

## LEARNING AS A PRECONDITION OF MIGRANTS' INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT

SARA GRECO MORASSO

**Abstract:** This paper considers the complex relation between migrants' interest in their host country and their consequent civic or social engagement in the framework of processes of transition following the rupture of international migration (cf. Zittoun 2006). In phases of transition, migrants live processes of identity definition, sense-making of the situation and learning new knowledge and social, cognitive and practical skills. I argue that learning may be considered a precondition for a migrant's interest and engagement with the host country culture and institutions. In this connection, I use Eade's (2007) notion of migration strategy to describe migrant profiles based on learning. My case is supported by a qualitative analysis of two paradigmatic case studies

**Key words:** international migration; learning; transition; identity

### 1. What is engagement? Semantic remarks on a network of concepts

Within the European project PIDOP—Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation (<http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop>), clear-cut semantic distinctions are proposed for the meaning of two dichotomies: engagement/participation and political/civic (Barrett 2011; Zani, Cicognani, Albanesi 2011). According to Barrett (2011), *engagement* is a psychological process, described as having an interest in, paying attention to, having knowledge or having opinions about either political or civic matters. *Participation* is an activity which has the intent or effect of influencing governance or achieving a public good (Pachi and Barrett 2011).

Following Verba, Schlozman, Brady (1995), Barrett (2011) defines *political participation* as an activity which has the effect or intent of influencing governance, either directly (by affecting the making or implementation of public policy) or indirectly (by influencing the selection of individuals who make that policy). *Civic participation* is a voluntary activity focused on helping others, achieving a public good or solving a community problem, including work undertaken either alone or in cooperation with others in order to effect change (*ibid.*). For migrants who do not have full citizenship in the host country, it seems particularly important to distinguish between political participation and civic engagement. If political participation *stricto sensu* is not possible, however, even non-citizen migrants may be civically or socially engaged.

Barrett's definitions establish a network of connections and hierarchies among these concepts. Most importantly, *engagement* could be seen as a precondition to civic or political participation. It may be that a person is civically engaged and has an interest, say, in the common good of her local community. Though reading local newspapers and keeping informed about main events, however, she does not feel like directly engaging in local organizations. The opposite situation, i.e., that a person participates in civic activities even though she is not engaged (interested), is less likely to happen.

This consideration brings to light an important connection between engagement and *interest*. Interest is the root of engagement. Not coincidentally, it also plays an important role in the PIDOP model of psychological factors of participation (Barrett 2011). Moving from a careful etymological and semantic reconstruction of the term *interest*, Cigada (2008, 61-63) elicits two features of this concept:

1. First, interest is defined as a *function with variable intensity*; such function connects an advantageous state of affairs to an individual (or a group) with a *positive* relationship. To define such relationship, Cigada introduces the term *positive proximity*.
2. Second, interest is a polysemic word, used in two senses. First, it might refer to an *objective* interest, coinciding with a real advantage that *concerns* an individual de facto, like in "You should know more about the financial crisis because sooner or later it will interest you". Second, it might allude to a *subjective* interest, reflecting the individuals' conscious attention: "I am interested in Feng Shui". The latter concept of interest implies a human subject actively *engaged* to realize his interest; we could imagine a person reading books on Feng Shui or designing her room according to the principles of this discipline.

*Engagement, thus, is a consequence of subjective interest.* In other word, an individual is engaged if he or she has an interest. In this paper, I will move from these semantic considerations and adopt a broad conception of engagement based on subjective interest. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of a corpus of interviews to international migrants, I will concentrate on what I have found to be a precondition of engagement, i.e. *learning*. To do so, I will rely on a model of life course and development based on cultural psychology, interpreting engagement in the framework of processes of *transition* which may follow to the *rupture* of international migration. I will integrate this model with the notion of migration strategy (section 2). Section 3 presents the data used in the analysis while section 4 discusses two paradigmatic examples of the connection between learning and engagement.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Life course and transitions

