that the association would have at least a month to recruit teams, equip the spaces, etc. In reality, the prefecture started to send buses containing beneficiaries after only 2 weeks. People arrived in a disorderly fashion... We had to welcome people in spaces that were not made for them and, later, set up teams, establish protocols, furnish, rehabilitate spaces, etc. Doing a participatory workcamp was an idea we had but it was not really in our plans at start: it imposed itself due to the double urgency with which we were confronted: housing traumatized people and convincing neighbors that this center could be a good thing for the neighborhood. In the end, it was an incredible experience”*.

Results

We couple constructs of psychological and structural empowerment and participatory initiatives to answer the guiding question “how does participatory actions empower immigrants and foster their integration?”. More specifically, the problematic of voice, interpretations, actions, self-esteem, impact, and the link between individuals, organization and community focused our qualitative analysis of the constructions of empowerment. Participant responses, observations, and document analysis formed a basis for interrogating ways that empowerment includes a multiplicity of different conditions and negotiated meanings.

The project studied allowed us to identify empowering processes and outcomes at three levels (individual, organizations, and communities). Processes and outcomes have been qualified as empowering when, according to our interviewees, they participated in rebalancing power relations.

Individual level of empowering processes and outcomes

At the individual level, empowerment processes include actions leading powerless actors to develop decision-making skills, resource management and collaboration with others. At the Cinq Toits, several empowerment processes have been identified at the individual level, for the immigrants' group (powerless actors) but also for the professional actors (powerful actors). The renovation of the facilities involved different types of stakeholders that had to find ways to collaborate despite different socio-cultural or professional backgrounds. Besides being an opportunity to occupy one's day, being involved in project and working in teams allowed immigrants to meet and interact with new actors. It also offered them the opportunity to use prior experiences to the benefit of others and/or gain new skills. A former resident mentioned that *“in my country, I was doing manual jobs but when I arrived to France, it could not get one: I was expecting for my papers, did not have any certification and language was a problem. I could not do anything... so when I was asked if I wanted to participate to a construction project, I said ‘ok’. It was good: I had something to do every day (It is important) [...] and people were nice to me (I even spoke with people*

would have never spoken to normally)". Manually experienced individuals helped the less experienced ones to perform task and learn new construction techniques. In parallel, proficient actors helped the less fluent ones to learn basic French and develop their linguistic skills. Two managing directors explained that *"our logic was to involve a maximum number of residents and actors in the construction of the place, in a whole range of manual activities. Involving them in this workcamp was a way to train and take care of humans [...]. Some wanted to work mainly with wood because they liked it or because they had experience in this field. Others had no experience but wanted to enjoy the atmosphere of the site and do some handling to clear their heads, etc. A lot of things happened: it freed us from the constraints of contracting and was useful to residents. We produced skills assessments afterwards and it proved to be useful for immigrants, to help them project themselves and say: 'I worked with wood, I loved it, I could go and train as a carpenter because I discovered that I am good at it'."* Professional actors also emphasized the need for regularity and active participation of members in the development of confidence and trust among individuals. As explained by one of the Director of the facilities, *"these guys went through hell to come here, and it might be hard for some of them to trust others – especially if they do not speak the same language. We tried to include a form of stability in the process by attempting to have the same people intervening for a given amount of time. It did not always work, but we tried. With time and regularity, barriers started to fall down".*

Involving stakeholders in the renovation of the facilities participated in increasing the sense of control and self-esteem for residents. The interactions that occurred during the construction helped residents gain confidence while developing new skills and social capital. Moreover, being member of a team and collaborating with others reinforced residents' self-esteem and self-confidence: it generated a sense of belonging and motivation to take part to the society while providing opportunities to learn and understand their new environment. It also shaped their integration by allowing residents 1) to reveal their talents and make the most of their skills and prior experiences and, 2) to draw upon external resources to become self-sufficient and gain autonomy. Interestingly, this project also had empowering outcomes for professionals. The emergency of the situation, coupled with the complexity of safely collaborating with non-professional or unexperienced actors led to question their practices and to innovate to ensure the success of the project. As explained by a social worker, *"this site was also enriching for us because it questioned a lot of things: how we do things, how we work together, how we communicate, etc. We had to adapt every day, depending on the people we had, the constraints of the day etc."*. In sum, actions implemented to empower immigrants also generated empowering outcomes for them as it led them to imagine new ways of making and sharing decisions and of working with others. This virtuous cycle effect appears to be reachable in case of an active participation of all members and regular coaching/training from the most highly to the less highly skilled actors (as a form of transfer of knowledge). Active participation and coaching/training raise individuals' skills and confidence to perform a task, while creating the conditions required to favor inter-personal collaborations and team work.

