



Governmental Support for Migrant Voluntary Organizations: An Exploratory Framework of Transnational Collaboration*

Apoyo Gubernamental para Organizaciones Voluntarias Migrantes: Un Marco Exploratorio de Colaboración Transnacional

ADRIÁN MARCELINO VELÁZQUEZ VÁZQUEZ¹, JENNIFER NICOLE NEWMAN²

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Abstract

State governments in Mexico provide increased levels of services to their native population residing in the U.S. One of the most prominent ways in which state governments engage with the migrant community is through the creation and consolidation of voluntary organizations. This paper intends to gather and review available data for an exploratory analysis of the voluntary organizational model supported by the Guanajuato state government and the services they provide. The methodology involves analyzing public documents and publicly available information along with original data obtained from in-depth interviews with state government officials and community leaders in charge of U.S.-based voluntary organizations that participate in this initiative. The multiple deficiencies in physical structure and availability of volunteers and resources restrict the systematic delivery of services to the migrant community. Moreover, due to the inherent nature of the target population, their efforts have limited success in promoting integration/adaptation of Mexican migrants to the United States. However, since the available data is limited, more research is needed to further our understanding of these dynamics.

Keywords: Migration, Ethnic nonprofit organizations, Voluntary organizations, Transnational collaboration.

Resumen

Los gobiernos estatales en México gradualmente aumentan los niveles de servicios proporcionados a su población nativa residente en Estados Unidos. Una de las vías más destacadas en las cuales los gobiernos estatales se relacionan con la comunidad migrante es a través de la creación y consolidación de organizaciones voluntarias. Este trabajo pretende recopilar y revisar los datos disponibles para un análisis exploratorio del modelo organizacional de voluntariado, respaldado por el gobierno estatal de Guanajuato y los servicios que ofrecen. La metodología emplea el análisis de documentos públicos e información de dominio público junto con datos originales obtenidos por medio de entrevistas exhaustivas con funcionarios del gobierno estatal y líderes comunitarios a cargo de organizaciones voluntarias en Estados Unidos, que participan en esta iniciativa. Las numerosas deficiencias en la estructura física y en la disponibilidad de voluntarios y recursos, restringen la prestación sistemática de servicios a la comunidad migrante. Además, debido a la naturaleza inherente de la población analizada, sus esfuerzos han sido limitados al promover la integración/adaptación de los mi-

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¹ Associate Professor, Department of Public and Health Administration, College of Business and Public Management, University of La Verne, La Verne, USA. Licenciado en Derecho, Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico, PhD. in Public Affairs, University of Texas at Dallas, USA. e-mail: avelazquez@laverne.edu

² Lecturer, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, College of Health and Human Development, California State University, Northridge, USA. Bachelor of Science, Biology, Ohio University, USA, Doctor of Public Administration, University of La Verne, USA. e-mail: jennifer.newman@csun.edu

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grantes mexicanos a los Estados Unidos. Sin embargo, dado que los datos disponibles son limitados, se requieren más investigaciones para seguir comprendiendo estas dinámicas.

Palabras clave: Migración, Organizaciones étnicas no lucrativas, Organizaciones voluntarias, Colaboración transnacional.

Introduction

Migration to the United States is a common contemporary occurrence. Every year, hundreds of thousands of migrants move to the U.S. with the expectation of a better life (Migration Policy Institute, 2007). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2023 the migrant share of the U.S. population will reach 14.8 percent (51 million), the highest level in American history (Zeigler and Camarota, 2015). From there, the migrant population is projected to continue to grow at a rate nearly four times faster than the native-born population, reaching 15.8 percent (57 million) of the total U.S. population in 2030, 17.1 percent (65 million) in 2040, and by 2060 nearly 1 in 5 U.S. residents (78 million) will be foreign-born (Colby and Ortman, 2015). These projections underscore the importance of exploring alternate methods of service delivery to the U.S. migrant population, especially since the census reports that these numbers are largely driven by legal rather than illegal migration (Zeigler and Camarota, 2015).

Mexican migration is particularly prominent nowadays (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Consequently, the Mexican government holds a distinct interest in the migrant population residing in the U.S. due to their perceived economic power and increased vulnerabilities (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2010). Thus, it provides support and services through a network of consular facilities (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2011). However, it cannot realistically provide for all the needs of a large population outside of the Mexican territory.

Along with the influx of migrants, nonprofit and voluntary organizations multiply in order to provide services and to help people settle into their new environments. The proliferation and

consolidation of ethnic/migrant nonprofit and voluntary organizations in the U.S. has been rising “in the last three decades in a more open and accommodating society” (Hung, 2007, p. 707). However, due to the nature of Mexican migration, traditional avenues for interaction and integration to mainstream practices is not always available (Velázquez Vázquez, 2011).

Problem statement

The authors of this study attempt to gain further insight into Mexico’s unique approach to service delivery, which transcends formal jurisdictional boundaries and national borders. The Mexican government has taken an active role in helping its migrants transition to life in the United States by offering a range of programs and services designed to eliminate barriers to integration in the areas of education, civic engagement, and health care (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2015). Over the past decade, Mexico has expanded the functions of its 50 U.S. Consulates to include services aimed at improving the health and general welfare of Mexican migrants in the United States. These efforts are largely driven by the assumption that better integrated migrants are also more capable of contributing to Mexico’s economic growth and development; thus, there is a strategic incentive for Mexico to invest in and maintain ties with its diaspora. Moreover, the United States stands to gain from Mexican government-led integration initiatives that alleviate voids in the U.S. social welfare system caused by eligibility restrictions, funding deficits, and lack of experience with migrant populations (Laglagaron, 2010).

