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The Inner Process of Collective Interpretation in Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Interpretative research assumes the collective nature of knowledge production and enhances the development of intersubjectivity. However, the question of how to generate collective and intersubjective knowledge within a research group has barely been addressed. This paper describes in detail the strategies that our research group developed during the process of collective interpretation that we performed during an exploratory study, as part of a research project on learning of active citizenship. Based on specific examples from our study, we uncover the strategies used to respond to the different degrees of convergence and divergence identified. Finally, we provide with some reflection on the difficulties and benefits of this collective process.

The Inner Process of Collective Interpretation in Qualitative Research

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Interpretative research assumes the collective nature of knowledge production and enhances the development of intersubjectivity. However, the question of how to generate collective and intersubjective knowledge within a research group has barely been addressed. This paper describes in detail the strategies that our research group developed during the process of collective interpretation that we performed during an exploratory study, as part of a research project on learning of active citizenship. Based on specific examples from our study, we uncover the strategies used to respond to the different degrees of convergence and divergence identified. Finally, we provide with some reflection on the difficulties and benefits of this collective process. Keywords: Interpretative Research, Intersubjectivity, Research Group Strategies, Collective Research.

Introduction

Analysis in qualitative research opens an intersubjective dialogue between the researcher and the voice of the informants who participated in the project. As qualitative researchers, we have chiefly addressed the interest in including the grounds upon which we justify our interpretation in our final reports, explicitly explaining the process that makes the construction of scientific knowledge possible.

However, this interest in transparency fails to address the analysis process when it is performed collectively by multiple researchers. The objective of this article is to offer a detailed reflection on the negotiation strategies required in the collective analysis of qualitative information. To that end, we use our experience in the "Learning of citizenship: Discourses, experiences and educational strategies" R&D project as a source of concrete examples that illustrate these strategies.

The development of this project included personal interviews that subsequently became part of a common corpus for later joint analysis by the research team.

Collective analysis must be understood from a flexible perspective in which intersubjectivity expands its possibilities. In this article, we provide the strategies that were put into practice to advance collective analysis and create a final report. The negotiation of meaning led to two lines of results, demonstrating both the agreements reached and the divergences which will be subject to further studies.

The sections below cover the following: a) justification of the need to take a collective approach to the analysis of qualitative information; B) presentation of our project, which serves as a framework for contextualizing our collective analysis experience; C) the negotiation of meaning strategies used, taking examples and references from the analysis performed; D) final discussion.

Collective Knowledge as an Imperative in Qualitative Research

Interpretive epistemology focuses on the relational dimension in the production of scientific knowledge. Research is a process of interaction between researcher and informants

(Flick, 2007; Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2006), a dialogic output based on the relationship between the two agents with the assumption of the principle of equality as a necessary condition in the interaction (Seidman, 2013; Vasilachis of Gialdino, 2009).

From an interpretive research standpoint, constructing meaning responds to a dialogic approach in which different voices interweave to shape intersubjective knowledge about the social experiences and worlds being studied. This collective nature of the knowledge generated through interpretive research not only refers to that which is constructed between researchers and informants, but necessarily implies the idea of community among researchers who develop a project together. The challenges and problems posed require a dialogue of knowledge when it comes to the interpreting meanings from different disciplines that must interlink. Thus it is considered by the various calls for research funding, which evidences the need to build diverse work teams that adhere to the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge. In the European context, for example, the Horizon 2020 framework programme for research and innovation underscores collective, dialogic and interdisciplinary aspects as criteria for evaluating projects (European Commission, 2014):

> How should transdisciplinarity be addressed and evaluated in proposals? In the context of Horizon 2020, transdisciplinarity refers to approaches and methodologies that integrate as necessary (a) theories, concepts, knowledge, data, and techniques from two or more scientific disciplines, and (b) non-academic and non-formalized knowledge. In this way, trans-disciplinarity contributes to advancing fundamental understanding or solving complex problems while fostering multi-actor engagement in the research and innovation process.

The demand for an interdisciplinary perspective seeks to account for the complexity of social processes; a way to overcome hyperspecialization in academic and professional fields. However, this approach does not take the interaction of researchers into consideration. Research groups must meet the challenge of creating a collective and interdisciplinary knowledge reached through dialogue, but to what extent do the methodologies with which we work support this joint construction?

The collective construction of knowledge within the research group itself has not been a topic of discussion in methodological theory and practice. Faced with the question of how to put together an investigation considering the diversity of researchers in a group, we find interesting methodological proposals that help us structure fieldwork, for example, the analysis of a multiple or collective case study (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2013), as well as life stories based on multiple narratives (Shkedi, 2005). The researchers participating in a project may therefore contribute to the study through the development and analysis of a specific unit (one case, one story). However, the outcome does not always result in the incorporation of these contributions, but rather appears in the form of a repertoire, collection or specific examples that illustrate a general theme. These alternatives place focus on the diversification of scenarios or informants, without the result necessarily involving the interaction of research group members.