Organizational level of empowering processes and outcomes

Empowering organizations provide people with opportunities to gain control over their lives through processes such as shared responsibilities and leadership, activities promoting individual development, commitment, peer-based support and community

building (Zimmerman, 2000). We examined the goal orientation and decision-making process during the construction and identified three empowering processes implemented at the organizational level: shared responsibilities, leadership and governance within the facilities. Small mixed teams were formed, each benefiting from a large autonomy to perform the tasks assigned by professionals. Members were encouraged to share ideas regarding the division of work within their teams, debate and make collective decisions before and taking responsibility and leadership on identified actions. A professional explained that *"often, we see difficulties for newly arrived immigrants to take regularly part to a project. Their migration journeys are so traumatic that planning ahead becomes difficult. What we did here was to start with simple and daily projects: immediate tasks, etc. At the beginning of each day, teams were assigned with short-term objectives and freedom to organize themselves as they wanted (as long as it remained safe). It worked... At the end of the day, the guys were satisfied and most of them came back the day after, etc."*

A shared governance has been implemented to include the different stakeholders involved in the construction and the life of the facilities in the decision-making process. Activities, problems, and projects are being discussed, and a small budget is available to stakeholders willing to develop specific initiatives. However, if volunteers, NGOs and other professionals showed diligence to this council meetings, residents' participation remained scarce. Three elements have been identified to explain the non-engagement of residents in the governance of the facilities: 1) the temporary nature of both the stay of residents and of the project; 2) a perceived disconnect between the topics discussed during meetings and residents' specific concerns (asylum applications, etc.); and 3) the difficulty to take part to debates due to linguistic issues and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Overcoming linguistic barriers was, indeed, a critical issue as it impacted communication processes at all steps and reduced immigrants' ability to make decisions. A resident recognized that if language was a problem, language classes were not suited to him: *"I did not want to go to French classes, sit and listen: too hard for me, I left school long ago. I wanted to find training to get a job and earn money to send to my family. But to go to training, you have to understand some French. The construction was great because it was like a collective training, and we learnt some basics of French"*. Alternatives have been co-developed and implemented in collaboration with professional activists. Artefacts (pictograms) have been created and theater sessions organized each day to facilitate communication among participants during the operations.

"We worked with a troop of artists and launched together a form of French classes focused on the tasks to be carried out on the site: safety issues, tools or materials used during the day. There was a 15–30-minute session in the morning to explain what we were going to do during the day, and a second time (in the evening) to see if the words were really understood. It worked well, because we all used it and, in the end, residents said: 'At last I'm learning words that can be useful for the day's activity'. In the evening, we mimed scenes from the day and the roles were reversed: the residents became site managers and vice versa. It was funny and enriching because everyone could better understand each other's problems – it really made a difference in the way people behaved within the group. We pushed things with the architects to also make pictograms. At one point, there was a huge board painted on a blackboard with a drawing of a saw written in five languages. It sounds

stupid, but it allowed a lot of guys who didn't speak the same language to work together" (Managing Director).

The initiatives engaged generated a set of organizational empowering outcomes related to language, collaborations, mutual understanding, and motivation. Extant literature (e.g. Zimmerman, 2000) showed the critical nature of language. For professional helpers, the language used has an influence on the perception individuals have of their own state of power. Empowering organizations use language that redefine the role and relations of actors, from a powerful-powerless situation to a collaborative one. Our analysis revealed that the organization adopted by actors during the construction shaped the role and language of actors, where "beneficiaries" and "experts" became "team members" of equal perceived importance. Reversing roles during theater sessions also rose participants' understanding of others' realities and environments, leading to more benevolence, support and satisfaction among actors. It changed participants' perceptions about immigrants (including the residents themselves), from powerless actors to equal team members. This perception was reinforced by the development of linguistics skills among residents, as it participated in immigrants' ability to share ideas and implement them while driving their co-workers to ensure the success of each operation (and vice versa).

