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Cristóbal Mendoza

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the reasons why highly skilled immigrants from Italy and Spain migrate to Mexico and their patterns of incorporation into the country's workforce. Specifically, it explores the dynamics of local labour markets, possible niches for qualified workers, and the mechanisms granting immigrants access to technical and managerial posts in Mexico. Based on a comparative approach, it analyzes the similarities and differences between Italians and Spaniards in Mexico and compares flows before and during/after the 2008 economic crisis to see how relevant the crisis is to an understanding of current migration flows.

KEYWORDS

skilled migration; Mexico; Southern Europe; economic crisis; international migration; human capital

JEL F22, J24, J61, O54

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INTRODUCTION

The numbers of emigrants from Spain have dramatically increased since 2008, mainly owing to the economic crisis. Official data show that the number of Spaniards living outside the country rose from 1,471,691 in January 2009 to 2,305,030 in January 2016 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2016), a total outflow of 833,339 Spaniards for the whole period. This represents an annual growth rate of 6.4% for the period 2009–16. On the Mexican side, official data show that the number of resident Spanish nationals has risen from 69,571 in 2009 to 123,189 in 2016 (INE, 2016). The annual growth rate is even higher for Spaniards in Mexico than for Spanish emigrants overall (8.2% for Mexico and 6.4% worldwide). Mexican data on foreigners obtained from residence permits reveal that Spaniards comprised the country's second largest foreign community in 2009 (Rodríguez Chávez & Cobo, 2012). Even though these numbers are high, official data do not reflect this rising trend accurately, since many migrants do not choose to register in their destination countries. It is also assumed that a significant proportion of these migrants is highly skilled (but data on professional profiles are even less scarce than overall numbers). In this light, this paper analyses extensive fieldwork data collected from highly skilled Spanish immigrants in Mexico to explore their reasons for immigration and their patterns of incorporation into the country's workforce. Even though the numbers are smaller, the paper also analyses Italian immigration into Mexico to

explore any possible comparative trends between these two Southern European countries, which have undergone similar economic circumstances during the recent economic crisis.

Skilled migration is far from being homogeneous (Nagel, 2005), and the first issue we face is the definition of a skilled migrant. For instance, Meier (2015) argues that the term 'skilled migrant' is incorrect, since not all highly skilled migrants can secure a professional position commensurate with their qualifications. Generally, however, the literature agrees that migrants are qualified when they possess a higher education diploma, even though educational degrees are not always easily transferable between countries (Eich-Krohm, 2013; López-Rodríguez, Faina, & López-Rodríguez, 2007). It is also generally assumed that people with higher education are more able to perform functions at a higher level in different labour markets than other workers (Fratesi, 2014). Yet, decisions to migrate and incorporation into the workforce in destination countries largely depend on each immigrant's characteristics, personal circumstances and previous work experience, as well as the legal framework, recognition of titles of study, and the openness of the labour market of the receiving country. In periods of economic crisis, it is especially true that unemployed people with a higher education may seriously think about emigrating to countries that are perceived to offer greater economic opportunities.

Skilled immigration (and immigration in general) has not been extensively studied in Mexico. Two remarkable

CONTACT

 cmp@xanum.uam.mx

Department of Sociology, Metropolitan Autonomous University-Iztapalapa (UAM), Mexico City, Mexico.

exceptions to this rule are Castaños Rodríguez (2011) and Izquierdo (2015) on foreign academics in Mexican universities and research centres. Both authors conclude that Mexican academia is relatively open to new foreign arrivals, even if Castaños Rodríguez (2011) has a more general historical perspective, and Izquierdo (2015) focuses specifically on recent migration from the ex-Soviet Union. By presenting the results of a study on highly skilled migrants from Southern Europe (Italy and Spain) in four Mexican cities (Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla), this paper fills a gap in the scientific literature. Latin American countries, and particularly Mexico, have experienced relatively high economic growth rates and low unemployment. Mexican cities may, therefore, appear attractive destinations for qualified migrants, especially after the 2008 international economic crisis that substantially affected Spain and Italy. Taking this into account, this explores the reasons for migration and incorporation into the Mexican workforce, while also examining the possible employment niches for skilled migrants.

