

Expanding Frontiers and Affirming Belonging: Youth Travel to Israel

- A View from Latin America

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Abstract

This paper analyzes educational trips as part of the cultural and institutional practices for which Israel is conceived to be a site for the symbolic encoding of meanings and the formation of a sense of belonging, while the awareness of an interconnected Jewish world is strengthened. It does so from the regional perspective of Latin American Jewish communities. The relationship between world Jewish communities and Israel can be conceptually approached as spanning diverse meaning systems, which in turn leads to varied structures of relations between them that build differentiated, modified and strong links with Israel. These relations evolve and manifest along a national axis that interacts with transnational ideational motives. It is in this context that the growing visibility and prominence of youth trips rouses the need for a systematic discussion on their role, scope and reach. Educational trips may be conceptualized as a praxis that reveals the unique convergence of a longstanding modern nationalism and the growing practical and conceptual presence of transnationalism in the Jewish world, thus showcasing the changing place and role held by the idea of a Jewish center or Homeland as a guarantee for the continuity of the Diaspora. By looking at the different youth trips as part of the educational system and organizational order of Jewish life, this article sheds light on the significance that factors such as institutional density, social capital and communal legacy have on the nature and scope of these trips, their character, time extent and goals. It incorporates a regional perspective in order to examine the varying array of youth trips amidst an increasingly interconnected Jewish world. For this purpose, several characteristics of Jewish life in Latin America are underscored in a comparative perspective; highlighting the role Zionism and Israel have played as identity referents and community builders, in order to approach the differentiated nature of the trips. The related cognitive and existential dimensions associated with the trips' experiences are central factors in the socializing process of youth. Israel becomes the territorial and symbolic space in which strong and durable collective bonds are expected to develop, though the goals and natures of the various trips themselves may vary.

Reflecting both a conceptual approach and empirical data, the case at hand, albeit singular in certain respects, exhibits traits that may help to analyze the character and significance of trips for other Jewish settings and for transnational ethnicities, in a broader sense.

Keywords: Youth trips; Latin America; Zionism; identity; Diaspora; transnationalism

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Introduction

This paper aims to analyze central aspects of youth trips to Israel in terms of the relationship between institutional density, social capital and Jewish communal legacy and the nature and scope of these trips. This is particularly important when the related existential and cognitive dimensions associated with the trip's experience are seen as part of a socialization process by which Israel is construed as the territorial and symbolic space in which strong and durable collective bonds are expected to develop, while at the same time one that contributes to the circulation of shared values. Educational trips may be seen as fragments of the cultural and institutional practices that build cultural continuity, identification and collective life and produce a sense of belonging, by encouraging knowledge, loyalty and fraternity. The purpose of this paper, reflecting the perspective of Latin American Jewish communities, is to analyze educational trips as part of the cultural and institutional practices for which Israel is conceived as a site for the symbolic encoding of meanings and the formation of a sense of belonging while the awareness of an interconnected Jewish world is strengthened.

Increasing levels of heterogeneity and diversity in the Jewish world point to complex logics of interdependence, disjuncture and convergences between diverse dimensions of identity and belonging. For this purpose, some unique characteristics of Jewish life in Latin America - mainly Mexico, Argentina and Brazil - are underscored in a comparative perspective that links the differential character and scope of educational trips to Israel to the role Zionism and Israel have played in these communities as individual and collective referents.

While an interconnected Jewish world demands that the connections between territory, culture and identity be rethought, new dynamics diversify values and communal patterns, drawing new realities of permanence and change, especially when looking at them from a generational perspective. Social and cultural referents, as well as the birth, transmission and reconstitution of ideas and identities, make Jewish life a challenging experience. Thus, inner diversity and continuity become cultural and normative axes that define the Jewish collective. Today's radical modernity has deepened the questioning of prevailing shared values and deconstructed certainties while reconstructing belonging. While change in the Jewish world opens up novel pathways, it does not necessarily imply erosion and decline.

Thus, interactions between Israel and Diaspora Jewish communities and their role in building Jewish identities exhibit complex dynamics. Plural meanings of Center-Home (spiritual, symbolic, material) and transnational ideational motives develop systems of relations among communities that keep differentiated, modified and strong links among them and with Israel. Therefore, the growing visibility and prominence of educational/youth trips to Israel have unleashed the need for a systematic reflection on their role and scope, meaning and reach. These questions have certainly become a stimulus for research endeavors that aim to throw a light on the links and connections between Jewish communal models and modes of belonging, as well as prevailing cultural codes and meanings

inside the Jewish world. In a broader sense, educational trips are part of the educational system and thus, a meaningful venue from which to approach Jewish life (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015).

Youth trips may be conceptualized as a praxis that reveals the unique convergence of modern nationalism with the growing practical and conceptual presence of transnationalism in the Jewish world, thus throwing light on the changing role of the Center or homeland, in guaranteeing the continuity of the Diaspora (Bokser Liwerant, 2011). Seen from the perspective of interactions and circulation, trips oscillate between links and bonds to the nation-State and Diaspora-building (Kelner, 2010).

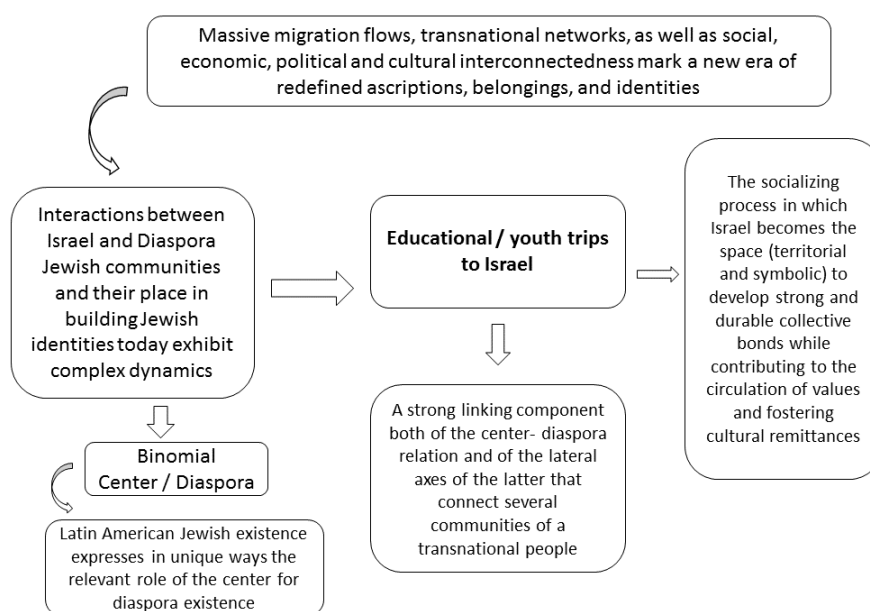
Radical transformations, linked to globalization processes and related changes in the Jewish world system, have given birth to a complex array of trends, in which tacit disagreement and even open disputes regarding the frontiers of identity, its collective expression and the place of the State of Israel take place. Massive migration flows and transnational networks, as well as social, economic, political and cultural interconnectedness mark a new era of redefined ascriptions, belongings and identities. The singularity of the Jewish case is manifest in the wide associational and institutional underpinning of collective life and it is precisely through its weight that we may explain the dialectics of identity building and the role played by Israel. From this angle, the multi-functionality of the latter for Latin American communities as identity referent, organizational axis, energy catalyzer and space for relocation of collective life has been determinant (Avni 1976; Sherkolewsky, 1984; Goldstein, 2005; Bokser Liwerant, 1991, 2008).

Historically, the changing interaction of the binomial Center-Diaspora brings to the forefront the old significance of an underlying assumption of Zionism, regarding its functionality for the Diaspora's modern life: its concurrent role in the overall renaissance of Jewish life, both as a project to renovate Jewish national life in the Jewish Homeland and as the idea to foster Jewish life in the Diaspora. Thus, Zionism sought to address a wide range of problems; beyond Jewish sovereignty, its global goals of generating an overall *aggiornamento* in Judaism led to the coexistence of both the denial of the Diaspora condition and the aspiration of revitalization of Jewish life as a whole (Almog 1982; Vital 1978; 1998). It aimed to foster identification and develop loyalty to the symbolic and concrete homeland, assuming the latter was essential to the former's continuity. It is certainly part of the inherent complexity of the Zionist project in its aim to be relevant both to the new sovereign Israeli society and to the Diaspora; a singular interaction between ideology and needs (Bokser, 2008, 2014).