Community empowerment processes and outcomes

Communities play an important role in the overall ability for immigrants to successfully navigate through new systems. Some individuals will be able to transition rapidly and to help others develop new skills, find their way in the city, form meaningful connections and serve as models for their peers. On the opposite, others will need time and support to transition, due to the traumas, distress and other form of violence they endured during their migration journey. Empowering communities provide members with the relevant information, resources and the support needed to reach their objectives and obtain satisfaction from their work. They also improve the quality of life of its members and encourage tolerance for diversity through the development of networks with other organizations/institutions or resources accessible to all members, for example (Zimmerman, 2000).

In our case study, several initiatives have been identified at the community level. Informal alliances have been formed with local authorities, local NGOs and professional activists before and during the construction. These alliances aimed at facilitating acceptance through a transfer of legitimacy from the institutional actors to the NGO managing the project, reduce tensions with the neighborhood by giving supporters a voice, and access to the resources and capabilities needed to ensure the success of the project. As mentioned by a founder of the project, *"We have been appointed to the neighborhood council by the mayor and it changed a lot of things because it is a space for direct and open exchange with the residents, in which we realized that a large proportion of people are indifferent, a small proportion are very, very vehement, and a small proportion are also very supportive and say: 'We're happy that you're here, the 16th arrondissement can accommodate us, and we're fed up with this label that sticks to us'".*

Social entrepreneurs joined the facilities, either to locate their activities and/or to take part to the construction of the site. The selection of partner structures was guided by the desire to avoid creating competition with existing businesses while attracting local citizens. Examples include an insertion restaurant, handicraft shops or a media specialized

in migration topics, etc. In parallel, communication campaigns have been organized on social media to provide citizens with regular information on the project and its partners. Besides reducing tensions, the objectives were to make participants visible and to propose alternative discourses to change perceptions on migration.

"The structures we hosted, our dynamism on social medias, and the invitations sent to neighbors to come and see what is going on inside (and take part to the governance of the facilities) really helped to allay fears and stereotypes. Many people came in initially out of skepticism and went back saying, 'It's not that bad'". (Founder of the Project)

These efforts rose the interest of several professional actors (medical doctors, etc.) which offered to NGO to come as volunteers after completion of the site to organize activities dedicated to residents and designed to improve their well-being and understanding of social norms. Examples include debates on gender roles in France, consults with psychologists, etc. Figure 1 presents a summary of the empowerment dynamics observed within the facilities.

If these initiatives had a positive effect on the acceptance of the project in the area in general, one must mention that tensions still persisted with some groups of neighbors that remained determined to stop it. Furthermore, the reluctance of several local medias to talk about the project prevented the NGO from reaching an audience unfamiliar with social medias – reducing the impact of these actions on the empowerment of local communities. Table 3 summarizes the empowerment processes and outcomes identified at the three levels.

Discussion

The aim of the paper is to understand how participatory initiatives empower immigrants in France.

Our results show that the participatory project turned to be an empowering experience by removing conditions leading to psychological state of powerlessness (Lecoutere & Wuyts, 2021) at the individual, organizational and, to a lesser extent, community level. Our findings are consistent with existing literature on migrants' empowerment by confirming the critical role of language proficiency (Hannafi & Marouani, 2023) and the contextual nature of empowerment processes and outcomes (Cakir & Guneri, 2011; Malovics *et al.*, 2019).

We enrich prior findings in several ways. First, we identified that language barriers influenced participants' attitudes differently depending on the level of sophistication of exchanges. When confronted in simple or easy discussions, actors develop artefacts and use arts as a way to make communication fluid and re-balance power relations between participants. In line with the social information theory (e.g. Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), these results showed that using arts to reduce information asymmetries increase human interactions, dedication (Schaufeldi *et al.*, 2006) and participation in decision-making (Aheane *et al.*, 2005). However, when exposed to more challenging exchanges, such as operational and monitoring discussions, language become a barrier leading to the withdrawal of the most vulnerable actors. These results add to prior discussion about language proficiency by showing the influence of the perceived level of sophistication of exchanges on actors' coping strategies and attitudes.

