Migrant agency and community structure: Competing explanations for economic decline in migrant sending communities of rural central Mexico

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Abstract

In response to Giddens' structuration theory, this study attempts to unravel the linkages between migration and local economic growth by moving beyond the household to the community level of analysis, and by considering lagged relationships over several years. The case study -24 towns in central Zacatecas, Mexico- concludes that remittances from US migration play an ambiguous role, providing basic income but at the same time resulting in more expenditures outside the community, which results in a lower multiplier effect and lower growth rates (measured by population growth). The reason for the externalization of expenditures is not so much the migration experience itself, as the socio-economic structure of sending communities, including their small populations and poor employment structures, which put overwhelming constraints on their growth and development.

Keywords: migration, economic growth, structure, agency, Mexico.

Introduction

Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling. This, of course, does not prevent the structured properties of social systems from stretching away, in time and space, beyond the control of any individual actors (Giddens 1984:25).

Anthony Giddens argues that structure and agency occur at different scales, and are part of a recursive process that operates over time. In addition, he believes that certain elements of structure remain present (like genetic markers) even after many recursive cycles, influencing agency deep into the future. His structuration theory offers insights that are useful to migration specialists, and particularly to those working with the broad and ambivalent relationship between migration and development. First, Giddens' ideas are useful methodologically. Between migrant agency (at the individual and household levels), and development (at the community level), there exist considerable time and space over which other factors intervene. Surveys of households in a single (or a few) towns, at a given point in time, cannot hope to reveal how migrant households' use of their remittances, and of their experiences abroad, are related to the growth of their community. Second, structu-

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ration theory is useful conceptually. The poor economic and social infrastructure in many migrant communities both compels migration from those communities and influences how economic and social remittances are used---and whether this in turn generates growth and development.

The migration-development process has many strands. In this study, I examine the role of international wage-labour migration on one facet of development---economic growth in towns of origin. I first establish the relationship between community structure (geographic, economic, and social), migrant agency (receipt of remittances), and community growth (population growth being used as a surrogate). Does a community's structure completely explain any effect that migration might have on growth? Second, I investigate how migration affects the rate of local expenditures by households, and how this in turn affects community growth. Do households in communities with high rates of remittance receipt spend more money outside the community (which determines the value of the economic base multiplier), thus resulting in lower rates of growth? Third, I ask how this localization of expenditures is related to a community's stage of migration and to its community structure. Do mature migrant communities (those whose US migrants have cumulated extensive time abroad), and smaller communities, spend less locally? Does migration stage (agency) matter more than the size and economic potential of a community (structure) in where expenditures are made? In the analysis that follows, to capture the likelihood of lagged relationships I examine structural factors in one period, migration/ remittances and expenditures in the next period, and community growth in a subsequent period. The case study is a predominantly rural area in central Zacatecas, Mexico (the state with the highest incidence of U.S. migration) over the period 1980-2000.

Migration and rural growth linkages

A basic question facing migration/ development researchers is whether the forces that compel out-migration from poor communities may be reversed by the remittances that flow back to such communities. This literature suggests not; two disparate conclusions are that (1) *rural migrant households are sustained and improved by migration;* but that *(2) their communities stagnate or decline, and migration from them continues.* But this doesn't fully answer the question: remittance-receiving communities may continue to decline but remittances may lessen the rate of decline. One problem is that little explicit research exists on the topic.