Analyzing Diaspora trips, Cohen (2014) considers this double commitment in terms of an underlying contradiction; while these trips rely on the existence of Diaspora life, he sees in classic Zionist ideology the successful creation of the modern State of Israel, which would mean the eventual end of the Jewish Diaspora. However, as the majority of Jews living in Western countries are not

emigrating, the emphasis of trips has shifted from the classical *hachsharot* to the strengthening of emotional commitment to Israel and to Judaism among youth who later return to their homes in the Diaspora. Hence, follows the supplementary character of these interdependent realities. The functionality of the Center to enhance Jewish continuity in the Diaspora calls for an analytical perspective in which trips may be seen as a strong linking component both of the Center-Diaspora relationship and of the lateral axes that connect the multiple communities. They express the plural and differing local and national experiences of a Jewish life that has historically exhibited strong transnational characteristics: a sort of interplay between de-territorialization processes and the relevance of the ancestral territory/modern State (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. The interactive context of educational/youth trips to Israel



In Latin America, this dynamic draws interest as part of the process of a national-ethnic Diaspora becoming an ethno-transnational Diaspora. Ethnic Diasporas, the exemplary communities of the transnational moment, as Tololyan (2002) defines them, are today engaged in a renewed geography of dispersion. This reality characterizes Jewish communities of the region in their current experience of emigration and relocation in new destinations, mainly Israel and the United States, as well as in their mobility and exchange.

In a globalized world, educational trips express global trends as well as local intersections of diverse Latin American Jewish communities. In broader terms, the interaction between nation-state, transnational spaces and Diaspora belonging may enable us to grapple with issues that have developed in scholarly discourse. Jews are comparatively understudied in contemporary Diaspora research (Diaspora tourism included), where they seem to have lost their historical relevance. Similarly, there is a relative dearth of discourse about communal institutional underpinnings in the available literature on transnational social relations. Such studies tend to focus primarily on individuals and their globalized networks, without always affording sufficient attention to the maintenance of structural strategies deployed by Jewish groups (Bauböck and Faist, 2010; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Pries 2008; Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al 2015).

Building Jewish life / Being Jewish in Latin America

Latin American Jews have shaped their communal life and built their associational and institutional profile, as well as their collective consciousness, as part of a broader feeling of Peoplehood and a sense of collective belonging that has expressed itself through global political and cultural interactions with the wide Jewish world. They have developed a singular nexus, with Israel as the Jewish homeland and normative referent for guaranteeing their Diaspora continuity, as well as the warrantor of a safe haven for Jews worldwide and a vital axis for Jewish life.

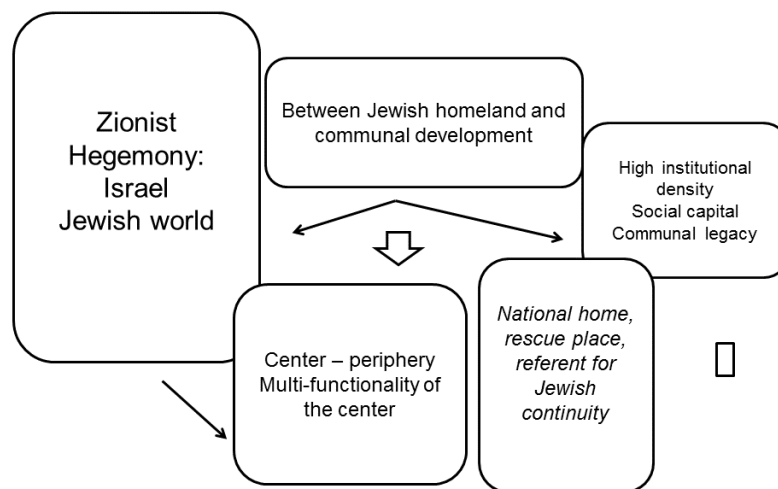
Building communal structures has shaped collective Jewish life in the region. Founded by secularists who nevertheless sought to answer both communal and religious needs, communities were forged in the cast of European Modern Diaspora Nationalism, emphasizing its inner ideological struggles, organized political parties and social and cultural movements. The dominant pattern evolved as a continuous trend toward secularization and politicization, inspired by plural transnational cultural baggage. Varying ideological, cultural and political currents flowed energetically in the Jewish street: from communist to Zionist; from *yiddishist* to *bundist*; from liberal to assimilationist and from there to orthodoxy; also, from highly structured organizational options to non-affiliated and individual definitions.

Local conditions and world Jewish developments have directly influenced and turned the Zionist idea and the State of Israel hegemonic. While an overall disenchantment with the Diaspora condition was among the main causes for the emergence of Zionism in Europe, in the new communities, Zionists committed both ideologically and institutionally to guarantee a new Jewish life. As any ideology in the process of being absorbed by other cultural and symbolic frames of reference, it acquired novel sociological meanings without necessarily redefining or rephrasing its contents. Its

organizational functionality was altered, resulting in ideational and structural modifications that strove to answer to diverse and emerging needs beyond its original and recognized goals (Bokser Liwerant, 1991; 2013 a).

For Zionism, hegemony building meant institutional insertion into central communal instances that acted as channels for the development of links with Israel and the Jewish world. Its communal centrality was expressed in the contour of educational systems and youth movements as domains in which to express solidarity with the Zionist building (Bokser Liwerant, 2000, 2008) (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2. Regional and international changing circumstances



The links between the Center and Jewish communities distanced from one directional and consented dynamics. The dominant interpretation of those links, in terms of bonds that connected one-directionally a periphery to a center, was manifest within the organized Zionist movement. The region was alternately seen as an undefined and not clearly visible part of the West or as part of a peripheral region. Zionist sectors invigorated the Center with both “national home” and “refuge” qualities that simultaneously nourished and reinforced their own Diaspora profile (Avni, 1976; Bokser Liwerant, 2008, 2013 a).

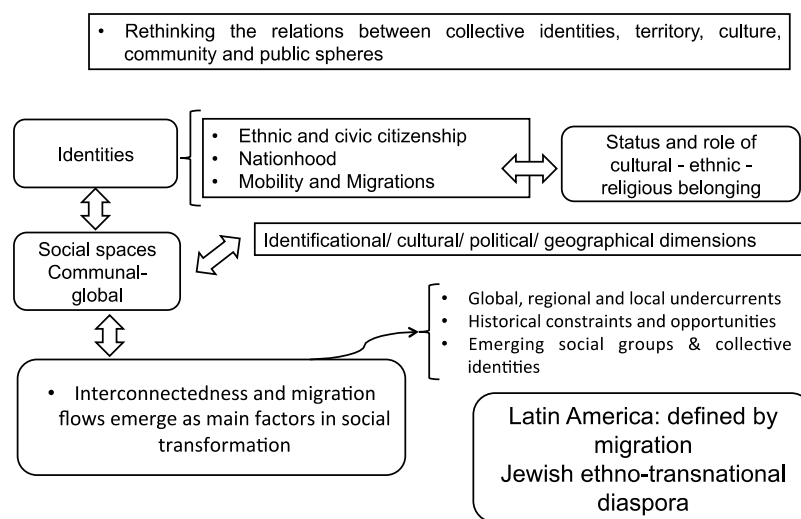
Through successive phases, Zionism found itself caught between two different perspectives: on the one hand, Israel’s expectations of massive immigration were high, and on the other hand, by equating Zionist identity with Jewish continuity, its involvement in Jewish life in the Diaspora was validated. The discrepancies around the changing boundaries of Jewish dispersion coexisted with specific strategies aimed to recreate, lead and even strengthen it. The communal centrality of Zionism and Israel were expressed in the contour of educational systems, youth movements, *educational trips*

and national funds; all of these domains aimed at developing solidarity.

As stated, besides its condition of being a national sovereign and creative cultural center, Israel has historically been a vital space for those who are in need. Necessity and ideology have interacted in particularly interesting ways, as expressed through migration waves and selected places of destination. Regional and national trends point to dependency of *aliyah* (and Jewish migration in general) on the unfolding of specific local circumstances, varying recurring economic crises, political unrest and returns to normalcy; in some cases, these factors have tended to form repeated cycles (DellaPergola, 2009). The situation in the country of origin has been the most powerful determinant, although one cannot neglect the intervention of a successful absorption in the country of destination as an additional explanatory factor. Jewish migration and Israel population growth can thus be attributed, in some measure, to the general crises and their interferences with the orderly life of Jewish communities in Latin America.² The fact that Jewish migrants preferred Israel to other available alternatives indicates that “cultural and symbolic” factors continued to play an important role among the determinants of existential choices concerning the preferred place of residence (DellaPergola, 2009). But the fact that Israel is ranked significantly above every Latin American society, according to the Human Development Index, is certainly compatible with making that choice consonant with the routine preference of most international migrants to move from poorer to better environments. More than 100,000 Jews have made *aliyah*, and the different moments and profiles point to the weight of their ideational motive; this is part of the cultural legacy that can’t be omitted when approaching the frameworks of youth trips to Israel.