Following Zittoun (2009, 406), I adopt the couple *rupture/transition* as a unit of analysis for the study of development in *life trajectories*. *Rupture* is understood as a moment of discontinuity or break in the individuals' "taken for granted", often including the emergence of something unexpected. International migration is likely to produce a rupture, which requires following adaptation in various material and psychological ways (Kadianaki 2010; Hale and De Abreu 2010). For my respondents in particular, the rupture of international migration is combined with the experience of *motherhood*. Depending on different

circumstances, these two spheres of experience may support each other, the one providing a sense of continuity to the other; or they might be perceived as two synchronous ruptures which to some extent magnify each other's dilemmas. Migration and motherhood are assumed as potential ruptures; in approaching the data, however careful attention is paid to the events *actually* experienced as ruptures by participants, as "and what is actually perceived as a rupture is often a far and unpredictable repercussion" of the change which we assume as a potential discontinuity in an individual's life (Zittoun 2009, 412). For this reason, real ruptures need to be *located*, paying attention to what a respondent says and to her implicit assumptions. A careful linguistic analysis of migrants' narratives is therefore necessary to locate ruptures.

Transitions are defined as processes of *developmental* change, which are generative of new ranges of possible conduct and, at the same time, do not prevent the individual from maintaining a sense of *continuity and consistency* (Zittoun 2006, 4). Transition processes follow a rupture, when an individual aims at making sense of the new situation or environment. In order to capture the adaptations a person lives during a transition process, Zittoun (2012) proposes to consider three lines of change: processes of *identity* definition, processes of *sense-making*, linked to how a person evaluates the situation and her transition process; finally, processes of *learning*. Zittoun and Perret-Clermont (2002) qualify learning as acquiring new knowledge and social, cognitive and practical skills.

Individuals living phases of transition need *resources* for learning and sense-making (Zittoun and Perret-Clermont 2002). Within this perspective, cultural elements, such as books, movies, music, songs or other cultural systems and experiences may be used to support a person's sense of continuity when moving across through spheres of experience, if those cultural elements are mobilized as *symbolic resources* in processes of transition (Zittoun 2006). Symbolic resources help in shaping processes of identity, learning and sense-making.

## 2.2 *The notion of migration strategy*

In order to characterize transitions following international migration, I propose to connect the work on rupture and transition to the migrants' *migration strategy* (Eade 2007), because this helps describe how they live processes learning, identity and sense-making by specifying particular migrant "profiles". In describing Polish migrants to London, Eade (*ibid.*) defines four main categories related to their migration migration strategy, considering their goals as well as their relationship with the host country.

*Storks* are transnational migrants who live in the host country only for about 2 to 6 months per year. Storks might be students, working in London to pay for their tuition fees in their home country, or seasonal workers. Studying Polish migrants, Eade (*ibid.*) found that they are often clustered in Polish communities, because they rely on Polish social networks. *Hamsters* consider their stay in the UK as a one-off act, intending to return to their home country as soon as they have accumulated enough capital. Like storks, hamsters are often involved in Polish social networks. *Searchers* are "those who keep their options deliberately open", thus being characterized by "intentional unpredictability" (*ibid.*, 34). They want to increase their social and economic capital and, therefore, see their migration experience as part of a path which might lead them to other destinations. Eade observes that searchers

often are young migrants, employed in a large variety of diverse jobs, and easily adapted to a flexible and transnational lifestyle. Finally, *stayers* are those migrants who have stayed in the UK for a while and intend to stay over for good.

Despite Eade's study being only focused on Polish migrants living in London, these categories can be fruitfully applied to other groups of migrants, although they need to be adapted to the specificities of each situation. Several of our respondents represent complex cases. Take the case of Janet<sup>1</sup>, who moved to London in 1994 with the intention to go back to New Zealand after a few months, in a *hamster*-like manner, but she got engaged and married a British man. As time passed, she progressively felt more at home in the UK, especially after her children went to school; she became a *stayer*. At the time of the interview, however, she was considering separation from her husband; she said that, should she remain on her own with her two children, she would possibly go back to New Zealand. Migration strategies, then, change over time. Migration goals do not necessarily overlap with those of Polish migrants in London either. For example, many of my respondents who fall under the "hamsters" category came to London in order to improve their education or professional opportunities but they did not necessarily enjoy better conditions from the financial point of view.

