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Articles

Transnational social cohesion and migration in Guanajuato. A perspective in construction from the South

Cohesión social transnacional y migración en Guanajuato. Construyendo una perspectiva desde el Sur

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Abstract

How do migrant groups affect social cohesion, community values and the development of their communities of origin? To answer these questions, an exploratory survey was applied to 658 people, 21% of whom were returned migrants and/or their families. The objective was to identify the resources mobilized by migrants during their migratory trajectory based on the five dimensions that, according to Jane Jenson compose social cohesion. This work had two findings: migrant groups have sustained their community values and commitments in a structure of social linkages supported by family and friendship relationships, as well as a low recognition of national and subnational political institutions. Evidence also suggests that some elements of community participation that constitute this linkage structure are present simultaneously in multiple geographic spaces. This would reinforce a sense of multiple belonging and create a notion of transnational social cohesion and a research agenda to verify it.

Keywords: social cohesion, community, multiple belonging, transnationalism, international migration, return.

Resumen

¿Cómo afectan los grupos migrantes la cohesión social, los valores comunitarios y el desarrollo de sus comunidades de origen? Para responder estas preguntas se aplicó una encuesta exploratoria a 658 personas, 21% de las cuales eran personas migrantes retornadas y/o sus familias. El objetivo fue identificar los recursos movilizados por los migrantes durante su trayectoria migratoria con base en las cinco dimensiones que según Jane Jenson componen la cohesión social. Este trabajo tuvo dos hallazgos: los grupos migrantes han sostenido sus

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valores y compromisos comunitarios sobre una estructura de vínculos sociales apoyada en relaciones familiares y de amistad, así como en un bajo reconocimiento a las instituciones políticas nacionales y subnacionales. La evidencia sugiere, además, que algunos elementos de participación comunitaria que constituyen esta estructura de vínculos se manifiestan de manera simultánea en espacios geográficos múltiples. Esto reforzaría un sentido de pertenencias múltiples y crearía una noción de cohesión social transnacional y una agenda de investigación que lo verifique.

Palabras clave: cohesión social, comunidad, pertenencias múltiples, transnacionalismo, migración internacional, retorno.

Introduction

This work seeks to explain how migrants have formed transnational community ties from a social cohesion perspective. The topic contains a paradox: while transnationalism is conceived as the simultaneous and permanent contacts that keep migrants connected to their communities of origin and destination (Glick Schiller et al., 1992), social cohesion emphasizes, from the perspective of host countries, the economic, social, or cultural effects that highlight the difficulty of assimilating migrants within the established social order. The first perspective seeks to explain how migrants live their lives across borders that simultaneously connect two countries. The second perspective emphasizes the integration of national communities and the elements that sustain the national social fabric and therefore constitute a well-ordered society (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Jenson, 1998; Ratcliffe, 2012; Portes & Vickstrom, 2012). Using a historical perspective, this work follows the structures of social bonding that migrants have with their communities of origin to argue that there are social groups that have constituted a form of transnational social cohesion in the rural communities of southern Guanajuato.

Transnational social cohesion refers to mobile social groups that have woven dense social networks (Coleman, 1998) in which they support their sense of community belonging and have established shared values in multiple geographical spaces. The above makes it possible to propose the hypothesis that their forms of association and the subjective representation with which they reconstitute their community membership (Dickes et al., 2011; López Sánchez, 2016) have been based on two points. The first is the structure of social ties sustained fundamentally by family and friendship bonds and low confidence in the national and subnational political institutions (Portes & Vickstrom, 2012) existing in Guanajuato, first, and in Mexico, later. The second is that the structure of social bonding has historically manifested itself simultaneously in individual and family interactions existing in multiple geographic spaces, reinforcing a sense of multi-spatial belonging.

The concept of social cohesion explored in this work is defined by Jenson (1998) —Social cohesion is a process that sustains the social order in which individuals maintain shared values and a commitment to their community—. This definition has the national community as its unit of analysis. Its central concern is given by how the integration of the social fabric within a space geographically delimited by borders is sustained. Despite taking this definition as a basis, when focusing the analysis on mobile populations, it is necessary to ask how the spatial movement of a social group affects that process of community integration. How does this mobile group maintain community values and establish commitments in their communities before migrating, during the migratory process, and upon their return to their communities of origin? In other words, instead of being a characteristic of closed national spaces, insofar as borders delimit them, the structures of social bonding of migrant groups in transnational spaces are analyzed. Bonding structures are considered the individual attributes, relationships, and resources that make up social groups, which, in turn, determine the relationships between individuals and social groups, as well as individuals and society (Dickes et al., 2011). This makes it possible to assume that these bonding structures are maintained despite the division caused by borders by establishing a process that explains how migrant individuals and groups configure their relationships with the market, their families, and their communities in multi-spatial contexts. It also explains how migrants establish incomplete citizenship by being absent from their countries of origin and having limited rights in destination countries. As Anderson (2019, p. 2) points out, "it is possible to distinguish between the migrant in the law and migration policies, the migrant in migration statistics, and the migrant in the public debate".