Another problem is the multifaceted nature of rural development itself. Development's different dimensions, encompassing the dynamics of income and employment, inequity, social conditions, political issues, environmental sustainability, etc. (Forsyth and Leach, 1998; Jones, 1998; Vullnetari and King, 2008)---are too varied and diffuse to examine in a single study. However, one dimension is of particular importance in evaluating the role of migration and remittances in emigrant towns---that of *community economic growth.* It is generally assumed that this role is a positive one, in that export-basic income in the

form of remittances, targeted to families, recirculates locally to generate multiplier effects for the entire community. The extent, to which this occurs, however, has not been established. In this study, owing to the absence of community-level income data, I use population growth as a proxy for economic growth. Although there are circumstances in which population growth does not reflect economic growth (as for dormitory communities or extractive towns, for example: Hinderink and Titus, 2002; Ellis, 1998) these situations do not characterize isolated towns in emigrant regions. Population growth has been shown to be closely related to rural income and employment growth (Bradshaw and Blakeley 1982; Kwang-Koo et al., 2005; Sridhar, 2010) in towns such as those analysed in this research.

Most analyses of migration and remittances are derived from household surveys in individual communities, and only a few of them draw conclusions regarding economic growth of the community per se (for examples, see Black and Costaldo, 2009; Jurgens, 2001; Mahler, 1998; Nicholson, 2004). Regarding Mexico, more research exists, but its conclusions are contradictory. Early work provided evidence for positive local multiplier effects in the form of remittance-fuelled handicrafts, sewing, and horticultural enterprises, as well as multiplier effects from local consumption expenditures (Durand et al., 1996; Jones, 1995: 72-78, 119-121; Stark et al., 1986). Recent research has been less sanguine. Jones (2009) finds that villages in Zacatecas have continued to decline demographically and economically despite the continued arrival of remittances that provide benefits to migrant families. Binford (2003) notes the deterioration in migrant enterprises and towns in Puebla and Zacatecas, which he attributes to the insidious effects of remittances and migration. Cohen et al. (2005) also make note of this deterioration, but attribute it to structural forces that are stronger than any developmental potential which remittances may possess.

The indeterminate conclusions concerning the migration-growth relationship are a function of complex interacting forces that are not easily deciphered. However, the bringing together of two broad perspectives "under one roof" offers some hope for untangling these forces. (1) The first of these is the *structural perspective* that persuades us to consider the locational and temporal context in which local development is embedded. Taylor and Dyer (2009), for example, remind us of the "sensitivity of international migration's impacts to local market conditions and differences in the effects of migration and remittances in the short and long run." Similarly, Hinderink and Titus (2002) discuss the dependence of small towns on natural resource endowments, population, market accessibility, and political/economic structures that are outside their control. This perspective suggests the role of geographic, economic, and social forces in local development that run parallel to, and influence, migration experience. It implies the desirability of analyses at the level of the community, over multiple years. (2) The second perspective that helps decipher the migration/ growth relationship is the *migrant agency perspective*. Its proponents, while not ignoring the role of structure, remind us of the im-

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portant role of migrant decision-making in community growth. Decisions on how remittances are spent are critical to local growth (Ellis 1998), and these decisions are heavily influenced by such factors as migrants' ties abroad and their commitment to the community back home (Cantú et al., 2007; Jones, 2009; Jones and de la Torre, 2009). As de Haas (2010: 256) notes, "Depending on th(e) broader context, migration may enable people to retreat from, just as much as to engage and invest in, social, political, and economic activities in origin countries. It is the very capabilities-enhancing potential of migration that also increases the freedom of migrants and their families to effectively withdraw from such activities."

Both perspectives benefit from the analytical concepts of *community economic base analysis* (Tiebout, 1962; Gibson and Glenn, 1999). In this analytical technique, a community's competitive advantage attracts basic income into the community from purchasers outside it, and this income becomes the principal engine of community economic growth. This growth is realized, however, only if income re-circulates within the community---that is, only if there is a significant *multiplier effect* (see Jones, 2007; Davidson, 1990; Brunn, 1968). In the current context, a capable and mobile labour force constitutes the community's major competitive advantage; the inflow of remittances comprise its basic income; and households' (and family businesses') local spending and investing behaviours determine the multiplier. These spending and investing behaviours are crucial to the multiplier effect, and they involve both community structure and migrant agency. That is, whether remittances remain locally or leak away from the community depends on (1) structural factors such as the size of a community, its location relative to larger places, its human capital, and its economic development potential; and on (2) migrant agency, including migrants' economic and social embeddedness in the community and their cultural identification with it. In other words, the impacts of both agency and structure are articulated through the multiplier, to affect local growth.

