

# **Migration and Youth Empowerment: The Migration Experience of Young Latin Americans to Catalonia**

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## **Latin American Youth Migration to Spain: an Undiscovered Reality**

Despite their importance in quantitative and qualitative terms, our knowledge regarding young Latin American immigrants living in Spain remains far from exhaustive. There is much evidence of the need to continue investigating this group's situation and update those methodologies and analytical perspectives used to date (Cachón, 2003, 2011). The present work aims to highlight new dimensions of the youth migration phenomenon by approaching it from the novel perspective of youth migrant empowerment. Specifically, our starting hypothesis is that, during the period of youth, migration can also be thought of as an empowerment process in itself: it is an opportunity for individuals to increase their capacities and self-confidence and develop a wide range of sociocultural skills and learning (Úcar-Martínez et al., 2016; Soler-Masó et al., 2017). These ideas are supported within the transitions perspective, which understands young people as active subjects and emphasizes the individual, while still highlighting the effect context exerts on modes and complexities of transitions (Casal et al., 2011; Sepúlveda, 2013). Based on a qualitative methodology that incorporates biograms, in-depth interviews, graphic representations of life paths and explanations of the latter, it is possible to determine the dimensions in which the empowerment of these young people takes place, and the moments, spaces and people such processes are linked to (Abel, 1947; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 2013; Barbour, 2014; Esteban-Guitart et al. 2017).

Before analysing the central theme of the research, however, it would be useful to briefly note some of the problems we encounter when addressing the reality of young Latin American immigrants in Spain. A first look at the written literature on immigration in Spain, and specifically at those studies focusing on Latin American

immigration, which began in the mid-1980s and increased in number in the late 1990s and early 2000s, reveals that the experiences of this group of immigrants have mostly been addressed without making any geographical or cultural distinctions (Feixa et al., 2007; Pedone and Gil, 2008a; García Ballesteros et al., 2009; Marin-Belivaqua et al., 2010; Retis and García 2010; Medina Audelo, 2011; Quiroga and Alonso, 2011, among others). This means that literature has not taken into account the fact that the term “Latin America” refers to a vast territory - Central America, the Caribbean and South America – and to very different countries, cultural practices, linguistic identities, and social, historical and economic processes and realities.

Although this research undoubtedly belongs to the same genealogy, we wish to delimit our contribution in these terms. We have therefore decided to restrict the universe to immigrants from Chile, Uruguay and Argentina living in Catalonia - where this study was carried out – given the similarities in the historical, political, economic and social processes experienced by these three countries (aside from the many differences that certainly also exist): a) all three have been Spanish colonies; b) towards the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, they all received distinct migratory waves of Europeans - mainly Spanish and Italians - with whom they wove relations, which also explains c) the solidarity and welcome that Argentinian, Chilean and Uruguayan political exiles received when they came to Europe - and especially to Spain – following the respective *coups d'état* in these countries (between 1970 and 1984); d) one last common feature relates to a similar process of development and economic well-being from the last decades of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, a cycle that was interrupted with the crisis at the beginning of the 21st century - specifically in 2001 - resulting in a second period of emigration to Europe, and mainly to Spain (Mira Delli-Zotti and Esteban, 2003; Jensen 2005, 2006; Actis and Esteban, 2008; Moraes Mena, 2008, 2010; Schmidt, 2009, 2010).

A second observation regarding existing studies would be the lack of depth in the knowledge produced to date on the differing situations of young immigrants living in Spain. This is related to the fact that this specific group only started to become visible between the immigration boom - from approximately 2000 onwards, with the consolidation of the migratory processes that began in the late 1990s - and the

economic, financial and social crisis - which began in 2007 - when the “social problems” of immigrant Spain were first addressed by Spanish institutions and the Spanish media. On a social level, families were reunited and the need subsequently arose to discuss and plan administrative strategies to improve coexistence and introduce mechanisms of integration and participation for these new members of the host society. This scenario explains the variety of criteria that have been used to address the reality experienced by these young people (Cachón, 2003, 2007; Pedone and Gil 2008b; Jiménez-Ramírez, 2010; Romaní and Feixa, 2013; Cea D’Áncona et al., 2014; González Ferrer et al., 2015; Vilà Baños et al., 2015).

A further aspect that has led to knowledge regarding young immigrants in Spain lacking visibility lies in the complexity condensed within this category. It is a category with a dual social condition: that of being young on the one hand, and of being an immigrant on the other. The condition of “youth” brings with it criteria related to age, biology, society and culture, reflecting the diversity of existing realities associated with young people, especially, since young people have multiple family, sociocultural and ethnic origins. In this regard, few studies have dared to take this category into account and consider its weight in the immigration process. Furthermore, the notion of “immigrant” gives a name to (and stigmatizes) a subject constructed from the perspective of the host society, conditioned and defined by legal-political institutions that establish ever heterogeneous, relative and changing conditions (Jiménez-Ramírez, 2010; Marin-Belivaqua et al., 2013; Rubio, 2017). It is therefore necessary to establish some criteria to clarify what exactly the term “young immigrants” refers to; because, when creating their samples, the consulted studies included adolescents, young people and less frequently immigrant children from different countries, immersed in the different realities and complexities of Spain’s autonomous regions.<sup>1</sup> The results are no less valuable because of this, but they do reveal aspects of the reality of the group that are too general.

The research project this work is part of has the goal of enriching a field of study that, due its broad and fluctuating character, requires constant delimitation and

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the linguistic complexities are different for those who know Spanish and those who do not know it or live in autonomous regions with their own linguistic identities in addition to Spanish. This reveals the need to continue investigating and providing more precise knowledge about young immigrants living in Spain.

renewal.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we focus on the perceptions of young immigrants from the Southern Cone regarding their empowerment processes. To do this, we use graphic representations and explanations from a small sample of young people about the empowerment processes they have experienced in their lives. We first discuss the concept of empowerment - anchored in the contributions of social pedagogy - in relation to youth studies and the research hypothesis. Following this, we present the methodology - design, procedure and analysis – developed for the graphical exercise used by the participants. And, finally, we detail the results and conclusions.