The argument is constructed based on fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2016 that examined the following questions: how do migrants build their sense of community belonging by maintaining a multi-spatial life? How do they establish their political, economic, and cultural socialization activities in both countries? Finally, how have they adapted and readapted their community ties in space and time? By emphasizing how these elements have been historically constructed in the perception of migrants, in their daily interactions before migrating, during their stay in another country, and upon return to their communities of origin (Eckstein, 2015), the social order was identified based on a structure of social bonding that are maintained over time on a multi-spatial basis. The above implies that the migratory movement is sustained in a specific social relations process in which shared values, community commitments, and sense of belonging alternate regularly at different times and in different spaces. To introduce the argument of this work in the following section, the basic concepts used in the questionnaire and the methodology are presented. The third section provides the results of the fieldwork, which will lead to the discussion and conclusions.

Social Cohesion in the Mexico-United StatesImmigration Regime: Methodological Notes

One of the assumptions of this work is that the century-old migration from Mexico to the United States has structured different institutional arrangements or regimes that, formally or informally, have guided the political, economic, and social conditions. These regimes have also guided the national migration policies that correspond to each of the six periods identified by Durand (2016) that have characterized this process throughout its more than 100-year history.[1] They have somehow established a social order in which individuals maintain shared values and commit to their community (Jenson, 1998, p. 13) that alternate in different geographic spaces and communities (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). In this process, they have established a structure of economic, political, and social links that can be identified in the five analytical dimensions that make up social cohesion (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17; Jenson, 2010): *belonging/isolation*; *inclusion/exclusion*; *participation/apathy*; *recognition/rejection*; *legitimacy/illegitimacy*.

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[1] The idea of a migration regime was derived from the notion of a citizenship regime defined by Jenson and Saint Martin (2003, p. 80) "By the concept of citizenship regime we mean the institutional arrangements, rules, and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims-making by citizens".

The dimension of *belonging/isolation* refers to the feelings shared by communities that facilitate the integration of individuals. "A threat to social cohesion is associated with feelings of isolation from the community" (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17; Jenson, 2010). The *inclusion/exclusion* dimension is related to markets. A well-unified society ensures inclusion, according to the author, and implies equal opportunities, especially in labor markets, to create conditions of cohesion. Therefore, a risk to social cohesion is then associated with market exclusion. The *participation/apathy* dimension has to do with the different forms of community involvement and organization to assert their interests before national and sub-national governments (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17; Jenson 2010). The fourth dimension, *recognition/rejection*, establishes (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17) "the necessary mediation of differences over power, resources, and values that is ensured by institutions, whether formal or informal, public or private (...) that in different places or moments can be mediators or promoters of conflicts". Thus, the maintenance of social cohesion depends on the creation of institutions that contribute to, rather than undermine, the recognition of difference. This recognition is "defined as the feeling of citizens that others accept them and recognize their contributions to the community" (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17). Rejection and intolerance, on the other hand, as well as efforts to achieve an excessive level of unanimity, make states and communities less "livable". The last dimension, *legitimacy/illegitimacy*, Jenson defines as the fundamental role of political mediation (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17; 2010). Specifically, it refers to the State's capacity to manage conflict in a pluralistic society through "macro-institutions" that guarantee security, access to social programs, and necessary services to diverse communities. This group of intermediary organizations includes social services, political parties, government agencies, and civil society organizations, among others.

This social cohesion perspective contains elements that define who is part of the community and shares values built in social spaces that are closed and delimited by borders. This work uses these five dimensions to construct the items of a closed questionnaire and the topics of semi-structured interviews tested during the fieldwork. These elements helped to comparatively identify how migrants perceive their community ties before leaving Mexico, during their stay in the United States, and on returning to Mexico. Among them, this work focused on their conditions of inclusion in the market, their perception of the sense of belonging and the problems experienced in formalizing it when returning to or living illegally in the US, their participation in social and political organizations, the recognition and belonging of their communities, and the legitimacy/trust extended toward public institutions. A comparison over time, where possible, allowed the identification of how these bonding structures are maintained and expanded in a multi-spatial way, combining local, national, and transnational experiences.

