



# **The role of Latin Americanness for Immigrant Activism in Europe.**

## **An exploration of qualitative interviews with Latin-American leaders**

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POLITIS

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Processes (**IBKM**)

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# **POLITIS – a European research project**

## **Project information**

Populations of immigrant origin are growing and changing in Europe. POLITIS explores the potential of immigrants for the development of a civically active European society, starting with foreign students' perceptions of Europe and focusing on sustained social and political activities of immigrants. POLITIS is the short title for the research project "Building Europe with New Citizens? An Inquiry into the Civic Participation of Naturalised Citizens and Foreign Residents in 25 Countries" (2004-2007)

The study was divided into 3 parts:

- Part I: A comparative literature review on immigrant civic participation in 25 member states
- Part II: A comparative analysis of foreign students' perceptions of Europe, exploring the potential of their ideas about Europe with the help of essays and focus group discussions
- Part III: A comparative analysis of more than 150 qualitative interviews with civic activists of immigrant origin in the EU to identify favourable and unfavourable biographical and national conditions for active participation

## **The POLITIS Working Paper Series**

POLITIS working paper series may include project-related contributions by all project partners. The main project researchers in the consortium constitute the editorial committee of the working paper series. It is editorial policy to secure quality standards while encouraging the discussion of results that are preliminary or limited in scope.

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## **Consortium**

Interdisciplinary Centre for Education and Communication in Migration Processes (IBKM) [www.uni-oldenburg.de/IBKM](http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/IBKM)

Hellenic Foundation of European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) Athens. [www.eliamep.gr](http://www.eliamep.gr)

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Churches' Commission of Migrants in Europe (CCME) Brussels. [www.ccek.org/content/ccme.shtml](http://www.ccek.org/content/ccme.shtml)

## **Foreword**

Leonora Torres is currently participating on CELARE (Centro Latinoamericano para las relaciones con Europa) in Santiago, Chili and also with the University of Chili and its observatory of migrant and development issues.

The author has participated as an interviewer in the POLITIS project, conducting, translating and transcribing three interviews with civically active immigrants in Portugal. She took part in the two POLITIS summer school, receiving training and contributing to the research process during discussions.

As a former coordinator, I welcome this late and last contribution to the project. The project's publication policy encouraged project-related contributions by all project partners and the discussion of results that are preliminary or limited in scope.

Dita Vogel, August 2008

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the motivation of 17 highly active Latin American immigrants in 6 European countries, using interviews from the POLITIS database of 176 interviews of civically active immigrants. It argues that there is a distinct notion of Latin American political culture, and that this notion can be identified in the interviews of the immigrant activists. Three types of activists have been identified which link their motivation in different ways to their Latin American background: The old leftist political activists clearly relate to their socialisation in the struggle against dictatorships and have adjusted their political engagement to their immigrant situation; the cultural activists relate to the positive aspects of Latin American heritage and culture and their function for integration; the young antidiscrimination activists integrate in academic or other groups and base their claims for equality in these contexts. While all interviewees make references to the general situation and their personal situation in their countries of origin which show similarities between Latin American countries, specifically the cultural activists in non-Latin European countries use the notion of Latin America as a taken for granted concept.

“I am an optimist person, I believe in people (...)  
Sometimes it’s something that you carry on your DNA and you  
don’t know why...” (Peruvian female, living in Italy for over 12 years).

## 1. Introduction

Civically active immigrants are important for the receiving societies as they may provide links between immigrant communities and parts of the native society. If and how they become active is influenced by circumstances in the receiving society. However, we can also ask whether there are commonalities that relate to their background – the place where they come from. It has been shown that migrants often become active on behalf of migrants from the same region of origin.

With respect to Latin America, it is an open question whether the geographical reference region could be the country or a smaller geographical unit, or rather ‘Latin America’ as a larger geographical unit. The academic debate which is reviewed in section 3 after a brief conceptual introduction indicates that it is possible to speak of a distinct Latin American political culture.

In the empirical part, the paper explores the motivation of 17 highly active Latin American immigrants in 6 European countries, using qualitative interviews from the POLITIS database of 176 interviews of civically active immigrants. The paper argues that it is possible to distinguish three types of immigrants according to their self-presentation of their motivation to be civically active, and that these types are characterised by specific relations to their Latin American background. The last sections add some considerations on the findings.

## 2. Theoretical and conceptual embedding

This paper argues that the way that highly active immigrants express their motivation is strongly linked to their Latin American background. Therefore, it makes sense to explain the notion of immigrant activists and of motivation.

