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Empowerment through participation? Collective mobilization and transnational women's movements as actors in the European sphere

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Abstract

The notions of wellbeing and empowerment are, in their political participation dimension, interlinked with civil society activism and collective mobilisation. Usually these ideas are discussed in relation to either the national or the global level, but they are relevant as well to the emerging transnational European sphere.

This paper analyses the role of transnational civil society actors as mediators of wellbeing for the ones active within the organisations and networks. The objective is to assess wellbeing as the ability to participate in political activities both in terms of who participates and how the organisations are structured as well as the European institutional set-up surrounding their actions, thereby restraining or enhancing their opportunities of participation. The paper, thus, addresses both the possibilities of access and generation of wellbeing and argues that political participation as wellbeing and empowerment is both a matter of representation and recognition.

1. Introduction

The mobilization and political activism at the European level takes place in a particular public space constituted around the political institutionalization of the European Union. The European sphere constitutes a space of civil society action where different actors can, potentially, impact and contribute to the constitution of the discourses and policies. Several processes of transnational claims-making on the part of the organisations and networks acting within this space can be discerned. Within this field, transnational networks and organisations working with gender equality issues have emerged. They formulate policy positions, articulate discourses and influence European public policy-making on gender equality.

The aim here is to analyse a particular kind of political mobilisation, namely that of the gender-oriented organisations in the European realm of both majority and minority origin and self definition. Drawing on theories about participation and capabilities, the notions of empowerment through civil society action and wellbeing, here with a particular focus on human capabilities as defined by Martha Nussbaum (1999; 2000), will be interlinked. The transnational actors attempt to promote wellbeing and further the living conditions for women and men by enhancing gender equality through their policy proposals. In some cases they also act as providers of social services, thus contributing to the implementation of policies aimed at furthering wellbeing and the quality of life of European citizens. Most importantly in relation to this paper, however, is the role of the transnational civil society actors as mediators of

wellbeing for the ones active within the organisations and networks. The objective is to assess wellbeing as the ability to participate in political activities both in terms of who participates and how the organisations are structured as well as the possibilities of the institutional context in which the claims-making takes place. Empowerment is, in this sense, an important element of wellbeing, both individually and collectively.

This should, however, be seen in the particular context of the transnational space which, in many ways, differs from the purely national approach. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the role of the transnational organisations as potentially influential actors in the European sphere and, in this way, address the idea of capabilities and wellbeing at the transnational, and especially European, level to a further extent.[1] The argumentation is based on an underlying assumption that processes of wellbeing through empowerment are faced with particular problems when located at the transnational level. These are, for instance, the economic constraints related to a participation which does not take place in the proximity of the location where one's daily life takes place, and the existence of multilevel political structures towards which to direct the claims-making and demands which may diffuse the ability to assess the accountability of the political institutions and the possibility of influencing the decisions which have repercussions in one's daily life. It is furthermore argued that the EU both discursively and institutionally (through funding and resources) contributes to the shaping of the political activism and claims-making set forward by the organisations in the civil society.[2]

In order to uncover the specific problems related to empowerment and wellbeing at the transnational, European level, I wish to analyse the structure and functioning of a series of organisations in order to evaluate their capacity as generators of wellbeing at the level of policy (i.e. their possibilities of generating wellbeing through participation in policy-making processes and civil society activism) as well as their role regarding access to wellbeing (i.e. political participation through transnational organisations is seen as a particular form of wellbeing). The questions posed in the paper are two, namely: 1) to what extent do the transnational organisations have the possibility to act as channels for citizens' demands regarding gender equality; and 2) who participates in these organisations and in what way. In other words, do the transnational networks and organisations strengthen women's capacity to access and generate wellbeing at the transnational level and how is this perceived by the

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[1] The European level is considered as transnational here. The notion of transnational spaces will be developed further below.

[2] See also Rolandsen Agustín, 2008.

participants? I will focus particularly on minority and majority perspectives and relations since the ideas of empowerment and wellbeing seem to be problematized to a further extent when addressing these issues towards excluded or marginalised people. The questions become more pertinent when the capabilities seem to be somehow restrained, such as in the case of women minorities in Europe.