The paper also has a comparative element that is practically nonexistent in the literature on skilled migration and may also cast a light on labour migration patterns and processes within Mexico. Since Spaniards have a longer tradition of migration to Mexico than Italians, it could be assumed that Spaniards have more social networks to help them migrate and incorporate themselves into Mexican labour markets. We can also surmise that lack of any tradition of Italian migration to Mexico and the greater cultural distance (plus the language barrier) between the two countries, mean that Italians only migrate to Mexico if solid networks (or solid reasons) are in place. From another perspective, this paper also compares patterns of workforce incorporation in the four cities under study. As world-city analysts suggest (e.g., Sassen, 2000), Mexico City has a more dynamic and polarized labour market than Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla, and so highly skilled immigrants may find more valuable work opportunities in the country's capital. Furthermore, it may be the case that immigrants move to the four cities under study for different reasons, with Mexico City attracting more expatriates working in large transnational corporations.

In the case of Spaniards, the large number of interviews allows one to compare trends between different generations of immigrants, depending on their date of arrival in Mexico (i.e., before and after the 2008 international financial crisis). The research provides data on these flows, and throws a new light on the mechanisms through which flows are channelled in a crisis context. The traditional approaches to international skilled migration do not take into account the possibility of a de-skilling process within this phenomenon. This paper argues that the current situation is far more complex, especially for the young migrants who may find their job prospects curtailed in their countries of origin and try the international migration 'adventure' as an opportunity to develop skills undervalued by the Spanish labour markets. It goes on to explore the dynamics of local labour

markets, possible niches for qualified workers and the mechanisms granting immigrants access to technical and managerial posts in Mexico.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section critically reviews the literature on skilled migration, stressing that little research has focused on immigration into developing countries. It subsequently takes a comparative approach by analyzing the similarities and differences between Italians and Spaniards in Mexico. Following another line of comparison, the paper compares flows from Spain before and during/after 2008 (the year in which the world financial crisis exploded) to see how relevant the crisis is to an understanding of current migration flows. Continuing the comparative approach, but this time from another perspective, the paper compares the patterns of skilled Spanish immigrants' incorporation into the workforce in the four study cities to explore whether this changes according to locality, but concludes that this factor is irrelevant.

THEORIES ON SKILLED MIGRATION

A significant number of studies of highly skilled migrants focus on the brain-drain aspect, strongly emphasizing underdevelopment and dependence theories and suggesting that flows of skilled workers move from less developed countries to those with higher levels of welfare (Chiswick, 2011; Smith & Favell, 2006). Skilled migration, therefore, hampers development in the regions of origin and helps stimulate the economy in receiving countries (e.g., Grubel & Scott, 1977). This approach has recently embraced research on the mobility of students, whose temporary migration may follow a more permanent pattern posteriorly (Angel-Urdinola, Takeno, & Wodon, 2009; Solimano, 2009). Some authors have also argued that 'brain exchange' is a more accurate concept than 'brain drain'. Brain exchange refers to higher mobility (rather than migration) and multidirectional flows between skilled workers in a more integrated world (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Giannetti, Liao, & Yu, 2012).

Heavily inspired by the world theory, mobility within multinational corporations has been the second line for the analysis of skilled migration. In this case, first research suggests that corporate headquarters send their technical and managerial staff to subsidiary companies in developing countries. These employees are quickly promoted when they return to their country of origin, and so their labour mobility charts an upward trajectory (Beaverstock, 2002; Millar & Salt, 2008). The debate on development was also present in this literature, in the sense that transnational corporations are thought to use cheap labour with limited spillover effects in destination economies, even though spillover effects (and consequently pathways to development) may depend on the economic conditions of receiving countries (Ivarsson & Alvstam, 2005). Following this argument, subsidiaries and branches of large companies may have their own recruitment strategies, responding to more local needs, in countries such as Mexico (Mendoza & Ortiz, 2006). Rather than importing expatriates,

companies can choose local skilled workers and foreign professionals already living in the country, if they consider their skills suit their needs.

Human capital theories play a key role in neo-classical economic explanations of migration. According to this view, migration basically takes place because of regional differences in wages, which in turn are determined by the supply/demand of labour at a certain level of production (e.g., Graves & Mueser, 1993). These theories also argue that there is a close connection between workers' human capital and the wages in destination labour markets. With respect to skilled migration, however, it is argued that rather than being a balancing mechanism, it tends to cause economic disparities (Fratesi, 2014). Finally, a great part of the literature focuses on internal migration (e.g., Boschma, Eriksson, & Lindgren, 2014; Coulombe & Tremblay, 2009), partly because the transferability of human capital between nations is fraught with difficulty (Campbell, 2016; Chiswick & Miller, 2009).