For the notion of immigrant activism, the paper makes use of the definitions in the POLITIS project. Highly active immigrants (synonymous ‘immigrant activists’) are defined as people that (1) *give a voice to societal concerns*, e.g. by engaging in political parties, local committees, parent associations or migrant lobby organisations and (2) *organise solidarity and self-help*, e.g. by taking leadership functions in religious associations, ethnic associations or informal self-help networks. The persons devote substantial time and energy to societal activities (Vogel 2008a:18-19).

Motivation, as a concept, could be seen as a tricky one. I look at the link between individual disposition and collective involvement, usually by participating on different organizations and groups.

Nuttin (1982) with his *Human Motivation Theory* articulates the concept of motivation in psychology as the *dynamic aspect* of the relation between subjects with the world. Motivation, therefore, concerns the active direction of behaviour toward certain preferential categories, of situations and objects. The subject orientates its behaviour toward certain forms of interaction with particular objects, which makes it indispensable

for the *subject functioning* (1982:14). Moreover; the author sustain that necessity (project and goal) becomes personal, by *personalizing the motives*. When the individual meets others with similar orientation, they may create an organization working towards their goals. When a subject commits with a project (ego-involvement) in such a way, the prestige or personal interest may dominate the original interest goal in a dynamic process (1982:164).

Hopenhayn (1988) defines four main motivations of people to participate in civic and political activities:

- 1) To gain control over personal situation and own life- project, by intervening with decisions that has a direct impact on the environment in which the person lives.
- 2) To have access to better benefits and services that society has to offer, but it is not been delivered, because of some institutional mechanism that hinders this process.
- 3) To integrate into development processes.
- 4) To increase the degree of self-esteem by the recognitions of peers and personal rights, needs and capacities (psychological level).

Kosic (2007, 2008) explores *immigrants'* motivations and how they are explained with reference to individual factors and reinforced by participation experiences, based on the analysis of the POLITIS qualitative immigrant interviews. On the whole, she finds that highly active immigrants are not so much different from highly active natives, as patterns suggested as relevant in the literature can also be confirmed for this sample. For example, many immigrants have been activists already in their countries of origin, and have incorporated this fact into their self-concept and describe activism as linked to their personality. While Kosic acknowledges that motives for participation are multiple and complex, two factors seem to be specific for immigrants. Education and language competences are highly emphasized in the accounts. Secondly, the needs and problems of immigrants of their origin group and the perception of this group in the receiving society impact on the motivation to become active on behalf of this group.

But how do they define their reference group? It could be defined with reference to a village, to a country, to a continent. In this paper, I make an argument that there is an identifiable Latin American political culture, and that this culture is visible in the immigrants' accounts of their motivation to be active in Europe.

### **3. Latin-American political culture**

Vargas- Hernández (2007) argues that “Latin-American culture” is only a myth, based on stereotypes made by power groups in order to created a cultural identity; in fact, Latin-American people shares the common sense of being an ex-colony and cast off from its origins: Africans, other Europeans and aboriginals are denied from this stereotype image. According to him, this sense of unity it is result of an exercise coming from the elite and power groups, but part of it is really create by the people and their communities, lived and re-created daily (Westwood and Radcliffe, 1993).

Although this idea of Latin-American culture and identity is disputed in the academic field, I like to stress that the fact that most people in Latin America speak the same

language provides for a very general connection, particularly in non-Spanish speaking countries.

Sharing Peró's findings, there is a growing feeling of a "Latin-identity" which is been recently deployed politically, observed in European countries (in this case, England), and this is interpreted as a sign of a slow work of empowerment of immigrant communities giving to their cultural heritage a key role. Latin-American political culture is characterised by a strong sense of protest and collective movement (Garretón, 1993), that could still influence immigrants' participation in a new country (Peró 2007). When conventional channels (as voting, membership in a political party, participating in power spheres) are taking away from people, there are other instruments to use to express their position or to fight for rights.

In the case of Latin-American, specially around the south cone area, all kind of conventional participation during *dictatorship regimes* were shut down for a large part of the population and, in this sense, to fight for social, human and political right through non-conventional channel was a way out to canalize that big-civic and social potential (Westwood and Radcliffe, 1993).

The most important political and social process in Latin-America during late eighties and the nineties were the phenomenon called *democracies consolidation* (Garretón, 1996). It is not yet a complete process in all countries because authoritarian conclaves are still in power in semi-democratic governments. This effect causes a *low level of trust* on these new democracies (Red Interamericana Para la Democracia, 2005:12). Altogether, Latin-American political *ethos* is closer to the egalitarian and participative ideal rather to the liberal - individual, economic-orientated - one (Garretón, 1993) which explains the necessity of the people *to gain* more social democratization; poverty eradication, to create new mechanisms of participation, to fight against social exclusion and segmentation.