FIGURE 1
Three levels of empowerment

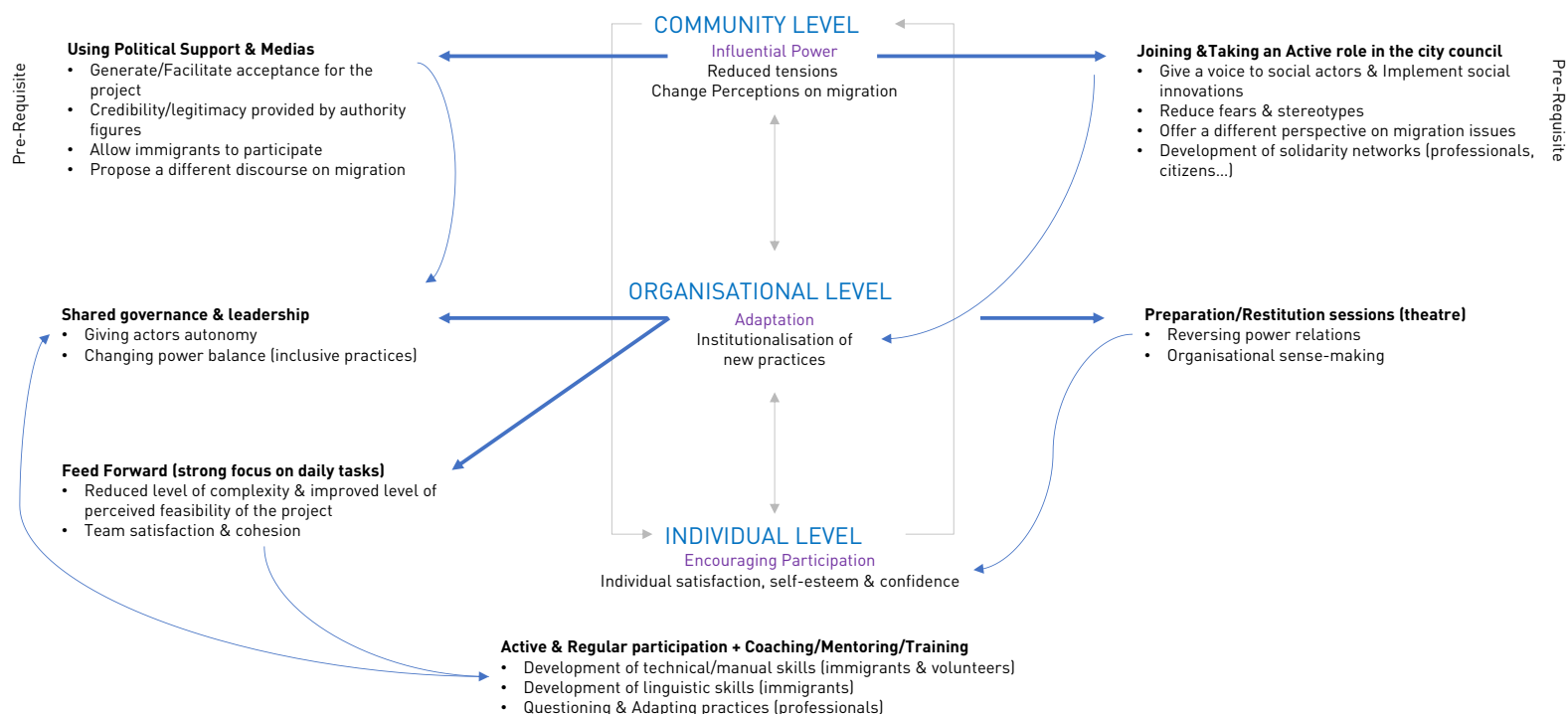


TABLE 3
Summary of the empowering processes and outcomes

	Individual level	Organizational level	Community level
Empowering processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with others regardless the cultural or professional background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared governance (construction and facilities' daily operations) - Shared responsibility and leadership for construction-related activities (encouragement to share ideas and take initiatives) - Reversing roles during theater sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political support through the decision of local authorities to appoint the NGO in its council. - Professional support offers to volunteer (medical actors) to improve immigrants well-being activities (social entrepreneurs) to attract citizens in the facilities - Communication on social medias to offer a different discourse on migration to citizens
Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coaching/training - Active participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating an empowering culture (where individuals / teams can share opinions, ideas and knowledge) - Adapting practices (technical and communicational) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of power and medias to influence local stakeholders
Empowering outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sense of control through the active participation in the construction of the facilities - Improved self-esteem and confidence - Development of new skills and knowledge (manual and linguistic) - Questioning existing practices and implementing new approaches towards support to immigrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased member participation in the activities - Modification in the language used (beneficiaries and experts becoming co-workers) - Better understanding of local environment (norms and values) - Changing participants' perception of immigrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced tensions with the neighborhood - Increased desire, from local citizens, to take part to activities organized locally or to volunteer - Creation of a network of professional activists

Besides language, we also enrich existing knowledge on the effect of time on the integration process. The actions engaged at the organizational level to include immigrants in the governance of the facilities went unsuccessful because immigrants were not supposed to stay long there, but also because the project was temporary per se. In line with Hannafi and Marouani (2023), we highlight the importance of the length of 1) individual stay and 2) the project they are involved in: the more temporary the project, the less probable immigrants will engage in strategic activities. This result can be explained by stability vulnerable groups needs after being exposed to long and traumatic events. Involving vulnerable populations in activities such as shared governance requires prior efforts – such as training (Wiewiora *et al.*, 2020) – to give them the confidence and sense of control they miss to take an active role in a wide scale project. Said differently, empowering actions engaged at the organizational level should be preceded by initiatives organized at the individual level in order to be successful.