The survey was applied to the migrant or a close relative of the migrant, such as spouses, parents, or children. The objective was to identify how the migrant felt welcomed by other community members, in which way and how long after returning to Mexico he or she was included in the market and in what conditions, and how he or she participated in community activities. Finally, this work aimed to detect how trust or distrust in their neighbors and different government or health agencies made them turn to them for help, to obtain identity papers for them or their children of age —especially those born or naturalized in the United States— to access social services and use financial institutions.[2] The data presented here are backed up by seven semi-structured interviews that included the migration history and the processes and problems of the reintegration of the interviewees —young high school and university students between the ages of 15 and 23— that were detected during the fieldwork. Although the document sometimes uses the concept of the returned migrant, it is not the interest of this project to focus on the migrant as someone who has concluded a migratory cycle, but rather to focus on the undocumented migrant in the United States who at the time of the interview had returned to Mexico.[3]

The municipalities studied were selected by comparing Guanajuato's results of the Migration Intensity Index 2000 and 2010 (Consejo Nacional de Población, Conapo, 2001; 2012) through two points: households that reported receiving remittances and those that reported having returned migrants. In both cases, the census question is constructed on households with remittances or returning migrants during the previous five years. Thus, this work identified Apaseo el Alto as a municipality with a high return and high reception of remittances. It was assumed that the returning migrants were the relatives of an economic-labor migrant and that that person was still in the U.S. sending money to his family, which would explain the apparent contradiction of the increase in households reporting return, with the increase in households reporting receiving remittances. For the cases of Tarimoro and Celaya —municipalities where there is a high level of return and where the reception of remittances has fallen— it was assumed that there was either a return of the entire family (Moctezuma, 2013; Vila Freyer, 2015) or a return of the economic-labor migrant, which would explain the reduction in remittances. Three rural communities were chosen in the three municipalities, with populations between 4 000 and 5 000 inhabitants, except for *Apaseo el Alto*, where surveys were also applied in the municipal capital, an urban community with 98 000 inhabitants.

The survey was exploratory;[4] 658 people participated, representing approximately 2%[5] of the rural community population. Since these are rural communities whose population is attracted to urban centers such as Celaya and Querétaro, priority was given to market days when the population is concentrated in public squares. The survey was carried out for security reasons between 10 am and 3 pm, to people between 17 and 60. Of the total number of people surveyed, only 41.6% had a family member who had returned from the United States, and of this group, 42.6% were migrants who had returned, 98% of whom had returned alone, and 2% of whom had returned with their entire family. Of the remaining 57.4%, those who responded to the survey were their direct relatives, that is, the wife (23%), one of the parents (15%), one of their children (7%), or another (10.4%). It is important to note that 26.5% of the returned migrants had returned in the last three years (as of 2014). Of the returned migrants, 69% lived between one and six years outside the country (44% from one to three years), 16% less than one year, and 15% had lived more than seven years in the US.

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[2] During the process, circular migrants who, having papers, can easily move between Mexico and the United States and who for some reason were in Mexico at the time of the survey, were detected. The answers obtained from these people were discarded.

[3] To the question, when was your last return?, 30.9% returned between 1981 and 2006 and 69.1% between 2007 and 2016, the years of the global economic crisis.

[4] One of the objectives of the survey was precisely to validate the questionnaire in order to carry it out with a representative sample throughout the state.

[5] In Apaseo el Alto 0.002% of the population was surveyed; approximately 158 surveys were taken.

Of those surveyed, 59% were women and 41% men; 7% were illiterate. Of the respondents, 24% had completed primary school, 34% had completed secondary school, 19% had completed high school, and 5% had a University degree or Associate's degree; the rest had not finished their studies. Another vital piece of information is that 20% took their family with them, either at the beginning of the migration journey (10.2%) or when they were already settled in the U.S. (9.96%). The rest never took their family with them. Only 84% returned, 13% with their family, and only 3% sent their family back to Mexico while the household head remained in the US.

Transnational Social Cohesion in Guanajuato: a First Approach

Guanajuato is a state founded by migrants. Since colonial times it has maintained a population fluctuation that has been related to the conditions of the internal labor market (Guevara Sanginés, 2017). Since the beginning of the 20th century, it has been part of the so-called traditional region that has expelled emigrants for more than 100 years (Durand, 2016; Durand & Massey, 2003). As a state with high migration, 31 of its 46 municipalities register a high or very high relationship with migration (Conapo, 2012). Therefore, more than half of the respondents (56%) answered that they, or a member of their family, had migrated to the US. Of these cases, the first notable aspect is the generational changes experienced when specifying who the family member who has participated in the migration is. One hundred percent of those surveyed have or had a male grandparent who migrated; when the migrant is the spouse, 86% are male, and 14% are female; in 79% of the cases, it was the father. The percentage continues to change when they are asked if the person with migratory experience is a son (77%), a daughter (23%), or a mother (21%). The migration went from being a strictly male event to one in which between a quarter and a fifth of the people involved in this process are women.