Migration waves from Latin America in the last forty years have been of diverse nature and scope; they have encompassed forced migration and exiled individuals under high risk (such as politically involved activists and intellectuals); voluntary household mobility motivated by safety, security and economic considerations; and movement of professionals prompted by opportunities and entrepreneurial expansion in the context of increasingly interconnected markets. Indeed, there has been a sustained movement of professionals in privileged occupations, who started or operated businesses and sought education; Jews have constituted a high proportion of these. Multi-localism and transmigration have become increasingly important phenomena; circulation of people and knowledge as well as the exchange of cultural remittances became part of it. New scenarios of current developments, integration processes in the region, renewed mobility and diversified codes of citizenship point to increased interactions between arenas of identity building and spheres of belonging. The complex ramification of these transformations for Diaspora and transnationalism may be seen in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3. Globalization, Diaspora and Transnationalism



It is estimated that in the past 40 years, between 150,000 and 250,000 Jews have emigrated from Latin American countries, both inside the region and outside of it, mainly to the United States, Israel and, to a lesser extent, countries in Western Europe (Spain) and Canada (DellaPergola 2009; 2011).³

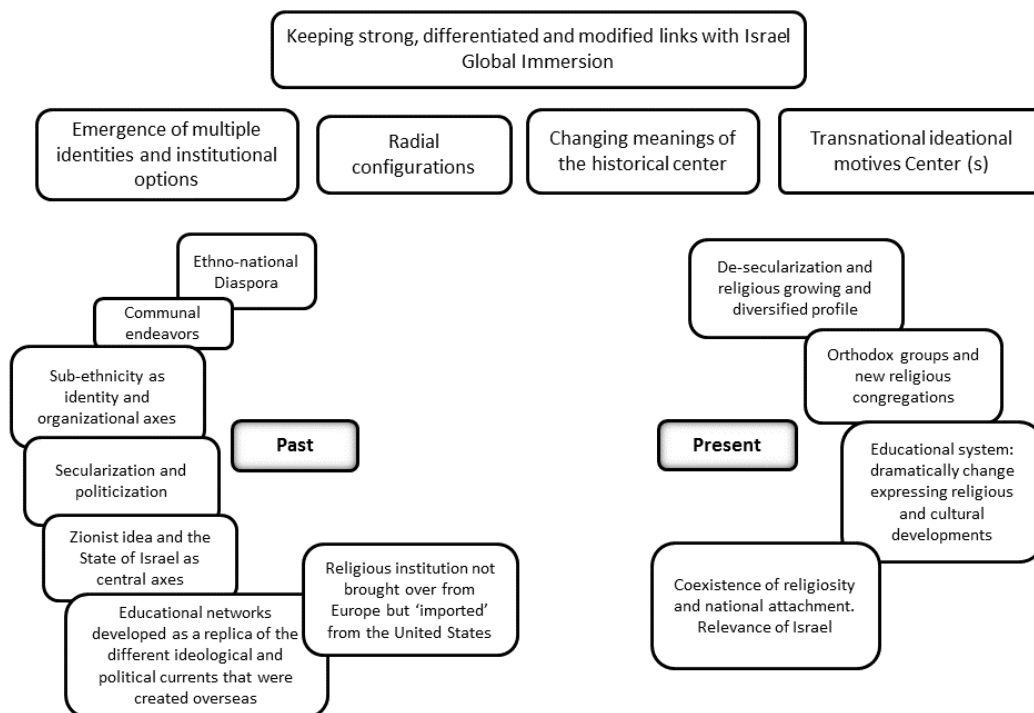
A survey by the Comité Central Israelita de México (2008) shows that while 97% of the older members (individuals 70 years and older) of the Mexican Jewish community express that Israel is of uttermost importance, only 77% of the young population (18–19 years old) make the same statement. These percentages are far higher if we compare them with opinions expressed by members of other Latin American communities. In Argentina, the percentage of those who express that Israel is of uttermost importance diminishes to 57%. Erdei (2011) points to age cohort effects when referring to (Jewish) self-definition by younger and older generations: Israel has occupied a prominent place for Argentinian Jews. However, when asked today about their country of preference in case of emigration, 27% point to Spain, and only 24% opt for Israel, followed by 14% that point to the US. The emigration preferences of Mexican Jews also show a reduction in the relevance attributed to Israel, even though 84% have visited it at least once (CCIM, 2006). Among Jews in Caracas, when asked in 1998-1999, before the significant change of political regime of recent years, about their options in case of a crisis, 14% stated they would go to Israel, the same percent preferred the US, 9% said that they would choose another country and yet 63% indicated that they would remain in Venezuela (DellaPergola et al, 2000).

Along this horizon, transnational networks and imaginaries develop through multiple processes, including educational trips and Diaspora tourism. Material conditions and cultural symbolic ideational factors are subject to transformations in contexts of high mobility (Bokser Liwerant, 2015 b).

The changing reality of Latin American Jewish Life: The mirror of the educational world

Latin American Jewish life has undergone substantive changes; it has been transformed by general social patterns with distinct implications for continued collective communal life: transitions from individualization to collective affirmation and their subsequent reversal; from congregational to communal models, albeit simultaneously witnessing a growing role for synagogues; from secularization to rising expressions of some forms of religiosity, even as secularism continues to gain ground; from privatization to communal revival. These trends are not linear but rather reflective of changing moments, fluctuations and interacting paths. In the following scheme, we aim to synthesize several traits (see Diagram 4).

Diagram 4. Latin America Jewry: Past, Present



Historically, education has played a central role in the shaping of the Latin American Jewish collective identity. Integral Jewish education, as expressed in Jewish day schools, became a priority over other aspects of collective needs and provided the substratum to negotiate incorporation into society (Avni, Bokser Liwerant, and Fainstein, 2011).

While the centrality of Israel cannot be denied, and main aspects of the educational system are interwoven with it; historical, political and ideological trends that differentiated schools in Latin America have been replaced by religious and communitarian (sub-ethnic) criteria, in consonance with world Jewish trends. The educational system has been undergoing transformations, simultaneously expressing and shaping general developments. Historically, religion played a minor role in what were basically secular communities. This trend was reinforced by the scarcity of religious functionaries, dating back to the earliest days of Latin American Jewry.

In the 1960s, the Conservative movement extended to South America. In recent years, Orthodox groups have formed new religious congregations. Today, there is a marked spread of the Chabad movement and an increase in the establishment of Chabad centers in large and well-established communities, as well as in the smaller ones, as is the case of Argentine and Brazilian Jewish communities. While in Mexico the presence of Chabad was initially marginal, today it has expanded to different cities along the country. There are well over 60 synagogues, study houses, *kolelim* and *yeshivot*, more than 35 of which were established in the last 30 years by Shas, Aish HaTorah and other *Haredi* (Ultra-Orthodox) movements. Argentine Jewry has also been influenced by the establishment of more than 30 Chabad centers during the last three decades.

With its local specificities, Brazil also has experienced this same trend. Moreover, it was in 1974, when the first Chabad Center was established in Sao Paulo, that Orthodoxy gained a communal presence, while consolidating its influence during the 90s, when Orthodox rabbis arrived to the country. Orthodox rabbis there scarcely numbered five in 1985; their number surpassed 100 in 2008, when 20 synagogues, five *yeshivot*, two *kolelim* and seven Orthodox schools were established (Topel, 2008; Goldstein, 2011).

Although extreme religious and self-segregation strategies are still marginal to Jewish life in Latin America, their growing presence corresponds to ongoing world Jewish patterns. In fact, there has been a redefinition of identification components, such as place of origin, the dilution of political ideologies — formerly the source of “hard-core” values — and the consequent emergence of spiritual calls. In recent years, new forms of religious sociability, less institutional and more individualized, have also emerged. In certain ways, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo and Miami display similarities along the transnationally constituted religious sphere.

These changes take place inside an educational ecology that reflects and shapes Jewish life and has strong connections with national-transnational cultural practices, such as the trips to Israel.

Trends and Findings

If we approach the scenario posited by interrelating educational systems, educators and youth trips, and link it to dominant structural characteristics and trends, an interesting picture emerges.

A recent comprehensive study we carried out, of Latin American Jewish Educators in a Transnational World - Argentines and Mexican - (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015) provides a platform to approach the abovementioned connections. The study focused on the emergence of a new transnational moment in Latin American Jewish communities and among Latin American Jews abroad. It centered on the role of Jewish educators and community educational professionals within the broader context of transformation of Jewish communities in the region and relocation of Jewish life to other external centers, namely the United States and Israel.⁴

In a first approach, let us underscore that the highest rate of population growth takes place at the religious schools. While acknowledging the fact that this tendency is related to the incidence of community social policies on communal cultural profiles, as expressed in the massive support offered by religious schools through scholarships, it must also be noted that this process reflects an increase in religiosity and observance. Changing dynamics differ according to particular traits of communities in the region.

Argentina is characterized by its comprehensive community school system, which has grown in spite of the various crises it has suffered since the 1990s. Today there are 33 schools, with a total of 21,833 pupils. The highest rate of population growth takes place at the Orthodox-Haredi religious schools. In total numbers, the Orthodox schools have experienced an increase of almost 49% in the last ten years, including 11 schools and over 5,000 students (Vaad Hajinuj Argentina 2014; Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015). Simultaneously, attendance at the secular school system, ORT, has increased; its population reflects main socio-demographic trends, among them the elevated rate of exogamic marriages.