At the individual level, the structural actions engaged acted of the four components of psychological empowerment for immigrants (Monje Amor *et al.*, 2021; Spreitzer, 1995). Indeed, working with others and being considered as their equal improved immigrants' motivation to perform tasks (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990): it made sense for their presence and utility on site, developed their skills and self-determination, and participated to the success of the construction (Huang *et al.*, 2006). In line with Ozane and Anderson (2010) and Tulakdar *et al.* (2005), our results show that participatory initiatives open possibilities for immigrants to developing new socio-cultural and technical skills. From a social integration point of view, it acted as proof of skill and competences, generating vocations and opening new job opportunities. We add to prior literature by highlighting the reverse nature of psychological empowerment, where actions developed by powerful actors for vulnerable populations turn, in the case of participatory projects, to be empowering also for them. Involving residents in the design, the construction and the evolution of the project allows actors to better understand beneficiaries' needs and led them to change their practices to be more inclusive. It allows stakeholders to develop richer and more effective solutions to solve housing and integration challenges. To this regard, using arts proved to be an efficient communication tool to prepare, run and make sense of the project.

At the organizational level, our case study also revealed that the success of this housing project on the empowerment of immigrants partially lies on the fact that all actors developed coping and adaptive activities (Goulding *et al.*, 2018). The efforts engaged at the individual level provided actors with the confidence they need to take initiatives, responsibilities and leadership on some activities at the organizational level.

At the community level, we highlighted the key role of political support and social medias to reduce tensions with local citizens and offer a positive discourse on migration. Using political power and medias to influence the local community appeared to be a pre-requisite for the implementation of the project and the participation of immigrants. Political support gave credibility/legitimacy to the project and allowed the NGO to deconstructing stereotypes by joining the city council and taking an active role in it. Understanding the importance of authority figures and being able to network with influential policy makers at the community level is of key importance to initiate the project. Moreover, the activities organized inside the premises (restaurant...) by partner companies opened the facilities to the public and participated in reducing fears too. However, our analysis revealed that if political and influential power are key pre-requisite

to such projects, community empowerment cannot be fully achieved on the short term but requires long-term actions.