The question of how to generate collective and intersubjective knowledge in a research group has barely been addressed, except in those cases in which triangulation as a validation approach is proposed. Triangulation is a combination of methods, study groups, local/temporary environments and various theoretical perspectives that study the same phenomenon (Flick, 2012; Stake, 2013). Investigator triangulation involves the systematic comparison of the results from each researcher for the purpose of reaching an agreement. However, recognising that no observation or interpretation is totally repeatable, triangulation also makes it possible to clarify meaning and identify different perspectives. Investigator

triangulation is warranted when it serves to compare, neutralise or at least bring to light different disciplinary biases. However, investigator triangulation is admittedly difficult to validate unless the authors explicitly describe how it was achieved. There has been a certain lack of interest in making the dialectic debate that lies behind an interpretive work transparent: processes like category identification and synthesis or the strategies used to relate one with the other are opaque issues in the reports (Moravcsik, 2014).

Thoroughly analysing, interpreting, and understanding is an exercise in participation, in struggle if required (Bajtín, 1982), which results in a change, a fresh perspective, new knowledge, mutual enrichment. Under the logic of interpretive research, clarifying the process of how meanings are negotiated within the research group itself is a task as necessary as it is transparent. This paper contributes to this task through the detailed description of our own collective interpretation process within the context of an R&D project, and the reflection on the difficulties and benefits this implied.

Research on Active Citizenship Learning

Developed between 2009 and 2012, the project was designed to formulate educational strategies that promote active citizenship learning by identifying and analysing practices, processes and experiences through which active citizenship –which we define as critical, participative and transformative– is constructed. We performed a qualitative study that aimed to advance the understanding of the subject itself (active citizenship), building from the perceptions and experiences of people with a proven history of citizen activism in various fields. The fields that we identified a priori as relevant to locating these actors were the following:

- Educational, broadly understood to include both formal and non-formal centers.
- Social movements focused on social transformation.
- Theorists and academics who research and/or teach this topic.
- Politicians, including party activists, unions and other organised groups.
- Media, with people who take a critical approach to their work in information and communication.

The research design included an exploratory study based on 37 in-depth, ethnographic interviews with people that fit the previously defined citizen profile. We elaborated the life histories of ten of these previously interviewed participants in a subsequent narrative research phase. Finally, we conducted participatory video research in collaboration with five of these participants.

The research project obtained funding from the Ministry of Science and Innovation in the annual call for R&D projects. As already noted, this type of competitive call for proposals encourages collaboration between institutions and research groups. Thus, the project involved three teams of researchers from different universities located across Spain: The University of Seville (USEVI), the University of Zaragoza (UNIZAR) and the National University of Distance Education (UNED) in Madrid. The team was joined by an additional three researchers from the University of the Basque Country (UPV), University of Veracruz in Mexico and the University of Coimbra in Portugal, respectively.

The methodological process of collective interpretation on which the conclusions presented in this paper are based was developed in the first project phase, the exploratory study. The proposal to conduct an exploratory study responded to the need to define the field of study itself. The conceptual framework which underpinned the project noted tensions in

contemporary educational discourse between proposals that advocate an educational approach "for" citizens through a weak discourse on active citizenship that lacks a critical quality and is based on preconceptions about what civic virtue as associated with active citizenship means, and those that defend the expansion of collective learning spaces "by" citizens, opting for democratisation as an ongoing process, and creativity and experimentalism as factors of social transformation.

We describe two aspects of the collaborative process that we conducted over the course of this exploratory study in some detail below and which are particularly significant for further reflection. The first focuses on the creation of the working group and the various collaborative spaces that were established; the second is concerned with the design of the exploratory study and how this was affected by the joint work between researchers and teams.

The Working Group. This research proposal is the result of an initiative from a group of researchers from the UNED, who also formulated and submitted the project to a call for national funding for projects based on the premise of cooperation between different teams. Once funding was granted, this same group also undertook the task of project coordination.

The teams involved had never collaborated on a project together before. Two factors came together when choosing specific participants: first, a broad shared discipline, as in research methodology in education. The subject to investigate –active citizenship learning– was relatively new to all participating researchers, and the range of knowledge and methodological approaches –narrative research, discussion groups, discourse analysis, participatory research– were perceived as an added value in order address a field of research characterised by the breadth and equivocality of its subject matter.

The collaboration effectively began in an initial general project launch meeting, where both the previous framework, created by the UNED group, and the methodological design of the exploratory study were discussed for the first time. The UNED proposal included a series of in-depth interviews with people who have a proven track record of citizen involvement in various fields: political, educational, academic, civil society, social movements, and the media. An ad-hoc working group of seven researchers from three different institutions (three from the UNED, two from UNIZAR and two from USEVI) was created to undertake the interviews).

