Photographic Commitment Exploring Rugby-women’s Empowerment Through Multimedia Approaches

This project envisaged a participatory photo project in Sarcelles, an underprivileged suburb in the north of Paris. In a first moment, I made a six-month ethnographic fieldwork in which I made a series of photographs of the rugby players in the College Chantereine of Sarcelles, one of the most stigmatized High Schools of the city. Subsequently, there was a collaborative work narrative creation and photographic editing: we realized regular reunions in which we discussed the sense we wanted to give to the exhibition that would take place at the end of June 2017. During this period, I bought a series of sound and photography material in order to understand the experience of the rugby women in the field. In particular, I bought a Zoom H6 and other sound equipment to create a multimedia project. I realized during the project that the “collaborative” aspect of this research was based on the link between photographic production (disposable cameras) and sound recording. Most of the sounds were recorded by the rugby women themselves. I learned from them how to make sound recordings and in that way I was able to "enter" in some spaces that were "forbidden" for me as an "older man" (for example, the locker rooms). The large photographic exhibition took place in walls of the High School. By doing so, we wanted to highlight the engagement of the young rugby women. We posted 23 pictures of 3x4 meters on the walls. The multimedia project was completed by the production of
a "photographic film" in which the images were mixed to the sound that I captured during the fieldwork (ambiance sound and interviews). A vernissage (exhibition preview) was prepared and open to the public. During this event more than 100 people participated to the encounter: families, inhabitants of this city, politicians and journalists were present at the projection of the photographic film and the launching of the exhibition. At the end of the project, each rugby women received a series of photographic paper prints. These were used to create new narratives, to keep memories and to feedback a material piece of the photographic experience we realized together. Finally, the multimedia project was awarded with the Prix du diaporama sonore 2017 avec Libération et Fisheye, the "Sound-Photography Slideshow Award 2017" by Libération (one of the biggest newspapers in France) and Fisheye Magazine (one of the biggest specialized magazine in photography). This allowed a great diffusion of the project: it was on the top 10 of the most viewed articles on Libération during two days, it had more than 30000 views (on the different video supports) and it was shared more than 2000 times on the social media. This large diffusion, was really appreciated by the rugby women, some of them were interviewed by some local media about the project. Colombia - Bogotá In Colombia the photographic research was intended to follow more or less the same structure of the French project. The funds were used mainly used in the airfare, meals and local transport during the two months of the fieldwork. However, the project didn't happen as expected. After two months of photographic fieldwork between July and September in the Minotauros Rugby Club - one of the biggest and best known teams of the city - I tried by all means to propose and realize a photographic exhibition with the group. However, they were not really interested in the realization of a participatory project. In Colombia, there are no High School rugby clubs. The players are mainly middle and upper-class workers and private university students. They were less available and they were also less interested in developing a participatory project to highlight their engagement in rugby. In September and November, I propose an ephemeral exhibition in two places, the Military University and the Ministerio de las Telecomunicaciones (National Department of Communications) but the propositions were rejected. I created a website of this project in which the information and the images are available: www.therugbywomen.com

Testimonial about Benefits of Fellowship

By the one hand, in Sarcelles, the participatory project worked really well: the rugby women were really interested and implicated in the realization of the multimedia project. It was largely diffused and thanks to the support of this fellow I was able to produce a large format exhibition. In Colombia they were less implicated. They accepted me as a photographer. They wanted a photographic documentation of their experience but they were not interested in doing a participatory project with me. This fact allowed me to interrogate the sense of "collaboration" in a photographic fieldwork. A participatory project is not always the best way to understand and explore people's experience. In Sarcelles, the realization of a participatory project in a high school where students come from low-income and stigmatized neighbourhoods, was a means to get people together. The exhibition and the diffusion of a multimedia project was a way to challenge the social stereotypes against them. Therefore, the SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship was an empowering experience to explore rugby-women's lives through engaged and collaborative photographic practices.