Our study contributes to the literature by addressing the shortage of empirical studies involving immigrants and exploring the conditions fostering their empowerment. We add to prior studies by showing that empowerment practices and motivations are intrinsically linked, and that their impact is not only limited to the target population, but to all stakeholders engaged in it. From a capacity perspective, we showed that participatory projects can act as proof of skills for immigrants by allowing them to upskill and/or overcome barriers related to the absence of degree or certifications to enter the job market. Said differently, it offers immigrants the opportunity to demonstrate to professional actors (potential recruiters) the detention of specific skills. These initiatives act as symbolic boundary spanners as defined by Wang, Piazza and Soule (2018), i.e. processes reducing demarcations among people, allowing immigrants to overcome traditional barriers and to facilitate their integration into their new environment. We also enrich existing literature by highlighting the dynamic, multilevel and multidirectional nature of empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). Our results pointed that the coaching/training actions engaged at the individual level rose skills, self-confidence and esteem (individual effects) but also encouraged actors to take an active role and collaborate within teams (organizational effects). This trend has also been reinforced by the decision to adapt and institutionalize practices in order to gain inclusiveness and efficiency (organizational level): the implementation of shared governance and leadership, coupled with the focus on short-term tasks, increase the level of satisfaction and encourage individual and team participation (individual and organizational effects). In the same vein, our results pointed the role of political support as a key enabling factor for the project's implementation. Said differently, we contribute to the literature by showing that community empowerment might be a pre-requisite for participatory projects involving vulnerable populations, and that it is highly linked to the project holder's networking and influential capabilities. Joining a power body (community level) and involving representants of the neighborhood in the governance of the facilities (organizational level) participate in changing, on the longer term, people's perceptions on migration issues. Our research makes several managerial contributions. Our study highlights the positive outcomes of participatory initiatives on stakeholders and the potential for value creation. It encourages managers to engage in such projects to develop solutions more adapted to the target audience's needs, to change their habits and engage into more inclusive practices. Furthermore, it highlights the role of arts as communication drivers but also as a way to change power relations within a group or an organization, and to give minorities the opportunity to take part to the decision-making process.

Besides managerial contributions, our study also presents two major ethical implications. First, if participatory projects open a lot of doors, it also generates a lot of expectations among members that instigators might not be able to satisfy, generating frustration among participants. Second, participatory projects tend to generate emotional attachment to a place, a project, and/or a group. If this emotional attachment is an important part of the empowerment process, it can also turn to a relation of dependence and, thus, be counterproductive. In the case of immigrants, for example, involving them in the construction of the temporary housing facilities generated a feeling of pride, of responsibility and a deep relation to the place and the members engaged in the project. However,

this deep attachment might also slow the final integration process down, and have a negative impact on individuals at the end of the project (or when they are attributed their final housing), such as a new feeling of displacement, reject, etc. Thus, a balance must be found when implementing participatory initiatives in order to benefit from the positive outcomes while avoiding generating dependence and frustration among participants.

Conclusion

In an attempt to understand how participatory projects can empower immigrants and foster their integration in the host country, we have combined the empowerment and participatory frameworks to identify the conditions leading to empowerment at three levels. Our literature review pointed the importance of cognitive dimensions on the empowerment process, the role of information asymmetries on power relations, and the influence of personal values, determination and meaning on the decision to take actions. Drawing from our case study, we saw that participatory projects empower immigrants as well as actors taking part to it. Actions engaged at the individual, organizational and community levels participated in changing people's perceptions of others, to question existing practices and generate higher motivation. It rose immigrants' self-esteem and confidence, while facilitating their adaptation to the local context by understanding social norms and values. It also revealed the difficulties to involve residents in complex and long-term decision-making activities due to language barriers, time constraints and diverging concerns.

Our study is not without limits. Our analysis is based on a single, major and innovative case. Replication is needed in order to obtain more diverse results, going beyond contextual factors to be able to generalize our findings. From a theoretical perspective, analyzing such phenomenon through the micro-foundation or dynamic capabilities perspectives could allow us to develop a deeper understanding of the role of individual capabilities, their evolution and impact on the group social performance. Furthermore, we observed that the participation of stakeholders was limited to the design, construction and governance, but not on the long-term evaluation of the project. Our interviews showed that the managing association does not have any indicator or criteria to measure the impact of such project. Thus, more research is needed to suggest evaluation criteria adapted to social and participatory projects.

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