Furthermore, state governments in Mexico have increasingly been involved in providing services and activities to their native populations. One of the most prominent ways in which state governments engage with the migrant community is through the creation and consolidation of nonprofit and voluntary organizations (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2010). However, in-depth research on this topic is rather limited, creating challenges to understand the structure

and development of support networks and even more difficulties when it comes to determining effectiveness and efficiency of the services provided. The authors of this paper aim to begin an exploratory framework that allows identifying key features of the programs and dynamics that revolve around Mexican migration to the United States, through the lens of voluntary organizations. Therefore, the research question broadly analyzed in this paper is: What are the features and services of ethnic voluntary organizations sponsored by Mexican state governments?

Due to the lack of clarity and scarce availability of information, the purpose of this study is to provide an exploratory description and analysis of migrant networks and their relationships with U.S. based non-profits, voluntary organizations, and/or governments in Mexico. As a starting point, the state government of Guanajuato in Mexico has been selected for this analysis as it is one of the states that annually contributes a high number of migrants to the U.S. Given this phenomenon, the state government of Guanajuato has an interest in providing services and resources for Guanajuato-born Mexican migrants living in the U.S. It also needs to maintain contact with these migrants to provide alternatives for the use of remittances, as it is the “most benefited state” when it comes to receiving said remittances (Rangel, 2017). With the addition of other state governments in Mexico using similar models to stay in contact with natives and provide services to their populations, the need to obtain more information on this topic is crucial (Cortes, 1998; Bielefeld, 2000). Ultimately, this work should provide useful information to conduct further research on this type of organizations, as well as allowing to expand the inquiry to other ethnic/migrant groups.

Ethnic Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations

In the United States, a vast array of public goods and services are provided by governments at the federal, state, and local levels. In

theory, citizens inform government of the goods and services they need through public discourse and the democratic process of voting. In practice, however, state and local governments throughout the country are finding traditional models of governance increasingly incompatible with addressing the complex needs of society’s most vulnerable populations. These challenges are often exacerbated by an evolving public demand for increased availability, quality, and delivery of services, without increased transactional costs (Shafritz, Russell and Borick, 2013).

As such, public administration has seen a rapid expansion of literature exploring innovative strategies for governing modern society including, for instance, contracting out local services to private entities (Hoppe, Kusterer and Schmitz, 2013; Petersen, Houlberg and Christensen, 2015; Smith and Larimer, 2013), coproducing service provision and design with citizens (Jakobsen and Andersen, 2013; Moon, 2015), and partnering with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or other non-profit entities for service provision (Peng, Pandey and Pandey, 2015; Schmitz and Mitchell, 2016; Shafritz, *et al.* 2013), to name a few.

Collectively, these examples contribute to the ongoing reinvention of public administration theory and practice, and are credited for promoting significant improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of government service provision, particularly at the local level (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2011). Nonetheless, as evidenced by the nascent body of human rights and social welfare literature (Cammatt and MacLean, 2011), disparities persist in the quality and distribution of public resources.

The growing scholarly research into effective service to the U.S. migrant population and the actual composition of organizations providing these services is unfortunately still lacking. In his analysis of Asian and Hispanic/Latino migrant nonprofits, Hung (2007) delineates a general profile of these migrant nonprofits. Generally, migrant nonprofit organizations have the dual purpose of facilitating “economic survival”

and “maintaining cultural identity” in the new country (Hung, 2007, p. 708). The author further develops a functional typography of migrant nonprofit organizations into the following categories: religious, cultural, service, and public interest.

While the majority of migrant nonprofit organizations were religious, migrant nonprofit service and public interest organizations had significantly larger budgets. Compared to the Asian community, Hispanic/Latino migrant nonprofits more often take form as service functional types. Lastly, migrant service organizations tended to be more recently established and “located in city communities with a more homogeneous ethnic population” (Hung, 2007, p. 708). Due to the nature of the work, Hung’s research provides a general profile of nonprofits and highlights the service orientation of Hispanic/Latino migrant nonprofits, but it does not provide details on the specific activities and scope of these nonprofits.

Similarly, but focusing on the “social welfare” aspect of transnational community activities, Poole and Negi (2007) argue that transnational communities work toward developing transnational civil societies capable of upholding “ethical systems on issues of social welfare and social justice applicable across nations” (p. 244). The authors separate the operations of transnational organizations using both macro-level and micro-level perspectives. As the name implies, macro-level organizations seek more systemic change, including policy agenda setting, resource development and redistribution, and inter-organizational collaboration to address “transnational sources of common problems” (Poole and Negi, 2007, p. 244). These macro-level organizations are akin to what Hung (2007) typified as the public interest functionality, since their organizing, financing, and sponsoring activities augment the visibility and voice of the migrant community.

On the other hand, micro-level organizations are what Hung (2007) typified as the service functionality. Poole and Negi (2007) described these organizations as “hometown clubs

and associations” defined by their “transnational, grass-roots philanthropic efforts in sending and receiving communities” (p. 245). As mentioned before, these formal and informal micro-level efforts encompass self-organizing communities that promote the creation of organizations that provide community-specific and culturally-competent services.

Due to the multifaceted issues migrants face, specific services may be strewn across various agencies. Furman, Negi, Schatz and Jones (2008) referred to this as the wrap-around model. This approach is particularly important for families in which the migrant laborer has left the country in search of work. For economically dependent mothers, the wrap-around model entails assemblage of a team that represents the various needs for the mother and her family to coordinate services, pool financial resources, and develop an appropriate service plan. For instance, a wrap-around team could coordinate services that provide safe and secure housing, education services for children, language services for the mother, coordination of medical and psychological care, and access to food. This model increases responsiveness and ensures that service recipients receive immediate, appropriate care (Furman *et al.* 2008).

Social Welfare Service Delivery

Social policies in the United States are generally designed to promote or enhance people’s welfare and ensure their well-being. These policies cover numerous aspects of people’s everyday lives, including income, health, housing, education, and safety (Livermore and Midgley, 2009). The scope of social policy governance can be far-reaching; it may include oversight for a specific social welfare program or may involve ensuring rights and interests of groups of people such as young children, elderly, disabled, or low-income individuals. Common funding streams include federal grants, state or local tax revenues, charitable contributions, or any combination of these.