A Conceptualization of the migration-economic growth process

A conceptual diagram will serve to guide the reader in the analysis that follows (Figure 1). A key notion from Giddens is that the migration-growth process is recursive. Based on the previously-cited work, there are four key factors in this process, and they are staged in time as well as in the number of other factors that they influence (exogeneity). This staging is understood to encompass one cycle only; over several cycles, all variables would be endogenous. The process begins with *community structure* in the first time period (t_1). Community structure creates the push forces that stimulate migration (relationship a), but in addition it helps determine where residents spend their remittances and other income (relation f). Small communities may lack higher order goods, forcing residents to shop elsewhere; they may lack human and economic resources, forcing local businessmen to invest elsewhere; and they may be inaccessible, further eroding their investment potential. Community

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structure also influences community economic growth directly (relation b), because communities grow for many reasons that have to do with quality of life rather than economic opportunity per se. *Migrant agency* is the next factor in the system, and takes place at t_2. Migration may affect community growth directly (relation c), by generating economic remittances (generally with positive results) but also social remittances (that may have both positive and negative results). It may also affect the externalization of expenditures by households (relation d), both because migrant households tend to earn more income and therefore may demand more sophisticated goods, and because they are more accustomed to U.S. goods. *Local multiplier effects* are next in the process (t_3). Since the propensity to spend locally is the key algebraic component of the multiplier, we would expect that this would directly affect community growth (relation e). Finally, *community economic growth* is the endpoint of the process (t_4) -the factor that is influenced by all others in the system.

Figure 1: A recursive model of the migration-economic growth process
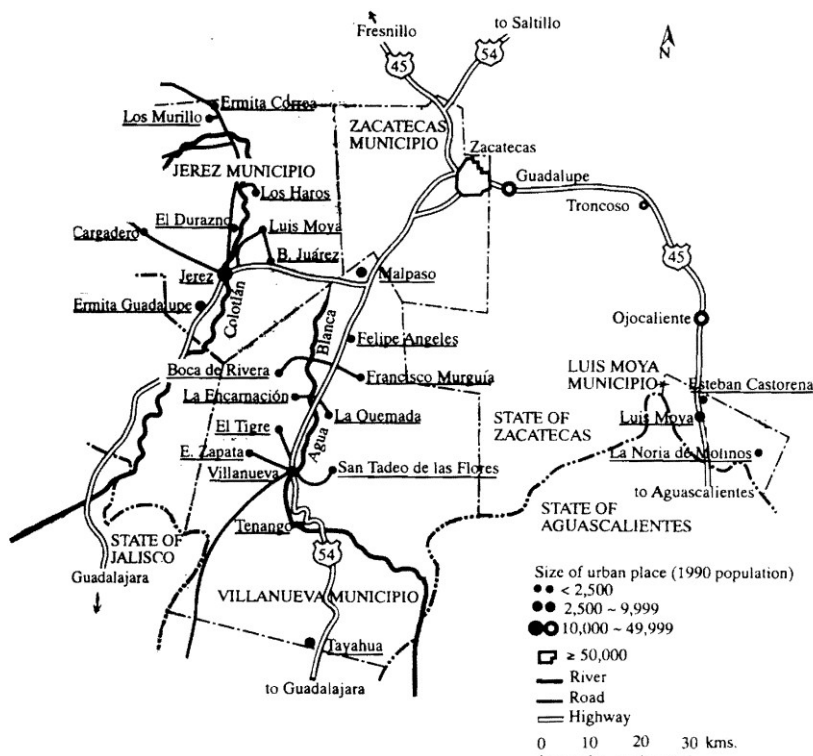