Table 1. Initial script for the interview

1. How citizenship is exercised and what activities are involved
➢ *What communities are you involved in?*   ➢ *What are your goals, how do they contribute to social transformation?*   ➢ *How would you describe that community or group?*   ➢ *What activities do they develop, how are they organised?*   ➢ *How are internal and external involvement and participation encouraged?*
2. **How do you learn and what resources, means and skills are put into play?**
➢ *Your learning experience.*   ➢ *Models and references.*
3. On what principles, values and motivations do you base your exercise of citizenship?
➢ *Values that move you to participate.*   ➢ *Your social project.*   ➢ *With whom you share those values?*

4.   What is it and what does it mean to be a citizen?

➢   *Concept and sense of citizenship.*
➢   *Who would you define as citizens in our society?*
➢   *Who do you not consider citizens?*
➢   *What part of life encompasses "the communal"?*
➢   *What is public and non-public?*
➢   *Limits and barriers to the exercise of citizenship.*
➢   *Main keys to citizenship education.*

Study Design and Planning. At the first working group meeting, the UNED subgroup presented an initial interview script proposal based on its previous experience in the subject. The script sets out four large generative themes that could guide the development of an interview with special attention paid to the particular experience of each informant. A number of questions were developed for each of these themes that could be used as lines of investigation adaptable to the different profiles and situations of the interviewees, proposing a journey that starts with experience as the basis for understanding and contextualising the conceptualisation of the term citizenship.

All study participants gave their informed consent for the analysis and dissemination of their data, which we treated anonymously except in those cases in which the participant expressly authorized the disclosure of his/her identity (life histories and video research). A relevant aspect of this consent is that some participants collaborated extremely actively across all phases of the research, which influenced the progressive incorporation of participatory research strategies and methods in our study.
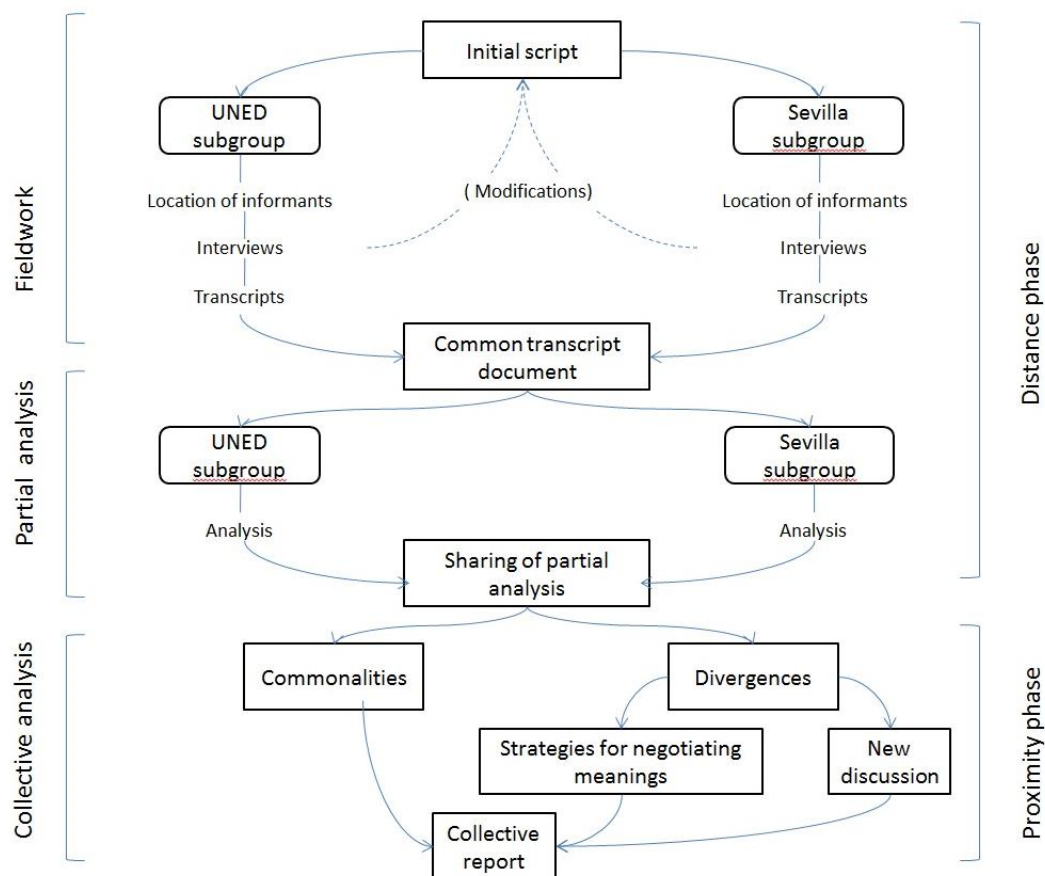