Despite its complex and seemingly stable foundation, the U.S. social policy system is a relatively new addition to the governmental machinery. In earlier times, the function of government was merely to ensure law and order and maintain national defense. However, the U.S. government's involvement in social welfare policy rapidly expanded during the 20th century, largely thanks to the efforts of progressive politicians, trade unionists, and social reformers of the time (Jansson, 2001). Though the range and scope of the U.S. safety net has continuously evolved, its government programs and policies have generally focused around three main goals: (1) provide basic financial security, (2) protect vulnerable populations, and (3) promote equal opportunity (Nightingale, Burt and Holcomb, 2003).

Adedoyin, Boahmah and Moore (2014) broadly classify the services that migrants need into four areas: language, financial, psychosocial, and health care. Identifying and addressing these needs, the authors argue, require “a more collaborative effort involving all stakeholders” in order to “build capacity for immigrants to actualize their potential” (p. 682). While Adedoyin *et al.* (2014) do not recognize legal services as a core area, it must be mentioned that this is a vital service when dealing with undocumented Mexican migrants. Resource limitations and eligibility restrictions of current U.S. social welfare systems necessitate the service delivery and advocacy roles of new migrant-oriented voluntary organizations. However, the literature regarding the methods U.S. based voluntary organizations use to assess the needs of the migrant communities they serve, as well as the composition and effectiveness of actual services provided, remains limited.

Gleeson and Bloemraad (2012) suggest several factors may contribute to this gap in the literature. For instance, the authors argue that standard ethno-racial minority categories, such as African American, Asian American, and Latino, traditionally used to quantify and evaluate

migrant organizations, may inadvertently undercount or exclude certain groups from study. Moreover, legal issues related to citizenship or residency status make certain groups less likely to join migrant based voluntary organizations, and/or choose to participate in any type of formal inquiry regarding such issues (Gleeson and Bloemraad, 2012).

In a 2010 report describing Mexico's integration strategies for its U.S. based migrant population, Laglagaron (on behalf of the Migration Policy Institute) stated: “While evaluations of IME's¹ programs remain scarce, its projects offer a number of potential best practices in areas ranging from distance learning, outreach, civic engagement, and health care” (p. 2). Despite limited information on the outcomes of U.S. based migrant organizations, it is still vital to understand the dynamics under which Mexican state governments establish and support service networks that involve organizations outside of their jurisdiction. Consequently, it is important to establish a theoretical framework for subsequent analysis in this area.

Social Construction and Policy Design

Schneider and Ingram (1993), in developing the social construction of target populations framework, posited that policymakers analyze the political opportunities and risks of target populations and construct policy designs to reflect and perpetuate those political benefits and burdens. The framework may help “...explain why public policy, which can have such a positive effect on society, sometimes – and often deliberately – fails in its nominal purposes, fails to solve important public problems, perpetuates injustice, fails to support democratic institutions, and produces an unequal citizenship” (Schneider, Ingram and DeLeon, 2014, p. 105). In other words, the theory of social construction and policy design directs scholars to assess not only *who* shapes policy

¹ Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior or IME (Institute of Mexicans Abroad) is an independent department within the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

issues, but also *how* they do so, as symbolism and the strategic framing of political interests eventually give rise to socially accepted rules, norms, and institutionalized routines (Schneider and Sidney, 2009).

Moreover, policy designs can also influence how segments of the population come to view and understand their relationship with government. To that end, Schneider *et al.* (2014) offer a series of theoretical assumptions along with empirical examples from the literature to demonstrate the application of the social construction framework and to help assess “how policy design characteristics impact the political orientation and participation patterns of target groups” (p. 109). This evidence interacts to inform two central propositions within the theory: the allocation proposition and the feed-forward proposition. Both propositions are discussed next, along with some of the implications they may have for migrants.

Proposition 1: Allocation

“The allocation of benefits and burdens to target groups by public policy depends on the extent of their political power as well as their positive or negative social construction” (Schneider *et al.* 2014, p. 109). As suggested in this proposition, a given “target group” or “target population” (the recipient of policy benefits and/or burdens) is classified along two dimensions: social construction and political power. On the social construction dimension, individuals are considered on a gradient of undeserving to deserving. Likewise, on the political power dimension, individuals are perceived on a gradient of powerful to lacking power. This continuum establishes a policy space that separates various target groups into one of the four “ideal categories”: advantaged, contenders, dependents, or deviants (Schneider and Ingram, 1997, p. 108).

Implications for migrants

While legal migration has access to various government services, those are extremely limi-

ted for undocumented ones. This is obviously by design, since resources are limited but also because one can posit that unrestricted access to government services by unauthorized migrants may have negative implications for political actors, thus requiring categorization and/or distinction between socially constructed groups (i.e., citizens, legal permanent residents, undocumented migrants). These categorizations are evidenced in many of the U.S. immigration reform and social welfare policies, including the recent overhaul of the nation’s health insurance system through implementation of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). Though the ACA extended health care coverage to millions of previously uninsured individuals (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015), it does not provide universal coverage for all individuals residing in the United States.

Unauthorized migrants are the only group explicitly excluded from the ACA and therefore, cannot participate in the federally subsidized health exchanges nor the Medicaid expansion. Similarly, students, visitors, and temporary guestworkers who are legally present in the U.S. but are not legal permanent residents (LPRs) are ineligible for ACA benefits, as are recently arrived LPRs due to a five-year residency requirement implemented under 1996 federal welfare and immigration reforms (Gusmano, 2012; Liebert and Ameringer, 2013; Marrow and Joseph, 2015; Viladrich, 2012). Thus, within the federal institutional arena of health care, documentation status yields unequal access to resources.

Moreover, policymakers stand to gain substantial political capital from punishing unauthorized migrants as they are both negatively constructed and lack political power, thus placing them in the *deviant* category of the social construction and power typology. Accordingly, “...deviants make up a kind of permanent underclass in the United States and are blamed for many of the ills of society that might more accurately be attributed to the broader social and economic system” (Schneider *et al.* 2014, p. 112). Newton’s (2005) study on social constructions in

immigration policymaking further demonstrates this point, stating “when it comes to drafting and defending immigration restriction policy, legislators must carefully delineate who requires restriction and why. They accomplish this by constructing immigrant target groups as problematic and undesirable” (p. 164).