Source: Author

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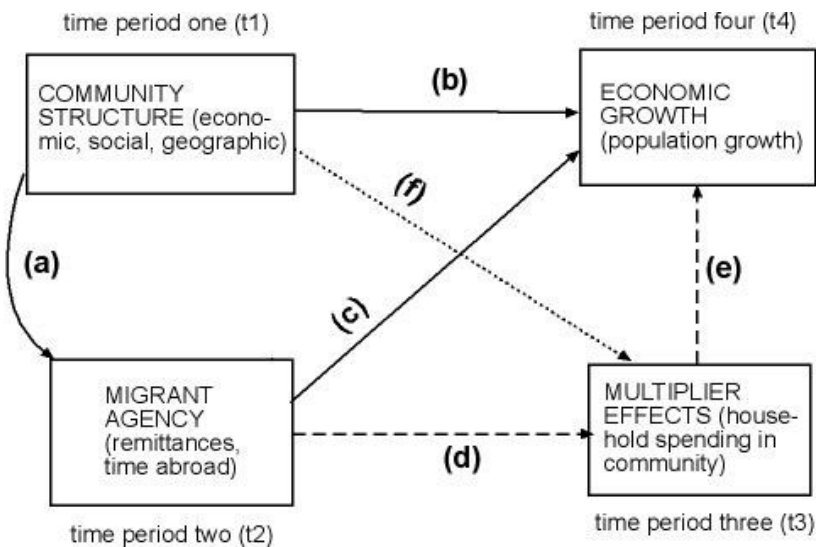
Study design and study area

My analysis proceeds in three steps -indicated by different arrow staffs (solid, dashed, and dotted) in Figure 1. In the model, causes precede effects empirically over time ($t_1 \ldots t_4$):

(1) I examine the role that structure plays in migrant agency (relation a in the diagram) and in community economic growth (relation b). The question is:

Does community structure completely explain any effect that migration has on growth (relation c)? Relations a, b, and c are shown with solid arrows.

Figure 2: Central Zacatecas: Municipalities and towns of the study (sampled towns are underlined)

Source: Author

(2) Assuming that migration has an independent role to play in community growth, I investigate how migration influences local multiplier effects (household spending within the community) (relation d), and in turn, the importance of these multiplier effects in economic growth (relation e). The question is: Do communities with high migration propensity spend less locally than communities with low migration propensity, and does less local spending translate to lower community growth rates? Relations d and e are shown with dashed arrows.

(3) I make a comparative assessment of the roles of community structure and migrant agency in determining the multiplier (relations d and f, respectively). The questions are: Do mature migrant communities (those with longer average residence times abroad) spend less locally than less- mature communi-

ties? Do communities with less-dynamic structures (subsistence agriculture, small population, isolation) exhibit less local spending? Which of these two effects is stronger? Relation f is shown with a dotted arrow.

The state of Zacatecas has the highest incidence of migration to the United States---over three times the Mexican average---and is ideal for investigating the role of migration and remittances in local economic growth. Three municipalities (counties) in central Zacatecas surveyed in 1988 (Jones, 1995) are the focus of this study: Villanueva, Jerez, and Luís Moya (Figure 2). A total of 596 households in twenty-four towns---including the three county seats and 21 geographically representative smaller communities---were surveyed in 1988. In the analyses below, household data are aggregated to the community level to give indicators for migration behaviour, household expenditures, and employment structure for each community. Other indicators (population size, growth rates, and accessibility) were obtained from published sources (INEGI, 1980, 1990, 2000; Guia Roji 1985). The indicators for each factor are staged by time period, with t_1 = 1980-85; t_2 = 1987; t_3 = 1988; and t_4 = 1990-2000. Therefore, the recursive sequencing of Figure 1 is correlated with the sequence of periods actually represented by the data. These are not inclusive periods of time (as would have been desirable), so a continuity of trends must be assumed covering the interstitial gaps, but this does not appear too severe an assumption given the nature of the data.

