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The 3x1 Program for migrants in Mexico: Boom, decline, and the risks of the disappearance of transnational institutionalized philanthropy

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Abstract

During 2002 the 3x1 program is established at a national level for migrants of community projects based on collective remittances from migrant organizations and the three levels of the Mexican government, which allowed the institutionalization of the migrant Mexican philanthropy and the impulse for the growth of those organizations in the United States and the funding of over 29,000 community projects with basic infrastructure (water, electricity, sewer system, streets, roads, clinics, schools, and scholarships) from 2003 to 2019. In this paper, we will study the evolution of the program, the debate in what refers to its functioning, as well as its impact, and the possible consequences of its budget exclusion during 2020 with the disappearance of transnational institutionalized philanthropy, through this program, analyzing recent research in several Mexican states.

Keywords: 3x1 Program; migrant organizations; transnational philanthropy institutionalization; and new migration policies and human rights.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, when Mexican emigration to the United States grew an average of 500 thousand migrants a year; hundreds of migrant organizations developed in that country, and the 3x1 Program for Migrants established nationally, many research papers emerged studying its contributions, contradictions, and challenges. Works by Goldring (2002, 2004, 2008); Alarcón (2004); Fox and Bada (2008); Cappelletti (2012,2014,2016, 2017) Burgess (2012) Duquette and Bada (2013); Duquette (2016); Rabadán Scale (2014); Escala and Rivera (2016); Rivera and Escala (2004, 2008, 2011); Fox and Bada (2008); Iskander (2010); Moctezuma (2003, 2011). These contributions continue to flow until recently. In this paper, we will point out the most relevant and current research from the perspective of migrant organizations, the progress of the Program, its contradictions, and current challenges. According to Héctor Rodríguez R. (2012), the participation of Mexican migrants in the 3x1 Program promotes new mechanisms for the participation of society in the construction of public policies (in local Mexican spaces). Through their intervention in defining the municipal agenda, as well as in the design, implementation, and evolution of programs and projects, migrants contribute to the development of binational public policies and, above all, to the redefinition (and evolution) of what is considered as “public policy” in the field of Political Science.

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According to the previous perspective, Rogelio A. Esquivias Rodríguez (2020) highlights the way in which the experience of this Program, promoted by Mexican migrants organized in the United States, represents a paradigm in the design of public policies due to its double contribution in proactive social organizations, in designing a new public policy for migrants, their families, and communities, and for doing so from abroad.

From the perspective of Political Science, Marcel A. Esquivel (2020) states that the Program has been incorporated into the control mechanisms of the Mexican State towards migrants abroad and their communities of origin as part of its social welfare policy in the construction of basic infrastructure works.

For their part, Rafael Fernández, Rodolfo García, and Ana Vila (2006) state that despite the 3x1 Program for Migrants is about clubs and associations of Mexicans living in the United States, is the only social Program of the federal government whose origin is within organized civil society. The Program basis lies on migrant organizations that collectively carry out events and collect funds which are later sent, in the form of collective remittances, to their communities of origin to carry out social infrastructure works. The Program has become an international benchmark because its results attack several points at the same time: it fosters the organization of the diaspora and establishes bridges with the communities of origin and destination; seeks to maximize the resources sent by organized migrants to carry out works of collective benefit and, finally, the migrant organization exerts a new type of pressure on different levels of government to make the use of public resources transparent, accountable, and accept community supervision in carrying out the works. Accordingly, and under the pressure of migrants themselves, once the necessary bridges of trust have been created, they try to attack the underlying problem and move from public works to productive projects, which poses a new challenge for the different levels of government. This opens a space for negotiation for migrants that implies pressure to achieve a new form of community development, based on a transnational learning process for all participants.

According to Héctor Rodríguez (2012), it is significant to consider that the participation of migrants (and their organizations) in the construction of the municipal public agenda has not been easy (the conflict and negotiation processes are permanent) and has a series of challenges that will surely affect the direction of their intervention as active subjects of local development. Among many others, five relevant aspects stand out: a) the capacity of migrants to expand their public policy networks through the strengthening of clubs; b) avoid the generation of spontaneous and volatile public policy networks (thematic networks), since most of them only propitiate the sporadic participation of the actors in the debate of a policy at a given moment without generating comprehensive medium and long-term visions; c) circumvent the political fragility that distinguishes municipal governments in order to prevent that the change of authorities dissolves public policy networks, collaboration incentives, and participation mechanisms; d) the ability to negotiate and agree with local communities about their urgent needs versus the interests and visions of migrants, and e) the willingness of local governments to promote greater intergovernmental management and overcome the vision of mistrust, bureaucracy, and little organizational capacity from the municipality in local spaces.