### 3. On the data and methodology

The data I am considering have been collected in the framework of the project "Migrants in transition: an argumentative perspective", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (PBTIP1-133595, Sept. 2010-Feb. 2012). The project focused on the migrants' reported inner dialogue in the perspective of their processes of *transition*. Twenty-nine migrating mothers of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (aged 25 to 50) have been interviewed about their experience of international migration. At the time of the study, the interviewees had all been living in the greater London area for a period of one to twenty-two years<sup>2</sup>. The interviews lasted from 32 to 90 minutes (average: 60.89 recorded min, mode: 60 min); they were all transcribed according to the standards of Conversation Analysis (for a discussion on this, see Greco Morasso 2011).

The interviewees have been selected through four main channels. Some of them answered to online posts; the large part of this group of respondents found a message on the Noticeboard or on the "Meet a Mum" board provided by the website Netmums<sup>3</sup>, while one answered to a message on the social network SistaTalk<sup>4</sup>. Other respondents were recruited at the toddler reading group of a local library in a London borough characterized by a high

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons of privacy, all of my respondents' names are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of sample uniformity, all of the interviewees were first generation migrants. Twenty-four of them had been living in London for a time span ranging from 1 to 14 years. Nevertheless, five *extreme cases* (Flyvbjerg 2001) of longer-term migrants (15 to 22 years spent in the UK) have been included in the sample to examine processes of rupture and transition in a longer time perspective.

<sup>3</sup> "Founded in 2000, Netmums is the UK's fastest-growing online parenting organisation with over half a million members, mostly mums" ([www.netmums.co.uk](http://www.netmums.co.uk)).

<sup>4</sup> Sistatalk ([www.sistatalk.co.uk](http://www.sistatalk.co.uk)) is "The leading niche social networking site from the National Black Women's Network".

level of diversity. Further contacts were made via direct or indirect personal contacts. Finally, there has been some snowballing effect. Yet snowballing and personal contacts were kept to a minimum to secure enough diversity in the respondents' social networks.

My sample was largely made up of educated (or highly educated), often middle-class women; they all spoke fluent English and the majority of them could easily have access to an Internet connection. This has guaranteed a certain uniformity of the sample. At the same time, the respondents were quite diverse in terms of linguistic, ethnic and cultural origin, number of children, work-family balance, migration strategy and family status.

From the methodological point of view, the study of migrants' processes of transition is supported, in general, by in-depth reconstructive interviews. Via this method, individuals reconstruct how they lived a moment of rupture and the following transition a posteriori (cf. Zittoun 2009, 415ff). Considering the data emerged from this type of interviews from a discourse analytical perspective<sup>5</sup> permits to analyse the individuals' decision-making processes, including internal differences of opinion and their resolution. Interviews are a basic method in human geography as well, with scholars paying increasing attention to the discourse structures and how people convey their meanings (Davies and Dwyer 2007).

Using a qualitative methodology, in this paper, I will identify *paradigmatic* cases (Flyvbjerg 2001) of the connection between *learning* and *engagement*, conceived of in a broad sense and in tight connection with interest. I will use the notion of *migration strategy* to help characterize migrant profiles in relation to the combination of learning, sense-making and identity. My study is exploratory and it is not possible to draw final conclusions starting from a relatively small corpus of data including a variety of migrants different as for ethnic and cultural origin. The purpose of this study is to highlight a connection that could not have been defined a priori: i.e. the connection between learning, interest and engagement, which emerged from a careful and nuanced approach to specific case-studies. The explorative value of case studies and examples is discussed in Flyvbjerg (2001); the use of examples in the social sciences has been highlighted in studies in discourse analysis (Jacobs 1986).

#### **4. Discussion: learning as a precondition to engagement**

In sections 4.1 and 4.2, I will discuss two paradigmatic examples concerning how learning affects a person's engagement with the host country.