Currently, new ways of participation and representation are increasingly important and change in quality, compared to decades ago, with a strong impact on the Latin-American society and institutions (Red Interamericana Para La Democracia, RID, 2005:5). Following Adúriz and Ava (2006) there are three types of participation:

- 1) by a direct protagonism,
- 2) by giving an opinion or making complains about a situation
- 3) classic republican participation in formal electoral processes.

The first one, direct protagonism, can be seen in a wide range of forms, such as political parties, NGOs, communal organizations, religious organizations, sport organizations, union trades, cooperatives and professionals groups, students associations, etc. Many degrees of involvement are possible, going from direct responsibility, attending to meetings, paying fees of incorporation or donations, by participating in collectives making-decisions procedures to only by soliciting information. The second type does not imply an associative logic nor an organization established, but merely the intervention into public channels of public opinion. The third means a formal and organized participation, particularly by voting. with level of commitment with the society.

According to Adúriz and Ava (2006), the *citizen participation*<sup>1</sup> is decreasing in Latin-America. Using the Citizen Participation Index in its 2005 version, the authors worked on eight Latin-American countries, doing a comparison between its results in each of them, but the main objective was to establish the current state of citizen participation on each country and to see its development. In general, the level of participation is low, particularly on political parties (Red Interamericana Para la Democracia, 2005:30) and its vision about democracy differs between countries (Bolivia, for example, will accept authoritarian government while it secure basic needs; for the contrary, Brazil, Chile and Argentina reinforce any kind of participation with a positive vision for democracy).

Interviewed Latin-American leaders declared that young generation of Latin-American are reluctant to become strongly involved in any activity that required dedication, time, resources of any kind and so forth, so for them the big challenge is to “re-enchant” younger generation to participate, both locals and immigrants.

Torcal (2001) studied the concept of *disaffection* (desafección) on political participation among southern European democracies and Latin-American. In new democracies, such Latin-American, *anti-democratic* past plays a main role, but in a negative way: instead of appreciate mayor goals accomplished during democratic period, such as democratic institutions, those people with a low-social and educative backgrounds are more reluctant to participate through conventional political channels, with a negative evaluation of democratic institutions. At the same time, people with high socio-educative background participates more (Knight, 2005), because they have *information and a positive primary socialization* in politics.

Following at Hopenhayn (2004), young Latin-American (ages between 15 and 25) have no trust on institution in general and political parties in particular, but the intention of participating through non-conventional channels is high, in sport and cultural groups, and particularly on informal groups (*okupas, graffiteros*). They have an increasing interest on a wide range of social movements such as indigenous and ethnic manifestations, human-rights, gender issues, ecological movements and so forth, but their interest is not leading them to create a strong movement and associations: in other words, they have the interest and the motivation, but the result are not palpable with new associations, or with a reinforce of old ones, for example.

Related to gender issues, Latin-American women have had recently gained more access to participate on high level of political participation, such the parliament and political parties (CEPAL, 2004) but still, this participation in low. Underrepresented groups in power position, such women (Westwood and Radcliffe, 1993), young people, indigenous communities (Bello, 2004) and elderly groups are now participating in more using non-conventional channels in order to gain power, access to decision-making processes, giving them a voice and representation.

Latin-America, during the 90's and keeps still as a mayor process the democratic *construction of politics* (Garretón, 1993), is now facing new challenges, such as fast globalization with a strong sense of economic growth but an weakening of cultural and national bonds; as Zemelman (1989) argues, *the relation between politics and culture* is

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<sup>1</sup> Defined with a double sense: as a collective sense, as being actively present on any process with high importance for the society as a whole, which makes it to participate in a public agenda, defending and promoting social and personal interest. As a individual action, which means a individual activity - as citizens- in a public agenda; not only concern on state issues but all kinds of public interest, emerging a new dimension of civic society (Adúriz and Ava; 2006:19)



the most important conceptual instrument to understand new political and social processes in Latin-America; there is a collective identity, formed by the new movements which arises from local and regional movements, such women movement, ecological, indigenous movement and so forth. In line with Peró (2006), this paper argues that Latin American identity also plays a role for immigrant activism in Europe.

It argues that it is plausible to speak of a Latin American political culture, and that this culture is shaped by the history of colonisation, dictatorship and democratisation. Low levels of trust towards political authorities, a strong leftist movement, and a general tendency to rely on unconventional channels of protest and participation are characteristic of this culture.