Despite the problems associated with the transferability of skills between countries, the economic crisis and lack of labour opportunities may push some young professionals to try the Mexican adventure. In this light, international migration may be the only way for them to pursue their careers fully. In Spain, for example, the unemployment rate in young people aged 16–25 years was as high as 49% in the last quarter of 2016 (INE, 2017). In this respect, Fashoyin (2012) considers that young people in countries with rigid labour markets, such as Spain, are at a clear disadvantage when it comes to finding work, and that when they do find it their jobs tend to be precarious, unstable and badly paid (Barbagelata, 2012). It is not surprising, therefore, that many see migration as the only way to escape from under-employment and precariousness. Surprisingly, no public policies have addressed these vulnerable young professionals to prevent them from emigrating. Moreover, the Spanish government deprived emigrants and undocumented immigrants of health services in Spain (R.D. 16/2012 and Law 22/2013), despite complaints from several local governments and left-wing political parties.¹

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on 129 in-depth semi-structured interviews with skilled immigrants from Spain and Italy in four Mexican cities (i.e., a total of 41 interviews were carried out in Mexico City, 31 in Guadalajara, 31 in Monterrey and 26 in Puebla). Although the research did not attempt to achieve a representative sample, efforts were made to collect information from immigrants with different backgrounds. Thus, we interviewed men and women in similar numbers, as well as different types of skilled migrants (i.e., managers and technicians in multinational corporations, academics and businesspeople; Table 1), but it was impossible to attain an equal number of Spaniards and Italians, because the former outnumbered the latter by four to one in Mexico in 2015 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), 2018a). We consider that the

Table 1. Interviewed Italians and Spaniards by sex, age, year of arrival and professional profile.

	Italians	Spaniards	Total	%
<i>Sex</i>				
Women	9	39	48	37.2
Men	14	67	81	62.8
<i>Age (years)</i>				
≤ 30	8	18	26	20.2
31–49	11	78	89	69.0
≥ 50	4	10	14	10.9
<i>Year of arrival</i>				
Before 2008	8	29	37	28.7
2008–15	15	77	92	71.3
<i>Professional profile</i>				
Managerial and technical staff companies				
Expatriates	1	19	20	15.5
Non-expatriates	6	36	42	32.6
Academics and teachers	7	22	29	22.5
Entrepreneurs and self-employed people	9	25	34	26.4
Others	0	4	4	3.1
Total (n)	23	106	129	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, June 2014–September 2015.

number of informants from Italy, although small, reached a saturation point (i.e., the answers were repetitive and no new issues emerged).

Owing to lack of reliable official statistics, a snowball sampling technique was used. Participants were assured that the interviews would be treated confidentially, so pseudonyms are used herein. Most interviews were carried out at the workplace, although some were held in the interviewees' homes and cafeterias, at their request. The interviews were carried out from June 2014 to September 2015. The 129 in-depth interviews, which lasted one hour on average, were structured along three lines: work, social integration and geographical issues. Via the interviews, it was possible to discuss reasons for migration, intentions to stay, opinions about Mexico's labour market, everyday experiences in Mexico and links with the home country. Data were analyzed through a content analysis method. This involves several moments. First, codes were defined. Since a large part of the interviews were made by the main researcher of the study, it was relatively easy to define and classify codes following the interview sections. Second, using free software MAXQDA, interviews were labelled and extracts were grouped along the different topics. Finally, systematic reading and analysis of this information allowed abstracting, and select relevant quotations to illustrate the main lines of analysis.

The research shows a great diversity of experience in the skilled immigrants regarding gender, age and socioeconomic circumstances. We therefore found the interviewees' profiles to be heterogeneous, with the exception of their higher educational background. All those interviewed had at least undergraduate studies, and they were either entrepreneurs or worked in managerial, technical or academic fields. The duration of their residence varied greatly. For some, their stay is clearly temporary, but this is not the case for the majority of the interviewees as their future options were more open.

ITALY AND SPAIN AS EMIGRATION COUNTRIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Leaving aside colonial times, historical migratory links between Mexico and Spain can be traced back to the huge European emigrations at the turn of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, when a considerable number of Europeans headed for the Americas. Before the 1911 Mexican Revolution, Spanish migration to Mexico was particularly substantial, to the point that many of today's large Mexican companies are headed by descendants of those Spanish immigrants (e.g., the Modelo brewery and the Gigante food producer; Noceda, 2005). The Mexican Revolution put a halt to foreign inflows in the 1910s (Pérez Acevedo, 2001).