##### *4.1 Gemma from Italy: Graham Greene to understand the British culture*

Gemma (30, 1 daughter) comes from Italy<sup>6</sup>. She married an Italian man who was working in the UK and has followed him just after marriage. She works as an engineer, and both her

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<sup>5</sup> In particular, I have analysed how international migrants' inner dialogue is often an *inner multivoiced argumentative discussion* (cf. Greco Morasso, in preparation). Within it, a migrant reconsiders her difficult decisions, like the decision to migrate or (not) to go back to her home country; the voices of others (family, friends, acquaintances) can be retraced in the inner discussions and the type of arguments can be analysed following the methodologies of argumentation theory and linguistics (cf. Greco Morasso 2011 for a methodological discussion).

<sup>6</sup> The excerpts from Gemma's interview have been translated from Italian.

and her husband see their international migration as part of a process of professional and personal learning. On the long run, Gemma may wish to go back to Italy but she has been in the UK for four years already and she intends to stay over for some more; she is a *searcher*. Within this time span, Gemma and her husband have first lived in Wales and then moved to London two years before the interview. During their stay, they have experienced professional and personal uncertainty at different times. At first, Gemma followed her husband to his residence in Wales and had to find a job there. Then, they moved from Wales to London because of Gemma's work without knowing at first if her husband could find a job in the immediate surroundings. Moreover, Gemma was hired by a company immediately before the 2008 financial crisis; she experienced a moment of dramatic change and lived for several months under the threat of possibly being fired. As she arrived in London, she found the professional world "golden", an El Dorado; shortly after, however, the "black" September (2008) came and El Dorado vanished "at the speed of light". Finally, Gemma's husband is in a PhD program and his career is still undefined in terms of where he will be hired after the PhD. As a whole, these moments of uncertainty are all to be considered as ruptures which affect many spheres of Gemma's professional, personal and family life; such moments are connected to her open-ended migration strategy.

The processes of transition which followed, and which were still in progress at the time of the interview, were influenced by the couple's migration strategy. Gemma explicitly talks about her goals: "We said let's go live this experience and let's see what comes out (.) not as a refusal of Italy but as a further possibility". At several times during the interview, she highlights her husband and her are learning a lot, professionally and personally. Speaking about her workplace in London, she comments "and I picture myself in fifty years I will still be learning something". Such is her willingness to learn that even of her first and very hard job in Wales, where she was part of the security team of a dangerous steel plant she describes as "Mordor's valley"<sup>7</sup>, Gemma nevertheless comments "It has been important for my training".

The awareness of having come to the UK to learn and build her career makes Gemma interested in the UK and willing not only to stay there but to exploit and enjoy such opportunity as much as possible. Speaking about her goals and attitude towards the UK, she says "I did not fly away from Italy I am not a refugee thus (.) thus I came willingly with an interest to know this country". Here, Gemma uses the word *interest* in connection to her engagement to understand the host country where she lives. Her migration strategy as a *searcher* is founded on learning; and, despite all difficulties, she is learning a lot in the UK: this correspondence allows Gemma to make sense of her difficulties as part of a process, a sort of developmental path. All this directly affects her engagement with the UK; Gemma is willing to learn and understand where she is and to grasp what is good of this country, as she puts it in other parts of the interview. She says living in the UK as a migrant has given her "that additional eye" to look at reality in a fuller way. This way of making sense of the situation is closely connected to *learning* (she now "sees more" of reality) and *identity*: an additional eye is almost a "physical change" and something which is bound to stay even if

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<sup>7</sup> Gemma refers here to the geography of *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. Tolkien. Mordor is the land where the main negative character lived.

she will go back to Italy at some point. In Gemma’s case, then, we see how the processes of learning, identity and sense-making (Zittoun and Perret-Clermont 2002, see section 2.1) are closely connected and how learning may affect interest and engagement with the host country. The concept of migration strategy allows to hypothesize that these three processes are combined in specific ways depending on the migrant’s profile. In the case of “Gemma the searcher”, learning is the original attitude which determines sense-making (even of difficult situations) and identity. In connection to her migration strategy, thus, learning is the fulcrum of her profile and of her interconnection between learning, sense-making and identity.