### **The Concept of Empowerment in the Field of Youth Studies**

The concept of empowerment is difficult to define due to its cross-disciplinary nature. Different fields in the social sciences, including sociology, psychology, social work, politics, health, pedagogy and education, have all appropriated the term, which has led to multiple meanings, methods and professional practices being employed in relation to the concept (Furtunati, 2014). Social workers, who have used this approach for some time, understand that individuals must use power to improve their life situations. They see power as being acquired in several ways: by intervening in decision-making, gaining access to material resources, learning through interpersonal relationships, developing communication skills and finding methods and solutions to solve problems. Empowerment is thus understood as both a process and a result that can equally occur at the individual level - via an external force or due to an internal personal process - and at the group level - within an institutional framework or organization. In line with this, Bozzer (2000) posited that individuals are empowered when they acquire power or capacities to make decisions about their own lives. The same author pointed out that empowerment is related to both the tools that

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<sup>2</sup> This work is part of the doctoral thesis “El proceso de empoderamiento de jóvenes originarios del Cono Sur Latinoamericano a partir de su experiencia inmigratoria en Catalunya” [The process of empowerment experienced by young people from the Southern Cone of Latin America based on their immigration experience in Catalonia], which was carried out thanks to support from the Secretary of Universities and Research, belonging to the Government of Catalonia’s Department of Economics and Knowledge (AGAUR), and funding from the European Union’s European Social Fund, within the framework of the HEBE Project <https://www.projectehebe.com/es/sobre-projecte-hebe>. Its main aim was to determine the empowerment processes of young people and young adults from the Latin American Southern Cone aged between 20 and 34 and living in Catalonia.

individuals are given to take control of their lives and to the practice implemented by professionals supporting those who seek help.

The literature refers to components of the reality experienced by individuals, such as self-esteem, self-knowledge, self-determination (or autonomy), resilience, confidence, knowledge and skills, and political awareness; and others related to collective reality, such as social participation, political rights and responsibilities, material and immaterial resources, culture and the economy. Research has also been conducted on the spaces or contexts in which empowerment takes place: education, health, culture, business, organizations, politics, family, work. And yet another axis focuses on the people or agents that accompany or guide empowerment processes: parents, educators, social workers, and peers, among others (Luttrell et al., 2009; Boluijt and Graaf, 2010; Fitzsimons, 2011; Bacqué and Biewener, 2013; Fortunati, 2014; Soler-Masó, et. al. 2017).

It is beyond the scope of this work to address the complexity and breadth of the notion of empowerment. Rather, we would emphasize the fact that it has begun to be applied in the field of youth studies over the past twenty years. An important step was when youth programmes - which had historically sought to rehabilitate, contain or prevent the social risks young people are exposed to- began to work from the perspective of empowerment, thus promoting positive and healthy youth development (Jennings et al., 2009). Negotiating this life stage involves immersing oneself in the search for direction in life, responsibility and confidence in resolving the problems that one will face. Therefore, young people require support for their individual and social growth, and tools so that they can act autonomously, choose their future and build their life projects while taking responsibility for the consequences of their own decisions. Such support also implies ensuring there are learning spaces - such as the family, organizations, communities, educational environments - where all this can take place and where they can find sufficient resources to carry out this process (Bozzer, 2000).

From a collective perspective, young people represent the future of a society, and working from a focus of empowerment, therefore, means fostering the potential they have as agents of social change. They are citizens who must be offered instruments to intervene in their political-social reality, and so it is important to

provide them with opportunities to actively participate in their communities and to promote the development of capacities and knowledge that allow them to access information - so that they are aware of the options they have - and endow them with resources, skills and the agency to make decisions that improve their lives (Jennings, et.al. 2009; Agudo and Albornà, 2011; Dambudzo and Juru, 2015).

Attending to contributions from the field of social pedagogy, we understand that “the essential core of the idea of empowerment refers to two different but successive capacities: the capacity to decide; and the capacity to act consistently with the decision made” (Soler et. al., 2017: 21). Individuals increase their empowerment as they improve their ability to make decisions and to act consequently with regard to that which affects their lives, and as they acquire power to participate and intervene responsibly in decision-making. Here we are referring to decisions on both the individual and community level; otherwise, there is a risk of falling into a solipsistic or individualistic and meritocratic interpretation of what empowerment is. All that being said, in order for individuals to make decisions, they must have or develop certain internal educational capacities - knowledge, aptitudes - and the environment in which they live must also allow them to exercise those capacities.

From this perspective, empowerment is understood in an educational sense, involving learning and personal growth. It is a process, the result of an interaction between the capacities held by individuals, groups or communities and the options offered by the sociocultural contexts in which they lead their lives. In this sense, we consider young people to be empowered through processes that allow them to overcome certain situations, thus acquiring skills and learning to participate, intervene and also transform the context in which they live, from an active and emancipatory stance. Two dimensions can be distinguished in this regard: the personal - in which one’s own capacities, experiences, and learning acquired in life play a central role; and the contextual, that is, the sociocultural environment and the possibilities, resources and opportunities that this context does or does not offer individuals to act (Soler et. al, 2017).

Emigration entails leaving the known and venturing into the unknown. It means disposing of whatever does not fit in a suitcase and taking only what is essential. Emigration means feeling uncomfortable and accepting that “lacking” structures our

subjectivity; the (false) feeling of wholeness that one had in one's comfort zone or in one's country of origin is never recovered. Young immigrants are accompanied by the pain, losses and nostalgia that uprooting brings with it. It is without doubt a very intense experience that can be at once traumatic but also satisfying and enriching. What perception do young people, the protagonists of their lives, have of this experience? How do they assess it? Can it be conceived as an empowerment process?