Iliana Martínez Hernández (2017) proposes to articulate the 3x1 Program with the National Special Migration Program, approved in April 2013, and the development plans of the state of Jalisco looking to amend problems such as the irregular management of resources and achieve greater participation of migrants in its application and evaluation.



During 2005 when Mexico benefited from the large increase of emigration and the reception of remittances (with 500 thousand migrants a year and 21 billion dollars), we pointed out the need for the country to have a different economic development strategy, with regional and local development proposals for the entire territory, in which migrant organizations would play an important role if the 3x1 Program was articulated, with that development strategy, at a national and regional level.

Based on the experience of the 3x1 Program in Zacatecas, we posed the following challenges regarding its future (García Rodolfo, 2005, 43-52):

- How to institutionalize this transnational learning process without falling into migrant corporatism.
- How to better manage the Program for Communities and Clubs with democracy, transparency, and effectiveness in its objectives.
- How to strengthen institutional strengthening in the communities of origin and destination so that they have a more active role in the Program and even promote emerging transnational development programs in education, health, and culture, as part of a new public policy.
- How to promote a culture of accountability and transparency towards the Program and the communities.
- How to strengthen the organization and economic, social, and cultural presence of Mexican communities in the United States, assuming the challenges of the second generation and the situation of economic, social, and cultural disadvantage they face in that country.
- How to advance in investment alternatives and productive migrant micro-projects that support local development, but do not distort the original 3x1 social program with social solidarity objectives and not profit-making.

However, from the beginning of the 3x1 Program in 2002, there was no interest in articulating it with a regional development policy in the country, taking advantage of the fact that it is a national program that involves a public investment from the three levels of government. A welfare vision towards migrants and their communities persists, from its start until 2020, because the autonomy of Migrant Clubs and Federations is excluded from management having to comply with the regulations defined annually by the Ministry of Finance through the Rules of Operation and its application in state governments. Thus an asymmetric institutional space is established along with an increasing dependence of migrant organizations concerning the three levels of government. The objective is to carry out the largest number of projects according to the objectives and interests of the Mexican government, a persisting dynamic from 2003 to 2018 when the new government of the Fourth Transformation radically reduced the budget for the Program in 2019 and eliminated it from the 2020 budget, seriously affecting transnational communities and risking a historical break in that government and the Mexican State.

Mexican migrant clubs and the 3x1 Program

Since 2003 the experience of the 3x1 Program, during a period of high growth of emigration to the United States from 2000 to 2007 and significant economic, social, and political impact for the communities of origin, migrant organizations, municipalities, state governments, federal

institutions, and political parties, explain the multiplication of efforts looking to promote the formation of migrant clubs and federations by these actors as a way of promoting the largest number of projects and receive the economic, social, and political benefits they involve. This explains why there was significant growth in the number of migrant clubs and Mexican migrants in the United States during the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. Since then, the number of migrant organizations maintains a growing trend with over 900 migrant organizations, during 2008 in the United States, involved in transnational philanthropy practices (García y Padilla, nd). Seven years later, that is to say, in 2015, that number almost doubled (1,697 organizations distributed in 41 states of the neighboring country). In 2019 the Institute of Mexicans Abroad reported 2,644 migrant organizations, of which 2,243 located in the United States, 283 in Mexico, and the others distributed in 30 countries; the amount in Spain, Canada, and Germany stands out. The clubs listed in Mexico (283), when reviewing their location, are almost entirely located in the United States (map 1).

According to the growth of Mexican immigration in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century (12.3 million and their geographical distribution), there are migrant associations distributed in practically all states (44 states); organizations located in California, Texas, and Illinois stand out for their number (together they account for 70% of migrant clubs) since they concentrate 64.1% of Mexican immigrants.

Importance of collective remittances and the 3x1 Program for migrants

As mentioned before, migrant clubs and collective remittances are a key element for the 3x1 Program, means by which those collective remittances are transferred, through the federal, state, and municipal governments, to their communities via social and infrastructure programs. Thus, the Mexican government delegates a part of its responsibilities with national development (García and Pérez, 2008) to these organizations, neglecting the migrant agenda by aligning it with the governmental, and vanishing the autonomy of migrant philanthropy before its institutionalization as governmental policy.