#### 4. Empirical part: Data and method

The empirical part makes use of a subsample of interviews from the POLITIS project. The POLITIS project sought to understand why immigrants become civically active in the receiving societies, what influences their choice of activity, and which factors promote or inhibit immigrant activism (Vogel 2008a). For this purpose, 63 international specifically trained students and PhD-candidates conducted 176 qualitative interviews with civically active immigrants in Europe. For the purpose of this paper, the 17 interviews with activists from Latin America were selected for closer analysis. These interviews with highly-active Latin American immigrants were conducted in six EU countries (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Finland and Estonia).<sup>2</sup>

The problem-centered interviews focus on the civic participation biography. While the interviewer set the frame, the respondents largely structured the interview. Interview methods followed the guidelines laid out in Rubin and Rubin (2005) and summarised for project-interviewer training (Cyrus and Vogel 2007a). A one-page interview guide contained main questions on the types of activity, the civic activation biography and the assessment of encouraging and discouraging conditions, with suggestions on how to formulate concrete questions and probes (for details see Brown a.o. 2007). In the transcription of interviews, interviewers were encouraged to extensively use explanatory footnotes (e.g. explaining abbreviations and functions of organisations) and fill out a table with socio-demographic features of the interviewee, summarising the interviewee's participation biography and describing the interview situation.

Table 1 summarizes characteristics of the Latin American Sample. This overview shows a socio-demographic diversity of all the cases and a wide-range of participant scenarios (cultural centres, associations, association's federations, state NGOs, local unions, political parties, women's centres and gays associations, among others). The interviewee's come from different *countries of origin*. Many of those generated streams of refugees in the the seventies and the eighties, meaning, political exile (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru mostly). There are also immigrants from Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. With regard to the *receiving countries*, we find 11 interviewees in "Latin-culture countries" (Spain, Italy, Portugal) and 6 interviewees in other countries (Belgium, Estonia, Finland)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Three interviews were conducted, transcribed and translated by the author.

<sup>3</sup> As we see in the Spanish legislation, ex-colony members such as Latin- Americans can apply for double citizenship and permanent permits after one year living legally in the country, and for those who

Related to *gender* differences, there's parity between men and women, but it is important to highlight the fact that three of the interviewees left their country of origin because of their sexual orientation - openly declared during the interviews - as the main reason to leave. Most of the interviewees are older than 40, many of them being political refugees, arriving in the 1970s and 1980s, others coming for post-degree studies, work and personal reasons. The youngest arrived recently for studies, in the most cases, for work and also their sexual orientation that makes them impossible to live in their countries as they are.

Their *education level* is high: most of them are college graduates, professional and also some cases with European post-degree diplomas.

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wants to apply for double citizenship it is acquired to live two years in a row in Spain. For the rest of other extra-communitarians, the time of staying over exceeds five years. See Spanish Constitution (1978), chapter 1, article 11.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the Interviewee Sample**

No. of POLITIS interview data	Receiving country	Country of origin	age	Sex	Educative level	Reasons to emigrate	Years in the receiving country	Participation scenario
9	Belgium	Colomb.	46	F	PD	PA	24	NGO
10	Belgium	Ecuador	32	M	PDS	CE y P	5	CG
11	Belgium	Ecuador	48	F	CEC	P	19	NGO
32	Estonia	Chile	40	M	PD	W	8	O
36	Finland	Argent.	51	F	PDS	PA	20	O
37	Finland	Argent.	29	M	PDS	CE	5	CG
38	Finland	Argent.	55	M	PD	P	25	CG
97	Italy	Peru	38	F	PD	W	12	CG
99	Italy	Peru	39	F	PD	W	15	IA
105	Italy	Domin. Rep.	45	F	PD	P	16	U
141	Portugal	Brazil	54	M	CEC	W	17	U, PP
148	Spain	Peru	47	F	PD	CE	17	NGO
149	Spain	Colomb.	58	M	CEC	PA	5	NGO
150	Spain	Chile	47	M	TE	W	1-2	IA
151	Spain	Peru	50	M	PDS	O	15	NGO
152	Spain	Mexico	29	M	PDE	CE	5	IA
153	Spain	Argent.	37	M	CEC	CE	7	IA

Source: Own compilation, from POLITIS data base.

Sex: M: male, F: female.

Educative level: SEC: secondary studies completed, CEC: college studies complete, TE: technical studies PD: post-degree (complete), PDS: post-degree student.

