# Civic Engagement as a Response to Economic Exclusion Among Immigrant Women in Montreal

**BMRC-IRMU Webinar**

*Migrant Resilience in Canadian Cities: People, Institutions and Policies*

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# Presentation Outline

① Introduction: Conceptual framework and (short) literature review: Citizenship, Immigration, Civic engagement & Labour market participation

② Data and Methods

③ Findings (1) Interactions and competition between respondents' civic engagement and economic participation

④ Findings (2) Civic engagement as a response to exclusion from economic citizenship

# Citizenship, Immigration, Civic Engagement & labour market participation

- Exploring immigrants' sense of citizenship
  - Opposing perspectives on citizenship: *formal* (top-down) vs. *substantive* (bottom-up)

"(…) in the narrowest sense of formal legality, an individual's citizenship status is strictly granted by the state. But this can mislead us into thinking that citizenship can be understood, even in preliminary terms, without recognizing the economic and market dimension already embedded within the public sphere and the state. Moreover, it tells us little to nothing about how citizenship actually works, not de jure 'on the books", but de facto, "on the ground", where market relationships and civil societies are always present and entangled with questions of equality and inclusion – or exclusion" (Somers, 2008, p. 36).

- **Civic engagement** and **paid employment** as ways of practicing substantive citizenship (Schulz, 2000; Shklar, 1991)

- Obstacles to economic integration of immigrant (women)
  - Family/household responsibilities (Dobrowolski & Tastsoglou, 2006)
  - Non-recognition of diplomas and credentials (Chicha & Charest, 2008)
  - Deskilling (Boulet, 2016; Ledent et al., 2017;)
  - Discrimination in hiring (Ralston, 1998; Tastoglou & Preston, 2005)
- Civic engagement as a springboard to (paid) employment (language skills, social capital, familiarizing with cultural codes, finding job opportunities)

# Data and Methods

**Research Question:**

- ***How is immigrant women's civic engagement related to their sense of citizenship, and more specifically to their economic citizenship?***

**Data collection**

- Semi-structured Interviews
  - Immigrant women who are (or used to be) involved in civil society organizations (Germain, 2004; Lister 2003)
  - Various Montreal neighbourhoods (Germain, 2004; Germain & Sweeney, 2001)
    - 28 women from 15 different countries
    - Living in Canada for 3-10 years
    - Involved in one or more organizations for at least 2 years
    - 15 citizens, 13 PR
    - 81 activities in 50 organizations (total)
  - Interviews:
    Civic engagement path, main reasons for getting involved, interactions with other activities & forms of participation

# Findings (1)

**Interactions and competition between respondents' civic engagement and economic participation**

*"When I came to [this organization], we finished the training [on integration] on Friday, I said well for the moment there is no work: do you have to do this training and go straight home? No. So I'm going to go directly to the organization to see if they have anything for the volunteers" (Mariame, 40, Ivory Coast).*

*" There are a lot of people who get involved at the beginning to get an experience because they don't have a job at the beginning, and then when there is a job, well you quit. I think ... it's not for everyone ... it happens mostly at the beginning, when you arrive [in Canada]" (Dounia, 50, Algeria).*

- **Conflict between two « Social worlds » (Strauss, 1993)**
  - Moral
  - Material

# Findings (2)

**Civic engagement as a response to exclusion from economic citizenship**

- Involvement in civil society organizations as a « defensive strategy » (Siegel, 1970) to face economic integration obstacles

- Civic engagement as a (long term) strategy of belonging

*"(...) it was not the involvement alone that made me feel like a citizen. And when I stopped being involved, I felt more of a citizen than before, but not like now, because it's the work that made me feel like I belonged to society. So yes, volunteering helps, but (...) employment is the key" (Isabella, 34, Mexico).*

- Role of economic integration in developing a sense of citizenship

*"There are plenty of reasons why we can feel excluded from citizenship, because we cannot find work with our diploma, because we are constantly told that we are above all North African, Indian, Egyptian... (...) There are plenty of reasons why you can feel excluded, but I think economic integration remains one of the most difficult things. We don't feel welcome, we don't feel welcomed if no one wants our skills" (Fatna, 40 ans, Maroc).*

- Full citizenship → equal capacity + economic inclusion

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