After the Revolution, political unrest was again the main reason behind flows from Spain to Mexico. The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) (and the tragic consequences for its losers) prompted a massive exodus of political refugees. Depending on estimates, it has been calculated that around 18,000–20,000 refugees from the defeated Spanish Republic were received by the Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas (Figueroa, 1986; Pla Brugat, 1994). The literature has seen this migration as an important human capital inflow into Mexico and a key to the creation of new economic dynamics (Fernández de Castro, 2004). In the mid-1980s, another type of migration arrived in Mexico, linked to the expansion of Spanish companies in Latin America. In fact, Spanish capital is crucial in sectors such as banking, hotels, communications and property (real estate) (Relea, 2005). More recently, after the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, Spanish immigration seems to have changed its profile again, and it has been suggested that the 2008–14 Spanish inflows into Mexico comprise highly skilled young people, expelled by the crisis and attracted to Mexico by opportunities for gaining work experience (Rodríguez-Fariñas, Romero-Valiente, & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2016).

All these historical developments are not applicable to Italians, who are far less numerous in Mexico. Italians are not among the 10 most numerous foreign nationalities in the country, according to 2009 data (Rodríguez Chávez & Cobo, 2012), although they did rank ninth in 1996 (Castillo, 2001). This is why the number of interviewed Italians for this study was 23 of 129 (17.8% of the total; Table 1). Our interest, however, was of a comparative nature: to explore whether Italians and Spaniards followed similar patterns of migration and incorporation into the

workforce in Mexico. According to the data, non-labour factors are of utmost importance for Italians when understanding immigration into Mexico. The following extract from an Italian national supports this notion:

I think all the Italians arrive here because of something, love, studies. In my case, I came to Monterrey because of my girlfriend, who is from here. I met her in Dublin. She asked me to come here, and after three months thinking it over I bought the plane ticket. In fact, I thought that I would stay only for three months. But I'm still here after two years.

(Fabrizio, 31, teacher, two years in Monterrey)

Our evidence is in line with the opinion in this interview. It is notable that 12 of the 23 Italians said their main reason for migration to Mexico was their partner. The second most mentioned reason for coming to Mexico was studies, since five of the interviewees arrived in the country via a university exchange (and decide to stay). In fact, only two of 23 migrated to the Americas for reasons other than a partner, family and studies.

Apart from their reasons for moving to Mexico, the evidence suggests that Italians are mainly employed in activities that are somehow related to Italy. More specifically, half work in professions associated directly or indirectly to their country of origin (12 of 23). Among the employees, the sample included four Italian language teachers and two technicians in medium Italian-owned firms. As for employers, we found entrepreneurs in the field of restaurants (pizzeria), Italian bookshops, housing and decoration, ceramics, and alternative energies. In all these sectors, many products are imported from Italy, so import–export relationships are basic for these companies.

If we delve further into this aspect of entrepreneurship, it is surprising to find such a relatively high number of self-employed workers and employers in the sample. In fact, almost half did not work as employees (10 of 23). Moreover, other two Italian employees pursue business activities outside their office hours. The interviews also reveal that business creation is not especially difficult and is also incredibly cheap in Mexico. This is summarized by Maurizio, who owned a pizzeria in Puebla for four years:

I got married here in Mexico [to a Mexican], and then we moved to Barcelona. Suddenly work was scarce because of the crisis. My wife did not find a job there, so we decided to come to Mexico. With few savings, we opened the pizzeria, which would be impossible in Italy or in Spain.

(Maurizio, 35, entrepreneur, four years in Puebla)

Interestingly, their business strategies are diverse, in response to the opportunities open to entrepreneurs. Enzo, for example, entered his current job through a capital expansion in an Italian-owned company. In fact, he came in Mexico in 2010 as part of a university exchange, and he is now a self-employed product manager who shares a part of the profits as a partner:

So you contacted [name of the enterprise] when you were a student?

No. In fact, I knew them. D. [a friend of the interviewee, also Italian] came one year before me, also through the same university exchange. I knew the other partner too. And they said, 'Why don't you join the company? We're growing.' So, I said, 'OK, why not?' I'm in charge of the security system line in the company. The chance of creating a business here is far easier than in Italy. We started with a small investment and things are going well.