Empirically the paper will draw on both document analysis and qualitative interviews with members of the selected organisations, and it will focus on both majority and minority organisations. The analysis covers organisations such as the European Women's Lobby, Women Against Violence Europe, Black European Women's Congress and Young Women from Minorities. After outlining a theoretical approach to participation and opportunities of mobilisation as generators of wellbeing at the transnational level, the paper first focuses on the institutional framework that the organisations interact with (in relation to resources, funding and policies) and, secondly, it addresses the participants' perceptions of representation and empowerment.

2. Political mobilisation and empowerment at the transnational, European level

The transnational space of mobilisation in Europe has expanded parallel to the development of the European integration process. It can be defined, on one hand, in relation to the nation-state as the space which is beyond the limits of the nation-state. In this sense, the transnational space is basically understood as the space where actions and institutions cross nation-state borders. This space beyond the nation-state is filled by institutionalised and non-institutionalised relations between different actors. The interaction between the development of the EU as a multi-level polity and the transnational space of mobilisation means that the activists, networks and organisations operating in this space can direct their demands at different levels; the local, the regional, the nation-state and the transnational level, i.e. the EU institutions. Different levels of interaction, of access points into the political system and of targets of claims-making appear (Hobson et al., 2007; Marks & McAdam, 1999; Soysal, 1994; 1997; 2004). The effects are visible both at the national and the transnational level:

> "As individuals and groups utilize trans-national legal frameworks, discourses and forums, we expect changes in the practice of citizenship, in terms of group identities, agency and power. Trans-national dialogues among mobilized groups often result in political learning. New strategies can emerge. Trans-national venues open up new political opportunities and new brokerage partners. Perhaps most importantly, trans-national institutions offer recognition movements new forms of leverage politics, as governments become more and more integrated in structures of multi-level governance." (Hobson et al., 2007: 445)

The transnational level is different from the national one in this sense both because of the organisation of the mobilisation which is, to a certain extent, detached from a delimited territorial reference (participants do not necessarily live close to each other or share a common cultural background) and the direction of the demands in the sense that the EU is a different kind of political system than the nation-states and, thus, the channelling of the demands and the access points require different strategies by the organisation who seek to gain influence or make themselves visible.

The interrelation between the various levels of activism and claims-making (local, national, transnational) is reflected in recent theories on transnational activism, originating in social movement theories (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 1998; 2005). According to the latter, the social movements are acting within a specific social environment and political context which may enhance or constraint their possibilities for action. The internal relations of the social movements, and their possibilities for action, are thus dependent on the external relations, and vice versa. Inherent within Tarrow's conceptualization of the social movements is the idea that the social movements produce change and are, at the same time, influenced by change in the immediate context. In this way, the actions of the social movements depend on the specific, contextual *political opportunity structure* at a certain time and space in history. The political opportunities are understood as dimensions of the political context which incentive collective action in as much as it affects the expectations regarding success or failure. They are "a set of clues for when contentious politics will emerge" (Ibid.: 20) and, thus, the possibilities for emergence, interaction and change that a social movement holds in relation to a specific social system. At the European transnational level, the EU institutions can be seen as the main institutional and discursive framework for such opportunity structures to emerge and be used by the social movements and organisations acting at this level.

The focus of this paper is, as mentioned above, the role of the transnational civil society actors as mediators of wellbeing for the ones active within the organisations and networks. One dimension of this wellbeing is the possibility of political participation. The ability to participate and to influence decisions that affect one's daily life strengthens the quality of life (Nussbaum, 1999). In this way, civil society is considered to play a role in the access to and generation of wellbeing as this is related to empowerment and the ability to participate politically for example through collective mobilization. At the transnational level, this ability may be constrained by

lack of access to resources as the possibility of participation beyond the local and national level is more difficult and economically demanding.

Nussbaum develops the capabilities approach as a way to achieve gender equality and social justice simultaneously. The capabilities are considered to be fundamental entitlements which any society should ensure in order to achieve the citizens' wellbeing. A rights approach, securing formal equality for example, is not sufficient since it does not necessarily put citizens in a position to make use of their rights, i.e. the capability to achieve effective equality. The capabilities approach, on the other hand, focuses on equal opportunities, and Nussbaum elaborates a list of central human capabilities that are required in order to achieve social justice, human dignity and quality of life (Nussbaum, 1999).[3] Among these capabilities is the 'control over one's environment'. This capability covers two dimensions, namely the material (being able to hold property, etc.) and the political (being able to participate politically, etc.). The focus here will be on the latter. Political participation is considered a necessary capability and, as such, one of the aspects of the general wellbeing to which any individual ought to be entitled in a just society. In Nussbaum's account, political participation covers both political participation, as the capability to "participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life", and the protection of free speech and association (1999; 2000; 2006).