Reason to emigrate: CE: college studies, W: work, PA: political asylum, P: personal (marriage, couples), O: others.

Areas/Scenario of participation: IA: immigrant association, NGO: non-profit organization, U: union, PP: political party, CG: cultural group O: other.

I read all interviews and coded sequences that have a relation with their personal motivation and how they participate, in which particular scenarios and how they will like to reach their goals, in the civic and political area. For the analysis, I paid particular attention what role they assign to Latin America in their accounts. Based on this preparation, I identified three types of activists which are presented below.

## **5. Results: Three types of Latin American Activists**

After analysis of the interviews, three types of activists have been identified which link their motivation in different ways to the Latin American background:

- The old leftist political activists clearly relate to their socialisation in the struggle against dictatorships and have adjusted their political engagement to their immigrant situation;
- the cultural activists relate to the positive aspects of Latin American heritage and culture and their function for integration;
- the young antidiscrimination activists with their distrust of conventional politics relate little to their political or cultural background but embed their engagement in other contexts.

The typology is presented in more detail below and illustrated with quotations.

### **5.1. The leftist political activists**

The key characteristics for this category are:

- settlement in the receiving country; some cases more than 10-15 years.
- (left) Political background in the country of origin, often refugee background,
- uninterrupted activism
- strong sense of political work, human right orientation
- inclusion of migrant issues in their political activities in the receiving country.

I present four cases in which the interviewees portray their activism as a continuous political activity with changing focus, depending on the social circumstances. They do not relate to Latin America, but to their country of origin. However, clear parallels can be seen in their accounts.

*Case 150:* The interviewee No 150 has been participating on political parties in Chile, since the dictatorship's government in the country, in 1973. When democracy's period arrived during the 90's, he assumed a "secondary role" as he called, yet active still. When he arrived to Spain he participated more on human rights vindication and workers rights. The interviewee lived in Spain for one-and-a-half year at the time of the interview and left Chile for economic reasons and personal development. The interviewee joined a Chilean association.

He reports about his awareness and motivation:

“It has to do all with the dictatorship government in Chile, that’s marked you and my whole generation. That has forced you to take an attitude against all the human’s right violations over and over, it mean that, that made you to take an active attitude against dictatorship....and from there one assumed a responsibility with history, to yourself and from that on I joined these fights. Then, with the democratic government (1990s’ and now) I had a secondary role, I was more concerned and attached to the solidarity part of it, with the people, the people with problems there and here in Spain. Well, I came back to regain that tradition that I had before the nineties.” (150, Chilean male, living in Spain for one year).

Now, the main goal is to fight for social justice, equality and development in Spain where he lives now. In this tendency, group-work and group-orientated advocacy are key elements of a long and constant participation. Almost all friend, even couples and relatives (most of their parent were highly-active) are involved on the same activities as the interviewee, or at least, they share the same way of thinking.

*Case 148:* The case of the interviewee No 148 is quite similar; an early political awareness in the country of origin and a constant struggle for political and civic rights for the people in Peru, where she comes from. The interviewee had an active participation on what is called “human rights claim” and “equality of opportunities” since her college period in Peru. Now she presides an important migrant association in the country. She also works as the voice-speaker in several platforms and round-tables. She said that she hasn’t changing her work field, because for her, the most important thing is the equality of opportunities which is her overarching theme. She likes to use the so- called “political and formal way of talking”, using several words such as “action’s frame”, “social inclusion”, “binomial partners”.

As she expressed about her motivation to be highly active:

“...but in Peru, I was already working on social participations projects, I participated on both social and cultural issues, searching for the youth’s involvement on issues related to marginal people. So, even embracing the utopia, which has been my own life’s instrument, I’ve always thought that it a change is possible, at least, a mayor change in your life, and when you use that, as a change’s instrument, a tool, your own life, yet the goal could seems so far away, when you couldn’t accomplished totally, well, at least, you lived your life plenty, because you have had always involved in trying to get something different about what you have and evidently, well, I have to change, to know, to get information, educate yourself, participate. Then, the result doesn’t respond to a single person, you can be useful or not, but it is been a long life working side by side with others and that is what’s fulfils me totally, and to tell the truth, I don’t miss anything, ¿right?” (148, Peruvian female, living in Spain for over 17 years).

Like the Chilean leader (case 150), she stresses the fight for a better and more egalitarian world, advocating for the marginalized, poor and minorities groups and emphasizes the continuity between her engagement in the country of origin and the receiving country. I may say it is *activism as an integral aspect of personality and self-esteem*.