Based on prior studies (Soler et al., 2014; Soler et al., 2015), an exhaustive review of theoretical material published on the concept of empowerment (Úcar Martínez, et al., 2016; Soler et al., 2017) and our own consultations with youth project managers and professionals, we have constructed a rubric to evaluate actions and socio-educational projects aimed at youth empowerment (HEBE Project. University of Girona, 2019). This rubric systematizes useful dimensions and indicators for its evaluation. Table 15.1 lists these dimensions and their respective definitions.

Table 15.1. Dimensions for measuring youth empowerment

DIMENSIONS	DEFINITIONS
SELF-ESTEEM	Positive attitude towards oneself that allows one to appreciate and value oneself
AUTONOMY	The ability to equip oneself with one's own objectives and standards of behaviour that make it possible to take initiatives and actions and manage them oneself
CRITICAL CAPACITY	The ability to formulate one's own arguments and contrast them with external ideas
EFFECTIVENESS	The ability to achieve desired objectives or effects
COMMUNITY IDENTITY	The awareness to share sociocultural elements with a group that identifies itself as a community
META-LEARNING	The awareness that one learns from previous learning
PARTICIPATION	Being part of or taking part in something
RESPONSIBILITY	Individuals' ability to assume and carry out tasks entrusted to them and their own decisions, while accepting the consequences

deriving from this

## TEAMWORK

The interaction of a group of people who collaborate intentionally to achieve a common goal

Source: HEBE Project. University of Girona, 2019

### **An Investigation with Young People from the Southern Cone who Migrated to Catalonia**

The aforementioned theoretical framework has been used to undertake research on young people from the Southern Cone aged between 20 and 34 who are undergoing a dual process of transition to adult life and insertion into Catalan society (Domingo et al., 2002; Serrancat Melendres, 2017). The research process has several underlying questions: In what spaces and at what moments do these young people's empowerment processes take place? How are these processes expressed? Who accompanies the young people in these processes? What possibilities, opportunities and difficulties have these young people had to empower, develop and increase their capacities, learning, knowledge and autonomy? What role has social context played (adults, institutions, associations, public policies)? What opportunities has it offered them? What is the relationship between the economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital of these young people and their empowerment processes?

In order to begin answering these questions, we consider it pertinent to turn to Bourdieu and his theory of capital. Bourdieu used the term capital to refer to the material and symbolic goods that give order and hierarchy to the relationships between individuals in a given field. There are as many forms of capital as there are fields, and in fact capital works in relation to a certain field. In turn, capitals are interconnected, but act independently and can be transformed or become another type of capital<sup>3</sup>. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between four main types: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

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<sup>3</sup> The capacity of "transformation" is what leads us to speak of "capital", since it is a good that can become something else. This is clearly seen in the case of cultural capital, which can become social



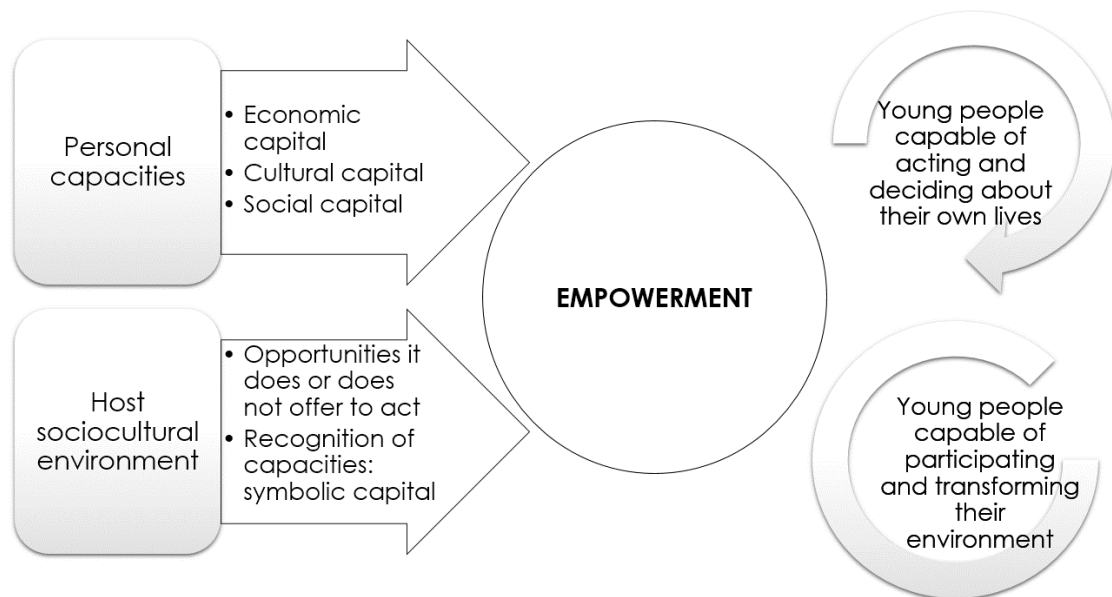
All young immigrants have an economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital of origin: their starting points. When undergoing a change in sociocultural space, they lose some of these capitals, must rebuild or acquire others and fight for the recognition of those that are, in theory, universal (such as educational degrees) but that, at the moment of truth, are not deemed fully valid by all social fields (Cachón 2003, 2011; Erel, 2010; Garzón, 2006, 2010; Jiménez Zunino, 2011, 2015). It is therefore relevant to ask about the role that the recognition of the capital of origin - social, cultural and economic - and the possession or lack of capital - social, cultural and economic - play in the host society for these young people: to what extent does the host society (its institutions, its members) validate or recognize the capital held by these young immigrants, thus giving “power” to that group? In other words, how does having or acquiring symbolic capital in the host society affect the empowerment process in terms of the possible choices and actions available to them? (Bourdieu, [1993] 1999).