(Enzo, 28, self-employed product manager, five years in Mexico City)

It seems that Italians mainly migrate into Mexico for non-labour reasons (partner, family, studies) and take advantage of their position in specific work niches. The economic crisis was not widely mentioned by the interviewees, although they did say that they have more chances for career development in Mexico than in Italy. The inflexibility of the labour markets (and obstacles for making business) in Italy were often mentioned.

SPANISH IMMIGRATION INTO MEXICO: THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

Comparatively, the number of Spanish self-employed workers and employers is not as great as that of Italians. This is because Spanish immigration is far more diversified, with a significant number of emigrants declaring that their main motivation was lack of opportunities in their native country. The sample of 106 Spanish interviewees allows one to differentiate those inflows coming into the country before and after the 2008 economic crisis (Table 1). We found upwardly mobile professional careers in Spanish migrants who arrived before the crisis, but this was far less common afterwards. The following sections clarify this point.

Before the 2008 economic crisis

Before 2008, incorporation into Mexican labour markets was generally considered easy and unproblematic. Furthermore, we found that some expatriates had initially worked for international agencies on short-term assignments (i.e., fewer than three years) and decided to stay in Mexico because they found the labour markets to be extremely dynamic and the country as a whole open to business. Another important factor was these people's capacity to create a business network that facilitated their entry into self-employment and entrepreneurship. Josep Lluís is a good example of this. He came to Mexico to work as the managing director of the Mexican branch of a Spanish corporation. After three years, he left this job and decided to set up a business:

The chance of buying my company just came up. It was very easy. I am involved in X [name of a Spanish business association]. Someone wanted to retire, so he could go back to Barcelona. He sold the business, and he talked to me personally. He showed me the figures and asked for a reasonable price. I

saw the potential, I asked for a credit and I bought the business.

(Josep Lluís, 42, entrepreneur, seven years in Mexico City)

As this example indicates, upward mobility in Mexico is not exclusively related to migrants' educational or occupational achievements, but also reflects an extensive use of the social networks they create after spending time in the country. Furthermore, the fact of being part of a 'welcomed' minority makes the web of relevant contacts smaller and easier to access. For instance, Christian said that after living in the country for almost six years, his current university job was offered in an informal dinner after a conference. Similarly, Marta, 32, who came to Mexico to visit her brother, said during an interview that she found her previous job as a manager of one of Mexico City's most important festivals at a friend's party ('I met the director of the festival at a party. We were dancing, and he offered me the job as the coordinator of the festival's international programme'). These 'coincidences' (or 'being in the right place at the right time') stress the importance of social networks as an aid to finding jobs. Obviously, an 'informal' dinner after an academic conference or a social event are restricted circles. This evidence also reveals extremely informal aspects of the Mexican labour market whereby jobs seem to be offered discretionally to people who are considered suitable.

During/after the 2008 economic crisis

The reasons for coming to Mexico (and the opinions about the country's labour markets) are significantly different from those of Spanish migrants who arrived during/after the 2008 economic crisis. Most of these interviewees clearly stated that they could not work in their professions in Spain, which led to a general feeling of frustration. In this respect, the characteristics of the Spanish labour market, especially for young people (49% of Spaniards aged 16–25 years were unemployed in 2016; INE, 2017), might push 'braver' workers to look for labour opportunities abroad. There was an evident de-skilling process in Spain, with many people working in jobs that clearly fell short of their expectations and educational qualifications. In this context, Mexico was seen as a possibility not only to find full-time employment but also to working in their chosen professions. Manel, a young journalist, is a good example of this:

When I was studying, I worked as a waiter. After my degree, I got a grant to work in a Spanish news agency in Ecuador. When the grant finished, I went back to Barcelona. Since I could not get a job as a journalist, I applied for a New Zealand working holiday visa and I also worked as a waiter. Back in Barcelona again, I could not find a job. So my boyfriend and I decided to come to Mexico. And I have been working in a small newspaper for seven months. I got the job here. We really came here with our savings. After Ecuador, I knew that Europeans are highly valued in Latin America and we had friends who had told us that Mexico is a country full of opportunities.