In some of her more recent work, Nussbaum (2006) reflects upon the application of the capabilities approach to the transnational or global level. In order to achieve social justice, the 'structural features', which work as obstacles to people's opportunity and dignity in life, must be removed. The question to be explored in this paper is what these features or obstacles are in relation to empowerment through civil society participation at the European level (i.e. political participation and mobilization). Nussbaum argues that the global interconnections are increasing, and that power is to a higher degree dispersed among different global actors. Consequently, she considers that: "…, a viable theory of justice for the contemporary world ought to have some way of coming to grips with the changing centers of influence and advantage …" (2006: 225). According to Nussbaum, we can no longer take the nation-state as the centre of

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[3] Nussbaum's understanding of the central human capabilities is based on a cross-cultural as well as a universal dimension in its proposition. The capabilities are thought to be basic entitlements which could apply to all societies and people independently of their different values or notions of 'the good'. The capabilities respect pluralism and difference but do not support cultural relativism but can, on the contrary, work on a cross-cultural basis. This means that the capabilities approach aspire to be universal and, at the same time, sensitive to cultural differences and particularisms. Thus, it relies on the idea of a consensus around central norms across societies such as justice, equality and respect for pluralism (1999; 2000; 2006).

attention when theorising about global justice but we must instead consider all the relevant global actors. This entails looking at both the national and the international level, and their simultaneous interaction, when considering the human capabilities. Thus, the approach serves as a basis for both national constitutions and international justice, in which case it is very closely related to the human rights perspective which is already well-developed at the international level and therefore a consensus is realistic. Ensuring the human capabilities on the international level should, according to Nussbaum, be an institutional responsibility since individuals have given the collective ethical responsibility to them and they have the capacity to implement the principles of justice. However, this institutional responsibility is more complex at the international level than at the national one since there is no basic state structure to rely on and power is dispersed. This means, for instance, that there is no adequate level of accountability (through principles such as the separation of powers or decentralising mechanisms). The responsibility for ensuring social justice must therefore also be relegated, informally and provisionally, to different global actors and structures and only with a 'thin and decentralised' global institutional structure (Nussbaum, 2006).[4]

I believe Nussbaum's approach, and especially its application at the transnational level, can be taken even further by considering, in addition to the institutional set-ups, the collective forms of organising and mobilisation in the civil society sphere. In this case, the focus would not only be on the written institutional arrangements but also on the opportunities that they create in the political sphere of action of the citizen activists. In this sense, we move away from an apparently interstate perspective towards a more truly transnational one which considers the institutional and collective responsibilities in the space *between* nation-states, in this case at the European level, where we already have formalised institutional structures. The EU structures can be seen as intermediate between the nation-state level and the global level and they can be addressed in relation to the issue of ensuring human capabilities as they have a delegated political responsibility as well as the necessary institutional capacity to be expected to meets these obligations of achieving wellbeing and social justice.

3. Gender-oriented organisations in the European transnational space

In order to address the question of wellbeing at the transnational, European level, I will analyse two types of organisations. These are, on one hand,

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[4] The examples mentioned are, for instance, the world criminal court, world environmental regulations and global taxation (Nussbaum, 2006).

organisations that mobilise around gender and women's issue at the European level in general, and, on the other, organisations that direct their attention towards a gender and ethnicity agenda. In the first more generic category we find the European Women's Lobby (EWL), the European Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA), the Women Against Violence Europe network (WAVE), the Women Citizens of Europe network (WCE) and the New Women for Europe (NWFE). In the other category, the key organisations at the European level at the moment are Black European Women's Council (BEWC) and Young Women from Minorities (WFM).[5] These organisations can also be categorized according to their organisational structure as umbrella organisations (for example the EWL) or networks (for example WFM). Two kinds of material from the abovementioned organisations will be analysed. This is, on one hand, printed and web-based document material concerning their particular policy positions and strategies within the field of diversity and minority policies and, on the other, interviews conducted with 1-2 representatives from each organisation.[6]

In the following analysis, I will mainly focus on four of these organisations, namely the EWL, the BEWC, the WAVE network and WFM. These organisations represent umbrella and network organisational structures as well as minority and majority organisations with a generic and a more gender and ethnicity specific agenda.