It was also detected that, in Guanajuato's southern region, the migrant is less and less related to agricultural work. When asked about the migration project —the reason for migration and the use they would make of the wages earned in the United States— less than 10% of the answers are related with farm work, acquiring land, or agricultural materials. However, before migrating, 11.3% owned land. When returning, 27.4% did. The acquisition of machinery for the countryside went from 6.6% to 11.2%, and livestock acquisition went from 3.7% to 13%.

The next section discusses the specific elements considered in the fieldwork for each dimension of social cohesion.

Belonging/Isolation: from Illegal Life in the United States to Illegal Life in Mexico

One of the most significant changes experienced by the migrants in the survey is that, when they return, they feel safer living in Mexico than they had when living in the U.S. When asked if they felt safe living in the US, 58% said yes. When asked the same question about their current life, the positive responses rose to 67%. This response seems to reflect the certainty of living "regularly" in their country, in a familiar environment, and without being exposed to raids, since they are fundamentally migrants in an irregular situation.[6] However, 26% of those interviewed had problems regularizing their papers or those of their children, while 29% had no access to public health services. As one of the young women interviewed noted:

> Being an immigrant is not bad in itself. You learn through good and bad experiences (...) being illegal is like not having proof that you live there (...) it is living trying not to get noticed, of not going near the police or checkpoints. When we returned, we continued being illegal for a while (...) my mom already had my birth certificate, and the only thing that was needed was to renew it (...) the problem that still exists is that my sister has an American birth certificate and we had to get a Mexican one (Ivonne, interview in Salvatierra, Guanajuato, April 21, 2016).

The sensation of security stands out when considering the violence in the communities of southern Guanajuato related to organized crime, which began to increase as of 2015.[7] As shown in Table 1, this is one of the problems migrants face when returning to Mexico. Their sense of belonging to the community is affected by the corruption of authorities, the lack of health services, problems in legalizing their papers, or because their economic resources are insufficient to restart their lives. For this reason, 42.3% also stated that the decision to return to Guanajuato was temporary, and 35.6% of them intend to return to the U.S. at the first opportunity. In comparison, 36.4% do not plan to return for now, or ever.

As the discussion below will show, the migrant has more confidence in the United States' public institutions than in the Mexican ones. At the same time, their family is the basis of their community ties. When asked if they trust their family while in the U.S., 83% said yes, whereas 94% do so once in Mexico. With friends, the opposite is true; trust in friends decreases from 74% while living in the U.S. to 70% when they return to Mexico; while trust in neighbors increases from 51% to 68% when moving from the U.S. to Mexico. The above is explained by the fact that some find their way of life no longer accepted in the community (6%), while 18% perceive that their family or friends are jealous of them or want to borrow money.

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[6] To the question about immigration status of migrants while they were away, the answer is that most left without papers: in 79% of the cases it was the spouse, 66% the children, 53% the parents. However, those who have a residence or green card—in order to be able to circulate in both countries—are 7% for the spouse, 16% for the child, 25% for the parent and 50% for the grandparent. For people who have traveled five times or more to the US to work: in 27% of the cases it was the spouse, 10% the children, 22% the parents, and 25% the grandparents. Finally, those who left and did not return had the following results, in the same order: 15% the spouse, 45% the children, 16% the parents, and 50% the grandparents. Of those interviewed, 9% have a child who is already permanently established in the US.

[7] See the Crime Prevalence Rate per 100 000 inhabitants at https://www.inegi.org.mx/temas/victimizacion/. The index does not include homicide.

When asked about the main problems they have had to face since their return, the answers were mainly related to exclusion from or inadequate inclusion in the market and illegitimacy at the different government levels.

Table 1. What have been the main problems you have faced since your return? (check all that apply)

Low and insufficient salary	62.4 %
Corruption and inefficiency of authorities	50.5 %
Fear and lack of safety	48.6 %
Lack of health services	29.4 %
It took me a while to find a job	27.5 %
Problems with paperwork/lack of paperwork to get a job	24.8 %
I do not use the skills that I learned in the United States in my work	16.5%
I am mistreated at work/no benefits	15.6%

Source: created by the author based on an open question in which all the answers mentioned were written down. The question was asked only to returned migrants (114 responses).

The young people interviewed, when confronted with their membership in the community, said the following:

> From what I remember, [in the United States] I have always had my customs from Mexico, my family has always kept those customs. But yes, we have also adopted the United States' customs, such as Thanksgiving, and so it can be said that I am part Mexican and part gringo or an American, whichever you want to call it. Yes, I could not say [that I am] 100% Mexican, nor 100% American (Arturo, interview in Apaseo el Alto, February 23, 2016).