In connecting this conceptualization of target populations to the second core proposition of the theory, Ingram, Schneider and DeLeon (2007) emphasize that the manner in which target populations are treated is not just relevant at a given point in time. Instead, the policy treatment of target groups based on their dimensions of social construction and power has *feed-forward* effects.

Proposition 2: Feed-Forward

Policy designs become institutionalized over time, and as policy consequences feed-forward to discourage the political participation of negatively constructed groups and encourage the participation of positively constructed groups, policy designs come to exert a powerful reinforcement of social constructions, prevailing power relationships, and institutional cultures (Ingram *et al.* 2007, p. 106).

Implications for migrants

The current political climate in the United States that enhances the negative aspects of migration constitutes an example of how nativist movements tend to exacerbate the animosity towards migrants. However, this is not exclusive of contemporary times, as it is a regular feature of the political cycle in the U.S. Periods of welcoming Mexican migrants, as with the Bracero program in World War II, are counterpointed by restrictive measures that limit access to legal paths of migration (i.e., travel restrictions for certain migrants considered dangerous, conflictive, or categorized in any other negative way). Implementation of restrictive migration policies without added provisions for a guest worker program has inadvertently heightened illegal

migration, particularly from Mexico (Ciment and Pitts, 2015). Consequently, as unauthorized workers frequently occupy the most dangerous, low-paying and demeaning roles in local labor markets, their lack of legal status combines with a negative social construction “...to exacerbate their vulnerability to illness, injury, and violence as well as their likelihood of confronting tangible and intangible obstacles” (Willen, 2012).

Depending on the focus and social construction of migration (i.e., high-skilled v. low-skilled migrants, family ties v. economic migrants), public opinion could change or be adjusted to reflect a certain narrative. Such changes often influence other policies, making them either more or less restrictive, depending on the prevailing narrative. Moreover, Schneider *et al.* (2014) also suggest that public attitudes toward the target population, and thus, future policy designs, largely depend on the ways in which benefits are conferred; or more specifically, whether policy rules are universalistic or particularistic. To demonstrate their point, the authors posit that “...a particularistic policy granting a ‘path to citizenship’ for undocumented immigrants who have a PhD and work in a science, technology, energy, or mathematical (STEM) field would gain more public support than a universalistic policy that grants a ‘path to citizenship’ for all undocumented immigrants” (Schneider *et al.* 2014, p. 119).

It must be noted that social construction and policy design are very complicated by nature. It is not the intention of the authors of this study to present migrants in a specific way, rather to bring about awareness of the situations they face on a regular basis. This will allow presenting a more complete picture of their needs and a potential set up for determining the viability of the initiatives created by the Mexican government to address them, which are activities that go beyond the scope of this work.

Data and Methods

The authors of this paper use an exploratory, descriptive approach to analyze one model of

Table 1. Interviewees' Profiles

Location	Interviewee's Position	Role	Organization
Santa Ana, CA	Enlace	Liaison with the community	State Government
	Board President	Volunteer	Club de Oriundos
	Board Member	Volunteer	Club de Oriundos
Dallas, TX	Enlace	Liaison with the community	State Government
	Board President	Volunteer	Casa Guanajuato
	Program Coordinator	Volunteer	Casa Guanajuato
	Board Member	Volunteer	Club de Oriundos
Chicago, IL	Enlace	Liaison with the community	State Government
	Board President	Volunteer	Club de Oriundos
	Board Member	Volunteer	Club de Oriundos

Fuente: Author's own elaboration.

ethnic voluntary organization based in the U.S., which is supported by the state government of Guanajuato, Mexico. As such, the authors use a two-pronged approach for developing this case study:

Secondary data analysis

First, utilizing secondary data obtained from publicly available sources and analysis of official documents, it describes and sets up the parameters to discuss the organizational structure, funding processes, and community activities of these organizations. It also provides information on the role 'not-traditionally-international' governmental entities play in the composition and activities of U.S. based voluntary organizations.

Description of original data

Second, by way of obtaining original interview data, the authors present an exploratory and preliminary analysis on the development of service networks and actual activities these voluntary organizations conduct in conjunction with the state government of Guanajuato on American soil. The data have been obtained over a period of two and a half years from ten face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted mostly in Spanish with Mexican public officials living in the U.S. (called *Enlaces*), board presidents and members, as well as high-ranking volunteers of

these voluntary organizations, using a purposeful snowball sampling technique.

Due to chain referrals and preliminary work, it was established that the most active, and thus most appropriate, sites to obtain information on these service networks included the cities of Dallas, Texas, Chicago, Illinois, and Santa Ana, California, due to the proliferation of organizations that fall within the required categorization of this paper and the availability of state government officials (*Enlaces*). The interviews were recorded verbatim, transcribed, and translated accordingly.

Table 1 presents the number of people interviewed at each site and their position or role at the time of the interview. It must be noted that all interviewees requested their names to remain anonymous, due to the general belief that managing these organizations and engaging in these activities usually carries a level of vulnerability for the interviewees themselves. Moreover, the overall perception is that discussing these topics lends itself to political manipulation. Respecting their wishes, the authors have eliminated identifiers from their profile. As a consequence, all data is reported exclusively at the aggregate level. Additional information, when required, was obtained via e-mail or by phone follow-ups.

The structure of the data collection instrument offered an opportunity initially to inquire about different common themes and only slightly modified on-site to reflect the type of orga-

nization of the interviewee. The instrument was designed to provide opportunities for flexible discussion within the following categories: organizational structure, funding streams, and general activities (Appendix A). As the conversations unfolded, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed the interviewer to incorporate organically other issues into the conversation.