4. Resources, funding and EU policies

Two problems seem to be salient regarding the constraints placed on transnational mobilisation in the European context: funding and access. These problems reflect two different bases of the risk of exclusion, namely economic and political grounds, both related to the actions, in one way or another, of the EU and other international organisations at the European level such as the Council of Europe.

The EU serves as a framework for the organisations' possibilities of generating and accessing wellbeing on different levels. This applies both in discursive terms, when they formulate demands and policy proposals, and in a more structural sense, with respect to organisation and funding. At a general level, the EU institutions

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[5] A few other organisations mobilise around similar issues at the European level such as the Women in Development Europe (WIDE) network or the Association des Femmes de L'Europe Méridionale (AFEM). However, for the purposes of this analysis, the abovementioned organisations are considered to be the most visible and relevant ones.

[6] These interviews were conducted at the organisations' offices, in some cases, and by telephone, in other cases. This imbalance concerning the method of collecting the interviews is not considered to be a mayor obstacle due to the nature of the content of the same, i.e. no personal or sensitive information were sought in any of the cases.

seem more receptive to a particular kind of organising, closely related to interest group representation. According to Marks & McAdam (1999), lobbying is a more efficient form of pressure than activism partly due to the limited institutional access, the absence of media at the EU level, the emotional detachment with which many citizens perceive the EU and the interest of the very institutions in receiving information from the lobbyist which may enhance their receptiveness towards this kind of interaction. This affects the particular opportunity structures that the organisations and networks may make use of at the transnational level. The EU institutional context, thus, calls for a particular kind of mobilisation, organisation and claims-making activity due to its delimitation of the arenas and access points made available.

The EU institutional structure for civil society participation influences the emergence of actors at the European level and it also influences the *funding* of the networks and organisations. The BEWC (founded 2007) initiated its activities in the realm of the European Year for Equal Opportunities for All and made its official launch during the European Year For Intercultural Dialogue which, according to the organisation itself, presented an opportunity to create alliances with institutional and organisational actors. A BEWC representative reflects upon the importance of the EU framework and the use the organisations can make of it in the following way:

> "We have to go out to tell the EU 'we are here' and not waiting until the EU recognises our presence [...] The good opportunity to do this at the European level was last year [2007]. Last year was the European Year of Equal Opportunities for all so I saw it as a good opportunity to invite black women so that we can together look at the European concept of equal opportunities for all from our own perspectives." (interview, November 2008)

The BEWC has used EU institutional contacts extensively during its launch and the first year of its existence and it does focus heavily on strategic lobbying vis-à-vis the EU institutions. The EWL (founded 1990) has for a number of years enjoyed financing from the European Commission (EC) on one of the continuing grants, an operating budget from the Community Action Programme. Even though the activities of the WAVE network (founded 1994) was initiated in relation to the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and as such emerged in the context of the UN rather than the EU, the network itself explains that the basic structure was not developed until 1997 when it was granted its first funding through the EC Daphne programme.[7] Similarly, the WFM (founded 1995) emerged in the context of a youth campaign, in this case

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[7] The first Daphne programme was launched in 1997. It is now running its third granting phase. The overall objective of the programme is to combat violence against children, young people and women, mainly by making funding available to organisations working in these areas.

launched by the Council of Europe, titled "All Different – All Equal" through which the organisation received funding for a pilot project and continued the work and the operation of the organisation after the project and the campaign expired.

The political and institutional framework of the EU can work both as a facilitator and as a constraint on the organisations' demands and activities. First of all, the EU is often articulated as the main space for gaining visibility and recognition at the transnational level (as reflected, for instance, in the quote above). This is also reflected in the BEWC self definition as an organisation of Black European Women (i.e. Black Women living in Europe):

> "This definition is part of the political strategy of Black European Women to position themselves in the political landmark of Europe, and claim and reinforce their rights to have access to goods and services, and to take part in all sectors of European society" (www.bewnet.eu)

Furthermore, the EU antidiscrimination policies, and especially the article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty concerning the six grounds of discrimination (sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation) and the posterior directives on equal treatment, have impacted the organisational landscape of European civil society. Large umbrella networks already existed or were set up at the European level in the years following the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. They cover different, separate grounds of discrimination and are partly funded by the EC.[8] However, as the EC preferences towards a multiple discrimination approach which perceives the six grounds of discrimination as integrated rather than separate (EC, 2004) develops, it should be expected that the civil society landscape would modify itself accordingly. This is indeed happening and in two different ways: the big umbrella organisations, which continue to be organised around one of the discrimination grounds, cooperate among themselves or with other smaller organisations to deal with intersecting inequalities (for instance the cooperation between EWL and several migrant women's organisations[9]) or new organisations emerge (such as the BEWC) which, in their self definition and objectives, already cover and deal with several discrimination grounds and as such are intersectional in their approach.