They say that when they ask God for help, they do it in Spanish, but when they curse, read, and do math, they do it in English. They believe that part of the difference between them and their peers is that they speak with an accent, do not know the communities, and get lost easily. They know little about meeting centers or that speaking English makes them appear conceited. Their parents find it more difficult to educate their children in Mexico (16%) and point out that their children have problems because they do not speak or write Spanish (5%).

The sense of belonging was also measured by social and family networks, presented in Table 2. During the time spent in the US, the number of people married, with children, or with friends in the neighboring country increased. Family or family reasons were the leading cause for returning to their community in 79% of the cases, discrimination, fear of deportation and removal in 28.6% of the cases, and lack of work and retirement for age in 19.5%.[8] It should not be forgotten that, as previously pointed out, only 10% of those consulted moved across borders with their families or took them with them once the head of the family was settled in the United States.

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[8] The question accepted several answer options, so it does not add up to 100%.

Table 2. The sense of belonging of migrants

Question	Before migrating		In the US		Upon return	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Are you married?	54.9%	45.1%	65.2%	34.8%	83.9%	16.1%
Do you have children?	49.6%	50.4%	68.2%	31.8%	88.2%	11.8%
Do you have family or friends in the US?	63.6%	36.4%	80.7%	19.3%	79.8%	20.2%

Source: created by the author. The question was asked only to returned migrants (114 to 109 answers).

Inclusion/Exclusion: Quality of Life and Work

Returned migrants take between six and eleven months to enter the Mexican market. The salary difference reinforces their perception that their personal and family life quality decreases due to the conditions in which they are included in Mexico's labor market. It is essential to consider this point because, despite the global economic crisis in which return usually is analyzed (Sandoval & Zúñiga, 2016), only 17.1% report having lost their jobs in the United States and state it as the reason for their return.

Table 3. Conditions for the inclusion of migrants in multi-space markets

Question	Before migrating		In the US		Upon return	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you have your own house?	46.2%	53.8%	56.7%	43.3%	80.4%	19.6%
Do you have a car?	27.4%	72.6%	51.4%	48.6%	68%	32%
Do you have a bank account?	7.3%	92.7%	26.4%	73.6%	37.5%	62.5%
Do you use bank loans?	7.4%	92.6%	11.2%	88.8%	29.9%	70.1%
Do you have running water in your house?	81.1%	18.9%	89.2%	10.8%	93.3%	6.7%
Do you have electricity in your house?	82.9%	17.1%	87.4%	12.6%	94.3%	5.7%
Is your quality of life better?	21.2 %	78.8%	69%	31%	75.7%	24.3%
Is the quality of life of your family better?	23.8%	76.2%	70.5%	29.5%	77.6%	22.4%

Source: created by the author. The question was asked only to returned migrants (114 to 109 answers).

The drop in quality of life is related to the fact that returnees are also involved in Mexico's informal jobs. This last point is assumed because the only government social programs they sought to access, until they were abolished in 2019, were the *Programa*

Oportunidades[9] (Opportunities Program) (23.2%) and the *Seguro Popular*[10] (Popular Health Insurance) (95.3%), which shows that the quality and security of employment is not optimal. Returning migrants with formal employment are defined by their affiliation to the Mexican Social Security Institute (Spanish: *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*, IMSS) (13.6%), the Institute of Social Security and Services for State Workers (Spanish: *Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado*, ISSSTE) (2.4%) or the Social Security Institute of the State of Guanajuato (Spanish: *Instituto de Seguridad Social del Estado de Guanajuato*, ISSEG) (0.2%). In contrast, 10.5% have no social security despite having a job. Even though 41% of the returned migrants received some type of training in the United States, 82% stated that this has served little to nothing in reintegrating them into the national labor market. Despite the above, as shown in Table 3, migration has allowed them to have their own home, a car, and to use bank accounts and loans. As will be seen later, the feeling of having a better quality of life has more to do with community recognition, the sense of belonging vis-à-vis the discrimination experienced, and returning to their family, even though their income has decreased.

People who received help from a family member or friend to find a job make up 44.5% of those surveyed. None approached any government agency to seek information to find work, access economic support to start a productive project or update their identity papers. All of these activities are carried out through their savings, through contacting migrants who know how to work in the market of the United States, who have established a business in their community, or after asking their friends where to renew their identity cards from the National Electoral Institute (Spanish: *Instituto Nacional Electoral*, INE). Then they obtain a unique population registration code (Spanish: *Clave Única de Registro de Población*, CURP) or birth certificate.[11]

Participation/Apathy: Almost no Participation in Social Organizations

Apathy is the fundamental characteristic of migrants who, in general, are poorly organized and participate little in civil society organizations in both Mexico and the United States (Table 4).