*Case 149:* The Colombian interviewee is a formal refugee. He said that he became civically active “since always,” especially in the fight for human rights, because his whole family was involved in this common interest. He said that he is “on this” for over 15 years by now. He also works denouncing of the Colombian situation in Spain, to make it public, and to bring cases into justice. He called that activity “solidarity with Colombia.”

He arrived in Spain around the year of 2000. This year in Spain is crucial, in juridical terms, because that year was passed two “foreign laws”, and the last one (84/2001) was very harsh and punitive against foreigners. Because of this fact, he joined some kind of “immigrant’s gatherings” in the city hall of Getafe (near Madrid) for over four months, trying to change the new law, making it less hard at practice. It congregated more than 100 immigrant’s leaders. The interviewee currently participates in one of the most important refugee association in the country. He shows in the past and in current time almost the same line of work, which is *to defend human-rights*. In a beginning was to fight for human rights in Colombia, he was forced to flee the country because of these activities and now he focuses on human rights and its relation with illegal immigrants. As he refers to his motivation:

“I’ve always worked with human rights; I am a defender of human rights of Colombia. So, I do it as a part of my job of defender of human rights, and as I see the conditions over here, pretty hard of the immigrants and refugees, well, I took that area of working as the main part. I also work the solidarity with Colombia, to report about what is happening in my country (...) solidarity, to report and to look mainly that, justice and respect for their own human rights.” (149, Colombian male, living in Spain for over 5 years).

This statement shows clearly that those immigrants’ issues may seem a natural topic for politically socialised people who come to a new country as an immigrant.

*Case No 141:* Another case of strong activism, where this participation in a part of their lives since early years is the Brazilian interviewed who lives in Portugal; the interviewee participates on an important migrant association in Portugal.

As he explains, his activism is a fundamental part of his life:

“I’ve been a political militant since the age of fifteen uninterruptedly. As a political and social militant, I participated in various fronts (...) I’m basically a political and social militant. When I came to Portugal, naturally I introduced myself to associationalism in the field of the immigration. As a Brazilian immigrant in Portugal, it was natural that I direct myself into a life proposal of which I am co-founder of the association movement, this since a social militant will link himself to quote/unquote “his people”; my people, my social people, we’ll say, that happen to be the Brazilians in Portugal.”

The four cases show that the *main core of motivation has a continuation through their lives, even after migrate* and it’s an *important part of their identity as persons*, shaping their lives and their family lives as well.

*Case 105:* Interviewee No 105 was born in the Dominican Republic and lives in Italy. During the nineties, the interviewee has been involved in antiracist activities and movements. She participated in women’s migrant association among other important activities. Currently, she is a municipal councillor in charge of environmental issues, citizenship rights and “the culture of difference,” as she puts in. She also tried to break through formal politics.

Her motivation is to see a better treatment to immigrants in Italy:

“There is a political push, political in a broad sense of the word, to see things change, for the benefit of the immigrant population, to gain some space for visibility, for recognition, in all senses.” (105, Dominican, female, living in Italy for over 16 years)

Two Peruvian women living in Italy show a similar background in Peru (highly-political, leftist orientation and feminist movement, focused on empowerment of marginalized people, such women in Peru). One woman focusses her activities in the trade union (case 99), the other one in an intercultural migrant organisation (97). Both relate their activism to the political background of their families in the country of origin.

“I work with foreign women, I am the person in charge for the group of intercultural mediator that works in the prison. My motivation – sometimes it’s something you carry on your DNA and you don’t know why. I come from a family politically strong, therefore my family always claimed for rights.” (97, Peruvian, female living in Italy for over 12 years).

Both also acknowledged that their work for immigrant issues enabled them to get more interesting occupations and a higher level of acceptance.

All interviewees in this group stress their political socialisation in their Latin American country of origin and the continuity of their struggle for human rights of all people on the globe, particularly those who are weak and disadvantaged. At the same time, they are aware that a large group of Latin-American immigrants want to keep and to preserve Latin-American culture and traditions in the sense of language, arts, music, folk, cuisine and costumes. The activists in this group do not relate to these issues, and if they do, it is sometimes critical, for example deploring that these activities may be publicly sponsored.

I didn’t consider important to belong to a Peruvian association because it’s for me such a restricting thing for a person. The fact that you cannot even choose with who you would like to speak but as you are of that nationality you must speak with them, do everything with them, claim right with them, it’s absurd for me. Since I think that certain things are equal, transverses, you can claim for everybody. Afterwards you maintain your identity and all the things, and it is a spontaneous thing that you choose to do with whoever you want. (99, Peruvian, female living in Italy for)

Commenting on a policy to subsidize immigrant organisations, an Ecuadorian in Spain says that “money always is welcome but if there are no projects for that money then is a waste”.