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[8] The main networks are: the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA, founded 1978), the European Women's Lobby (EWL, founded 1990), the European Disability Forum (EDF, founded 1996), the European Network Against Racism (ENAR, founded 1998), and the European Older People's Platform (AGE, founded 2001).

[9] For instance in the seminar "Incorporating Gender in Integration Policies: the Way Forward", celebrated the 1st of December 2008 in Brussels. The participating migrant women's associations were, among others, the African Women's Network, the Businesswomen Organisation of Lithuanian Ethnic Groups, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, the RESPECT network and the European Network of Migrant Women.

Several of the transnational organisations articulate their concerns and problems related to the financing of activities across borders. Here the projects emanating from the European institutions, such as the EC, are thought to facilitate the transnational mobilization to a large extent as project funding makes travelling and reimbursements for activity participation easier. However, some tensions also arise around the EU membership regarding the relations between the national and transnational dimensions. Firstly, there is a problem of down-prioritising the national level due to the added value attributed to the 'international':

> "In some countries they would never fund a women's shelter but if they fund like travelling to a conference, an international conference, they have the ability to say 'okay, we funded this for an international conference', then people get money." (WAVE interview, November 2008)

Secondly, there is a problem with the allocation of responsibilities, which Nussbaum also addresses in her approach to human capabilities at the international level. This particularly relates to EU candidacy and accession processes when the EU passes the responsibility of funding onto the state level, once countries become members. The states nevertheless do not feel obliged to take over funding responsibilities that previously were assumed by EU external or candidacy programmes. For member states, the EU only takes on the obligation to fund transnational projects (interview WAVE, November 2008). This has negative consequences for the activity at the local and national levels which can in some cases not be upheld.

Regarding the second element, namely that of *access*, the constraints concern the EU policies on mobility and, more concretely, the visa policies. One of the problems that are mentioned most frequently by the civil society organisations in relation to transnational activism relates to the issue of visa requirements:

> "One thing that we have been facing, one problem, is the visa issue. Visa issue for Eastern European participants travelling to the member states of the European Union and for migrants, now with the Schengen area, a migrant residing in Italy can travel easily to France or to the Schengen countries but a migrant person living in the UK will be needing a visa to enter Italy, for example. So, visa was a big issue. Visa and visa obstacles were there all the time, … […] And having especially like a migrant person, a refugee from Rwanda, living in St. Petersburg, travelling to here, was really difficult. […] So the visa, it's a tricky thing." (WFM interview, December 2008)

Even when there is funding available, the visa policies restrain the possibilities of mobility and, thus, of transnational political participation, beyond the economic constraints. The organisations may try to direct particular attention to participants from

countries with less funding possibilities but nevertheless the lack of access and mobility rights is often an obstacle:

> "Visa procedures are really restrictive […]. The goal would be that from every country one representative could participate at the WAVE conference but we couldn't fulfil it. […] Visa is also a big exclusion criterion. Often, I mean we have to sign guarantees for visas for people. We are covering everything till if they stay in a hospital, I mean it is also a big risk. […] It was always a problem, visa. But this is about the same exclusionary issue as money because often even if we have money, people cannot access the European Union, to learn from good practice examples from the European Union countries, because they just don't get visas even if we sign all guarantees because people like to play the power and whatever. […] We still strive to include everyone and to get funding for everyone but this is always also a big challenge." (WAVE interview, November 2008)[10]

The limitations in the access to participation in transnational activities in the European sphere seriously restrain the possibilities of ensuring wellbeing, by excluding access to the EU territories for non-EU citizens who are nevertheless considered to be covered by the activities taking place in the civil society. The EU has the institutional power to define who is included and who is excluded, and restrictive immigration policies have repercussions in relation to this distinction (García Agustín, 2008). The organisations may have broader definitions as regards to their constituencies but the access to wellbeing is constrained through the visa policies and the definitions set forward by the EU. This concerns also the other dimension of wellbeing and the human capabilities as set forward by Nussbaum, namely that of 'bodily integrity'. This is mostly related to the issue of freedom from violence but it also addresses, more broadly, the ability to 'move freely from place to place'. In this sense, the capabilities are related as the women activists, especially the migrant women and the non-EU citizens, are constrained in their capability of moving freely and this affects their possibilities for political participation. The limitations to their mobility also put obstacles in the way for the realisation of their capability to uphold their rights to political expression and mobilisation and, thus, their wellbeing.