Variable indicators

In this study, the *population growth rate, 1990-2000*---the endogenous variable in the system---is employed as a surrogate for economic growth, as noted earlier. The principal measure of migrant agency is the *percentage of households receiving remittances in 1987*, the year prior to the survey. This indicator is appropriate to the economic focus of the study, and it reflects active migration. A secondary measure of migrant agency is the *number of months cumulated abroad by an average migrant as of 1987*. This is an indicator for a community's stage of migration. High values imply anchorage to the destination and attenuation of ties with the origin (Cantú et al., 2007; Jones, 2009; Smith, 2001), which can affect community growth profoundly. The community structure concept---which has economic, social, and geographic dimensions (Hinderink and Titus, 2002; Sridhar, 2010; Sachs, 2005: 56-73)---is represented by three variables: the *percentage of the household heads working in non-agricultural activities in 1983*, the *population of the town in 1980* (expressed in logarithms to de-emphasize extreme values), and *the accessibility of the town, 1985* (whether it is located on a paved highway). These three indicators were selected from a larger number of variables based on their importance in the literature, their explanatory power, and their representation of underlying factors. The prevalence of non-agricultural activities is a surrogate for employment opportunities, investment opportunities, and the existence of other basic activities other than international migration. The population of the town is an indicator for the local availability of goods

and services and for quality of life in general. The location of the town on a paved highway reflects its access to inputs, products, and services in nearby cities. Finally, the multiplier is represented by the *percentage of total household expenditures that are local, 1987* (defined as within the area of continuous residences) and includes both consumption and investment expenditures.

Results

The means for these indicators are given in Table 1. The 24 towns averaged a 17% decline in population between 1990 and 2000. In fact, twenty of the twenty-four towns lost population over the decade, but as stated earlier, the question of whether remittances dampened the loss is still a valid one. Indeed, over half of the households received remittances in 1987, and the average migrant had spent almost five years working in the United States, both of which suggest that migration may have played a significant economic role in these places. These communities were quite rural on average, with ¾ of their heads working in agriculture---predominantly semi-subsistence agriculture on ejidos

Table 1: Means of Indicators: 24 communities in central Zacatecas, Mexico

Variable and **Indicator** (recursive model time period in parentheses)	**Mean**
Community Development (t_4)	
Population growth rate, 1990-2000, in per cent [a]	- 17.3
Migrant Agency (t_2)	
Percentage of households receiving remittances, 1987 [b]	51.7
Cumulated time abroad for average migrant, 1987, months [b]	55.6
Community Structure (t_1)	
Percentage of household heads in non-agricultural activities, 1985 [b]	24.5
Population of the town in 1980 [c]	2663
Accessibility of the town, 1985 (located on a paved highway = 1) [d]	0.63
Local Multiplier Effects (t_3)	
Percentage of total household expenditures that are local, 1988 [b]	33.4
Other Indicators	
Percentage of household food expenditures that are local, 1988 [b]	48.3
Food as a percentage of total household expenditures, 1988 [b]	46.8

Sources: [a] INEGI, 1990, 2000. [b] Jones (1995), survey of 596 households in central Zacatecas, 1988. [c] INEGI, 1980. [d] Guia Roji, Atlas of Mexican Highways, 1985.

(individual communal landholdings). Although the mean community population was almost 2,700, the median population was about 900; in fact only three places (the county seats of the three municipios) had more than 5000 persons in 1990. Almost 2/3 of the communities were on a paved highway. Only one-third of household expenditures were made in the community of residence; this percentage rose to almost ½ for food purchases, which accounted for approximately ½ of total household purchases.

    Remittances, community growth, and structure

The first question to be addressed is the role of remittances in population growth. Did a high level of remittances in 1987 promote or detract from community growth during 1990-2000? Relationship (c) on Figure 3 is a negative correlation of -0.293, and this might be taken to imply that remittances impeded growth. Such an implication is doubtful, however, because there is the possibility that unfavourable structural conditions in the community both stunted growth and simultaneously spawned migration, such that the migration-growth relationship was spurious. This possibility requires testing.