Limitations

Providing merely a descriptive account of these initiatives presents several challenges. Mainly, the lack of a definitive answer to the question of viability. The lack of demographic data for the undocumented migrant population makes this task even more difficult, as tracking their movements, such as access to formal venues of service delivery, adds to the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of this initiative. However, the authors of this work consider it is imperative to attempt to clarify the environment under which these voluntary organizations operate, as well as the role that the Guanajuato state government plays in this dynamic. In turn, this study will hopefully provide a useful starting point for future assessments of the program outcomes.

Furthermore, the limitations in this work extend beyond the difficulty to assess the relevance and efficacy of program outcomes (viability). Another limitation is the quality of data available. Any study is only as good as the sources of data that originate the inquiry. Due to the varied nature of the data and its origins (governmental sources, think tanks, non-profits, foreign government sources), contradictions and/or omissions may exist. While every effort has been made to crosscheck and analyze sources looking for confirmation, the possibility exists that some information may be unintentionally omitted or described inaccurately.

Lastly, as with any convenience purposive sample, there is high likelihood that the sample itself is not representative of the population. However, due to the fact that this is an exploratory study due to the lack of uniform data, this “approach is the only feasible one” that could be

used to further our understanding of these issues (Bryman, 2004, p. 99). In addition, the possibility of interviewing people who perceive themselves as vulnerable in their job or living conditions, creates a plausible condition that they may not be completely honest or forthcoming. If the researchers identify them in the study, their testimonies might be compromised. Since the purpose of this work is to establish a framework for analysis by obtaining truthful accounts and testimonies, to encourage participation and offer protection against problems for the interviewees, adequate measures to ensure anonymity and privacy to all participants have been observed at all times.

Case Selection and Justification

Background on Mexican Voluntary Organizations Based in the United States

During the 1970s and into the 1980s, Mexico played a limited role in engaging with its nationals living in the United States. During the 1980s, however, in response to reports of discrimination and labor-rights violations, several Mexican states began to formalize relationships with their diaspora. In 1985, Los Angeles based migrant groups with a shared place of origin, Zacatecas, Mexico, joined together to create one of the first transnational federations in the United States. The *Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos Unidos* was established as an umbrella organization and created a partnership between the governor of Zacatecas, mayors from several major cities, state legislators, and the U.S.-based hometown associations (HTAs). This allowed migrants the means to support infrastructure and service-delivery projects in communities across Zacatecas, as well as provide opportunities for cultural exchanges and political mobilization projects for the migrant populations residing in the United States (Laglagaron, 2010).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, other sending states such as Jalisco, Michoacán, Puebla, and Guanajuato, began adopting the Za-

catecas model and supported the formation of hometown federations in cities with high Mexican migrant concentration such as Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago (Portes and Zhou, 2012). These state-level programs and collaborative efforts represented a mechanism for Mexican migrants to remain connected with their hometowns or country of origin, while enabling Mexican states to interact with their diaspora in a more proactive and supportive setting.

Case Selection

The state of Guanajuato is located in the central region of Mexico. It is composed of 46 municipalities and is one the top five states with highest emigration rates to the U.S. (Zúñiga Herrera, Leite Neves and Acevedo Prieto, 2005). Even though recently those numbers have decreased considerably (Passel, Cohn and González-Barrera, 2012), the state government of Guanajuato has an interest in providing services and resources for Guanajuato-born Mexican migrants living in the U.S. Currently, close to fifty voluntary organizations of people from Guanajuato operate in multiple locations in the continental United States (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2012; Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2011).

Highly populated Mexican migrant areas even have state government officials permanently coordinating activities and providing services to these organizations. State government-paid public officials (commonly referred as *Enlaces*) reside in the U.S. and, as their name translates, act as *liaisons* with the migrant community. In the case of Guanajuato, as mentioned before, due to the high concentration of Guanajuato-born migrants, they serve three critical areas: Santa Ana, California, Dallas, Texas, and Chicago, Illinois. Their main purpose is to coordinate with volunteer organizations to create programs, provide services, and communicate with the state government (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2012). It is under these considerations that the authors of this work selected the activities of the Guanajuato state government for analysis.

Case Study: Guanajuato, Mexico

Next, using the example of the Mexican state of Guanajuato, the authors will attempt to provide insight into the research question: What are the features and services of ethnic voluntary organizations sponsored by Mexican state governments? The following analysis is not intended to present information as all inclusive, but rather as the foundational basis of further inquiry. The first part of this analysis relies on various archival and/or secondary data sources to collect information on the program activities and services offered to Guanajuato-born Mexican migrants living in the United States. More specifically, the study uses publicly available data from governmental sources, think tanks, non-profits, peer-reviewed scholarly journals, and foreign government sources to gather information related to the question specified previously. The most relevant information comes from official sources within the Mexican government, as well as other organizations and scholars that have investigated this topic before.

Organizational Structure

All the interviewees revealed participating at service-focused voluntary organizations, a finding that is compatible with the framework established by Hung (2007). These voluntary organizations, also referred to as "*Casas Guanajuato*" or "*Clubes de Oriundos*," use their existing resources to assist Mexicans living abroad in the transition to their new environment and to keep close ties with Mexico. This is not to say that Mexicans are the exclusive recipients of their services since they attempt to engage with the community at large with varying degrees of success.

However, data obtained from questions related to this area revealed a widespread lack of training, absent process formalization, and/or professionalization at the directive level. All interviewees report that organizations are composed exclusively of volunteers, with no part-time or full-time employees. It is indeed the informal

efforts of volunteers that serve as the foundation to start engaging the migrant community of their own hometown. Moreover, those organizing efforts usually imply that the continuation of work requires commitment from specific members. In all reported instances, there is no formal process to create a governing body. Instead, the foundational members or in some other instances, highly active members, end up taking on those roles de-facto, at least at the beginning.