5. Participation, representation and empowerment

The demands set forward by the organisations are either strategic policy claims regarding gender equality with a political-pragmatic orientation (see for instance EWL, 2001; 2006; 2007a; 2007b) or empowerment and identity related claims concerning recognition as citizens and belonging (see for instance BEWC, 2007). This

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[10] As a way to remedy this problem, the organisation in question uses a rotation principle whereby the conferences are held in different countries each year. This also foments the participation of activists from the more marginal countries or regions as they will participate in the conferences due to the proximity of their location (WAVE interview, November 2008).

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differentiation is important in the participants' articulation of their experiences of empowerment and, thus, wellbeing. The claims-making is namely translated into particular ways of considering and practising participation. The EWL cooperates with migrant women's organisations and has made a great effort to promote the development of migrant women's organisations, the institutional consultation of these and to make the voice of these organisations heard (see for instance EWL et al., 2008). The EWL (2006) argues that an objective is to "empower migrant women through mutual support and sharing of information." This shows that the issue is thought of in terms of cooperation (regarding policies and information) with partners external to the EWL itself and not an actual incorporation of the migrant women's organisations, necessarily, in the organisational structures of the EWL. To the EWL there is, thus, a difference between inclusion into policies and inclusion into organisational structures. The latter are mainly nation-state based (umbrella organisation) and the membership organisations in their majority are as well. An EWL representative recognises that "To make policies inclusive is maybe easier than the structural issue" (interview, December 2007) even though the aim is to achieve both. The WAVE network also encourages the consultation and participation of "black and ethnic minority women" and cooperation through an effort to "reach out, listen to, and work *with* BME women and children" (2002b, original emphasis). The identity-based claims set forward by the BEWC are reflected in the demand for voice for minority women. The BEWC women want to represent themselves because it is a way to empowerment and because they want to be considered equal also in the participation. In the interview with the BEWC representative, she argues that equal opportunities between women and men requires, as a precondition, equal opportunities between minorities and majorities, and that representation of these is closely linked to identity and requires self organisation:

> "I want a roundtable discussion where I have someone there talking about black women, a black woman, where I have someone talking about Muslim women, she's a Muslim woman, someone talking about the challenges of European women so that we can have this broad perspective. Only when we get there can we then talk about equal opportunities. [...] So if we agree that we are so diversified and that one, two, three organisations and honestly not in a position to represent the needs of the diversity we have then people will automatically see that the emergence of self-organised networks is absolutely necessary. It's actually a kind of richness in the society. This is participation. And the European policies are constantly talking about participation, they're talking about European citizenship, they are talking about spreading European values, the sense of belonging. When we start doing this it's because we realise that we are Europeans, we're living in a European context, we identify with the structures." (BEWC interview, November 2008)

The quote shows two kinds of understandings: on one hand, each minority group should speak on its own behalf in order for the claims the gain legitimacy and for equality to

emerge through participation and via empowerment processes. On the other hand, it defines what it is to be European and that this has to do with active participation, making use of citizenship rights, and that true inclusion is synonymous with the practice of this active participation.

However, another perception is set forward by one of the other women minority organisations within the sphere of European, transnational mobilisation. The WFM representative argues for a combined approach whereby the need for minorities to speak on their own behalf is reflected along side with minority integration (both as representatives and concerning the issues dealt with) in the majority organisations:

> "Having a minority person in these mainstream organisations, you know, bringing forward the agenda for minority issues is very, very difficult because when you reach to that level, then you're asked still to speak for everyone but then the minorities are asked to speak for everyone but then the majorities sometimes are not talking for the minorities. So, I think also for a political representation […] there is a need to establish minority organisations or minority women's organisations or migrant minorities because I think people need to raise their voice, first of all, and fight for their active citizenship, for their political participation. Of course minorities can not do everything by themselves. I think the collaboration with other organisations is important, I mean, especially the mainstream organisations. And a role also of these organisations is actually to mainstream minority issues in the mainstream organisations because we are not here to create islands of separated organisations, we need also to have more minorities also in the other organisations, you know, more representation of the minorities in the big organisations. I think that is also something very important, to lobby also from the national youth council, to lobby there, and make sure that more minorities are involved on key positions. And then, well, there should be even the possibility, then those who are more motivated will definitely go far but we need to set up the ground for equality at the end of the day because if the ground is there then you will see mainstream organisations with people from different backgrounds equally represented." (WFM interview, December 2008)

This perception reflects the need to create *opportunities* for participation along with empowerment through self representation. This is the double-sidedness of the idea of political participation as wellbeing: it needs to achieve both representation and recognition.

As reflected in the quotes above, the perception of the need to speak on one's own behalf also affects the relationship between the organisations themselves (minority and majority). This is both a matter of the minorities not being included properly into the majority organisations and the actual need for self organisation. The minority women may not feel included on equal terms into the mainstream organisations and therefore decide to set up their own organisations (WFM, 1998; BEWC interview, November 2008) but on the other hand the self organisation in itself is also seen as a means of empowerment:

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"We know best what our challenges are, and we have better solutions for them than anyone else. Let's make use of our know-how to fight for our place in Europe, 'our home'. [...] The key is that black women organise themselves, identify their needs and fight to make them visible, they must stop playing the role of victims, a role they are most often forced to play, and become active players." (Achaleke, 2007: 24)

This implies information and education but it is also about joining networks and making strategic alliances in the civil society. Similarly the WFM argues that a main objective is to empower young minority women to become active citizens. In this sense, it is crucial that their voices are heard:

"They must be listened to on their own terms. This is the condition for transforming deficiencies, as seen by national majorities, into resources, viewed from a postnational perspective. Young women (the same could probably be said for young people in general) should be seen as *partners*, not as *objects* in youth policy." (WFM, 1998)

Active participation and self organisation are seen as indispensable for the empowerment process. However, the process is also interactive with the broader society in the sense that a central focus for the minority organisations is to end the stereotyping that is going on in the media and in the broad public and to substitute the negative images with positive ones as a way to gain recognition and respect as well as inclusion. This is thought of in abstract terms (i.e. diversity should be perceived as an asset for society) and in more specific ways by creating positive images and building positive networks and achieve positive self awareness (BEWNET, 2007). The problem is summarised in the following way:

"[The] knowledge, skills, competences and professionalism [of Black women] are often not recognised, and they are reduced to being seen as inferior not only by the majority white society but also by some black men. Thus black women continually have to justify their true value to society, and have to struggle for the recognition and respect they deserve." (Achaleke, 2007)

6. Conclusions

The main obstacles identified in relation to the possibilities of accessing and generating wellbeing through civil society participation and empowerment at the European level are related to the institutional framework of the EU institutions. The shortcomings of this framework are both of political and economical nature. The economic dimension of ensuring the capabilities is related to the funding and resources available to the civil society organisations. In this sense, the EU both restrains the possibilities, by setting a particular agenda for the organisations to conform to, and enhances them, through particular programmes and project funding opportunities.

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However, the funding processes also seem to have a negative spill-over into the national arenas in some cases via a tendency for member states to prioritise the areas of participation and service provision offered by the organisations less once the EU withdraws. This is an implication of the diffusion of responsibilities that is particularly prominent at the transnational level. Another kind of institutional constraints are the political ones, here best reflected in the visa regulations governing the access into EU territory. This is both a problem of lack of mobility, which results in a lack of participatory opportunities, and a problem of the right to define the European space. The latter is more restricted in the EU notion of it than in the organisations' self perception of their constituencies. Both of these aspects restrain the generation of wellbeing through political participation at the European level.

Another aspect of the assessment of wellbeing as the ability to participate in political activities is the way in which participants themselves feel represented and empowered. There is a need for of combination of self representation, related to claims of identity, voice and recognition, in order for participants to achieve a subjective and reflexive sense of empowerment, and a formal representation of themselves, their concerns and issues on the 'mainstream' political agenda and in the other, majority-dominated organisations and networks. Both dimensions seem to add to the generation of wellbeing, beyond the potential institutional constraints on participation opportunities.

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