At the level of symbolic resources (see section 2.1), there is one aspect which especially qualifies Gemma’s engagement with the UK and her readiness to know more about the country she has moved to (see Excerpt 1). When asked about her favourite books, Gemma mentions Graham Greene (line 3) and then Nick Hornby (line 31); because she had few occasions to meet “real British” people, as she explains at 17-25, she reads these books in English and, via the language (6), tries and reconstructs the mind-set of the British people, their experience (20) and “how people think” (17).

Excerpt (1)<sup>8</sup>

Gemma	1	Boo:ks as soon as I got here as soon as I was able to read in English: I tried and
	2	read (.) one of my favourite (.) authors (.) but this time in the original language it’s
	3	Graham Greene
Q	4	Ah! Okay
Gemma	5	And (.) because I lik- I mean I liked getting close (.) to their mindset (.) I mean
	6	via the language via their writing (.) looking (.) I mean reading books when you
	7	are in the same context as the author who writes (.) and: (2) well you understand
	8	much more you understand:: well then hence I chose a bit of English authors (.)
	9	this (2) I started reading something: by a Welsh author but it was poetry so: it was
	10	Dylan Thomas who is from Swansea where I was but (.) it was poetry so (.) it
	11	didn’t capture my attention (.) then I was also excited because I was able to read
	12	books in the original language so: I liked it very much ( )
Q	13	( ) But eh: (2) eh (.) well okay anyhow Graham Greene as a way of: (.) I mean to
	14	find him again you knew this author already
Gemma	15	Yes
Q	16	A way to find him again
Gemma	17	Yes in order to understand the place the territory again how people think also
	18	because (.) I MISSED (.) really (.) I mean (.) having encountered very few people
	19	especially in Wales (.) hh I mean how should I say (.) not having the possibility to
	20	know about the people’s DIRECT experience (.) I mean of British English Welsh
	21	whatever (.) eh somehow I wanted to go out and look for it and I should either

<sup>8</sup> In Excerpts 1 and 2, “Q” refers to Question. The respondent is indicated with her pseudonym. Line numeration is relative to the extract only (and not to the entire interview).

	22	have watched EastEnders <sup>9</sup> but (.) that was depressing (.) or: the other thing was to
	23	go and get I mean since televisions feeds you with what it wants while you can
	24	choose books then I went and chose something which I knew that (.) that I liked
	25	already certainly it is about a different period seventy years ago maybe more (.)
	26	but it was a first approach I liked it
Q	27	And afterwards did it really help you in your experience afterwards? (.) I mean
	28	here or with your colleagues from London in any moment
Gemma	29	Mmh hh actually not really it helped me more when I then started to read (.) more
	30	contemporary things maybe by Londoners and when I as soon as I moved to
	31	London (.) for example I read Nick Horn- Hornby (.) and::=

Gemma's use of a symbolic resource such as English novels in connection to her interest for learning about the UK is all the more interesting if it is contrasted with another strikingly opposite example. Hasina (30 years, 1 daughter) comes from a large city in India. Her husband works in an IT company and he has been relocated in London with a temporary contract. Hasina followed him to London; she worked for some months as an academic researcher and then stayed at home after giving birth to their daughter. At the level of migration strategy, Hasina is a *hamster*: she and her husband view their stay in London as temporary and plan to go back before their daughter starts education. Her friends are mostly from Indian origin; she says her colleagues at work and other non-Indians had been helpful but the relationships have remained "formal". The few books Hasina displays on her bookshelf at home are travel guides about London; at the level of symbolic resources, thus, she seems to make sense of her situation more as a long stay as a tourist than as settling in the UK; her interest in the UK and her learning processes seem therefore limited by her migration strategy. Also in this case, the concept of migration strategy helps define a profile in which learning, sense-making and identity are connected in a specific way. For Hasina, her way to make sense of her migration as a one-off act is the fulcrum of her profile; her identity and learning processes are connected to such "mind-set", as she defines it.