In order to investigate these questions further, we propose to understand empowerment as a process that frames personal capacities (a category that refers mainly, but not solely, to economic, social and cultural resources or capital) in a dialogue with the recognition given to them by the host society (thus allowing the acquisition of symbolic capital) and the resources offered by the host society in accordance with such recognition (Figure 15.1). When the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social sphere is satisfactory, that is, close and positive, young people will be able to decide and act on their own lives. Equally, these active and empowered young people will then be able to make transformations and contributions to the community they live in (Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman et al., 2011; Úcar et. al, 2016; Soler et.al. 2017):

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capital (providing access to certain groups and social relations) or economic capital (providing access to certain labour markets, for example). This is why “capital” is not merely a resource.

Figure 15.1. Empowerment from the perspective of social pedagogy in dialogue with Bourdieu's theory of capital



Source: authors' own data

The theoretical proposal presented here justifies the working hypothesis of this study, namely, that migration during youth can be thought of as a process of empowerment in itself: it is an opportunity for individuals to increase their capacities and self-confidence and develop a wide range of sociocultural skills and learning. This is true whether the decision is personal (doing a training or educational placement with or without state funding, seeking improvement in material conditions), or taken by the family of origin or with a partner. Depending on the case, it will involve individuals' emancipation from the family group of origin, awareness of the consequent process towards autonomy that this entails, separation from the sociocultural group in which they grew up and therefore also the challenge of learning new social and cultural codes to enter into new relationships. And if migration takes place with the family, although they will, in all certainty, be able to count on their support and the networks that derive from them, those other ties that are equally important for living in society will also need to be reconfigured.

Although the change of sociocultural space will initiate a process of overcoming difficulties (sometimes insurmountable and, other times, at too high a price), it can also involve a process of personal growth and the necessary acquiring of confidence in

one's own character, intensified autonomy, getting responsibilities and significant learning, redefining one's identity, reevaluating one's own culture and recognizing that of others - via the encounter with a socioculturally different Other.

These ideas are also based on youth being conceived as a specific and different stage in subjects' lives; moving away from its representation as a time of passive waiting (Comas, 2011). This conception also fits more accurately with the current reality of young people, forced to make constant career choices. This paradigm views young people as active agents, who make decisions, build their own life paths and draw their own biography in a given - changing and complex - social environment, while continuing to emphasize the incidence of context on the forms and complexities of transitions. It is not the same, then, to spend one's youth in a society that offers few paths, with more or less predictable ends - like in industrial societies or in many Latin American countries, marked by inequalities and poor social mobility - as to make the transition to adult life within the framework of informational capitalism, which boasts a great diversity of transitional modes, characterized by contradictions, uncertainties and risks (Casal et al. 2006; Casal, 2011; Casal et al. 2011; Sepúlveda, 2013).

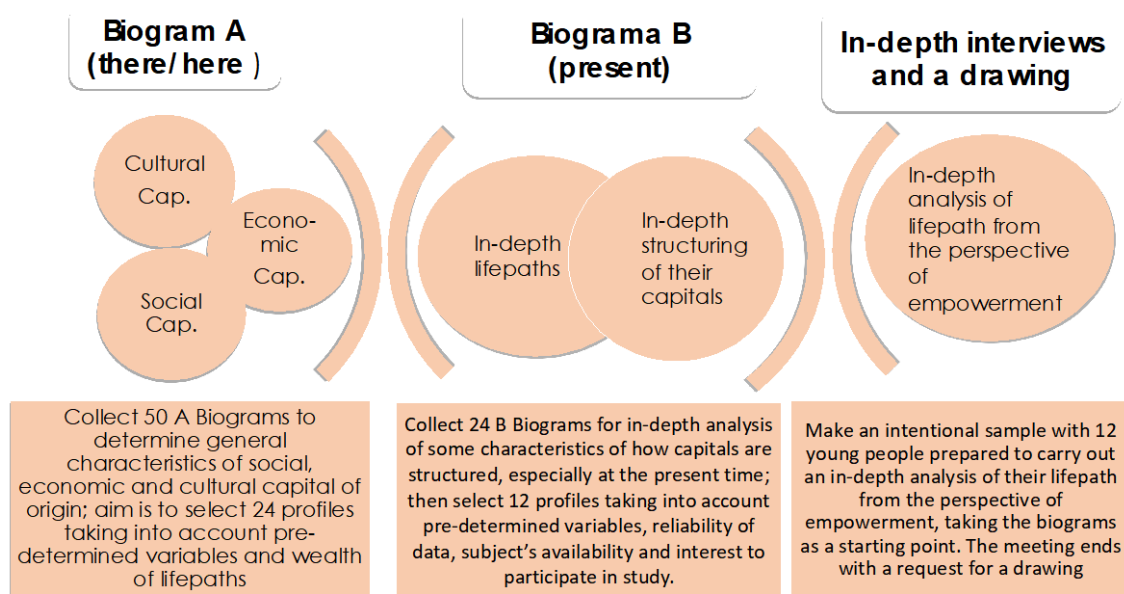
The realities of the young people studied in this work are marked by their having made a significant decision in their lives: that of emigrating - or that of staying with their families who have migrated - and undergoing their transition to adulthood in a society that is not their own. Immigration is an experience that causes a change in individuals' life paths and forces them to overcome difficult situations, acquire skills and learn to participate and transform the environment they live in, from an active and emancipatory position. That being said, empowerment also depends on the possibilities the context offers for action and is therefore not only about the decisions that these young people have made, but also the opportunities they have to act.

### **Draw me your Life. A Graphical Representation of the Life path**

A first approach to the reality of this group and the need to place it in dialogue with the concept of empowerment (Úcar Martínez, et al., 2016; Soler et al., 2017), Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capitals and its applications (Garzón 2006, 2010; Erel 2010; Sayad, [1999] 2010; Jiménez Zunino, 2011, 2015; Costa and Murphy, 2015;) and contributions

from numerous investigations on immigration and youth (Feixa 2014; Cairns, 2015; Esverri Mayer, 2015; Nowicka, 2015) led us to design a complex methodology that entails different phases and methodological tools (Figure 15.2), combining the biogram method, originally proposed by Abel (1947), but re-adapted here, with in-depth interviews, and subsequently young people’s graphic representations of their life paths, with the corresponding explanations (Páez de la Torre, 2017).