In Figure 3, as in Figure 1, symbols for the arrow staffs (solid, dashed, and dotted) are keyed to the three analytical steps defined above. Relationships (a), (b), and (c) refer to step one and are shown by solid arrows. Note that two

Figure 3: Relationships between variables in the migration-economic growth system: 24 communities in Zacatecas (simple Pearsonian correlations)
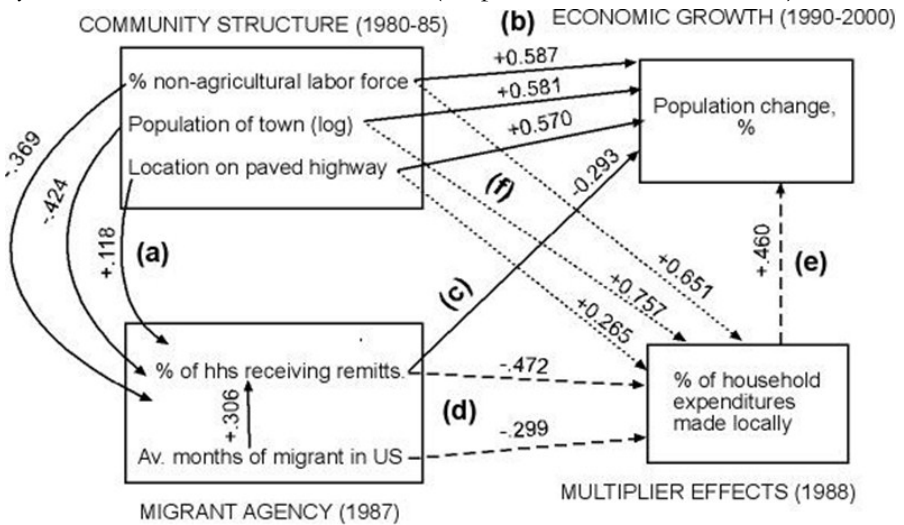
Figure 3. Relationships between variables in the migration-economic growth system: 24 communities in Zacatecas (simple Pearsonian correlations)

Source: Author

indicators of community structure (non-agricultural labour force and town population) are inversely related to receipt of remittances (the correlations are -0.369 and −0.424, respectively) and directly related to population change (+0.587 and +0.581, respectively). The third indicator (location on a paved highway) is poorly related to remittances (+0.118) but substantially related to population change (+0.570). Therefore, with one exception, community structure is moderately to substantially related to both international migration and growth (It should be pointed out that the relationship between structure and population growth is undoubtedly mediated to some degree by internal migra-

tion, in response to the lack of local opportunities). This exogenous association by itself does not prove spuriousness; this requires a test of the relationship of remittances to growth controlling for the structural variables. A multiple regression analysis with population growth as dependent and the three structural indicators plus remittances as independents establishes that remittances (or the underlying migration for which they are an indicator) have a negative influence that is independent of structure. The partial correlation coefficient for remittances (-0.245) is almost as high as its zero-order coefficient (-0.293). The R^2 for this regression is 0.584.

If the negative correlation of remittances with growth is not explained by structure (a town's isolation, economic backwardness, and lack of services), then what explains it? The answer may lie with an additional measure of migrant agency---the propensity of migrant families to spend locally.

The role of the economic base multiplier.

The economic base model poses that the inflow of basic income is not enough by itself to generate community growth. Households and businesses must spend and invest this income locally, promoting its circulation and ultimate multiplication of jobs and income.

Do households in high remittance-receiving communities tend to make their purchases elsewhere? Relationship (d) in Figure 3 (between remittances and local expenditures) is –0.472, so this does appear to be true. Does the externalization of expenditures contribute to a slower growth of their communities? This also appears to be the case: relationship (e), +0.460, is equally strong.