In Mexico, 9,372 students - close to 93% of Jewish children - attend Jewish schools. This country's Jewish educational system has developed a strong organizational structure, with 16 Jewish day schools (15 in Mexico City and one in Monterrey); one school for each 2,500 Jews in Mexico City. Close to 25% of the student population benefit from scholarships, while more than 40% do so in the Haredi schools. The latter, serving 26% of the student population, show the highest population growth: 55% in the last eight years (Vaad Hajinuj Mexico 2014; Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015). The increase in enrollment at religious schools reflects the demographic changes in the composition of the community. The Ashkenazi schools show the greatest percentage of decrease (28%), and the Magen David (Halebi) schools show the highest growth rate, concentrating 46% of

the total student population. Of this group, 40% attend *Haredi* schools, which serve 26% of the student population and show the highest population growth: 55% in the last eight years.⁵

Inside this diversified system, among the preferences expressed by educators regarding possible available options aimed at developing and strengthening Jewish identity, there is broad agreement on the relevance of *educational trips to Israel*. The differentiated meanings of the State of Israel and *Eretz* Israel (the Land of Israel) should be stressed as a clear indicator of the diversified system of meanings the territory concrete-symbolic territory acquires.

A clear majority - 80% of the respondents - overall stand behind Israel; the higher contingent of non-Zionist educators (15%) comes from Mexico, where the Haredi population was included in the survey. Anti-Zionist and post-Zionist, or even ('Indifferent') options appear at the very margins of the system.

However, considering the ideological orientation of educators, the main cleavage appears between educators in Haredi institutions and all the rest. Less than 20% declare the relevance of their self-definition as Zionist, versus the majority to two thirds that belong to all other educational orientations. This religious axis, in any case, appears to be the true divide within the Jewish educational system. In spite of the fact that 36.5% of the educators declared to be non-Zionist - with another 14% critical pro-Israeli - some of the answers provided to other issues demonstrated a far stronger and more positive involvement with Israel's fate and values.

Preoccupation with Israel's security, and the importance of strengthening its relations with the Latin American Diaspora, stand as top priorities. In other areas, wide gaps characterize the opinions of educators according to countries. Those Latin American educators that live in Israel and in other countries stand up much more in favor of (civil) principles such as civic pluralism; in respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict, favor the two-state solution; and express preoccupation with the situation in Judea and Samaria, while allowing a critical assessment of Israel's stand in this matter in the presence of both other Jews and non-Jews.

Thus, the prevailing positions of educators in Argentina and in Mexico tend to align with support for Israel that does not seek to question the mode of operation of Israel's government or to tackle the more controversial issues on the table. Even taking ideological and political differences into account, one may explain these attitudes in terms of the overall symbolic value that Israel holds.

Regarding the interaction between the centrality of Israel and the co-lateral axes of Diaspora communities' life, this study demonstrates that whereas education helps to build and maintain identity borders, transnational Jewish identification unifies educators not only within a given country but also across countries (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015, Chapter 7).

Informal education has developed extensively in Latin America, both in the form of youth movements and large sports clubs affiliated to world Maccabi movements, which on this continent have taken various names, such as Maccabi, Centro Deportivo Israelita, Hebraica, Hacoach and

Estadio Israelita⁶. Argentina is noted for the wide range of options and modalities offered by the non-formal Jewish education system in diverse sports and social institutions – grouped together by the Federation for Maccabean Community Centers (FACCMA) or youth movements (*tnu'ot no'ar*).

In Mexico, children and youth enrolled in the formal Jewish education system as well as those who attend non-Jewish schools, come under the umbrella of an extensive network of *tnu'ot*. Of a total of 9,372 students that attend Jewish schools – of which a total of 2,534 children and youth are between 10 and 18 years old, comprising the sum total that could attend these movements – it is estimated that close to 30% are participating in them. Their presence is noted both in the traditional *tnu'ot* (close to 1,200) and in independent movements organized by sub-ethnic communities (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015).

As data shows, Jewish educational ecology, in-group sociability patterns and communal affiliation act as central factors behind the close relation between modes of Jewish life and types of educational trips (see Table 1).

Table 1. Day school attendance, outmarriage, affiliation, trips to Israel in Latin American countries

Country	Jewish day school attendance	Outmarriage rates	Affiliation rates	Trips to Israel
Mexico	90%	<10%	85%	70%
Argentina	45%	50%	45-50%	50%
Brazil	50%+	50%	45-50%	45%

Source: Table elaborated by the author (Bokser Liwerant 2013b).

The explicit correlation between indicators of Jewish education (as measured by Jewish day school attendance), institutional density (as indicated by affiliation rates) and participation in trips to Israel presented in Table 1, rather than reflecting a lineal or causal approach, underscores a matrix of Jewish life that extends to in-group interactions, such as social ties and marriage, ritual and cultural practices and communal membership. Our emphasis is on spaces of belonging, which certainly are not far distant from circuits of identity as expressed by the diverse indicators that have aimed to measure the importance of being Jewish (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015).

Type of trips to Israel

Masa programs last between five and 12 months, and include Youth Movements, Experiential, Academic, Specialization, Orthodox and Haredi programs. Their target population is young adults (predominant age 18-19). This long-term educational trip offers two main paths: firstly, members of youth movements attend Machon Lemadrichim, Marba and/or Kibbutz (work and seminars offered by the youth movement). Those not belonging to *tnuot* have two options: *Bekef* (World Macabi) or Challenge, from Hanoar Hatzioni: they include Marba, Kibbutz and trips through Israel, a leadership seminar and voluntarism. *Teen Trips* take place for five to six weeks, and are designed for ninth graders. *Taglit* lasts ten days, and participants are young adults of 18-26 years. *March of the Living* lasts 15 days, and is designed for high school students and young adults.

Table 2. Latin American youth trips to Israel, 2009-2010

Country	MASA	TAGLIT	MOTL	TEEN	TOTAL
Brazil	224	428	158	*	1,210
Argentina	294	967	200	*	2,061
Mexico	261	29	272	350	912
Total	779	1,424	630	1,350	4,183

* Not available.

Source: Table elaborated by the author, based on data provided by the Jewish Agency (Bokser Liwerant 2013b).

Table 2 shows that Mexican youth have visited Israel in the framework of the Jewish school system and consequently have a stronger presence in long-term educational programs and a minimal one in Taglit. Table 3 shows the distribution of participants from Mexico by Jewish religious background.

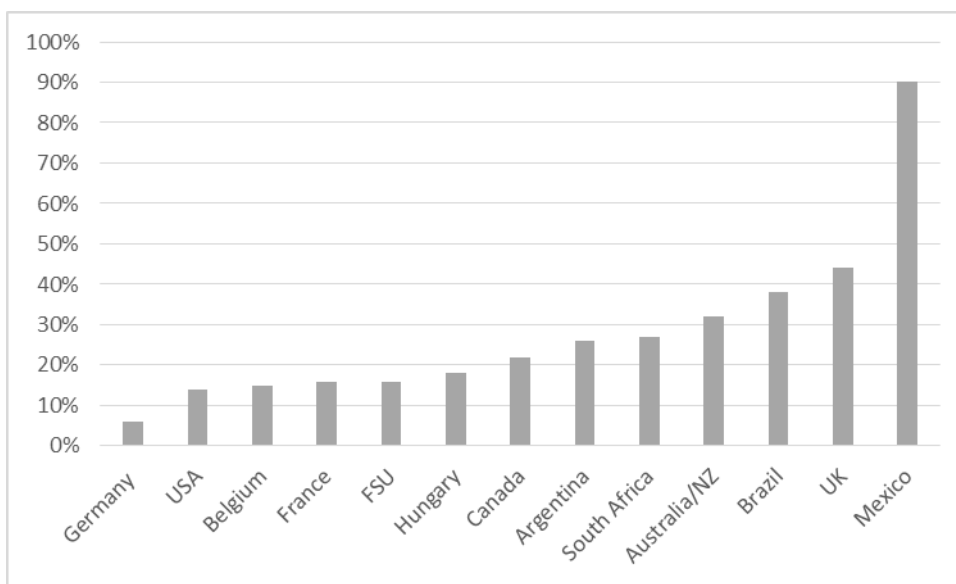
Table 3. Teen Trips from Mexico, 9th graders

Year	Jewish traditional settings	Haredi	Trip participants
2005	453	146	407
2006	530	143	477
2007	444	154	399
2008	463	155	416
2009	463	151	416
2010	404	180	363
2011	404	182	363
2012	381	192	342

Source: Vaad Hajinuj, Mexico (Bokser Liwerant, 2013b).

Concomitantly, this data explains the success of Taglit in Argentina and Brazil – both larger Jewish communities with lower levels of Jewish education and similar intermarriage rates. Jewish education still explains why, in spite of lower affiliation rates, there is a strong cultural component (Argentina). Families of participants are engaged with and related to the Jewish community.

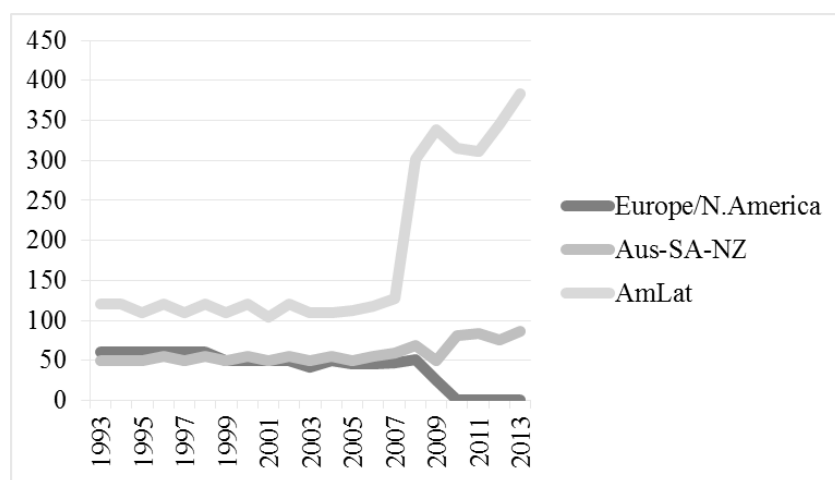
It is further meaningful to look at the place of Israel Experience in Diagram 5.