Figure 1: Exploratory study analysis process

We addressed the question of how to make our cooperation effective in terms of both data collection and its interpretation and analysis from the start. Both tasks were initially proposed as consecutive and separate phases, for which two different workspaces were established: the space shared by the subgroups from each university, whose researchers would select the informants and interview them in their respective regions; and a common working group space in which the transcripts of all interviews would be shared, and a collective interpretation carried out. Using the terms of Döös and Wilhemson (2014), we consider "proximity" the subgroups' fieldwork phases, and "distance" the collective interpretation phases.

The actual dynamics of the work showed that the proximity phases of fieldwork also involved a pre-analysis in each subgroup. This pre-analysis began with the selection of informants who reflected a preference for certain areas in each subgroup: formal education in one case, politics in another and social movements in a third. Moreover, the proximity of the study as it developed led to a process of translation and reinterpretation of the questions that the subgroups included in the script. The questions became more specific and complex, incorporating both the previous ideas and the researchers' expectations and experience in the field. The development of question no. 4 is an example of this process:

Table 2. Comparison between initial and final scripts

4. What is it and what does it mean to be a citizen?	**4. What is it and what does it mean to be a citizen?**
➢ *Concept and sense of citizenship.* ➢ *Who do you not consider citizens?* ➢ *What part of life encompasses "the communal"?* ➢ *What is public and non-public?* ➢ *Limits and barriers to the exercise of citizenship.* ➢ *Main keys to citizenship education.*	➢ What is your ideal concept of citizenship? ➢ What do you think is the real meaning of citizenship? ➢ Who would you define as citizens in our society? How would you describe them? ➢ Who do you think are not considered citizens in our society? ➢ In your opinion, what areas and dimensions include the concept of citizenship? ➢ What part of life encompasses "the communal", what is the scope of the public sphere, what cultural differences must be considered in the public sphere, what issues should be subject to collective decision-making? ➢ What is public and what is private? What issues do you think are objects of collective decisions? Private decisions? What decisions do you think should be made collectively and are instead made by a handful of individuals? ➢ What limits and barriers do you find to the exercise of citizenship? What coping strategies do you adopt? ➢ In your opinion, what are the main keys to citizenship education?

Likewise, the closeness of researchers from each subgroup in the proximity phases facilitated dialogues and debates that generated meanings and pre-categories shared in each subgroup. Because it immediately followed the fieldwork, the meanings shared by the

informants closest to each subgroup in this pre-categorical phase acquired a significant specific weight in the researchers' interpretations. This fact, which in the case of an individual study would have involved a clear bias, was beneficial in the distance phase. On the one hand, it allowed us to maintain proximity to the context throughout the interpretive process. On the other hand, the differences and disagreements arising from this subgroup pre-analysis led to a much richer and more complex process in the distance phase, forcing us to develop a number of specific collective interpretation strategies.

Based on concrete examples from our study, below we describe in detail the strategies with which we responded to the different degrees of convergence and divergence identified based on the pre-categories under discussion.

From Pre-Analysis to Collective Analysis: Work Strategies

We observe different approaches and results in each work when analysing the pre-categories developed by both subgroups. The flexibility of the interview script presents us with a task of principally inductive analysis or, in other words, a creative process which involves ourselves (our experience, our training, our expectations about the subject, etc.) and the research objectives and purposes. It is this dialogue between analyst and information that results in different interpretations that are seemingly difficult to reconcile into a common discourse, as we assume that all knowledge is situated knowledge (Haraway, 1997), which may not reflect reality in a neutral way. Seeking a commonality in interpretation is part of our goal, without losing sight of the fact that the new, the surprising, and the original must be recognised and given value in an analysis that aims to provide alternative looks at the social issues that concern us.

Categorisation's Double Twist

In a certain way the act of categorising, of naming, involves setting limits. The experience is always richer than the language; and in language, the word is a symbol and implies a reduction as such. As Borges (1992) argued "the main problem is unsolvable: the enumeration, even partial, of an infinite set" (p. 218).

We can confirm the difficult relationship that exists in the act of naming; a relationship that is determined by the intersection of those doing the naming, their experience and new components that arise and must be named. Words are an intellectual classification of reality, charged with emotions that influence to a greater or lesser degree the act of naming. Naming, categorising, thus constitutes a play on words where the similar and the original, synonymy and polysemy intertwine.

It is this complexity that justifies the range of decisions about the categories, as discussed in the examples below, and which we have responded to using three strategies to achieve an intersubjective understanding: accepting similarity, translating the comparable and avoiding polysemy. Below there are examples of each one of these strategies.