For García Zamora and Gaspar Olvera (2020), it is a transcendental Program inside and outside Mexico since it is known as one of the best experiences for migrant philanthropy worldwide by different 2007 and 2016 Migration and Development World Forums. Beyond its impressive figures, obtained by financing over 29,000 community projects from 2002 to 2019 (drinking water projects, electricity, urban infrastructure, roads, schools, clinics, and scholarships), the Program works as an instrument for the organization of the transnational community of migrants and generates spaces for negotiation with the three levels of government in favor of the members' communities of origin by promoting the design of a new type of public policy with a transnational focus. That is to say, migrant organizations function as a transnational social actor by modifying the well-being of the communities of origin and acting between two or more countries for their social development, besides promoting not only a culture of social control and accountability but also a new institutional framework for collaboration with the three levels of the Mexican government. Although, certainly, the 3x1 Program has not all been positive during its 2002 - 2019 administration when there were internal contradictions of design, operation, and regulations. In fact, its "Rules of Operation" are designed annually, and vertically, from the Ministry of Finance and are likewise applied through the Ministry of Social Development and state governments. Migrant organizations and their communities of origin maintain an asymmetric and subordinate relationship due to their geographical separation abroad, their limited organization and technical training, and their lack of knowledge of Mexican bureaucratic culture. This situation has caused several anomalies, such as



the existence of hundreds of “formal guarantees” from some of the migrant clubs, without their collective remittances financial contribution so that mayors and state governments receive a greater federal budget and presuming the accomplishment of a greater number of Program projects without any financial contribution from migrants.

In his analysis of the 3x1 Program in Zacatecas and Michoacán, Fernando Robledo (2019) points out great institutional fragility and ambivalence in the migration policy of the Mexican government, along with institutional weakness of the migrant organizations that, despite their important philanthropic contribution y diversity of proposal, not only fail to become actual social actors in what refers to public policies but are also subordinated to the Mexican State, which additionally applies a welfare and corporate immigration policy, thus expropriating the 3x1 Program as transnational philanthropy. The regulations designed by the federal government have generated a vertical, bureaucratic, and authoritarian management of the 3x1 Program in an institutional space of asymmetric negotiation between migrants and the three levels of government.

Valentina Cappelletti (2018) agrees in pointing out how the 3x1 Program moves from its initial stage of successful transnational philanthropy to helping communities of origin for the corporate government policy as a federal program in 2002, along with institutional irregularities in an asymmetric space of power between migrants and the three levels of government, allowing the emergence of the “cancer” of the “formal guarantees” favoring state and municipal governments without migrant financial contribution in order to increase public investment and the political prominence of governments that choose communities with projects, type of projects, and provoke contradictions among migrant organizations.

In her research, carried out in Zinapécuaro, Michoacán, Karina Zuñiga (2020) showed the positive social impact of the Program in what refers to infrastructure, participation, and community organization in small communities. However, she detected that the benefits are invisible in larger communities as well as three central problems when operating the Program in that municipality: politicization-corruption, displacement of migrant participation, and lack of budget to give it continuity.

Due to the latter, and for ten years, we have been proposing the need for an institutional reengineering of the Program in its design and articulation so that it becomes part of a truly public policy for regional and local development of the country in regions of high intensity in international migration and return, as well as of a social policy with a transnational focus that recognizes and strengthens the philanthropy of the Mexican migrant organizations supporting the organization and institutional strengthening of Migrant Clubs and Federations in the United States. The eventual reactivation of the 3x1 Program for Migrants should contemplate new regulation, one that is thought of and constructed by all its social actors. In particular, one that allows migrant organizations to regain their autonomy, a leading role, the ability to debate, propose, and participate in what refers to the application, social control, and redesign of the Program and the new public development policies in which it may be inserted after integral reengineering.

If we consider the 3x1 Program’s operation, from the perspective of the beneficiary communities themselves, there are, undoubtedly, more positive than negative impacts (García Zamora, 2019). The information from over 29,000 accomplished philanthropic projects and the number of benefited communities and families demonstrate its impact and the need to maintain, restructure, and improve the Program. Eliminating the 3x1 Program from the 2020 budget reflects the lack of recognition of the historical contribution of migrants outside the Mexican economy and

of the contribution in remittances by those who returned which, during 2019, was of around 36,000 million dollars. The latter is not reflected in the increasingly reduced budgetary items, which show the lack of a comprehensive migration policy that protects Mexican migrants and their children born outside of Mexico, or in the government's lack of interest in addressing a growing problem of repatriations and returns during the past ten years (Graph 1).

Their budgetary exclusion affects migrant organizations, their ability to organize, to formulate new social projects, and to collect collective remittances, and will undermine their ability to continue supporting the community development of their regions of origin. Politically, there is a severe message because the federal government and the National Congress are communicating migrants that they are unimportant for the national agenda and that they are not a priority in their policies or budgets. The millions of Mexican migrants in the United States, for 50 years, have supported the country's development with over 450 billion dollars in family remittances and over 29 thousand community projects from 2002 to 2019, are now wondering perplexed: what happens to Mexico's new government which, during the electoral campaign in 2018, called us to build a New Nation Project? (García and Gaspar, 2020).