#### 4.2 Petra from Poland: Pottery to feel a Londoner

Petra (35, 2 children) from Poland explicitly links identity and learning, the possibility to learn being the main reason why she now feels a Londoner. She came to London in 2001 to visit her sister. Eventually, however, her sister went back to Poland while she stayed over; when she got married to a Polish, he followed her to the UK and he now works in a construction company. Petra has two children who were both born in the UK. At the moment of the interview, she was a stay-at-home mum; yet she was doing volunteering work in her children's school and she was training to become a teaching assistant. In terms of migration strategy, Petra oscillates between being a *searcher* and a *stayer*.

Excerpt (2) reports Petra's answer to my question about her intention to request a British passport. Since she has been a resident in the UK for more than five years, she could apply for citizenship. Petra chose not to do it and justifies her decision, at first, in terms of her new



hybrid identity: “I DON’T feel more British I feel more Londoner” (line 2); from 6 to 9 she discusses her stance on her identity and explains why it is possible to feel a Londoner without being British. At line 11, she goes back to my original question, justifying why she did not apply for a British passport. First, she describes migrants who apply for British citizenship in a negative way (lines 11-14); then she distinguishes herself as not needing more security because she feels “enough secure” in the UK (14-16). Upon my indirect question at 7, she starts speaking about the reasons why she likes London. Interestingly, most of these reasons are linked to the possibility to learn and develop in her professional and personal life. At 20, she emphasizes that London allows to “move on”. Linguistically, the verb “to move on” presupposes a dynamic process, and suggests that Petra feels on a path towards her personal development. By contrast, Poland is repeatedly described as a place where one is stuck (see for example lines 20-22, 26-29 and 41-42).

Excerpt (2)

Petra	1	The fact is because you know I don't have a citizenship we didn't we never
	2	applied (.) that's why I DON'T feel more British I feel more Londoner/
Q	3	Yes
Petra	4	I still feel like a: mix of people who live here (.) that's maybe
Q	5	Yeah so you: are not concerned with=
Petra	6	=I'm not connected actually to British people because this is actually for me the:
	7	different I'm from Poland and I'm Polish they're British (.) I'm more Londoner
	8	because I was saying there's people from all over the world here and then (.) I just
	9	live with them
Q	10	And why did you=
Petra	11	=ah because you know we don't (.) because we don't have to now (.) it does
	12	nothing for me (.) it doesn't matter really (.) I don't fff ah some people some
	13	people apply because they can have a council flat or I don't know if that for that
	14	(.) this is the reason why people actually apply hh or: (.) fff we don't have to we
	15	just we feel I because they don't maybe they don't feel enough secure (.) I feel
	16	enough secure in this country I can you know (.) I can find a job (.) easily (.)
Q	17	Si yes (.) and you like the fact that London is made up=
Petra	18	=yes for that kind of people like me (.) to just meet the other people to just mh
	19	explore your things and I just (.) meet other people just yeah I don't know and
	20	meet other people and just and MOVE ON that (.) living in Poland eh: (.) you
	21	have to sacrifice so many things if you have eh for example hobbies or you need
	22	to have lots of money hh (.) to just eh: (.) do what you really want in this country
	23	it's much easier (.) for example even these (.) silly courses in [...] college (.) I
	24	would never think about it at home (.) to do a pottery: course (.) and here (.) in
	25	[...] „cause it's just next to my house I can just jump in do a pottery course just
	26	because I want I want to see what is it or do some painting course in Poland (.) oh
	27	my god it's probably I would have to go to some (.) eh: big town because: eh:

	28	people from the: little towns or the countryside they don't have the opportunity (.)
	29	and the older people the older people just stay get home (.) and I think to do study
	30	when I when I when I were children (.) finally just grow up I think it to do some:
	31	proper study to do something mo- more for myself (.) that's what I like about this
	32	this town there's so many opportunities in this town (.) and so many: and art hh
	33	and the crafts and everything and you know?
Q	34	Yes I [understand
Petra	35	[This that's why that's why it's so it's so still exciting and it will be exciting for
	36	EVERY (.) age for every group of age you know for there's something for the
	37	older
	38	people something for the young people is (.) for everyone
Q	39	Yes yes no I understand that because also for us it was a bit of a: land of
	40	opportunities
Petra	41	Yeah! Exactly! We're not in a ( ) eh eh we're not left in a ( ) like in Poland (.)
	42	you stay at home and look after your children and when you're retired no! you're
	43	just (.) get your life and move on (.) people go travelling from here (.) they're
	44	moving I don't know to Spain or Italy the nice hot countries to just relax and (.) in
	45	Poland people don't go (.) don't go out my parents hardly go to a restaurant (.)