Diagram 5. Market penetration of Israel Experience by region

Source: (Cohen, 2014).

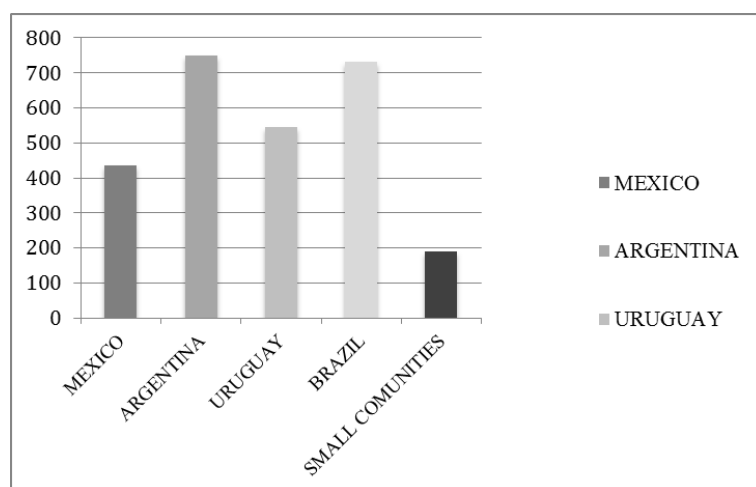
Particularly substantial regarding the role and scope of educational trips is the presence of Latin Americans in the Machon Lemadrachim as a place where youth receive a sustained educational program, as shown in Diagrams 6 and 7.

Diagram 6. Participation in Machon LeMadrachim, all regions



Source: Sergio Edelstein, CEO Machon Lemadrachim (Bokser Liwerant 2013b).

Diagram 7. Participation in Machon LeMadrachim: Latin America



Source: Sergio Edelstein, CEO Machon LeMadrachim (Bokser Liwerant 2013b).

These figures offer an interesting picture of the scope and relevance of the Masa trips for Mexican youngsters. This option – with its inner diversity of paths or circuits – is the one that provides the main framework for their educational trips. Long-term trips and specifically the Machon LeMadrachim are conceived as collective initiatives for educational experiences and training that aims to prepare the participants to go back to their communities and educate future generations (Table 5).

One striking feature in our study of the Latin American Educator is the self-reproductive capacity of the educational system as manifest in the high percentage of educators who were trained in the Jewish school system and have participated both in informal educational settings and educational and training trips. The differences between Mexico and Argentina (higher in the former) reflect the divergent structural national and communal trends, in spite of the shared and convergent traits (Bokser Liwerant, Della Pergola et al, 2015, chapt. 5).

We will now review data provided by three studies evaluating the Mexican Masa trips.

Table 5. Participation in MASA Trip – Mexico

Year	12th grade	Participants	Percentage of cohort
2013-14	397	240	61%
2012-13	389	244	63%
2011-12	378	253	67%
2010-11	474	305	64%

Source: The Jewish Agency, Mexico.

Table 6. MASA Mexico circuits

Year	Tnuot	Experiential	Academic	Specialized	Orthodox
2013-14	51	180	22	2	11
2012-13	45	201	28	5	20
2011-12	42	190	38	7	16
2010-11	56	231	30	1	19

Source: The Jewish Agency, Mexico.

A double tendency may be first noted: the indisputable relevance of long-term/educational trips and the rising levels of religiosity of the Mexican community, as reflected in the participant population.⁷ The Taifeld and Fainstein (2014) evaluation study of Masa relates to the composition of the participants. Regarding levels of religiosity, 51% self-reported as traditionalist, 28% as observant and 9% as very observant. When analyzing the level of religiosity, the pattern of observance is congruent with Jewish self-definition. All in all, this data reflects a traditionalist community with a relatively high level of observance. Close to 40% share more religiously oriented patterns, while the rest maintain a traditionalist profile. Mendlovic found 13% self-reported as "Very Observant," 44% "Observant," 34% as "Low Observance" and 9% "Non-observant." Pinto's study as well, points to growing levels of religiosity, both in terms of number of participants that expressed religious belief and the importance ascribed to religion.

Also striking in this study is the percentage who define themselves as secular (6%); three times more than in the other studies. Religion has become a growing referent for Jewish identity, as can be seen from a comparative perspective. If we look at the figures of the different socio-demographic studies of the Mexican Jewish community along the last two decades, as shown in Table 7. Worth underlining is that in our study of Latin American Educators, while both educational systems – Argentina and Mexico - showed an increase in religiosity, Mexican Jewish educators were far more traditionalist and observant (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al, 2015, chapter 8).

Table 7. Levels of observance of the Jewish Community in Mexico

	1991	2000	2006	Of which: Age 40<
Very observant	3	4	7	12
Observant	4	6	17	20
Traditionalist	77	77	62	59
Low observant	11	10	10	7
Secular	3	2	3	2
Atheist	2	1	1	0

Source: Sociodemographic Studies of the Jewish community (DellaPergola and Lerner, 1991); (Central Committee, 2000, 2006).

Regarding the core values of Jewish identity in Masa participants, the picture draws upon a combined universe of values: "universal ethical values" (41%), "*kium mitzvot* and Jewish values" (39%), and "belief in God" (21%) (Taifeld and Fainstein, 2014). It is important to underscore the relatively low weight that memory of Shoah registers (5.17) if we take into account, as we will see, the increased relevance of March of the Living trips and the place it has acquired among Jewish youth worldwide (Cohen, 2014). This certainly reflects the trends that are shaping the Mexican Jewish community and most of the Latin American ones.

With respect to the impact of the trips on the youth attachment to Israel, we observe a very strong connection: 93% feel very close and close to the State of Israel, and for 96% Israel has a "very important" or an "important" place in their life. Regarding past trip experience as well as the educational system, we need to highlight that more than 43% have visited Israel three or more times, and another 30%, two times (Taifeld and Fainstein, 2015).

As to attachment to Israel, Pinto (2012) found that Israel is seen as an opportunity to strengthen their Jewish identity, which they usually base in religion. Mendlovic (2010) reported that 38% considered Israel to be very important or important and only 19% defined either "low importance" or "not important." In addition, 20% reported to be "very attached" to Israel, and 41% "attached."

It is certainly necessary to distinguish between *Medinat* Israel (the State of Israel) and *Eretz* Israel (the Land of Israel) when referring to the divide separating the Haredi community from the rest of the religious, Orthodoxy included. Thus, a shared and separated or fragmented space poses dilemmatic questions both as a concrete place and a symbolic referent.

Table 8. Participants in MASA Program attending Orthodox and Haredi institutions, 2008-2016

	2008-2012	2012-2016
Argentina	402	386
Brazil	219	362
Mexico	65	186
Total	686	934

Source: MASA Program, Jerusalem Office, 2016.

If we observe the wide span of institutional spaces offered by the religious circuit of the Masa

program, we find both classical and emergent religious institutes and *yeshivot*, reflecting the alternative presence and influence of the different currents in Latin America (Report of Masa Program, Jerusalem, 2016).

Hazara Betshuva (Return to the Faith) holds a significant place, as part of a movement showing up in the general frame of trips to Israel; it is closely related to the radicalization of the Orthodoxy in Israel after the 70s and the transformation of *Chabad Lubavitch* in a transnational movement (Fishkoff, 2009; Levy, 2015). On a global level, it is related to new networks of solidarity and affiliation that cross borders and allow for the circulation of human resources, connections and educational initiatives. Are these networks part of a globalized transnational Diaspora or do they represent a chain of interconnected enclaves? This query has certainly entered both academic research and public discussion (Topel, 2011; Bokser 2011; Beck, 2007; Lehmann, 2006, 2009).

When exploring the drives and reasons that account for participation in trips and the relative importance of psycho-social *vis-à-vis* cognitive-ideological drives, these three studies underscore the in-group strengthening of links as an increasingly relevant variable. As surveyed participants stated (Taifled and Fainstein 2014), among the main motives encouraging their participation in these trips, priority was given to their desire to find themselves outside the family framework (20.7%), to the rewarding experience these trips offer (21.4%) and to their desire to meet youth from Israel and the world (17.1%). Among the more educational-ideological motives, underscored is the desire to experience the history of Israel and engage in volunteer work in Israel.

In Mendlovic (2010), 81% of the participants "strongly agreed" with the statement, "It is very important to have a good time and have fun with friends;" 66% considered more important the social group rather than the program itself; 81% considered the recreational dimension as the more important one; and 73% put emphasis on the experience of freedom.