Figure 15.2. Methodological design



Source: authors’ own data

The biograms are designed for exploratory purposes, to be complemented in a second stage with in-depth interviews (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 2013). At the end of the data collection phase, a method is applied that was inspired in visual methodologies (Barbour, 2014; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2017), in which participants are asked to draw their life, that is, to graphically represent their life path from the perspective of empowerment. The approach and use of these tools focus on the individuals’ perspective, voice and experience (Goetz and LeCompte, 1988). This means renouncing generalizations to obtain, in exchange, in-depth data and a space conducive to self-analysis by participants, thus awarding prominence to - and therefore empowering - the minorities of a society.

The following table shows the profiles of the 12 young people selected to draw their lives<sup>4</sup>:

Table 15.2. Profiles of participants

<i>Pseudonym</i> <sup>5</sup>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>C. of origin</i> <sup>6</sup>	<i>Year of arrival</i>	<i>L. of studies</i> <sup>7</sup>
<i>Patricia</i>	Studying	33	F	CH	2014	University
<i>Xurri</i>	Studying	34	F	AR	2015	University
<i>I1</i>	Working	32	F	CH	2011	Post-university
<i>Lulú</i>	Working	27	F	AR	2000	Vocational training
<i>Competitive</i>	Studying and Working	30	M	AR	2010	Post-university
<i>Ernesto</i>	Studying and Working	30	M	AR	2014	University
<i>Fabián</i>	Studying and Working	28	M	UR	2007	Vocational training
<i>Valis</i>	Studying and Working	28	F	CH	2012	Post-university
<i>El ceibo</i>	Not working or studying	27	F	AR	2014	Advanced degree
<i>Jimi</i>	Not studying, temporary work	24	M	UR	2015	Did not complete secondary

<sup>4</sup> The variables taken into account to collect the data were: a) age of the participant on arrival (no older than 12); b) occupation: studying / working / studying and working / not studying and not working or temporary job; c) a third variable that is believed to be important is that of the country of origin (the aim was to have an equal representation of young people born in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay); d) an equal gender split; and e) age diversity.

<sup>5</sup> Participants chose their own pseudonym. In cases where the pseudonym coincided with the name, the initial was retained and a new one proposed to protect the personal data of the participants.

<sup>6</sup> C. of origin: Country of Origin. We used AR to refer to Argentina; CH for Chile; and UR for Uruguay.

<sup>7</sup> L. of studies: level of studies. The level of studies recorded was the one they had at the time of the interview. In the case of those studying at the time, some were at a higher level: *Patricia* and *Ernesto* were both about to present their final Master's project; *Competitive*, *Valis* and *I1* already had a Master's degree and were finishing their PhD studies; *Fabian* was a university student who had not yet finished his degree.

<i>Negro</i>	Not studying, temporary work	28	M	UR	2007	Did not complete secondary
<i>Suárez</i>	Not studying, temporary work	26	M	UR	2006	Did not complete primary

Source: authors' own data

As Table 15.2 shows, the participants had diverse life paths and equally heterogeneous levels of education, as well as social, economic and cultural backgrounds. They had migrated for different reasons and at different times: before, during, or after their own or their host country's economic crisis. They migrated - alone, with their birth families or with their partners - because they wanted to do an academic, cultural or social placement or in some cases improve their material conditions. We can say that they had a need to migrate but there were no traumatic experiences. The diversity of profiles and life pathways converge in the migratory experience. Migrating necessarily involves facing large-scale and profound changes that often lead to a situation of crisis (Páez de la Torre, 2019).

The 12 face-to-face<sup>8</sup> interviews lasted between one and two hours each. The information collected in biograms A and B served as the starting point for the narrations<sup>9</sup>, and from there we had each participant reflect on their life path<sup>10</sup>, trying to delve deeper into those resources - economic, social, cultural and symbolic - that they had had available to them and those that had allowed them to improve their living situation. Our aim here was for them to reconstruct their routines, dynamics and daily life prior to migration (in the society where they were born) and afterwards (in the host society), and thereby to recall anything of significance they had learnt in the two contexts. We also investigated experiences that were difficult to face but made them grow as people and become empowered, as well as their expectations and life

<sup>8</sup> Except for one which, given the distance, was done online.

<sup>9</sup> In this study, the terms "stories", "narration" and "interviews" are treated as equivalent concepts, as are "participants", "reporters", "interviewees", and "narrators".

<sup>10</sup> Further details were requested based on the information obtained from each participant's biogram.

plans. At the end of the meeting, using a method inspired in visual methodologies (Barbour, 2014; Esteban-Guitart et al. 2017), by way of synthesis, we proposed that they draw their lives on a blank sheet of paper, indicating the most significant spaces, moments, decisions and people in their empowerment processes. Once this had been done, we asked them to explain what they had drawn.

These sketches provided a broad snapshot of the central features of the young people's life paths. Each young person interpreted the request subjectively using what they had remembered during the meeting. In this sense, the drawing was an excuse to provoke reflection from a more creative side and also a way to overcome the difficulties inherent in the concept of empowerment - which was very abstract and out of the ordinary for some of these young people - thereby implicitly forcing them to adopt a position on it, since the exercise entailed looking at one's own pathway from the perspective of empowerment (Martin García, 1995).

To analyse the 12 resulting texts<sup>11</sup>, we followed theoretical contributions from discourse analysis (Fairclough and Wodak, 2000; Van Dijk, 2000; Montañés Serrano, 2001; Van Dijk, 2002; Wodak, 2003; Karam, 2005; Fairclough 2008; Arnoux, 2009), using the battery of youth empowerment dimensions and indicators presented previously in Table 15.1. At the methodological level, this instrument was used to categorize the discourses thematically and identify situations of empowerment referred to by the participants in the form of "quotes". These situations are detected when "a change, a decision or an action is observed that contributes to implementing one or more of the dimensions of the empowerment indicators" (Llena-Berñe et al., 2017: 86). The recurrences of these discourses were counted to provide a global overview and determine the most significant dimensions as far as the empowerment of participants in our study was concerned.