As a consequence, boards are usually governing bodies that do not follow election protocols or succession planning. At least in one instance, this created such internal conflict that ended up pushing out the existing board members and replacing them with new ones. This is not surprising, as the informal relations of people who travel from some of the municipalities tend to take center stage at first, but as time passes, with the arrival of new migrants with different ideas, it can lead to tense organizational climates. *Enlaces* reported that those dynamics are typical for these organizations, as most board members lack formal education or training in these areas. One of the goals of *Enlaces* is to assist boards with the governance of the various organizations.

Furthermore, in most instances, board members were unaware of the intricacies of the legal system in order to operate as a registered nonprofit in the United States. Nonetheless, the better-established organizations, either in size or longevity, were either already a registered nonprofit or engaged in the process of becoming one. These results were usually attributable to external people that volunteered themselves to help with this process.

Also, predictably, these organizations rely on volunteers for most of their activities. Those volunteers engage in informal practices to form their own ad-hoc committees in order to perform specific tasks or carry out limited-term mandates. The frequency of these committees also varies depending on the particular engagement of the population at a determined moment. Interviewees also mentioned that they do not engage in strategic planning activities or planning

of any kind, as the level of volunteer participation and availability determined priorities for the most part. At this point, it is important to discuss funding streams for their activities and the kind of resources these organizations are able to generate.

Funding Mechanisms

Most interviewees reported a main source revenue: the collection of membership dues. All of those who mentioned this as the main source of revenue also expressed frustration with the volatility of such a revenue stream. This could be explained partly because of the transient nature of the members. Migrants tend to have less-stable living arrangements than their native counterparts, as Capps, Bachmeier, Fix and Van Hook (2013) posited. However, interviewees described as well certain dynamics within organizations that prevented them from getting an actual number of dues-paying members. Poor record-keeping and concealment/secrecy are the most often cited reasons for frustration.

Furthermore, interviewees also cited another traditional mechanism for revenue generation: donations. Upon further inquiry, interviewees admitted that donations are unpredictable and for the most part, unreliable. Even more, monetary donations are also not tracked due to their sporadic nature and small amounts. On the other hand, donations in-kind, while also rare, tend to be more visible and harder to hide. In one case, an organization claimed that the very building where they conduct their activities, was purchased and donated by the state of Guanajuato.

Well-established organizations also reported similar financial, as well as technical and programmatic support by the state of Guanajuato. While specific amounts were not revealed, interviewees reported that such support was vital for their operations and continued existence. Probing interviewees on that subject was fruitless, as all refused to discuss their organizations' finance plan or composition.

Again, this is not necessarily unexpected, as the amount of time it took to obtain face-to-face

interviews was a warning from the beginning. This dynamic speaks to the reticence of participants to engage in transparent discussions about their activities for fear of repercussions or information manipulation for political purposes. Such findings match similar observations reported by Meseguer and Aparicio (2012) in their own analysis of hometown associations, as they reported that projects tend to be financed first based on political preference and not necessarily communities' necessities. The dynamics observed here also coincide with the framework described earlier for social construction and policy design. More specifically, it relates to unequal effects of policy on target populations during the implementation of public policy (Schnider and Ingram, 1993, 1997; Schnider and Sydney, 2009; Schnider *et al.* 2014), which in this case affects migrants, it seems, due to the demographic concentration in certain areas.

Scope of Services and Activities

As referenced above, the services provided by these organizations vary greatly upon size, assets, and civic participation. The scope and types of services are also contingent upon the type and quantity of resources available to these organizations on a regular basis. The majority lack a formal physical space to engage the community, especially when the migrant population from a specific town is small and rely on the work of volunteers from their own homes. However, the most successful ones have a physical presence in their communities (those with a significant number of migrants), especially when they are able to engage people beyond a nominal town label and/or when they engage people in the larger community in more systematic ways. These larger organizations rent or own buildings with office space, gymnasiums, and/or classrooms. Unsurprisingly, they also tend to have better organizational structures and direct support from the state government of Guanajuato.

In all instances, volunteers coordinate and, in many cases, implement governmental initiatives to support migrant-specific programs. The

government of Guanajuato supports programs in the areas of education, health, civic engagement, financial literacy, public works, and the provision of traditional state government services to migrants. *Enlaces* declared that such activities aim to integrate and build the social and human capital of migrants.

Civic engagement, culture, provision of state services, and education

Most organizations provide community activities that include cultural events, sports, specific job skills, and educational elements. Larger organizations are able to coordinate with the appropriate state governmental agency in Guanajuato to organize "workshops," where state officials travel to the United States to provide access to traditional state services that cannot be accessed easily through the Mexican consular network. It is here where *Enlaces* are crucial, as they provide guidance to the organization and the different government agencies to set up these collaborations. Some of the services provided on-site include the expedition of birth certificates and other official documents, as well as free enrollment in educational and vocational programs at a virtual university.

Cultural components are widespread in these organizations. Services aim to maintain the connections between Mexican migrants and their culture, while offering elements to understand and, whenever possible, incorporate American culture. One of the objectives is to provide context for new generations and to educate the non-Mexican population. The most common activities involve Spanish classes, history lessons, and traditional dance and music performances.

Voluntary organizations also promote sporting activities and programs. Participation in group and individual sports aims to integrate Mexican migrants into social environments. However, due to the lack of facilities to practice these sports, smaller organizations find it difficult to incorporate these activities in their scope of services.

Some of these voluntary organizations acti-

vely work toward providing Mexican migrants with an increased level of skills and knowledge. Diverse seminars and classes (on the ground and online) aim to expand the available resources for those without the ability or monetary resources to enroll in the American educational system. Multiple levels are offered, ranging from elementary education, financial literacy, all the way to college degrees, with the purpose of providing a wide range of opportunities for as many migrants as possible. Unfortunately, the success of these educational programs is questionable due to the lack of qualified instructors, complicated logistics, available technology, and compromised legitimacy of educational credentials in the United States.

Some of the larger organizations try to provide mostly free professional assistance and counsel to navigate the complex American legal environment, since volunteers claim that a large part of the recipients are undocumented migrants, have limited English speaking abilities, or minimal formal education. In more intricate situations, which requires continuous legal advice, the services are provided at a lower cost than market-based fees. The justification for these activities revolves around the idea of protecting the rights of vulnerable people, which goes along with the assertion that services are provided to enhance human and social capital of migrants made by *Enlaces*.