Accepting similarity. We understand similarity as those categories which are named the same in the different pre-analyses and which refer, in turn, to a common meaning. Schematically, we could identify it as follows:

There were not many of these cases when our initial work was pooled in each subgroup. As an example, we cite the shared FAMILY category to refer to the role the nuclear family plays in citizenship learning:

> I first learned from my parents. I saw that both my father and my mother were active people who were involved with the neighbourhood, with their companies, they helped their family, they helped friends…that is, they were people who, in a sense, cared about others. I think that's important...that leaves its mark (I25).

We rarely find the same labels responding to the same content. It is likely that our training and common experience somehow shapes us and justifies similar categorisations. In any case, they are accepted as such in this search for intersubjective dialogue, becoming part of the joint analysis.

Translating the comparable. Or, in other words, accept synonymy between the meanings ascribed to categories which appear to be different:

$$\neq \textbf{label} = \textbf{content}$$

Equal meaning implies accepting a relationship of significant similarity. Sharing a substantial part of two or more categories warrants negotiating the same name for both. We use the MIXED POPULATION category in our analysis to indicate one of the necessary conditions in the groups that served as support for citizenship learning and practice.

> What most influenced me are the friends who have left, the friendships that I still maintain, with the differences we all have [...] If we have to live together we must accept people who think differently [...] We all live together and you have to accept what the others think… (I13).

A similar idea was reported in the second subgroup, referred to as TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW.

> I'm 48 years old and have lived through [Spain's] political transition. It was a time of social engagement. So I've been living this involvement since I was 16 or 17 years old because we had meetings at the high school. Friends from different political persuasions came together because it was a very contentious time. I had friends in the Socialist Youth Union, the Communist Youth Union, anarchists and people who still believed in Franco. And we would sit down there to talk (I17).

Accepting that both categories could be considered synonymous leads us to think of a more appropriate label. In the aforementioned example, it seemed clear that the MIXED POPULATION category best synthesised the meaning that both labels share, adding plasticity to a theoretical discourse that underlies our work (the intercultural approach).

Avoid polysemy. Searching for language accuracy –the aim of scientific language– certainly deprives it of the plays on words we use in our lives. Each category in scientific language should be constructed according to a single criterion and ambiguities should be avoided.

Polysemic meanings are not allowed in the proposed categorical systems. The following possibility, therefore, is not considered:

$$= \text{label} \neq \text{content}$$

When pooling our work we find the CHANGE category identified with different meanings in each subgroup. In the first case, it focuses on the ability to change:

> For me, being a citizen is nothing more than being a better person and trying to change things and not thinking that this is the way things are and that's it. So it is important to question why things are the way they are and how they could be changed. (E3)

The other subgroup focuses on the value of small changes as an important aspect in achieving a citizenry that aspires to social change.

> We believe that changing in relationship to another person has already shifted something. And each person is a change, because you might say that you're not going to change anything by doing something with a group of women, because it's obvious that you won't put an end to violence against women in this country, which is an endemic problem...but you're doing something…for them and for yourself, because for us feminism means to never stop questioning things, learning... (I10).

It therefore becomes necessary to redefine categories, avoiding duplications and underscoring the specificity in each case: "possibility of change" and "value of small changes" were the new categories proposed in our joint analysis.

Reorganise Meanings

To illustrate the reflection on the process of negotiating meaning using different pre-analyses, we adopt the metaphor that Martínez Miguélez (2006, pp. 264-265) employed to address categorisation, structuring and theorising in qualitative analysis:
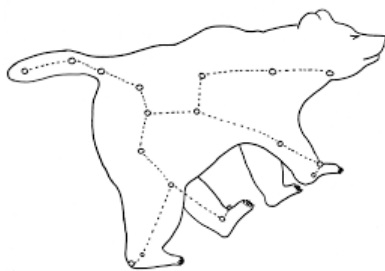
Since ancient times, the human mind has performed a process similar to the one we are describing: it first located a group of stars in a sky filled with thousands and thousands of them, even gave them names like Pole Star, Aldebaran, etc. (categorisation), then it connected them with an imaginary line (structuring), and finally assigned it a new meaning (theorising) "it's a bear", "a lion", "a bull", etc.).

Figure 2. The Great Bear

We will describe how we were able to progress in negotiating meanings according to the above metaphor. A task which did not initially follow a procedure as clear as the one we now propose as a result of our reflection on the process.

Following Martínez Miguélez's (2006) metaphor, this phase involves matching the categories which were identified in isolation, tracing the threads that link their meanings and making it possible for us to move towards a new theoretical development.

Redefining categories and reorganising meanings are not processes that occur sequentially or independently in practice. For example, resolving multiple meanings often involves prioritising categories, defining one as a specific aspect of the other. In the above example we found that confidence in the change, a component of transformative citizenship, included the positive assessment of any change that involved social improvement, however small.