## **5.2. Cultural activists**

The second type is called ‘cultural activist’ in this typology, but this does not mean that they are not concerned about social issues. They are engaged in migrant issues and in assisting migrants in their daily needs. However, their motivation is not connected to an internationalist political motivation, but combined with the idea that immigrants should keep in touch with their roots and culture.

Some of the cultural activists also had a strong political background in their countries of origin, as for example an Argentinean in Finland (case 36). She left her country for political and work reasons. In the mid-80’s she participated in a club for Spanish-speaking children, she also was one of the first promoted a Latin American Cultural Association.

“I consider myself as Latin American and as Latin American I have something to give, as all the immigrants, one of the jobs I do in the radio is to try to show that the immigrant does not come only to ask, the immigrant gives. The immigrant gives, offers something, he gives another vision, a different perspective, eh... he creates,

creates in Finland. And every time more we are seeing that we are not talking only about the gastronomic aspect, but also...about business, culture. And when it was formed, eh, they said they will form a Latin American cultural centre I said “there, there, that is my place, ¡I want to be there!” (36, Argentinean, female, living in Finland for over 20 years).

*Case No. 38:* The interviewee describes the change of his orientation: Originally being oriented to the political situation in his country of origin, he changed his orientation to Latin American culture.

“So, I started to meet and to cooperate in all the activities of political solidarity that we conducted, with the Chilean resistance (...) then, somehow it seemed that the Latin American who were here, on one hand we ran out of platform, to put it in a way, what are we fighting against?, but on the other hand, we started to...after several years of being here I think it was the issue of the national identity what leads us to create the Latin American Cultural Centre with the aim of putting before the public opinion, before the Finnish audience, Latin American cultural expressions.” (38, Argentinean male, living in Finland for over 25 years).

While these Argentinian in Finland clearly articulate a Latin American identity in a country with relatively few immigrants from each Latin American country, a third interviewee sees himself as ‘kind of ambassador of Argentina here in Finland’ and relates to activities in the Argentinian community.

Similarly to case 38, an Ecuadorian in Belgium started off with more narrowly political activities in her country of origin and turned to cultural and social activities in her receiving country, arguing that they have a political character (case 11).

“I believe that the people of different parts of the world can be made known through artistic expressions (...) I believe that through all this- artistic expressions- the situation of our continent can be show up. Through the culture I believe that I can get to make known and make more politics in favour of my people, of the people of the continent. I have never stopped being political. I have always been a political but I have looked for another means, through the culture to make a policy of integration, to make a policy of social approach of aid in the sense integrate and to make feel or give them a position (...) they have not given any rights to us within the society (because we are economic immigrants) However, I believe that through the culture, one of my great ideals is to fight and to look to find a recognition to this immigrants (11, Ecuadorian, female, living in Belgium for over, 19 years)

Interviewees in this group use the concept of Latin Americanness as a taken-for-granted concept and relate their activism to it. In the context of this analysis, the reasons for the differences cannot be followed up. Maybe the fact that they live in a non-Spanish speaking environment with relatively small immigrant communities from this continent has encouraged their self-perception as Latin-American. The same context may have also furthered the feeling of a need to gather with other people with a similar background.

### **5.3. Young Anti-discrimination activists**

While the first two types presented above consist of older immigrants, some younger immigrants were interviewed in the context of the study. They differ from the first two types in several respects. They are *young professionals* with awareness *as immigrants* in



a new social, cultural and political environment, which denies some rights to them<sup>4</sup>. This has a strong relation with their personal legal status (one of them has a student visa and the second has a European nationality). Anyhow, they both work very actively into different participative scenarios (one academically-orientated and the second civic-right orientated). They are seen themselves as migrants but their interest is to work as equals with natives and other groups that have the same ideal of equality, fighting against all types of discrimination and to build a civic-society.

The main characteristics are:

- Recent settlement on receiving country.
- Young, professional and studying in Europe, in most cases.
- They fight for migrant rights and also to claim rights as minorities (sexual).

What is very interesting to see is how the concept of *political activism* has a strong influence - in a negative way - among these activists (what differs from the first type), because all of them don't want to *be seen a part of any political party or political activism whatsoever*; they constantly remark that they do not belong to any political party or even have had participate in it during early years.