## **Migration Experiences as an Empowerment Process in Youth: Analysis of Results**

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<sup>11</sup>At the end of the online interview, conducted via Skype, we asked the narrator to recount those moments in her life that were empowering. Although there was no specific drawing in this case, her discourse was recorded and her perspective on this point included in the analysis.

As Table 15.3 shows, we worked with a total of 79 quotes related to the dimensions and indicators used to measure empowerment. The results reveal that in the drawings done by this group of young people, empowerment is more relevant in the dimensions of autonomy, effectiveness, self-esteem and critical ability. The dimensions of meta-learning, participation, responsibility, community identity and teamwork are less significant (Páez de la Torre, 2018).

Table 15.3. Results obtained from the analysis of explanations participants gave about the graphic representations of their empowerment processes

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	<b>INDICATORS</b>	Total	<b>Total Dimens ion</b>	<b>Percen -tage</b>
<b>AUTONOMY</b>	Showing initiative	11	22	28%
	Ability to choose and act according to one's convictions	11		
<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b>	Being able to make decisions to achieve objectives	11	17	22%
	Being methodical and consistent in completing tasks	3		
	Achieve stated objectives	7		
<b>SELF-ESTEEM</b>	Being satisfied with oneself	3	16	20%
	Being able to cope with difficult or adverse situations	6		
	Being comfortable around others	2		
	Feeling secure about yourself	2		
	Knowing your own abilities and recognizing your own limits	1		
	Feeling recognized by others	2		
<b>CRITICAL CAPACITY</b>	Being able to analyse problems or situations	9	13	16%
	Having your own criteria to judge problems or situations	5		
<b>META-LEARNING</b>	Being aware of having acquired or improved your own knowledge and skills	1	3	4%
	Having developed the ability of learning how to	2		



	learn			
	Being aware of the acquired power to act			
<b>PARTICIPATION</b>	Getting involved in collective actions or projects	2	3	4%
	Being able to influence your environment	1		
<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>	Assuming commitments and tasks voluntarily and realistically	3	3	4%
	Assuming the consequences of your own decisions and actions			
<b>COMMUNITY IDENTITY</b>	Sharing the social and cultural heritage of the community			
	Actively identifying with the civic processes and associations in the community		1	1%
	Identifying public space as your own and making use of it	1		
<b>TEAMWORK</b>	Being involved in teamwork		1	1%
	Being able to exercise leadership roles in teamwork	1		
	Being able to communicate			
	Being able to negotiate and reach a consensus			
Total			79	

Source: Authors' own data.

After categorizing the discourses - using the battery of youth empowerment indicators - 10 thematic categories emerged (Table 15.4), which function as a bridge between the social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital of these young people and their empowerment processes.

Table 15.4. Emerging thematic categories and their recurrence in graphic representations

Thematic categories	Recurrence	Percentage
<b>Work</b>	21	27%
<b>Migration experience</b>	14	18%
<b>Family</b>	10	13%

<b>Training/education</b>	10	13%
<b>Critical experiences</b>	6	8%
<b>Participatory experiences</b>	5	6%
<b>Relationship with partner</b>	4	5%
<b>Internal migration</b>	4	5%
<b>Travel</b>	3	4%
<b>Friendships</b>	2	3%
<b>Total</b>	79	100%

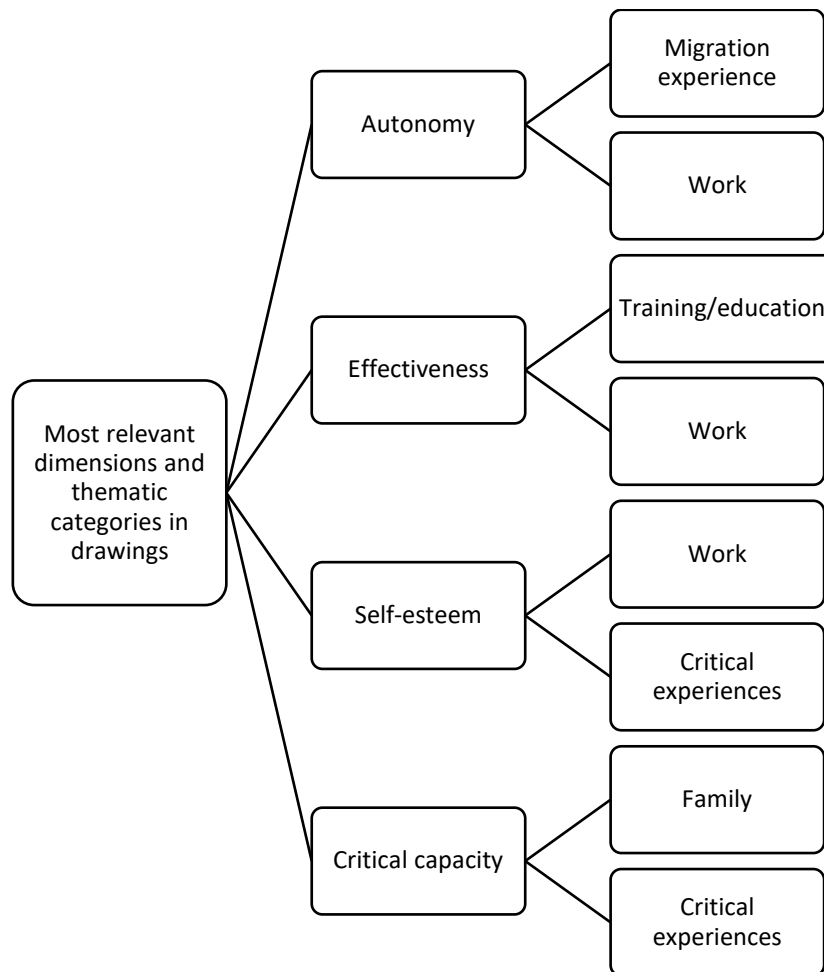
Source: Authors' own data

This means that when the participants explained the drawings they made in relation to their empowerment processes, they mainly referred to work experiences; the migration experience; training/education and family; and critical experiences. Less relevant were participatory experiences, relationships with partners and internal migration experiences; travel and friendships. These categories account for the spaces, moments and people they link with empowerment along their life paths.