Nonetheless, we will highlight the main strategies developed through the reorganisation of categorical relationships, once again using concrete examples from our process.

Negotiate. The figure of the teacher was crucial in our analysis when it came to addressing citizenship learning. However, its relevance had been defined by different words, possibly the result of the analysts' own attitude towards the educational system. This attitude leads to two positions that, without being irreconcilable, prioritise a different perspective: strengthening the ROLE OF THE TEACHER compared to criticising LIMITATIONS IN TEACHING. The following two quotes serve as an example:

> Participation is mandatory for me because of my work in education. So the first time I put participation into practice was almost mandatory in the classes at first…I prioritize ways to start talking and getting [others] to talk... somehow forcing participation to be the guiding theme of the class. (I27).

> And the role of the teacher is being increasingly called into question. They tend to not make an effort with or talk to the kids. I know this is generalising a lot, but sometimes I do see that there is this tendency to fall back to the trenches of authority, that the only thing that drives us in this society is conflict maintained over time, not solving the problem (I5).

In our analysis, both categories are supported by a number of quotes, so none can be considered exceptional. The representativeness and significance of each category are reasons that warrant the need to keep them in the discourse. The question requires that a way to integrate both categories be determined, choosing the connector to express a contrast ratio between them:

<div align="center">Potential for change ← in contrast → criticising teaching</div>

Regroup. The dynamics of the analysis continually led us to rework the relationships that included some categories in others. We redesigned our relational map as we moved forward. In our joint analysis experience, we noted how much of the information categorised as HOW IT IS LEARNED was closely linked to HOW and WHERE IT IS EXERCISED.

> I think you learn to love by loving and learn to be a citizen by being a citizen (I19).

> I believe that the status of citizenship is learned everywhere and around the clock (I8).

Despite being based on guiding questions, the previous interview script conditioned us to identify answers about these three areas in the proximity phases. Further analysis reveals the relationship between them. A good portion of the specific categories included in these areas could serve as an example for both, from the moment that both become parallel processes defined by a relationship of mutual dependence.

How it is exercised $\leftarrow\rightarrow$ how it is learned

Dismiss. Pooling the pre-analysis results revealed some unique categories which were mentioned by only one of the subgroups. Such is the case of the AESTHETIC DIMENSION as considered within the conceptualisation of citizenship.

> At some point, aesthetics are crucial for making people feel more involved with their environment...What is the reality there? Are the streets washed down every night, is the rubbish collected every night…In the Polígono Sur, on Su Eminencia, in certain areas...not only are the streets not washed down, but there are times when rubbish is not collected, or collected at 3 or 4 in the afternoon, after it has started to smell bad. There are also no trees... (I7).

The fact that a category is only mentioned in one subgroup is no reason to decide to dismiss it. It is precisely the interpretive approach that adds value to new ideas focused on a new understanding of social reality. Therefore, the reason to dismiss a category is related to the value it provides within the overall discourse. In the example above we agree to note the slight contribution that the aesthetic dimension makes towards understanding a citizenry that gradually took shape as participatory, critical and transformative. We finally dismissed this category because it fails to provide a substantive relationship with the other dimensions mentioned.

Integrate. Conversely, those categories identified by a single subgroup which are later valued for the relevance of their meaning become part of the common discourse as a result of the degree to which they contribute to and complement other categories. This is the case of categories like GENDER and POSITIVE VALUE OF CONFLICT, for example.

The GENDER category was incorporated into the conceptualisation of citizenship because a significant difference was noted in the meanings attributed to citizenship from a male or female perspective. The following quote refers to the female concept of citizenship, linked to the ethics of care:

> Citizenship. That is, focusing on life as understood as taking care of the environment, of your surroundings, of other people, yourself. That is, focusing not on economic or money-related aspects but rather on people, in ensuring that people are taken care of (I5).

Likewise, we agree on the importance of considering the positive value of conflict as a strategy for citizenship learning and practice. Citizenship cannot silence conflict. It is necessary to recognize conflict as a condition for seeking solutions.

> There is a kind of culture of sticking your head in the sand, of...it's better not to talk about conflict as if simply not talking about it would make it go away, it's hard to say: let's see, let's get right to it, let's call things what they are, there are conflicting interests here, how can we reconcile them (I14).

Benefits of Collective Analysis

Consensus on how to order and categorize meaning results in the construction of new networks of meanings that are enriched by the contributions from successive phases of negotiation, both proximity and distance. However, it is necessary to refute the idea that analysis ends when agreement is reached. Qualitative research is, by definition, research that is never exhausted by its analysis, and therefore new questions and debates arising from "what has yet to be resolved" must be acknowledged and valued, opening new and unexpected lines of research.