Over 40 Mexican migrant organizations in the United States launched their Manifesto to the Nation against the double pandemic encompassing health and economy at the end of April 2020. In this Manifesto, they propose their inclusion in the National Agenda and the Federal Budget 2021 through concrete proposals during the COVID-19 stage and after it. In Mexico and the United States, it also states concrete proposals referring to migration policy and protection in that country looking to support the 4 million migrants returned to Mexico (600 thousand children and young people of Mexican origin) from 2008 to 2019. Their goal is to reestablish the 3x1 Program, correct all its institutional failures, and make it function as part of a comprehensive development strategy in the communities of origin (Ortega Neri, 2020).

Conclusions

The 3x1 Program has been recognized, for over fifteen years and in multiple world migration forums, as an example of the institutionalization of transnational philanthropy with clear contributions to the well-being of the communities of origin of migrants. This raises the question of why communities are structurally still expelling migrants and why contradictions and problems have grown between them, the three levels of government, and other social actors that intervene and benefit from the Program?

Migrant organizations from Morocco, Senegal, Philippines, India, Ecuador, and many others wonder why the communities of origin continue to be "factories" of international migrants since more than 2,200 migrant clubs have financed over 29,000 community projects (2003 - 2019) and have been sent more than 450 million dollars in remittances to Mexico for the last 40 years? The answer may be in three dimensions: the first is historical, a century-old migration that generates a network of transnational communities linking over 12 million migrants with their families in Mexico who, despite the crises and pandemics, continue to send increasing amounts of remittances and remain interested in the 3x1 Program. The second is historical and political; governments and the national political class have perceived migrants as a marginal sector in the national agenda for over 40 years, which, from the perspective of an extractivist mentality, is very useful when, under the dictatorship of federal and state regulations, billions of remittances are sent, and thousands of community projects get funded, although remain excluded from public policies and budgets related to them. The third is the absence of an actual national development strategy that involves public



policies for regional and sectoral development and fosters internal market, employment, and well-being and, at the same time, affects the structural causes of migration. For 40 years, it has been the maquila, the automotive, and electronic assembly to the United States what promotes national growth with failed results, as expressed by the explosive growth of migration to that country until the Great Recession of 2007 - 2010. Nowadays, the Fourth Transformation Government, without a national development policy beyond welfare neoliberalism, is betting on the T-MEC (Mexico, United States, and Canada Treaty) as the supposed instrument to overcome the double health and economic pandemic in 2020 and achieve the growth lost for over 38 years.

It is severe that, since the beginning of the Program in 2002, the Mexican officials institutionalized the Program as part of the government's social welfare and corporate policy towards the entire population of the country and particularly towards the migrant communities. They have never shown interest, for over 18 years, in articulating it with a regional or local development strategy of the Mexican government. In fact, the emerging migrant paternalism was incorporated, together with the official paternalism towards the communities. Often the communities themselves, instead of resorting to municipal or state officials, turned to migrant leaders in the United States to process their requests, proposals, and projects for their communities.

The institutionalization of the 3x1 Program in 2002 not only meant the institutionalization of subordination, but also of the asymmetry of migrant organizations in what refers to their relationship with the three levels of government, builders, and political parties; constantly disputing and distributing the resources and benefits, obtained through the Program, under the rules defined by the Secretary of Finance, which annually formalizes and regulates this asymmetric space of public policy.

Thus, the contradictions, conflicts, and problems between migrant organizations, communities of origin, and the three levels of government were increasing and was expressed in the hundreds of "formal guarantees" for projects without contributions from migrants; the hundreds of poor quality projects, or the lack of budget for its maintenance, and, finally, the arrival of the new president of Mexico in November 2019 for whom the Program does not deserve a budget for 2020 due to mismanagement and patronage by previous governments. There was no alternative to preserve, improve, and strengthen the transnational community philanthropy for the benefit of the migrants' communities of origin and their organizations in the United States. This decision may produce a historic fracture between government and migrant organizations. Despite the latter, 40 Mexican migrant organizations in the United States, at the end of April 2020, launched their Manifesto to the Nation proposing their inclusion in the National Agenda and the budgets and programs by reestablishing the 3x1 Program with a thorough transformation. Their proposal is relevant under the new reality of 2020, with the impact of the double pandemic in Mexico and the increasing demand from the State for an actual national development strategy that includes employment and well-being for all and the more than 12 million Mexicans in the United States. Thus, it is possible to integrate various proposals that the Transnational Civil Society has been generating in Mexico since 2010, 2013, and 2019 in what refers to policies of comprehensive economic development, migration, and human rights, including a thoroughly reformulated 3x1 Program as part of the regional development policies with social subprograms (health, education, food, environment, and culture), and migrant micro-productive projects, under the perspective of transnational economic solidarity.

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