In Pinto's (2012) survey, the participants underscored the opportunity to strengthen the relationship with their peers and develop deeper affective bonds (both in terms of their expectations as well as their evaluation of the experience) as central to their trip.

In spite of the strong educational character of the Masa trips, a shared conclusion of these three studies is that the social dimension of this experience tends to overshadow the cognitive/educational one. It is also interestingly argued that Masa could be seen as a rite of passage, similar to the Bar Mitzva, or the 9th year trip, i.e., as part of a natural stage of their life cycle. Indeed, the Masa trip takes place as they finish their studies, take a gap year, enter the university and get married, which in Mexico occurs much earlier than in Argentina or Brazil.

If we consider the wide cultural realm in which the symbolic encoding of meanings and the formation of a sense of belonging develops, Israel becomes the site where these cultural practices occur. Indeed, one may assert that in-group attachment develops in two ways: 1) through interpersonal bonds, whereby people develop relationships with other members and 2) through group

identity, whereby people feel connected to a group's character. Thus, we may relate the existential and cognitive dimensions and see that Israel becomes the space (in the territorial and symbolic sense) to develop strong and durable collective bonds that may further enhance the attachment both to the country and to the group. In other terms, there seems to be a strong interaction between the cognitive and existential dimensions built through learning, volunteering and recreational activities, a link that brings together intellectual and emotional dominions of Jewish identity.

5. A comparative detour: Taglit trips

While long-term educational programs can be characterized by a strong and distinct connection between cognitive and existential dimensions, for Taglit trips the experiential coding of meanings prevails. The overwhelming figures for participation in Taglit trips in the United States validate the connection between affiliation rates, educational systems and attachment to Israel.

Latin America's own reality shows that there are important differences in Taglit participation. If we compare Mexico to Argentina and Brazil, the latter two countries contain the largest Jewish communities of the region (first and second largest). Similar to the United States, both Latin American countries share lower levels of Jewish education and similar intermarriage rates (Vid Supra Table 1). Undoubtedly, structural and cultural patterns define the profile of national societies and the place and characteristics of Jewish communities. The wide spectrum of convergent and divergent traits may again be seen in the figures presented in Table 9 and Diagram 8.

Table 9. Participants in Taglit/Birthright

Country	2010	2011	2012
Brazil	428	757	716
Argentina	967	996	1,105
Mexico	29	25	-
Other countries	96	69	66
Latin American participants	1,515 (5.4%)	1,837 (5.4%)	1,887 (4.9%)
Total participants	27,862	33,624	38,091

Source: (Bosker Liwerant 2013b).

Diagram 8. Taglit participants by country (Latin America)

Taglit

Country	Participants
Argentina	Over 10,000
Brazil	Over 4,000
Mexico	700

Argentina and Mexico

Strongly connected Taglit plus extended trip
(*hachsharot*)

CHALLENGES FOR RESEARCH

- Nature of participants: Non-Jewish education, non-affiliated; outmarriage.
- Lack of structural channels to guarantee inclusion

Though we have focused in a matrix approach that highlights structural trends of associative life, when looking at Jewish education and its role in identity-building processes, there are substantive differences in each case. As seen, Jewish education in Argentina has historically played an important role. This explains why, even if facing lower affiliation rates, the cultural aspects of identity in this country are still quite significant. Following Taglit Evaluation Studies both for Brazil and Argentina (Shain, Hecht and Saxe, 2012 a, 2012 b), day school attendance among participants is much higher in Argentina (42%) than in Brazil (19%). A much smaller percentage was enrolled in supplementary school or less intensive options; 39% had no formal Jewish education. In Brazil, many participants in the group were among the members of the community with the least amount of Jewish education.⁸

With respect to informal Jewish education - seminars, trips, Jewish youth activities, Jewish camps, clubs, religious youth groups, Zionist youth movements - the percentages are much higher (in both cases) than the ones of formal Jewish education. However, participation is higher in Argentina (68%, seminars or Jewish camp; 61%, other Jewish youth activities) than in Brazil (56%). Considering the educational potential of youth trips, a key finding is that almost all Taglit participants from Argentina (89%) extend their trips time-wise (Shain, Hecht and Saxe, 2012 a, p. 11).

In an overall look, similarities and differences are present. The percentage of in-married

parents is much higher among participants from Argentina than Brazil, although the intermarriage rates are similar in both countries. In Argentina, 70% of Taglit participants were raised by in-married parents, while in Brazil, almost half (48%) have a non-Jewish parent.

In both countries, participants are characterized by a strong secular/cultural Jewish bent. In Argentina, they originate from families that are more Jewishly engaged than the Jewish population in the country as a whole. In Brazil, three quarters of Taglit participants were raised with a non-religious Jewish identity. These trends are congruent with the general profile of the respective Jewish communities. (Sorj, 1998; Erdei, 2011).

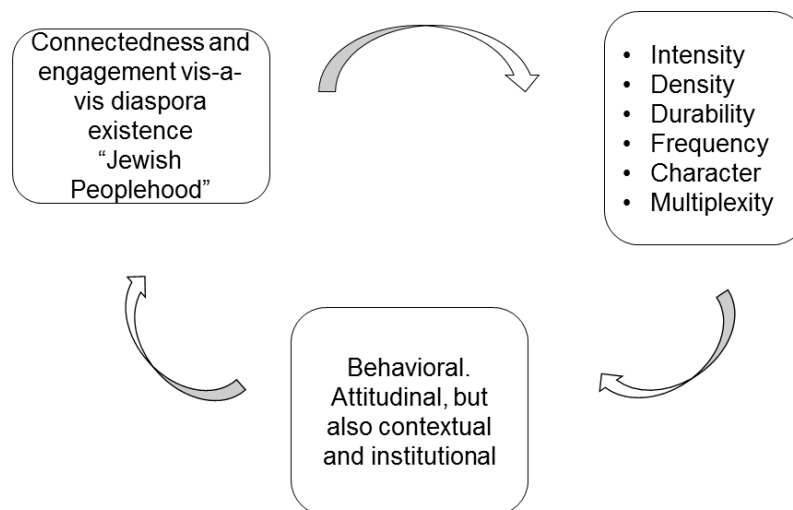
When evaluating the participation in programs or events coordinated by Jewish organizations, there are similar percentages (more than half) in both cases, though Argentina is slightly higher (57%) than Brazil (51%). This pattern suggests that Taglit participants are indeed close to the organized communal Jewish world. This dimension raises further questions as to the possibility that non-affiliated youth may be mobilized to this initiative, as is the case in the United States.

The evaluation reports assert that this trip also leads to a change in attitudes and views with respect to the Jewish community. However, reported figures do not indicate any increase in Taglit participants' desire to raise their children as Jewish, an item on which research on US participants has shown a positive program impact. Participants from Argentina show an increase in feelings of connection to their Jewish peers and Jewish friends. At the same time, Argentine Taglit trips, like those from North America, result in significantly stronger feelings of connection to Israel and the Jewish people, as expressed in the reference to the wide concept of Jewish Peoplehood-*Klal Yisrael*.

Thus, according to the reports, the trip has a very positive impact on most participants in regards to their perceived closeness to Israel, to Jewish heritage and to Jewish people. However, the percentages for all indicators considered differ markedly by country. We are in need of further analysis and the presentation of more balanced conclusions regarding the impact on attitudes. For example, with respect to Israel, the report mentions two indicators: connection to Israel and closeness to Israel. The percentages vary for each country: In Argentina, Taglit participants are 86% more likely to feel "very much" connected to Israel than non-participants; while a smaller percentage (46%) are more likely to feel "very close" to Israel. In Brazil, participants are 27% more likely to feel "very much" connected to Israel than non-participants, while the difference between participants and non-participants regarding closeness to Israel is not statistically significant. While in Argentina, 86% feel very connected to Israel, in Brazil this percentage reaches 20% (Shain, Hecht & Saxe, 2012; Cohen, 2014). Why are the percentages so different for connection and closeness in the case of Argentina? Given that, as the report mentions, Argentina is characterized by a historically strong solidarity with Israel, this trend might seem counter-intuitive.

Essentially, the trip's impact on identity and belonging, connectedness and engagement follows complex and mediated processes, as represented in Diagram 9.

Diagram 9. Interdependence, disjunctures and convergences



At this point, we will also address the strength and centrality of Israel’s role for Latin American Jews in the US, whose youth participate both in the framework of US trips and in the options offered by their country of origin, mainly Mexico (Bokser Liwerant, 2013c). Being Jewish in a school or extracurricular program in the new environment tends to promote a revised articulation of social and cultural markers, not only or mainly as in the case of family unity, but specifically in the ideational connectedness with the State of Israel. These values — once perceived as flowing from the Latin American Jewish experience — may now come to be regarded as more universally Jewish (Bokser Liwerant, 2015b). Latin American youngsters in the US increasingly participate in Taglit, which has become an alternative to the study trips common in their countries of origin. While comprehensive evaluations have not taken place, these trends need to be tested in light of the hypothesis of American Jewish self-distancing from Israel, which has elicited much recent debate.