New networks of meanings. The meaning of citizenship became more complex as the collective analysis advanced, based on dialogue between the informants' contributions and the analysts' interpretations. It went beyond the limits set in the scripts that guided the interviews and new categories emerged that helped us formulate a citizenship reconstruction model underpinned by a participatory and transformative character. The agreements reached as a result of intersubjective dialogue can be seen in the following figure:
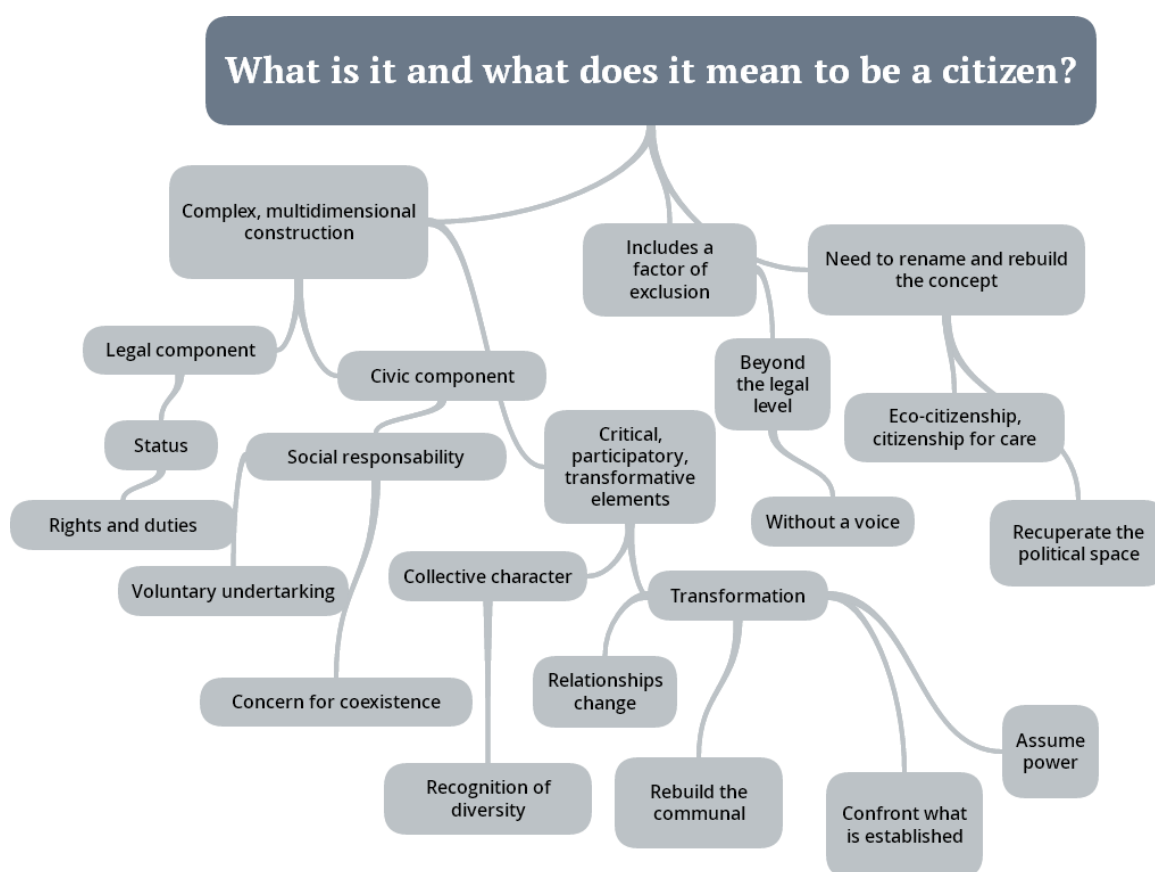

Figure 3. Conceptual map about the meaning of citizenship

This network of concepts based on the notion of citizenship discussed in our analysis reveals the complexity of its meaning. Citizenship can be associated with a legal or civic component that limits its meaning. To address this, we propose a critical, participatory and transformative approach that underlines its collective nature and its power to drive action, empowerment and social change.

Proposing new debates. In some cases, significant disagreements arose during the interpretive process as the result of a substantial contradiction among various interpretations. One of the most significant disagreements arose from two seemingly dichotomous perspectives

on the role of the citizen, which seemed to be at two extremes: the individual or the organised group as an actor. Citizenship is seen in some cases as a collective behaviour of "organised actors":

> When we talk about citizenship we are talking about actors who are organised or need to organise. We say that the individual counts as an individual, but it doesn't have…doesn't take part as an individual, but sees the need to organise with others beforehand (I13).

In other cases the individual as an actor is linked to one's right to speak and participate for oneself:

> A person who asks questions about everything before doing anything collective [...] That is, an individualised person, civil-minded; ask me before raising taxes or changing a street name. They can ask me. We are now in a system that makes it possible to ask questions, there are tools for asking questions. And certainly not having others represent and speak for me (I6).