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[9] *Oportunidades* was a human development program that guaranteed funds to families living in poverty and external poverty (1 USD per day) to ensure access to minimum survival conditions. The economic support was granted monthly to the women—as heads of their families—and was conditional on the children of the household attending school—the financial support was increased as the children advanced in the educational system—as well as on semiannual health check-ups.

[10] *Seguro Popular* was a program created in 2002 to provide access to health care for people working in informal markets and, for that reason, excluded from social security programs. The payment of services is related to the income of the families. The program helps reduce catastrophic medical expenses for people living below poverty levels.

[11] According to data provided by the *Instituto de Atención al Migrante Guanajuatense y sus Familias* (Institute for Attention to the Migrants from Guanajuato and their Families), between 2014 and 2017 some form of economic support was granted to 177 deported migrants who requested it and found themselves stranded at one of the internment points on the northern border of Mexico. Through the *Inversión Migrante* program (Migrant Investment program), only 120 productive micro-projects were created for returned migrants.

Table 4. Multi-space participation of migrants

Question	Before migrating		In the US		Upon return	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Are you in a union?	7.6%	92.4%	7.5%	92.5%	9.4%	90.6%
Do you participate in church organizations?	5.6%	94.6%	5.5%	94.5%	11%	89%
Do you participate in the organization of the local festivities?	23.2%	76.8%	19.8%	80.2%	43.7%	56.3%
Do you participate in any sports association?	15%	85%	15.6%	84.4%	15.6%	84.4%
Do you participate in a migrant club?	0%	100%	4.7%	95.3%	3.8%	96.2%
Do you vote in elections?	43%	57%	3%	97%	58.9%	41.1%

Source: created by the author. The question was asked only to returned migrants (114 to 109 answers).

The only community activity that migrants participate in at a distance is the organization of the patron saint festivities. From the United States, they participate by sending money (20%), while in Mexico, 44% do so in cash and in kind. However, when they return, there is a slight increase (11%) in participation in some religious associations, while only about 6% did so in the US. Participation in sports associations, basically in soccer teams, both in Mexico and in the United States, remains at 16%. Involvement in a migrant club is 4%, and only during their stay in the northern country. Simultaneously, participation in elections increases by a few points when they re-establish themselves in Mexico.

Recognition/Rejection: from Voting to Neighborly Trust

The feeling of being accepted by the community increases significantly when the person returns to Mexico (Table 5). Actually, most of the responses about life experience in the United States reflect the feeling of rejection and discrimination experienced by people during their stay in that country. The perception of being recognized or rejected in their communities was measured (see Table 5) with questions such as do you think people would vote for you? To which 33% of those who returned said yes, compared to 14% who said yes while living in the United States. Similarly, one of the questions asked was if their neighbors would let them take care of their children in case of need, which went from 51% while in the United States to 73% when living in Mexico. Migrants also do not show trust in their U.S. neighbors, since 42% would have asked their neighbors to take care of their children, while in Mexico, 63% would have left their children with their neighbors. These responses show that they feel recognized and trusted in Mexico, even if they are more cautious about recognizing their neighbors or friends as trustworthy in their own country.

Table 5. Recognition of migrants in the communities where they lived

Question	Before migrating		In the US		Upon return	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you think the people in your community appreciate you?	71.8%	28.2%	54.8%	45.2%	78.1%	21.9%
Would your neighbors let you take care of their children in case of need?	60.4%	39.6%	50.5%	49.5%	72.7%	27.3%
Would you let your neighbors take care of your children in case of need?	57.1%	42.9%	41.6%	58.4%	63.4%	36.6%
Do you think people would vote for you?	17.2%	82.8%	13.8%	86.2%	33.3%	66.7%
Do you think your neighbors see you as an equal?	57.7%	42.3%	46%	54%	69%	31%
Do you feel like your neighbors are your equals?	67%	33%	58.8%	41.2%	70.6%	29.4%

Source: created by the author. The question was asked only to returned migrants (109 answers).

Legitimacy/Illegitimacy: Invisible to the Government in Mexico/Tolerated in the United States

As presented in Table 1 above, the first problem to be faced is the drop in the standard of living. Wages in Mexico are hardly close to those received in the north, even in jobs without benefits and in unstable situations. The second problem is the corruption and inefficiency of the authorities in providing them with access to social programs, either because they ask for money to "facilitate the procedures" or because the time that must be spent in accessing them discourages them. The third problem faced by returned migrants is fear and lack of security. In general, this is a consequence of the conditions they have to face in their daily lives, where they are victims of robberies, muggings, and loss of the resources earned in their jobs.