When drawing their life paths, the majority of the participants put the decision to migrate as an important moment in their life, and those who did not explicitly do so included significant events that occurred as a consequence of migration: obtaining a new qualification, living with their chosen partner, professional recognition. The overall assessment allowed them to recognize that, after much learning and dealing with certain difficult situations - which sometimes even manifested themselves in illness - they managed to overcome the crisis represented by immigration, and this allowed them to continue with their life plans and decisions, whether that meant staying in the host society, returning to their home countries, or achieving clarity about how to continue with their lives (Páez de la Torre, 2019).

Figure 15.3 provides an overview of the relationship found between the dimensions of empowerment and thematic categories obtained from analysing the drawings that young people made regarding the empowerment processes experienced in their lives.

Figure 15.3. The most relevant dimensions and thematic categories of empowerment in the graphic representations the young participants did in relation to their lives



Source: Authors' own data

The thematic categories account for the relationship between capital and empowerment:

a) Increased *autonomy* is related to the initiative that these young people have had to start their migration project. This project cannot be sustained without economic and cultural capital, so work appears as an essential space to support the decision to migrate.

In 2005, I decided to leave my country to help my family. I came to live with my father who was here and I started to make money to help the rest

of my family to come over. First, I was able to get a ticket for my mother, then for my brothers (Suárez).

b) For these young people, *effectiveness* is linked to training and education, which is what has allowed them to have a certain job or achieve certain goals. Cultural capital thus emerges as a central element in relation to the ability to achieve desired objectives.

At the top, there are many books and a giant guitar in the sky. I don't think I know which decisions I got right and which I got wrong; but one good decision was to read a lot and the other was to play the guitar a lot (Jimi).

c) *Self-esteem* is linked to cultural and social capital. That is, one's positive attitude towards oneself increases when young migrants receive recognition of their cultural capital in the host society. This recognition (or also symbolic capital) is expressed in access to jobs that young people consider appropriate for their skill levels.

And I think that also the UB<sup>12</sup> with my coworkers, because there was the whole first period when it was like, no, but then I proved my worth. You see? This is me, this is Virginia, this is Ilaria, this is Elvira, this is Rodrigo, the chubby one, José and my boss. I drew them all, because at the beginning it was like I was just another person... but then I had to prove myself and later... at this point I drew the little square. It was like when they... gave me space to do things. "Hey look, I have this idea, why don't we do this? Hey, can you cover me because I'm going on parental leave?" So they counted on me and I took on that role of "I'm a teacher and I do things" (I1).

Equally, self-esteem is strengthened when "others" - social capital - give these young people recognition, and also when those others, those networks they rely on (or which are being built in the host society), accompany them at critical times.

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<sup>12</sup> University of Barcelona.

N: Then I lost my job. That was the worst thing that had happened to me in my life. Not having work was like throwing everything away, like throwing away the time I had been here. (...) I felt so down that I couldn't do anything. I couldn't do anything to recover from that... I put on 10 kilograms while I wasn't working... I didn't feel like doing anything.

E: You suffered a depression, then? How did you overcome that?

N: It was doing sport that helped me. Going out, meeting different people in the local area, getting out more ... that helped me a lot (Negro).

d) At a higher level, *critical capacity* is related to cultural capital, to the extent that training and education provide tools and frameworks for interpreting that capacity. And, on a more concrete level, it is related to social capital, because these young people come to challenge their own arguments, rethink their own choices and decisions with the mandates and discursive models of their families, the space in which they first became socialized. Empowerment is also evident in the critical capacity required to reflect on how and in what way they have overcome critical experiences throughout their lives.

I learned a lot of things. I have matured a lot. I have learned to see life differently, to understand that there's nothing wrong with others being different to you, to sacrifice, to have to earn your bread every day. I've learned a lot... to be a person, I've also learned that Spain is not better than Argentina, there is no ideal or better place. In Argentina there are good and bad things and here there are good and bad things... but within the bad and the good, I feel comfortable here. That's why I'm telling you that I wouldn't mind going back... because it doesn't seem to me that everything is a complete disaster there (Lulú).

Economic, cultural and social capital are intrinsically related, just as the categories built as a bridge between these capitals and the notion of empowerment are also related. According to the analysis presented here, we can state that work is the most relevant aspect in attaining empowerment in a society that is not your own, and economic and

cultural capital are both key in this respect. Without economic capital, the migration project cannot be undertaken or sustained over time. Equally, for this group of young people, it is cultural capital that has allowed them access to the labour market. In addition to economic support, work provides a legal framework, access to a residence permit, social security, housing, and the acquisition or reconstruction of social capital. Over time, it is possible to transform these capitals into symbolic capital; that is, recognition and access to power groups.