The collective exploration of this and other dilemmas led us to turn them into open, non-polarised lines of inquiry that could contribute to refining and increasing the complexity of the results of our study. Thus, we deconstructed the dilemmas and brought the underlying "tension" to light through collective deliberation and reflection.

Continuing with the above example, the exploration of the initial dilemma, formulated in terms of an INDIVIDUAL ACTOR versus a COLLECTIVE ACTOR, led us to identify a network of tensions running throughout the experiences of our informants, which we interpret as placed in the context of the transformative processes that citizenship meaning and practices is currently undergoing within the context of globalisation and a growing interest in social and political participation in non-institutionalised groups and collectives: social movements, citizen platforms, networks and communities of practice, etc. Using this dilemma as a point of departure we delved deeper into the exploration of the tensions between *private interest* and *common good*; *autonomy* and *interdependence*; *diversity* and *homogeneity*; *freedom* and *co-responsibility*; *equality* and *recognition*, and *leadership* and *horizontality*. The contrast between plural interpretations and argumentative discussion made it possible for certain findings to emerge which, besides helping to make our study more complex, opened new lines of research in which we continue to advance today.

Discussion

As qualitative researchers our goal is to explore how a pluralistic approach enriches our knowledge, generating complementarity between findings. This has been identified as a form of triangulation which includes various understandings of the phenomenon through the study of different aspects, different voices, until interpretive integration is reached (Frost et al., 2011). However, we reproduced the debate about triangulation as a strategy of social knowledge in our study. In agreement with Moral (2006) and Ellingson (2009), who noted the impossibility of subjectively representing reality in a way that is the same and shared by all, we chose to speak of crystallisation, rather than triangulation, as a metaphor that explains the production of knowledge in qualitative research, where there is no "right" or "single" reading of the event. Interpretation diversifies through crystallisation, enabling a partial, dependent and complex understanding of the issues (Ballesteros, Mata & Espinar, 2014).

The search for consensus has been revealed as a pragmatic interest rather than a component of our research. Perhaps the repeated effort to legitimise qualitative research through procedures and criteria that focused on backing up agreements should give way to understanding intersubjectivity as a process that is socially constructed through our exchanges with others. Our background, our experience, our affections are involved...by posing the possibilities around that agreement as a question: "How can we explain that an agreement among different people is possible, since the autobiography that each person lives and writes over the course of their existence reveals the diversity in the construction of their knowledge" (García Fallas, 2005, p. 11).

The description of the work strategies that we develop in the collective interpretation process described helps us to clarify what is a generally opaque process of negotiation and collective construction of meanings. On the other hand, it compels us to reflect on the benefits, difficulties and challenges involved.

On the one hand, our collective interpretation experience helps to challenge the presumed linearity of the research process. Data collection and interpretation were carried out simultaneously in proximity, where the choice of contexts and the identification of informants involved decisions based on both previous assumptions and the interpretations that were modelled on each subgroup's data collection process. At the distance phase, this circular dynamic of pre-analysis first helped shape the design of the study itself, providing more thoughtful questions and revealing issues that were incorporated into the initial script.

On the other hand, the comings and goings to and from the field were revealed in our study as new opportunities for dialogue and the comparison of ideas among researchers and informants, as well as among researchers in each subgroup. Opportunities that not only led to new and more complex questions throughout the process, but also nurtured and strengthened the arguments in the collective debate. This succession of proximity and distance phases can gradually build a broad intersubjective framework that does not necessarily need to be based on consensus, but on the problematisation of our own interpretations and openness to new findings (Döös & Wilhemson, 2014).

Alternatively, in many cases the distance phases in our study involved an intense comparison of arguments which clearly evidenced the researchers' individual and collective position as well as the strong influence of context in proximity. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) note the limits of the self-consciousness of the researcher when tasked to "identify, articulate and take account of the range of influences" (p. 435) that shape the data analysis phase in an individual research.

It is difficult for scientists to recognize the impact of personal and situational influences on their research work and its results (Breuer, Mruck, & Roth, 2002). Officially, these influences are treated as defaults that are to be avoided. Faced with this stark objectivity we must recover qualitative research's value as a strategy to delve deeper into the problems under investigation. And it is through this process of increasing complexity that new relationships and meanings will emerge and new and relevant questions will be posed. Rather than reaching closed agreements, qualitative research should be assessed as a framework for incorporating interpretations, as well as suggesting new approaches.

We believe that the process of collective analysis can certainly contribute to the identification and increased awareness of the constraints that shape different positions, and promote the development of a high degree of group reflexivity, placing politics on the same basis as the production of knowledge. It involves conducting research that makes it possible to move towards socially engaged and responsible knowledge.

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