The multiplier mechanism of remittances at local scale is seldom considered in the migration and development literature. Remittances are certainly very important to small towns in the historic region, and a large proportion of this money recirculates in Mexico in the form of foodstuffs, everyday clothing, construction materials, tools, and demand for specialists such as doctors, teachers, and architects (Durand et al. 1996). Yet if the focus is on the growth or development of *sending communities*, then local expenditures should mean expenditures within the community -not the municipality, the region, or Mexico. For the 24 communities in this study, an average of $1/3^{rd}$ of expenses were local (Table 1) and this dropped to $1/6^{th}$ for non-food purchases. The former figure generates a multiplier of only 1.5 -i.e., each remittance dollar would create an additional 50¢ locally. The multiplier for the smaller towns is lower still -c. 1.33.

A final question is whether this externalization of expenditures is itself a function of the poor structure of sending communities, or of other elements of migrant agency itself. This question is now addressed.

Community structure, migrant agency, and the multiplier

It is an intriguing question whether the same structural factors that compel migration and feed population decline also lead to external expenditures. An alternative explanation is that the attitudes and behaviours of migrant households themselves---e.g., preferences for more sophisticated, higher-value goods and lack of embeddedness in the town---lead to fewer local purchases.

These questions are impossible to answer definitively with the data at hand, but inferences can be made from the correlations in Figure 3 (relationships d and f). For this analysis, an additional indicator of migrant agency is considered: the average number of months a household migrant has spent in the United States. This is an indicator of the migration stage of the community, which has been connected elsewhere to more family members abroad, owning a home abroad, and the possession of legal status among migrating family members (Cantú et al., 2007; DiSipio, 2002; Jones, 2009; Marcelli and Lowell, 2005; Riosmena, 2004; Smith, 2001). As such, it suggests lessening ties with the sending community that occur with an *advanced stage of migration*. Relationship (d), showing a correlation of –0.299 between migration stage and local expenditures, verifies the notion that longer stays abroad cultivate a demand for external products and services. This goes along with the inverse relationship between remittances and local expenditures (-0.472) discussed in the last section. Note that longer stays abroad are associated with more sending of remittances (+0.306). As such, longer stays play both a positive role (generating more money for sending communities) and a negative role (less local spending of this money). Evidently, for longer stays abroad, the non-local pattern of expenditures trumps the increase in remittances, such that migration is negatively correlated with growth, controlling for structural factors (see above).

Overall, in regards to the multiplier, community structure is of greater consequence than migrant agency. The strong correlations of local expenditures with non-agricultural labour force (+0.651) and town population (+0.757), in comparison to the more modest correlations with remittance receipt (-0.472) and time abroad (-0.299) bear this out. The existence of higher order shopping opportunities in urban centres is an overwhelming advantage that leads to a higher local multiplier and also to basic income from shoppers who commute from the surrounding region to shop. The operation of population thresholds (a minimum local population needed to support the first business establishment of a given type in a town) for goods and services is the major organizing principle for Central Place Theory in geography (see Dale and Sjoholt, 2007) which is in turn the theoretical basis for much of modern urban geography.

Placing migration, structure, and community growth in perspective

The examination of averages and correlation coefficients obscures the demographic gulf between urban and rural places in this region. The role that migration plays in local development, in this case study, is a tale of two city types (Table 2). Following UN conventions, I consider places above 5000

population to be urban. The three urban places in central Zacatecas grew in population over the 1990s, while the 21 rural communities (in all but one case) lost population, and the average loss was over 1/5 of their 1990 population. This represents village decline on a pronounced scale. Urban size, the most influential component of structure in this analysis, thus plays an overpowering role in economic growth. On a broader scale, in Zacatecas as a whole, 60% of non-metropolitan municipalities lost population over the decade. This compares to 37% for the historic migration region (Durand and Massey, 2003) and 29% for Mexico overall.