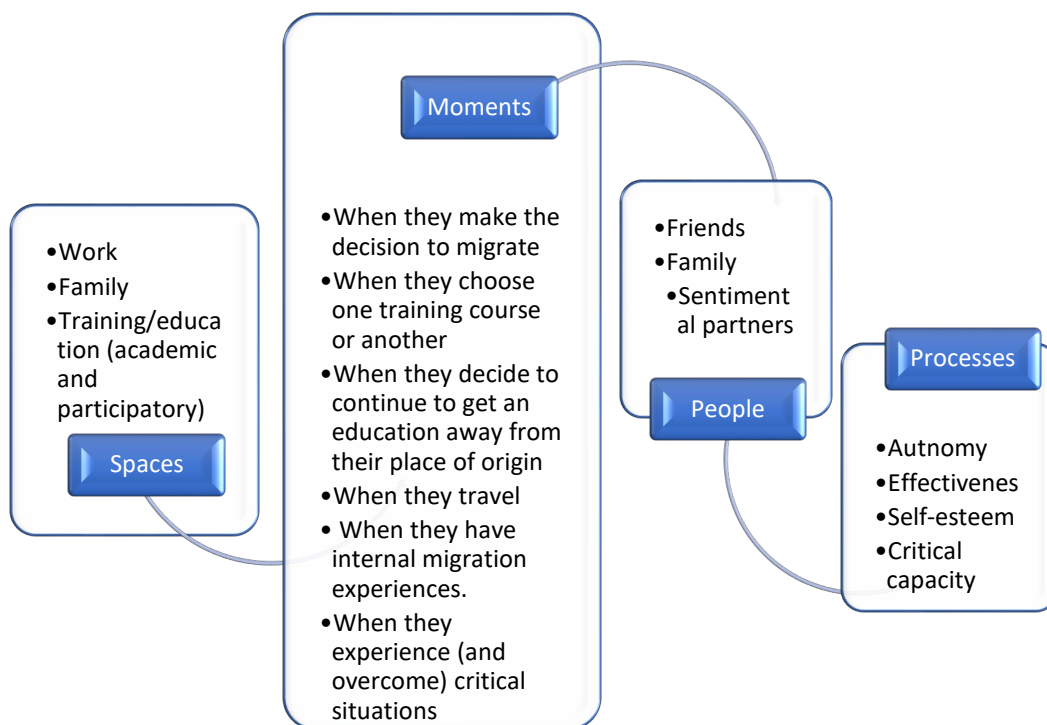
The analysis presented here also confirms that migration has involved an empowerment process for these young people. At a specific juncture in their life, a “critical moment” in the terms used by Soler et al. (2017: 25), they have made a decision that has marked a before and an after. Therefore, there is a story, some circumstances, a life that was led a certain way at an economic, cultural, social and symbolic level, which changes after migration. Naturally, one does not need to move to a new country to become empowered, but the migration experience is so intense that there can be no doubt it tests the capabilities of the individual. The migration process brings with it difficult situations; when these are overcome, significant learning is acquired that strengthens and empowers. That being said, we do not wish to idealize this experience, which is full of unrewarding and challenging events. In some cases, the social and political context even makes it impossible and denies any possibility of empowerment, while in the most favourable contexts, individuals may still adopt the *role of victim* and thereby hinder “the possibility of acting through their own abilities and learning new ones that make it possible to live beyond [state] aid” (Ricaurte et al., 2013: 200).

We therefore believe that it is important to underline the weight of the country of origin in this study. As previous research has also shown (Mira Delli Zotti and Esteban, 2003; Jensen, 2005, 2006; Actis and Esteban, 2008; Moraes Mena, 2008; Shmidt, 2009, 2010; Cea D’ Áncona et al., 2013), of the wide range of ethnic groups existing among immigrants in Spain, those of Latin American origin are the least discriminated against, meaning that they have greater symbolic capital, or what Erel (2010) and Garzón (2006, 2010) identified as national capital. Furthermore, we would also note that the majority of participants in this study (75%) had high levels of education. Possessing symbolic (or national) and cultural capital means having

valuable tools to deal with the socialization processes and function with relative success in the host society.

In addition to providing a general overview of the participants' biographies, analysing their drawings also allowed us to identify the spaces and moments in which empowerment processes are expressed, as well as the people that accompanied these processes and the ways in which the empowerment of these young people has manifested.

Figure 15.4. Empowerment in the life path drawings by the young participants



Source: Authors' own data

## Conclusions

Throughout history, people have been displaced for economic, political, climatic, ecological and social reasons. The fluidity, openness and technological revolution that characterize the globalization age have made it normal “for people to think beyond borders and cross them” (Castles, 2010: 143). In other words, it is a possibility that people now see as an *option* (Sassen, 2007). And although forced migration is currently

a reality that characterizes the population dynamics of many countries (Ricaurte et al., 2013), migration is not always linked to *poverty*. In addition to work and money reasons (to later return to the country of origin and live relatively well there), people are sometimes simply seeking *better living conditions* (Pinzani, 2010).

The need to address a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common - and especially among young people (Serrancat Melandres, 2017) -, from perspectives other than the traditional ones, has led us to adopt a theoretical approach - anchored in the contributions of social pedagogy, the perspective of empowerment and the notions of Bourdieu - and a qualitative methodological proposal - limited to a specific and small group. The study presented here therefore provides more in-depth results that allow the migratory experiences of young people to be interpreted from other viewpoints. Like other recent studies, such as that conducted by Corvalán Nazal et al. (2018), we have tried to give space to subjectivity and capture those aspects that account for the growth, personal development, self-knowledge processes, learning and significant knowledge that the migratory experience has afforded these young people.

We believe that asking participants to graphically represent their life paths from an empowerment perspective, in line with visual methodology proposals (Harbor, 2014; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2017), has proved successful as a strategy to provoke reflection from a more creative viewpoint. This, in turn, has also allowed us to overcome the difficulties inherent in the concept of empowerment, which is seen as abstract and unusual by these young people.

The results presented here indicate that, for these young people, empowerment is mainly related to autonomy, effectiveness, self-esteem and critical capacity. These are very significant aspects during youth, which also highlight, on the one hand, the importance of adopting an approach such as empowerment to understand the enormous diversity of migratory experiences and, on the other, the ways in which young people's life paths manifest themselves. However, these dimensions are to a great extent anchored in the individual reality of empowerment, and those aspects related to the community reality, such as participation, responsibility, community identity and teamwork, are less relevant in the results obtained here. We believe that this is related to the lack of or scarce social capital available to these young immigrants, having left their affections, friends and relationships in another country.



This factor surely limits the possibilities they have to actively transform, intervene in or decide on their environments.

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