(Manel, 28, journalist, one year in Mexico City)

Mexico is an attractive destination for the interviewees since its local labour markets are diversified enough to have a range of options for skilled workers and also provide openings in business. Even though the wages and working conditions are not as favourable as they may have thought (for instance, Laura stated that she wants to go back to Spain because of lack of benefits of any kind and the very short holiday period), the interviewees could develop their careers (or at least work in jobs related to their careers). Finally, some interviewees opted to try something different, and we found some full-time employees who have tried their luck in informal businesses. This is the case of Andrea (37, seven years in Monterrey) who holds a managerial position in an important university but also has a cosmetics business with a sales network mainly built on personal contacts. In any case, the variety of self-employment arrangements provides another example of the diversity of forms of employment open to new immigrants arriving from a country with high unemployment and limited job prospects.

On the other hand, changes in immigration laws have also had an impact on incorporation into Mexican labour markets. The new 2012 Migration Act establishes tougher controls on new arrivals. Before this law, and according to the interviewees, tourists could easily pass to an immigrant category, once in the country. After 2012, though, the new arrivals should ask for a (work) visa before their entry into Mexico if they want to stay in the country for more than 90 days. In many cases, interviewees do not have a clear idea of the legislation framework and/or their intentions of stay in Mexico are not clear on their arrival. Of importance for this paper, and different from other developing countries (see, for instance, Koser & Salt, 1997, for an appraisal of migration policies in Southern Asia), Mexico has not a specific programme for attracting highly skilled migrants. Even though large transnational corporations do not have real problems of obtaining work permits for their foreign employees, according to the interviewed expatriates, the situation is more complex for small to medium-sized Mexican enterprises that face difficulties to justify the lack of qualified Mexican workers for several positions. In any case, migration laws (and ineffective bureaucracy) are not a deterrent to migration, but a complication for labour incorporation in Mexico to the point that several immigrants worked irregularly in Mexico at their interview.

MEXICAN LABOUR MARKETS: DOES THE LOCAL MARKET MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANTS?

Theories on global cities have long argued that the labour market in such cities is highly segmented, with immigrants present at both ends of the employment spectrum. These ends are somehow linked, as unskilled immigrants can do many jobs needed by the top managerial class (e.g., personal services, cleaning; Sassen, 2000). Theorists have also tried to create hierarchies of cities, in which Mexico City is sometimes considered a global city (e.g., Parnreiter, 2012). Even if Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla are not

generally included in global-city rankings, they are important service cities (Table 2). When observing economic indicators more closely, we see that foreign investment and financial services are highly concentrated on Mexico City. By contrast, Guadalajara and Puebla play a more relevant role as regional trading and manufacturing centres. Monterrey is in between these two city models, with the highest population growth rate and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of the four cities under study (Table 2).

Regardless of the economic profile of the city, the evidence indicates, however, that Spanish migrants are concentrated in similar employment clusters. In other words, Mexico City is not very different from the other cities under study as regards the incorporation of highly skilled migrants into the workforce. In this respect, two groups of professionals clearly stand out in this survey: expatriates and academics.

Expatriates

Expatriates constitute a specific group in the interviewees (Table 1). In keeping with the literature, expatriates came to Mexico with temporary, well-paid employment arrangements, and for them emigration is synonymous with promotion, greater responsibility and autonomy, more power to make decisions, and better economic conditions. This vertical professional mobility is accomplished within the framework of a company's employment structure, as described by Salt (1988) and Beaverstock (2002). This was the case with Eduard. He used to work in a middle-management position in Barcelona but came to Mexico as a manager for a multinational corporation. In his own words, 'I am my own boss. I am number one in the company. I do what I think is right.'

The Spaniards contacted for this research who fall into this category are 20 men who were aged 35–50 on their arrival in Mexico. Significantly, there were no women in the group of expatriates. This is also in line with the literature, which agrees on the fact that expatriates are mainly men because business responsibilities are highly masculinized and wives simply followed men through family regrouping. As Kofman and Parvarti (2005) suggest, women are not given the chance to opt for overseas jobs in the male-dominated world of financial and production services, since such decisions are mainly made within male networks. In this respect, Willis and Yeoh (2000), who analyzed a group of expatriates' wives in China, concluded that these women 'accompany' husbands on their employment trails but relinquish their own positions. Along the same lines, Ortiz and Mendoza (2008) concluded that the female partners of expatriates in Mexico do not search for a job because of the legal obstacles to obtaining a work permit, and also because the available jobs do not fulfil their expectations. Contrary to their husbands' careers, migration for women represents a 'break from work' and, consequently, a 'return to the home' (Yeoh & Willis, 2005).