As in Gemma's case, also for Petra, learning, sense-making and identity are tightly connected. For Petra, the connection between learning and identity is very explicit. She directly positions herself as a Londoner, arguing that her new identity can be combined with her national origin—"I am Polish", she says at 7. At the same time, when asked about the reasons she likes London, she mentions the possibility to "move on" and develop professionally and personally at all times. What makes London exciting is the plethora of learning opportunities which are within reach. Petra mentions "silly courses" (23), like pottery, at a local college; she is not excited because she is particularly interested in pottery but because she could "just jump in do a pottery course just because I want I want to see what is it" (25-26).

In Petra's case, her migration strategy, which was very open-ended at the beginning, has been modified by the opportunity to learn. Petra makes sense of the rupture of international migration and the problems it necessarily implied (she mentions, above all, her parents and in-laws wishing them to go back) as a positive opportunity and an "exciting" one. Because of the possibility to learn and move on, Petra is inclined to become a *stayer* and remain in the UK, even though the possibility to go back at some point in the future is not excluded (Petra and her husband bought a flat in London and another flat in their country). In this case, thus, one may observe how learning affects a migrant's strategy, her way of making sense of a situation and even her identity. Petra's profile has changed over time, with learning progressively becoming the fulcrum determining the reasons why she wants to stay in the UK (sense-making) and her hybrid identity.

Learning is a precondition for Petra's interest in London; more, it is the reason why she likes London and she is more confident, as she puts it, that they might remain there forever.

This case also shows the tight connection between engagement and interest. In fact, Petra's professional career as a teaching assistant in the UK institutions derives from her interest in her host country and the English language.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, I have considered the role of learning as a precondition for migrants' interest in their own country and for their consequent engagement. This topic has been approached via a qualitative study of a corpus of in-depth interviews to international migrants all living in London, in the pursuit of revealing complexities and nuances of the learning-interest-engagement relationship.

I have shown that, following the rupture of international migration, individuals are living processes of transition characterized by the redefinition of their identity, and processes of learning and sense-making. Via the two paradigmatic cases of Gemma and Petra, I have shown that the possibility to learn offered by the host country is a key to the migrant's feeling at home; it bears an influence on her interest and engagement with the country's institutions and culture. Using the notion of *migration strategy*, I have also shown that in these cases learning becomes the fulcrum of a specific "migrant profile", influencing processes of sense-making and identity change.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Acknowledgement. I am grateful to Sara Cigada for her helpful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript; and to Martyn Barrett and Tania Zittoun for interesting discussions on these topics. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for his or her useful suggestions which improved my original manuscript.

This work is part of the project "Migrants in transition: an argumentative perspective" funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Grant PBT11-133595).

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#### Annex: Transcription conventions

Sign	Explanation
Eh:	Lengthening of preceding vowel is indicated by colons
A::nd	Longer lengthening of preceding vowel
(.)	Pause of one second or less
(3)	Pause of more than one second (the duration in seconds is indicated)
↑	Rising intonation (questions)
/	Slightly rising intonation (suspension)
↓	Falling intonation (exclamations)
YOU SHOULD	Majuscules indicate emphasis
<i>(looking at T)</i>	Essential non-verbal elements and actions are indicated in italic inter brackets
[...]	Omitted from transcription
( )	Inaudible/incomprehensible

University of Surrey, School of Psychology  
 Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences  
 AD Building  
 Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH, United Kingdom  
 E-mail: sara.grecomorasso@gmail.com