Table 2: Comparing urban and rural communities in central Zacatecas, selected indicators

Variable and Indicator	Jerez	Villa-nueva	Luis Moya	21 rural communities (means) [c]
Population, 1990	34,319	8,908	5,366	1,122
Population growth rate, 1990-2000, in percent [a]	+ 9.4	+ 24.1	+ 8.3	- 21.7
Percentage of households receiving remittances, 1987 [b]	34.3	33.3	23.3	54.7
Cumulated time abroad for average migrant, 1987, months [b]	55.9	49.6	42.1	56.5
Percentage of household heads in non-agricultural activities, 1985 [b]	82.4	47.5	50.9	19.4
Percentage of total household expenditures that are local, 1988 [b]	82.8	91.9	75.4	26.2
Percentage of total household expenditures that are local, 1988 [b]	82.8	91.9	75.4	26.2

Sources: [a] INEGI, 1990, 2000. [b] Jones (1995), survey of 596 households in central Zacatecas, 1988. [c] Rural is defined as less than 5000 population in 1990.

I concluded earlier that community structure is the underlying force for community economic growth, and this is more important than remittances and migration in this growth. Table 2 emphasizes this. It is not so much that larger places are *less dependent* on remittances (although this is certainly true), but that they have other basic sectors that give them an advantage over smaller places. Note that non-agricultural activities constitute from half to 80% of the jobs of urban heads of household, compared to less than 20% for rural heads. *Jerez*, the primate city of the region, is a beehive of retail activity and business services for five municipalities southwest of Zacatecas and Fresnillo (Figure 2). *Villanueva* is an important service and retirement city for its municipality, and also an emerging tourist centre for the ruins (10 km north) of the most important classical ceremonial centre north of Mexico City, Chicomostoc or La Quemada. *Luis Moya* is a commercial agricultural town on the agro-industrial corridor between Zacatecas and Aguascalientes, a processing centre for grapes and broccoli, and a garment sewing centre. These

centres attract investment and consumption purchases from migrant and non-migrant households alike to a much higher degree than the rural pueblos elsewhere in their municipalities.

Conclusions

In response to Giddens' structuration theory, this study has attempted to un-ravel the linkages between migration and local economic growth by moving beyond the household to the community level of analysis, and by considering lagged relationships over several years. The case study---24 towns in central Zacatecas, Mexico---concludes that remittances from US migration play an ambiguous role, providing basic income but at the same time resulting in more expenditures outside the community, which results in a lower multiplier effect and lower population growth rates. The reason for the externalization of expenditures is not so much the nature of remittances or the migration experience itself, as the socio-economic structure of sending communities, including their small populations and poor employment structures, which put overwhelming constraints on their development. In this regard, the 21 rural *pueblos* are hindered by their lack of population thresholds for viable retail es-tablishments, their inferior infrastructure and labour supply for industry, and their poor geographic connectivity---all of which discourage local spending and investment of remittances. On the other hand, the three urban places possess advantages on all these criteria.

This study has not dealt with the various flows that accompany monetary remittances---the norms, practices, and social capital that Levitt has referred to as "social remittances" (Levitt, 2001). These are certainly important in the decisions of migrant households to continue their transnational ties with the origin, and to invest and spend locally. They are the subject of considerable recent research, including that of the author, but are beyond the scope of the current study.

Mexico is changing in ways that are seldom acknowledged by migration re-searchers, who tend to present a rather pessimistic view from the perspective of rural sending communities. However, the urban centres in these emigrant regions are growing, taking advantage of new trade, tourism, and agribusiness ventures tied to the United States as well as to Mexican metropolises. These places are emblematic of the new Mexico, and are growth points in a sea of depopulating migrant villages. Their advantages provide a productive outlet for remittances. But quite apart from remittances, they possess other basic activities that enable them to create additional wealth and basic income, laying the groundwork for sustained community growth into the future.

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