Table 6. The legitimacy of institutions for migrants

Question	Before migrating		In the US		Upon return	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you trust the government?	25.5%	74.5%	29.3%	70.7%	18.5%	81.5%
Do you trust your family?	88.5%	11.5%	83.3%	16.7%	93.5%	6.5%
Do you trust your friends?	78.1%	21.9%	73.6%	26.4%	70.4%	29.6%
Do you trust your neighbors?	67.6%	32.4%	50.5%	49.5%	67.6%	32.4%
Is your personal safety better?	56.9%	43.1%	57.6%	42.4%	67%	33%

Source: created by the author. The question was asked only to returned migrants (114 to 109 answers).

To reaffirm this last question, this work compared the perception of personal safety before migrating, while living in the United States and returning to Mexico. The record (Table 6) shows an increase in confidence in the United States government, decreasing upon return to Mexico, despite having lived in the most unstable conditions in the U.S. At this point, it is important to consider the difference in the spontaneous response given to this question "Over there, things just work", "over there, officials do their work without asking you for money". The low legitimacy of the government is more evident in Mexico, in Guanajuato, and the municipalities. The illegitimacy of the federal, state, and municipal government is evident before leaving and upon their return.[12]

Upon return, migrants perceive a change in the way they are received in health institutions. Although 79.5% of returning migrants did not have any kind of social security while working in the United States, only 55.2% of those surveyed considered health services accessible while living in the country. The responses about the main difficulties faced in the health services of the United States were the following: they did not have money to go (36%), they were undocumented (66.7%), they were denied service (38.9%), and the employer did not pay for it (22.2%). Despite this, when asked to compare the service and access to health systems in the United States and Mexico, 63% said they preferred health services in the north. The spontaneous responses with which they explained this preference were: "they offer a better service", "they have better facilities", "they have trained personnel", "they take care of you there, even if you do not have papers", "they take care of you, even if you do not bring money, and then they charge you according to your income", "they care about your life there", and "they treat you with respect there".

The main complaints about Mexican health institutions were the following "they take a long time to get to you", "they are far from my place", "they never have medicine", "the service is bad, and they do not take care of you if you do not bring money". The fundamental thing about the relationship between people and health institutions is that their lives are meaningful in the United States, and they are treated with respect, "even if they are illegal". In Mexico, despite being citizens, they are denied service because they are poor. When comparing the answers, it is important to stress that, even though these people are undocumented, they can receive the service because over there "they care about your life", "they treat you with respect", and "they provide a service, even if you do not have papers or money". The above reinforces the legitimacy of the State, in this case, the United States, in the eyes of a community that illegally settles in its territory, despite having been the victim of discrimination, raids, and anti-immigrant policies.

Discussion

In discussing the results of this work, it should be noted that the fieldwork was conducted in ten communities in three municipalities in southern Guanajuato. This affects the definition and contextualization of national, sub-national, and local communities since while the former is conceived in the notion of social cohesion presented above, the trends shown in this text were found at the local level.[13] The survey was designed with the original idea of using what this research considers a comprehensive definition of social cohesion to measure the impacts of return migration on Guanajuato communities. By analyzing migration from a historical perspective, the structures of simultaneous and permanent community ties in two geographic spaces were detected as part of the individual process experienced by migrants. This makes it possible to establish the hypothesis that the shared values and commitments within a well-ordered society can exist and be maintained transnationally in spaces where mobile and static populations coexist, such as the communities studied in Guanajuato. Based on the findings, the topic has taken on importance when highlighting the trends that might trigger a research agenda on the existence or not of bonding structures that maintain cohesive communities transnationally. [14]

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[12] This topic is also addressed by Tse (2019; 2020) and Mateos (2020), who analyze the invisibility of migrants in public policy aimed at those who returned in the last decade.

That said, the first trend detected is that mobile community groups have created a process of shared values in which they maintain daily links across borders. The results seem to indicate that the social commitment and shared values of these mobile groups are lived and displayed transnationally. In other words, the dimensions of social cohesion are maintained simultaneously in time, though in different spaces. In terms of inclusion, migrants are informally included in the United States labor market, but their income is spent in the form of remittances to their families in Mexico. They participate in the organization of the festivities of their patron saints in one country when the festivities are held in another. They are recognized as community members on both sides of the border —accepted or discriminated against— but maintain an active presence in them.

This does not mean that they do not live in vulnerable conditions. While they are working in the less qualified market niches of the United States, their families in Mexico have a better material quality of life. Migration makes it possible for them to acquire homes, cars, land, and animals, among other properties. When they return, they have the perception that the material quality of life for them and their families decreases due to the low quality of the jobs they work in, even though, for the most part, they have their own house, car, and financial education, and were able to support the education and improve the health of their children. The above aspects would imply a higher quality of life than their community peers while sacrificing their social lives. Community, intra-group, or family recognition and participation are maintained by frequent telephone contacts, sending remittances, financing the patron saint festivities, and others. Participation in soccer clubs, trust in their neighbors, community recognition, and participation are less frequent but not non-existent. In terms of belonging in the political community and institutions' legitimacy, the percentage drops but with greater recognition of the United States government's institutional effectiveness.