Though some researchers claim that, with the exception of Orthodox youth, there is a growing distancing from Israel in the younger American Jewish cohort and that this trend will likely lead to a general distancing of American Jews from Israel (Cohen and Kelman 2009), others do not find a dramatic change in attachment to Israel in this population. The weakened bonds among the younger are not the result of a distancing pattern but a characteristic of Jewish life cycle (Sasson, Kadushin, and Saxe, 2010). Further discussion has highlighted the increased complexity of Israel-Diaspora relations and the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the abovementioned erosion, which shows

the need to consider both the changing circumstances of American Jewish life and Israel's social and political scenario.

Data on Jews living in Mexico and Argentina shows that both age and country of origin influence the place of Israel in people's lives and their attachment to it. As seen, Mexico has exceptionally high rates of visits to Israel while lower rates characterize Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela. Past trends in the US show that just over one third of all American Jewish adults have been to Israel (35%), almost two thirds (63%) of American Jews state they are emotionally attached to Israel and nearly three quarters (72%) say that US and Israeli Jews share a common destiny. Ties to Israel vary by affiliation and age. The affiliated are uniformly more connected to Israel than the unaffiliated.

Indeed, Latin American Jewish migration to the United States sheds light on recurring cycles of integration and distinctiveness, as new populations take part in the wider dynamics of (trans)migration, cultural pluralization and communal re-conformation. It therefore implies a redefined connection to Israel.

A geographically extended transnationalism replaces older binary connections between Latin American Jews and Israel. That does not necessarily imply the weakening of attachments but rather their re-signification. There is some departure from the previous dominant pattern of almost exclusive interaction with Israel or Israel-Zionist based organizations, as North American Jewish institutions have become an important source of direct political support and a model for collective organization (Bokser Liwerant, 2015b). Paradigmatic of this trend has been the support and advocacy Argentine Jews received, not only from Israel or Israel-based organizations such as the Jewish Agency (JAFI), but from numerous North-American Federations, the Joint Distribution Committee and the American Jewish Committee, when facing recurrent economic crises as well as the terrorist attacks on the Jewish community AMIA (1994) and its aftermath.

The debates surrounding this topic should be seen in the light of a multi-centered pattern that has taken shape and now prevails in the Jewish world. The last four decades point to a progressive, renewed code in the discussion, in which polarized options are gradually substituted by a more radial conception regarding center(s) and Diaspora communities (Bokser Liwerant 2015; Della Pergola, 2015). These relational trends find expression in the simultaneity with which all sorts of initiatives to enhance interconnections develop in different social spaces and geographical settings. These are both educational exchanges and recreational activities that promote shared interests and values. We refer to these in terms of strengthening the lateral axes of Diaspora life of communities that maintain both modified and strong relations with Israel.

The Latin American Jewish case is an appropriate choice in that regard, for Latin American Jewish immigrants in the United States have invested strongly in establishing institutional supporting structures aimed at guaranteeing their collective identities. Individuals interact at the communal level in dense and stable associational venues. These resources elaborate and re-orient organized Jewish

life. Patterns of continuity and persistence in educational practices among the Latin American immigrants reflect this dynamic background. The relative density of Latin American Jewish populations, socio-economic stratification, and the general availability of high-quality public education are among the factors that influence enrollment in youth trips (Bokser Liwerant, 2015 b).

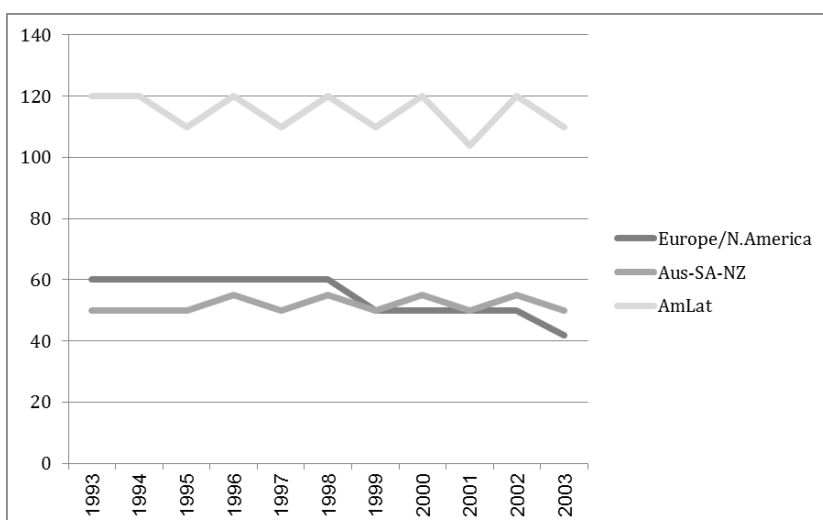
Taglit Mexico has not been comprehensively evaluated. One significant road, however, traces a circuit that points to participants coming from youth movements and non-Jewish schools, choosing Taglit, staying for *hachshara* and also deciding to make *aliyah*. Many of those who came back and expected to fully integrate into organized Jewish life, both through increased ties to Israel and community involvement, were not able to find the proper path of incorporation into the communal spaces. Doors of entrance have not been properly developed, and certainly this is not only a matter of follow up but also of social change. The trip alone can't modify a structural pattern of selective, though majority, inclusion. Initially, Taglit was offered to youth coming from exogamic families; *tnuot noar* had many of them. From 2012 through 2014, however, Taglit trips were not offered, due to scarcity both of candidates and resources. Additionally, Taglit had normative restrictions regarding age and previous educational trips to Israel. Starting in 2015, Taglit allowed youth that already had visited Israel in the framework of any educational trip, and widened the age of participants beyond the limit of 26 years. The same year, the program was adopted by the Monet Sinai community and close to 40 students attended. Comprehensive evaluations are required in order to have more precise comparative data. In this sense, a global and not only local perspective is needed to analyze the inter-dependence between educational initiatives and prevailing community organizational patterns.

One additional framework that deserves our attention is the March of the Living trips, which are characterized by intensive preparation and study and comparatively limited recreational opportunities. They are highly identity-oriented, based on two symbolic and geographical components - Poland and Israel - *MiShoah LeTekuma*.

Table 10. Participants in March of the Living, Latin America

	Argentina	Brazil	Mexico	Other Communities
2003	17		107	36
2004	24			69
2005	24		370	59
2006	68			69
2007	74	297	340	101
2008	263	475		263
2009	102	316	272	128
2010	220	158		109
2011	202	190	275	105
2012	252	171		139
2013	315	193	344	197

Source: (March of the Living, 2013).

Diagram 10. Participants in March of the Living, by major areas

Source: March of the Living.

As Table and Diagram 10 show, there is a sustained increase in participation in these trips,

which may be explained by a variety of factors. Regarding material and mainly financial conditions, Taglit and Masa have been highly subsidized since their inception, by the Israeli government, JAFI, JFNA, and KH, while the March of the Living is based on private funding. March of the Living has been able to mobilize support from local donors and institutions like KH, both of which have increased their funding in recent years.

On a more substantive level, related to identification and cultural components, we may see the growing relevance of March of the Living as an expression of the place of the *Shoah* in public discourse and social practices (Bokser Liwerant 2013; Cohen 2014). The *Shoah* has become an increasingly relevant axis of identification and points to a global trend in the Jewish world that reflects a reevaluation of the Diaspora as a valuable existential condition and a referent in identity building. This is part of a scenario in which the present is overshadowed by the moment of destruction because of an “unexplainable uneasiness” with Israel’s state power, while being more consonant with patterns of postmodern times (Wolf 2002; Levy and Sznajder, 2002). However, it is interesting to remember the secondary place it holds as an identity referent among the Masa youngsters surveyed in Mexico (2014). It should be noted that the coexistence of both of the geographies that the trip connects - Poland and Israel - provides a platform for exploring central, lateral and crossing axes of Jewish existence.

Summary and Discussion

Amidst changing paradigms in the Jewish world, educational trips to Israel can be seen as a relevant tool to enhance Jewish collective identity and the attachment to Israel among Jewish youth. The interdependence between these dimensions points to the singular oscillation of the educational trips between bonds to the nation-State and Diaspora-building, strongly conditioned by varying Jewish models of collective life.

Connectedness between Nation-State-Home (ideational, putative) and Diaspora develops along a diversified world of identities. It therefore concerns both the existential and the cognitive dimensions of educational trips, enhancing Israel as a territorial and a symbolic referent, allowing the development and continuity of Jewish life in the Diaspora.

The diverse educational trips we have presented throw light on the transformation process that the Zionist ideology has gone through, in the sense that the trips moved from vanguard *hachsharot* as a preparatory step, to *aliyah*, to both long-term educational experiences aimed at shaping collective Jewish life (Masa) and educational tourism or identity pilgrimage, in shorter frameworks (Taglit).

In the study carried out with Latin American Jewish Educators (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola

et al, 2015) we found that among educators, educational trips were both an essential component of their personal trajectory – as part of a circuit of mutual reinforcement between formal and informal education – and a prioritized resource in their conception of identity building.

From this perspective, the choice between formal and informal education comes to the forefront and calls for relevant considerations related to material requirements and economic resources. If we look at the massive mobilization by Taglit of young adults in the US - over half a million – it is certainly understandable that channeling resources either to education or to trips not only reflects the diversity of social scenarios, both national and communal, but also expresses the concrete availability of funds if size of populations and cost of formal integral Jewish education are considered.