Public works

In most cases, services targeting Mexican migrants usually include a component that would benefit their communities of origin. A multitude of projects aim to advance those communities in different areas of interest, which typically include economic development, educational and healthcare facilities, public works and other infrastructure, as well as improved general living and working conditions in communities of origin. Coordination and cooperation with all levels of the Mexican government is commonplace and *Enlaces* also play an important role. *Enlaces* take the lead in educating migrants about availa-

ble options, coordinating joint activities, presenting projects to the state government for consideration, and managing project expectations.

It is in these areas where *Enlaces* appear to have the most impact, as they coordinate and lead the efforts of migrants to participate in the “3x1 Program for Migrants.” The program encourages public-private partnerships to fund public works projects at the migrants’ request in their communities of origin. The purpose of the program is to increase coverage and the quality of basic social infrastructure in localities with high levels of poverty and high levels of immigration through collaborative development projects.

The 3x1 program formally started in 2002; however, some forms of this initiative have been around since 1986. The program in its current iteration is coordinated by the federal government, through the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL, for its initials in Spanish), with the assistance of states and municipalities, as well as migrant voluntary organizations (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2017). Currently, 29 out of 32 Mexican states participate in the program (Guajalato being one of them), in conjunction with more than 1000 voluntary organizations located in 40 US states. Support for projects fall under one of four categories: Social Infrastructure Projects, Community Services Projects, Educational Projects or Productive Projects (community, family, individual or entrepreneurial training) (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2017).

While SEDESOL maintains a physical presence in the United States (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2017), *Enlaces* mentioned that the scope of projects involves collaboration only with “registered” organizations in order to be able to participate in the program. The program encourages public-private partnerships to fund municipal public works projects where the only requisite is the technical viability of the project, according to interviewees. However, a more thorough review of available information revealed other requisites for eligibility and funding. Typically, the total cost is divided and paid for by the

migrants, federal, state and municipal governments in Mexico, in four equal portions for most infrastructure projects. Other financing formulas apply according to the type of project, but that is the most common. Specific results for the state of Guanajuato were not discussed with interviewees, as it fell out of the purview of their knowledge and beyond the scope of this work; but there was a very positive perception of the program by both migrants and *Enlaces*.

Discussion

The findings in the previous subsection coincide with the assertions of Adedoyin *et al.* (2014) regarding the types of services and activities that migrants need. The only exception, as noted earlier, is the provision of legal services as made evident by the data, since there is a large portion of the target population who has undocumented status or otherwise cannot afford or does not know how to navigate the American legal system.

Regarding the provision of mechanisms for education, Mexican migrant adults and children living in the United States face unique challenges with formal educational attainment at all levels. In 2011, 59 percent of Mexican migrants ages 25 and older in the U.S. had no high school or GED diploma. This is substantially higher than the 31 percent share of migrants overall and the 11 percent of U.S.-born adults (Stoney and Batalova, 2013). As a group, Mexican-born adults were also less likely to be university graduates (6 percent) compared to native born (30 percent) and foreign-born (29 percent) populations (Zong and Batalova, 2016).

Mexican migrant children living in the U.S. also face significant educational challenges, especially for English language learner (ELL) students and those who have parents with undocumented legal status (Glick and Yabiku, 2016). A growing body of literature demonstrates that structural barriers such as unauthorized legal status of parents, overrepresentation of migrants in low-resourced communities and schools, and migrant parents' limited experien-

ce with navigating U.S. institutions, negatively impact migrant youth educational attainment and progress (Bean, Leach, Brown, Bachmeier and Hipp, 2011; Crosnoe, 2006; Telles and Ortiz, 2009). Moreover, Mexican-origin children entering kindergarten experience lower outcomes in math, reading, and language proficiency when compared to their native-born peers (Laglagaron, 2010). Thus, it is not surprising that many efforts are enacted to close that educational gap.

As scholars become more aware of the increasing presence of migrant-led voluntary organizations in the U.S., the impact of collective remittances on social welfare services and community development projects in sending nations is an objective of particular interest. Mexico's 3x1 Program for Migrants is perhaps the most notable example of this type of transnational co-production. However, the reviews on the effectiveness of the 3x1 program remain mixed.

For instance, Duquette-Rury (2014) suggests that 3x1 program participation improves citizens' access to public goods when compared to municipalities not participating in the 3x1 program. In the absence of 3x1 program participation, however, migrant households are able to utilize family remittance resources to improve their hometowns on their own. Conversely, Meseguer and Aparicio (2012) argue that HTAs are less likely to receive 3x1 program funding when their communities of origin have increased political competition. Thereby implying that 3x1 program funding allocation is heavily motivated by political influence rather than community need. This statement coincides with the various observations regarding the interviewees' restraint when discussing some topics and the request to remain anonymous for this project.

Furthermore, initiatives such as the 3x1 program have been scrutinized for pressuring HTAs to expand engagement in their places of origin despite insufficient leadership and organizational capacity to effectively do so (Escala Rabadan, Rivera-Salgado and Rodríguez, 2011). In other words, what was once considered a method for enhancing civic and social capital

among migrants living in a new and unfamiliar land, appears to be a target of government and/or political groups attempting to spread their own agenda. Expanding on this perspective, Kunz (2012) postulated that "...emigrants who organize and send remittances are rewarded with recognition, political influence, and funding... groups that are not organized and institutionalized are excluded from the [3x1] program" (p. 106). Such dynamics are also in line with the theoretical framework described by Schnider *et al.* (2014) and others, as the observations allow to confirm that actors frame policy based on their political interests, giving way to the norming of behavior through implementation of public policies that may not necessarily address the needs of the target population.