Even if the bulk of expatriates are in Mexico for fewer than three years and consider their experience of working and living offshore temporary, a small portion of those

Table 2. Economic indicators of the four cities under study.

	Mexico City	Guadalajara	Monterrey	Puebla
<i>Population</i>				
Population, 2000	18,396,677	3,699,136	3,381,005	2,269,995
Population, 2014	20,729,069	4,718,336	4,390,910	2,896,423
Annual growth rate, 2000–14 (%)	0.9	1.7	1.9	1.7
<i>Working population, 2014 (%)</i>				
Farming, mining and energy	3.1	0.0	1.2	0.1
Construction	2.6	4.2	4.7	3.5
Manufacturing	10.0	20.2	15.5	19.8
Trading	21.9	31.7	23.5	32.7
Financial and accounting services	8.7	0.9	5.5	0.7
Non-financial services	53.7	43.0	49.6	43.3
<i>Other economic indicators</i>				
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita 2014 (Mexican pesos)	196,378	129,083	327,036	157,772
Foreign investment per capita average, 2012–14 (US\$)	6116.0	1044.0	1783.2	799.6
Unemployment rate, 2014	7.0	5.0	6.0	5.0

Note: Population and other economic indicator data are for metropolitan areas. Working populations are only for the municipalities of Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla. For Mexico City, the working population corresponds to the federal district.

Sources: 2000 Population: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI) (2018b); working population: INEGI (2018c); other economic indicators and 2014 population: Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad (IMCO) (2016).

interviewed decided to stay in Mexico for longer periods (and eventually leave the multinational that originally brought them to the country). In some cases, this decision is linked to better job prospects in Mexico compared with Italy or Spain. But, for others, personal circumstances (e.g., marrying a Mexican national) are the main reasons for staying. Eventually, a stronger identification with Mexico (and more critical stances on Spain/Italy) emerges in this group's discourse. Pedro is an example of this. He has come to Mexico twice, and reckons that the job options are much better there:

This is a construction company. ... In 2009 there was a very interesting project in Mexico, a hospital ... a public–private partnership. We invested, we built the hospital and now we manage it. ... I came here for that project. I was in at the design stage, then the construction. ... Later I went back to Spain in 2012, for eight months. I tried to do new projects there, but they were not successful. ... The company proposed that I came back here again, and I accepted the move. Since then, I have been in Mexico and I hope that I'll stay here for a long period. I decided to return to Mexico because things in Spain were not very good.

(Pedro, 34, expatriate, executive director, four years in Mexico City)

Finally, there are no relevant differences by city, since expatriates constituted 15–25% of those interviewed in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla. In other words, foreigners who are sent offshore by large companies are not exclusive to Mexico City. In fact, all four cities attract different skilled immigrant profiles, according

to their specific labour markets. Thus, Puebla's car industry attracts a significant number of foreign technical staff, while Mexico City's sample included many employed by international organizations (such as the United Nations and cooperation agencies).

Academics

Academics comprise a second group that is prevalent in all four cities (almost one-quarter of the total sample; Table 1). In a context of increasingly international curricula, academics seem to be more disposed towards international mobility. In fact, it has been argued that academia is international per se, that sciences are rooted in the circulation of ideas and people, and that career advancement in academia is directly linked to a degree of mobility, sometimes based on university-exchange agreements (Mahroum, 1998). Within the European Union, it has also been pointed out that one important reason for the mobility (or even migration) of academics from Southern and Eastern Europe is lack of opportunities for career advancement in their universities of origin (Ackers, 2005).

In this research we found many types of immigrants who were connected with academia in some way. Thus, we interviewed students who arrived in Mexico because of university exchanges (and decided to stay), recent doctoral graduates who came through mobility programmes, academics offered specific university contracts (who also decided to stay after these expired) and, finally, others who decided on their Mexican adventure because they had no prospects in their universities of origin and migrated without any formal arrangements. These various ways of entering Mexican universities clearly point at the lack of

permanent positions in Southern European academia, partly because of current economic crisis, as the main reason for immigration into Mexico. One example of the latter group is Paloma, who arrived in Guadalajara in 2006. She explained in the interview the difficulties of obtaining a permanent position in Spanish academia, and how she decided to move to Mexico:

I finished my PhD and then ... I did many things, I published and I competed for various university positions. ... I replaced someone who was on maternity leave for four months. ... Lately, I taught in secondary schools, and then I replaced a person who was on his sabbatical [in a Spanish university]. ... I became unemployed. At that time I came to a conference in Veracruz, Mexico. I had a friend who told me to come to Guadalajara after the conference. ... I handed out my CV [curriculum vitae] at different universities in the city. And my current job came about like that.