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[13] It is important to appreciate the careful review work done by the reviewers who compelled the author of this work to reflect on these epistemological problems and, above all, to highlight the limits of the findings and take them into account in future works.

[14] Certainly, in order to continue the agenda from a transnational perspective, questions about the role of social networks and simultaneous communication should be included, as well as elements that help to go deeper into the transnational issue. In-depth interviews should be conducted with returnees to explain their reasons for community participation vis-à-vis social organizations, etc. The issue of transnational relations emerged when analyzing the results, not when designing the survey that sought to explore the state of social cohesion of communities with returning migrant groups. The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

The sense of belonging, recognition, and security is increased by living in Mexico, strengthening the social fabric of the communities of return. It can be stated that the social and family networks that migrants have in the United States are those that help them sustain migration. The density of those same networks in Guanajuato helps support their reintegration into the communities of origin and return. Social and emotional ties are what seems to determine the quality of social life, preparing and justifying the return to the point of origin until economic circumstances pressure them for a new departure.

As other works have shown, migrants have been present in public policies when they are in the United States and absent when they return to Mexico (Tse, 2020; Mateos, 2020). The legitimacy of a receiving government that sees them as a risk and a delivering government that ignores them is perceived in the low regard in which migrants hold public institutions and the government. In the case of those who have returned, the mistreatment they receive when transporting their things, attending public health services, or the lack of access to some services, the difficulty in obtaining identification documents to work, among others, is added. These elements reduce the legitimacy of Mexican authorities vis-à-vis returning migrants, who in some cases express greater trust in the institutions of the United States, which they perceive as more empathetic in taking an interest in them or their lives, despite the environment of harassment and their undocumented status in the United States, as reflected in the spontaneous responses cited above.

The quality of the social life of migrants improves with an increased sense of security, recognition, and community participation upon their return home. It also contrasts with the change in security perception while living in unstable conditions in communities in the United States that discriminate against them despite hiring them as workers. The above is reflected in the perception of the anti-immigrant environment and the raids of which some of them were victims. Neither the government of Mexico nor the government of Guanajuato offer returned migrants the minimum guarantees that the State should provide to ensure a life without conflict, which is included in the definition of legitimacy analyzed as an integral part of social cohesion. Finally, in both Mexico and the United States, these are vulnerable social groups that are reintegrated into institutionally weak communities, to the extent that they have low participation in social organizations.

Conclusions

The findings of this research make it possible to conclude two points: first, within the communities of Guanajuato, social groups have been formed that have organized their social and economic life by sharing community values and commitments that alternate spatially. The above does not alter the quality of their community life, nor mutual recognition, nor their participation in social activities. On the contrary, the temporal and spatial simultaneity is reinforced by linking some economic, social, and cultural activities in the United States and others in Mexico. These activities reinforce bonds and a sense of multi-spatial belonging based on social networks that, paradoxically, seem to place them at a civic disadvantage (Vila Freyer, 2019; Vila Freyer, 2017). It is the weak political institutions that negatively affect the relations between migrant groups and the different ways of managing social relations between citizens. The above is what Portes and Vickstrom (2012, p. 100) define as communities “where the mechanical solidarity of extended families and tribal networks maintains a semblance of order in the face of weak or absent coordinating institutions”.

Second, so far, discussions about how migration impacts host societies assume adverse effects of migration on the social cohesion of host communities. Migrants are seen as a risk because they do not share the cultural elements, values, or sense of solidarity of the host society. Some authors emphasize economic rather than socio-cultural aspects that would explain the difficulties in participating in host societies (Ratcliffe, 2012). Portes and Vickstrom (2012) state that the conflict created by migrants in host societies is reduced by strong political institutions that manage or, as this work would add, revive it. However, when analyzing these elements from the point of view of the sending societies, much more dense, multi-spatial, and largely self-regulated community relations that reinforce the sense of community and mechanical solidarity within them are found. It is as if migration hinders social complexity processes in migrant communities, reinforcing and maintaining traditional relations within them. It is not only a question of inclusion in the market but also of the density of the social networks with which they are linked, which fragments the social fabric, an element that, in turn, serves to explain and justify emigration in the first place.

Hence, the need to develop a research agenda that analyzes and reflects on the state of social cohesion in Guanajuato, which necessarily requires comparing mobile and immobile populations’ conditions to measure the real impact of migration on its social fabric.

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