Conclusions

Observations from this work allow positing that most organizations depend on agent-based actions and not on sustainable community support. Their activities and programs are conditioned to particular interests and civic participation of represented groups, as well as political interests of governments. As a result, those factors compromise their effectiveness and engagement with the larger community. The main challenges that these organizations face include:

Uncertain or insufficient funding streams

Larger organizations rely on membership and service fees to continue operations. The vast majority are not registered as a 501(c)(3) organization (not-for-profit) with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, whose regulations limit the scope of the services and activities they can legally conduct. Moreover, it could be inferred that donations, monetary or in-kind, could be limited due at least in part to those restrictions. The services and activities are also subject to provisions of the state government of Guanajuato when it provides financial support. However, those provisions

appear uncertain and inconsistent as they are considered on a case by case basis and contingent upon the type of support the state concedes.

Unstable or unpredictable staffing

Volunteer participation is essential for these organizations as they provide personal and professional services and, in some instances, goods for the continuation of community activities. However, these organizations appear particularly vulnerable to the ebb and flow of volunteer participation. Another related issue is the lack of professional management for these organizations, which in turn affects record-keeping, accountability to members, and financial planning. While government officials interviewed for this project claim to provide assistance as needed, given the ratio of *Enlaces* in relation to the number of migrant voluntary organizations, such support is more than likely insufficient.

Transparency and accountability mechanisms

Another important factor to consider is the apparent subjugation and potential manipulation of organizational activities to political interests related to funding streams. Since traditional funding mechanisms are scarce and, at least in some cases, lack legitimacy, HTAs seem particularly vulnerable to undue influence. As a consequence, serious questions of accountability arise in the distribution and use of governmental funds. The issue is further compounded by the aforementioned lack of professional record-keeping, financial management, and lack of transparency.

Regardless of the challenges described, the authors also recognize the positive potential of these transnational collaboratives. The broad participation of transnational agencies has consolidated a network of services and support for the Mexican communities abroad. These networks are conceivably the biggest opportunity to expand reach within the Mexican community living in the U.S. and to provide a wider range of services. Managing such relationships and crea-

ting multiple, diversified delivery points speaks to the ability of Mexican officials to create and maintain collaborative networks. Especially since actors in these networks coordinate to deliver programs themselves, make facilities available, as in the case of larger or more well-established voluntary organizations, provide alternative funding streams, relevant expertise, additional connections to the community, and opportunities for increased volunteer contributions.

Since the recession of 2008 and for the first time in history, more Mexican migrants are leaving the U.S. than those who are arriving. This dynamic has created negative migration flows and rates that make it crucial to figure out a way to integrate Mexican migrants, who are choosing to stay in the U.S., into mainstream social practices. People need to develop ties to the host community beyond ethnic and cultural issues; ties that could be long-lasting and productive for all parties involved (Velázquez Vázquez, 2011). Consequently, the support and initiatives deployed by the state government of Guanajuato acquire relevancy as a bridge between communities, with tangible benefits that help Mexican migrants continue to be productive members of those communities. No longer is it possible to separate migrants' contributions to each community, as their activities are firmly entrenched in both. As a result, any program that contributes, directly or indirectly, to integration is very valuable and worthy of scientific inquiry to determine its viability and potential expansion in a more systematic way. This is not to say the authors of this work make an assessment of effectiveness, rather it is a recognition of the potential that transnational networks could have, as it relates to issues beyond provision of services.

The Future of this Research

While the focus of this study has been exploratory in nature, the implications for transnational collaboratives is evident. The main objectives would then involve deepening our understanding of the dynamics and issues that

Mexican migrants face once in America. From a public policy perspective, transnational collaborations such as these show promise for implementation on a wider scale and potentially, with other populations. However, more information is needed to determine the relative impact on minority communities and the long-term effects of these initiatives.

This study has also shed light upon the need to incorporate programs and tools that reach across organizational levels and, potentially, ethnic boundaries in order to establish inclusive practices. Thus, more empirical research is required to obtain information on specific program outcomes and outputs. Now that the main characteristics and processes of this collaboration networks have been gathered, future research can focus on developing an actual impact or outcomes evaluation of specific programs. Nevertheless, a more expansive inquiry related to programs effects is needed, including field work and a comprehensive perspective of specific program attributes. Researchers and practitioners need to create ways to engage civic participation to elicit sustainable institutional action. Expanding the inquiry to other types of ethnic volunteer and nonprofit organizations would allow the subsequent use of contrasting approaches that promote learning amongst this type of organizations.

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Appendix A Cuestionario

Misión/Visión - Estructura Organizacional

- ¿Cuál es la misión que guía a la oficina de Enlaces/Club de Oriundos?
- ¿Cuál es la visión a futuro de la oficina de Enlaces/Club de Oriundos?
- ¿Cuál es la estructura organizacional de la oficina de Enlaces/Club de Oriundos?
- ¿Qué tipo de personal ocupa?
- ¿Cuántos empleados/voluntarios ocupan?
- ¿Cuáles funciones desempeñan?
- ¿Qué tipo de legislación/regulaciones los rigen?
- ¿Cuál es el área considerada estratégica?
- ¿Qué tipo de planeación llevan a cabo?

Financiamiento

- ¿Qué tipo de estructura financiera utilizan?
- ¿Están registrados en los Estados Unidos como organización no lucrativa? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?
- ¿Qué tipo de apoyos financieros reciben por parte del gobierno del estado de Guanajuato?
- Esos apoyos financieros, ¿están supeditados a cumplir con requisitos predeterminados por el gobierno del estado de Guanajuato?
- ¿Ejerce el Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato algún tipo de auditoría o control sobre los recursos otorgados?
- ¿Cuál es la justificación jurídica para el otorgamiento de recursos a entidades sin fines de lucro que operan fuera del territorio mexicano?

Objetivos

- ¿Qué tipo de programas o servicios ofrecen?
- ¿Cuál es la población a quienes está dirigida este tipo de programas o servicios?
- ¿Existe algún programa de carácter oficial recomendado o subsidiado por el gobierno del estado de Guanajuato?