(Paloma, 39, lecturer at a private university, nine years in Guadalajara)

Again, there were no differences as regards the city of residence. We found Spanish/Italian academics in all four cities, not only in higher education (in both public and private universities) but also in other education sectors, such as secondary schools, special-needs schools and language schools. Furthermore, for some interviewees, teaching was a part-time activity performed to fill out their wages or simply because they like the academic world. In short, it seems there is a great demand for academics and teachers in different segments of the Mexican education sector. This demand is evident in all four cities researched, with no remarkable differences in the incorporation of immigrants into the education system.

CONCLUSIONS

By comparing two foreign inflows into Mexico and observing their incorporation into the workforce of four Mexican cities, this paper fills a gap in the literature, which has traditionally focused on immigration into developed countries and has lacked a comparative perspective. In this regard, and different from the prevailing literature, this research shows the relevance of social networks in the destination country for immigrant labour incorporation and mobility. By giving voice to highly skilled immigrants, the paper also shows the diversity of this group which face contrasting labour conditions. This research suggests that this diversity lies in several reasons; mainly, nationality, the age of the interviewee (and, consequently, the moment in which they are in their career), immigration year in Mexico (before/after economic crisis), nationality, and the channel through which immigrants arrive in Mexico (official channels such as transnational corporation labour markets and academia arrangements versus informal ways of getting jobs). These four aspects (nationality, age, year of arrival and immigration channel) are basic to understanding both labour incorporation and mobility in Mexico, and suggest that highly skilled immigration in Mexico does

not respond to a unique labour incorporation pattern, as the literature on expatriates suggests.

The extensive fieldwork on Italians and Spaniards living in Mexico shows differences between these two countries. The Italians, who are less relevant in Mexico in quantitative terms, came mainly for reasons unrelated to employment. Significantly enough, in their narratives, the economic crisis is virtually unmentioned. Their reasons for emigrating are basically associated with studies and personal circumstances involving marriage and the formation of relationships. Once in the country, however, they take advantage of labour market niches open to them, with a significant number of Italians becoming integrated into self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Spaniards, by contrast, show a more diverse pattern. When flows are compared by year of arrival, substantial differences are found between those who arrived before and during/after 2008. Most of the earlier arrivals experienced upward professional mobility in Mexico. For those who arrived later, however, we observed that their emigration was the consequence of the de-skilling qualification process they suffered in Spain, where they were in jobs that were clearly beneath their expectations and level of education. Mexico seems to provide the possibility not only of pursuing a career but also of working in their own professions. Irrelevant of their year of arrival, though, immigrants generally reckon that their entry into Mexican local labour markets and subsequent mobility were easy and unproblematic. Finally, when we looked at incorporation into the workforce by city of destination, the main conclusion is that there are no notable differences. Two groups of professionals stood out in the four cities, as expatriates and academics accounted for relevant share of the survey.

The above analysis also opens up the discussion as regards how states control (or otherwise) their migration flows. The Spanish government, for instance, seems not to appreciate the loss of human capital resulting from emigration (in fact, it has tried to curtail emigrants' rights in Spain, e.g., health services and voting rights). Along the same lines, Mexico migration policies are not aimed at keeping immigrants. On the contrary, the 2012 migration law imposes more restrictions (or restrictions similar to those of other countries) on potential migrants into Mexico. Mexico has not defined a specific policy for skilled migrants, resulting in some of the interviewees being in a precarious legal situation in the country. The obvious conclusion is that neither Southern European nor Mexican governments seem to view skilled workers as a positive asset for their economies and societies.

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NOTE

1. Real Decreto-ley 16/2012, de 20 de abril, de medidas urgentes para garantizar la sostenibilidad del Sistema Nacional de Salud y mejorar la calidad y seguridad de sus prestaciones. Ley 22/2013, de 23 de diciembre, de Presupuestos Generales del Estado para el año 2014.

ORCID

Cristóbal Mendoza  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8694-6830>

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