*Case 152:* Interviewee No 152, despite his young age, has held different positions in both public and private institutions, for example as a junior consultant for a Ministry. On the side of activism he has been in contact with unions and has been collaborating with the Mexican association with an academical orientation.

“we tend to be apolitical, precisely in order to avoid being identified with a particular political orientation (...) it is a non-profit organization that looks for the integration and guidance of Mexican student and researchers in Spain (...) we try to promote cultural exchanges.”(152, Mexican male, living in Spain for over 5 years)

*Case 153:* Interviewee No 153 came to Spain to do a Master's degree. He participates in radio programs for the Latino community and also in a Latino newspaper. He also created an assistance network for immigrants and contributed to the foundation of a federation of Latin-American associations. His motivation is to participate on civic activities in Spain started as his experience as migrant and his goal is to give information, assistance, and aid and also to fight for migrant rights:

“, I first came here as a student and later I was without any papers, so I lived without papers for over a year and then I got my papers because of some grandparents I had of Italian origin, so I went through the process of being a student, being without papers, being with an European citizenship, etc. This makes me look at the issue of immigration and citizenship from different points of view from being with papers, without papers, and see how it develops” (153, Argentinean male, living in Spain for over 7 years).

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<sup>4</sup> This is a very interesting case, due to the responses complexity; young Mexican student in Europe wants to show that they are as good professional as European, but in one case, another motivation is to work on an association in order to enrich its résumé, giving his more job possibilities. In this sense, motivation goes from group-work and also a clear individual element that might be present in all the interviews, but this person was the only one to express this idea openly.

A Peruvian gay activist (No. 151) was involved in civic participation from his early life, collaborating in lesbian and gay associations in Peru. Upon his arrival to Spain he collaborated in local organizations and also participated in some acts sponsored by the Peruvian Immigrants' association, but in interviewee words, "immigrants' associations tend mostly to avoid integration instead of promoting it. He was co-founder of a gay and lesbian migrant association.

While representing different lifestyles and goals, the young anti-discrimination activists have in common that they ask for equality, but this claim is neither based on a political conviction or ideology nor related to their country's or continent's cultural background, but rather centered around other issues such as academic, migrant or gay orientation.

## 6. Discussion

All activists in this sample work in favour of migrants' equality and acceptance in one sense or the other. However, they present their identities in different ways, and they base their claims on different arguments.

The political activists see their lives as a continuous political struggle. They relate to memories of political struggles in their Latin American countries of origin and see their fight for immigrant rights as a continuation of their political activities with a twisted focus. They are often engaged in organisations with a principally open character, such as trade unions, left parties, or intercultural migrant organisations.

The second type shows a great interest of using *culture manifestation as an integration tool*. They want to create links between cultures involved and most of all, to be seen as people than can provide positive element to the receiving country. Their description of civic and political participation has to do with the possibility of using the Latin-American culture as a way to gain visibility and respect, and their claim for equality is linked to this issue.

About the third ideal type, their claim is neither based on their political convictions nor on their cultural background, but rather connected to their belonging to other groups. For some, to fight for sexual rights or women's rights is seen as a struggle against discrimination, and the struggle for migrants' rights is connected to this issue. The young Mexicans in Spain come from the elite of their country with full rights and a high level, social and educational and after emigrate are people-immigrant- with a strong and sometimes a negative evaluation from the Spaniards in this case, they want to regain what they felt it is important; to see as equals- and in this case, as equal professional- (no longer a worker immigrant, but as foreign professional, with full rights to work and to be seen as a college professional).

Based on the literature, I have argued in this paper that there is a specific notion of Latin American political culture. I would also argue that the first type of activists have something in common in their self-perception that is typical for a specific section of the political culture of Latin America, although they do not base their identity on Latin-Americanness. Some of the cultural activists in non-Spanish speaking surroundings openly embrace and promote the concept of Latin American culture. The young antidiscrimination activists integrate in academic or other groups and base their claims for equality in these contexts.

While all interviewees make references to the general situation and their personal situation in their countries of origin which show similarities between Latin American countries, specifically the cultural activists in non-Latin European countries use the notion of Latin America as a taken for granted concept.

These are findings from a small sample of active immigrants which are in no way representative for immigrant activists in Europe. I cannot claim that there are only these three types of immigrant activists of Latin American origin, but these types surely exist. They can serve as an example that migrants who are active in receiving societies usually address issues such as migrants' rights and claims for equality, but that these claims may be grounded in different contexts. Questions can be raised on the basis of this analysis which may be answered in later more extended work, for example: Does the migration situation promote a perception of Latin-Americanness, and under which circumstances?

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