However, where Jewish educational ecology is highly developed, youth trips can be considered as “the cherry on the cake.” Thus, we may further add that the feasibility of engaging in informal Jewish educational experiences such as the ones offered by the trips is higher in these cases, and points to an interesting ulterior interaction between ideological changes, philanthropy, and voluntarism as central characteristics of collective Jewish life. Fundraising and philanthropy in general and in the Jewish world in particular have changed in the last four decades. While National Funds and the Israel government are essential partners in the financing of the trips, independent foundations and private funds play a growing role in defining priorities for Jewish life. Developing trends of these trips reveal that support to Israel is still a major objective, even though the fundraising patterns and allocation system have changed.

As assumed, the relation between institutional density, affiliation rates, educational ecology, and type of trips points to differentiated structures and trends of world and regional contemporary Jewish life. The impact of these cultural and social practices on Israel-Diaspora relations calls for further research. By highlighting the potential dynamics of interdependence, disjuncture and convergences among the diverse dimensions of identity and belonging, we gain analytical complexity in order to explain connectedness and attachment to Israel among youth as influenced by the intensity, density, durability, and frequency of the trips. Further analysis of the differentiated long-term lasting impact of trips on attitudes, behaviors, and institutional settings is necessary.

The importance attributed to the Center-Home duality provides valuable insights to approach the changing profile of an ethno-national Diaspora entering new transnational dynamics. Changing patterns of migration, geographical mobility and its implications, the reshaping of existing and newly created communities, the expansion of material and symbolic boundaries, and their redefinition in a mobile context, are all processes that influence and build strong, differentiated and modified links with Israel.

Reflecting on Taglit, although the aim of the program is to strengthen participants’ attachments to Israel and thus contribute to enhancing Jewish life in their communities, other

significant effects considered include encouraging a stronger feeling of connection to *Klal Yisrael*.⁹ Among participants in 2008 from the US in a Taglit-Birthright tour, the feeling of connection to a 'worldwide Jewish community' was strengthened, according to measurements made six months after the trip to Israel, whereas the sense of connection to the Jewish community where they live declined slightly (Cohen, 2014).

It should be stressed that, within the Jewish world, the consensus regarding the relevance of concepts such as Peoplehood, does not mean that it is equally understood by participants in the different programs. Certainly, societies and countries play an important role in the diverse understanding. Thus, in France for example, the political culture seems to create tension between Jewish Peoplehood and French citizenship, so that declaring oneself as part of the Jewish People may be seen as 'detracting from' one's French identity, while in the US, there is less perceived conflict in being equally part of the Jewish People and the American People (Cohen, 2014).

In Mexico, the Masa participants surveyed, while prioritizing the Jewish components of their identity over their Mexican ones, stated their aim to belong to both worlds (Taifeld and Fainstein, 2014). This aspiration to bring together both sets of identity referents expresses emergent modes of interaction between ethnic and civic dimensions as integral components of citizenship and legitimizing codes of national belonging. Moreover, the social construction of diversity set in motion in Latin America by globality, calls for a new analytical perspective that focuses on the interactive and integrative nature of the dynamics between "being national-being transnational" (Bokser Liwerant, 2013). This would account for current trends in the region's citizenship building process and the complex impact of globalization and transnationalism in the public sphere.

In his research on youth and Jewish identities, Erick Cohen (2014) has suggested that the connection to the State of Israel and its people was perhaps the most important overall factor in the definition of people and nationhood. Differences in the nature, intensity, closeness, and connectedness between Israel and Diaspora convey differing expressions and modes of relations. Experiences and identities draw a multifarious scenario that accompanies and reflects a world system and a Jewish system in which systematic empirical knowledge is highly relevant. Cohen carried out an exemplary exercise of a Holistic Analysis of Global Jewish Youth among participants in Israel Experience (including 24,751 youth from 37 countries between 1993 and 2001) around the axes of nationality, level of religiosity, age, and gender - explained in this order as builders of worldwide convergent trends. Intellectually appealing and conceptually challenging is his conclusion that in spite of the determinant role played by nationality/country, Jewish youth around the world have similar structural perceptions of the elements comprising Jewish identity(ies). They have common ways of understanding and cognitively organizing diverse dimensions (such as the *Shoah*, Israel, leisure time, and values); in fact, Cohen considered the basic agreement between Jewish youth around the world to be striking, and the few differences, enlightening.¹⁰

Notwithstanding, identities imply both an individual sense of belonging and collective-relational behaviors. The diverse settings where Jews dwell plus the different ways in which identity consciousness interacts with the process of individualization have deepened the inner differentiation of the variety of options that define the wide Jewish ethno-religious-national framework. Convergences and divergences as well as overlapping identities characterize the global framework of Jewish life. Educational trips reflect and further shape diversified links with Israel. Thus, it is interesting to see how, in the Mexican case, while the religious axis bisects the educational world, Masa trips reflect the role of Israel as a symbolic and concrete place where differing Jewish identities can be shaped. Diversity has to be approached in terms of the required communal, organizational and institutional spaces that may provide new options appropriate to the changing conditions in which diverse roads for continuity may be built.

In a mobile world, being and belonging are the outcome of an interplay between individualization processes and collective affirmation; and between agency and structure. The dynamics and the nature of the links of Jewish Peoplehood - affiliated or non-affiliated, primordial or elective - demonstrate that convergences are not a given fact. Jewish identities are not only or mainly an expression of inner plural denominations but also of the multiple Jewish social settings, constructions and structures that may enrich or weaken Jewish life, and in which Israel plays a meaningful role.

We have referred to Jewish life in Latin America in terms of an ethno-national Diaspora becoming an ethno-transnational Diaspora. Transnationalism embraces a variety of social relations that are both embedded in and transcending nation-states and communities, cutting across sociopolitical, territorial, and cultural borders and contributing to the multiplicity, pluralization, and diversification of semantic-ideological and institutional connections between major life arenas. For Jewish youth, these trips connect them to a wide Jewish world, as they expressed in their goal to meet world youth, in many cases, as an elective alternative to the primordial family framework. This kind of social interaction, coupled with current technologies, exposes them to an expansive world of cultural encounters, which their participation in organized trips to Israel may fortify. It will be therefore relevant to explore the ways in which circles and networks of interaction act as narrow or wide spaces that limit or open channels of communication among Jewish youth.

The challenge of continuity, integration, intellectual creativity, and communal innovation acquires new meanings and certainly implies the possibility of strengthening the role of Israel for the Diaspora's enlarged lateral axes. Young people are affected by the intertwined phenomena of globalization, elective bonds, and reemerging particularism. Trends towards homogenization exist alongside strong expressions of national, ethnic, and religious identity.

New ways of connecting ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship evolve in a complex dynamic of unprecedented forms of national borders and transnationalism, triggering reflection about their

mutual relationships. This conceptual shift enables the continued exploration of Latin American Jewish life within the borders of the nation-state and crossing them; youth trips are essential components. Narratives and parameters of Jewish identities are built in a context of revival and transformation. Investigating the conditions under which old identities prevail, new symbolic ones emerge, borders expand or contract and boundaries become redefined, becomes central to Jewish social research.

Endnotes

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² Chile and Brazil share a pattern dominated by one central political event in the early 1970s; with Cuba, the event happened in the early 1960s. Argentina and Uruguay appear somewhat similar in the sequence of some of their disrupting changes throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Venezuela and Colombia share a pattern of more recent destabilization. Occasional economic crises underlie the Mexican experience of the 1980s and 1990s. These data quite clearly throw light on the underlying hierarchy of general political and socioeconomic circumstances in the countries of origin vis-à-vis the changing socioeconomic and security circumstances in Israel. Ibid.

³ Estimates vary between 227,500, based on the core population definition, and 303,000, considering the enlarged population definition.

⁴ The study comprised 1,379 Jewish educators that responded, most of whom were reached through an Internet survey. The study covered 606 educators in Argentina (out of 1,497 identified in this country, a response rate of 40.5%), and 636 educators in Mexico (out of 1,074, a response rate of 59.2%). Another 137 respondents originating from Latin America were interviewed in other countries, of which 70 were in Israel (a response rate of 33.3%) and 67 elsewhere in Latin America, North America and Europe (a response rate of 27.2%).

⁵ In Brazil, a total of 8,000 students are enrolled in 14 schools, thus reaching a rate of 50% attendance; the main population growth also took place in the religious schools and in the proliferation of *kolelim* (Topel, 2008; Goldstein, 2011).

⁶ However, research on this phenomenon is totally focused on pronounced Zionist aspects, as stated by Shlomo Bar-Gil, *Youth – Vision and Reality: From Deror and Gordoniya until Ihud HaBonim in Argentina: 1934-1973* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Yad Tabenkin, 2007.

⁷ The more comprehensive evaluation of the Masa trips is the one by Taifeld and Fainstein (2014), which covered 244 participants, 143 who made the trip, and 101 before they traveled. The study included internet questionnaire and focus groups. Two previous studies have been more limited in scope, either due to population-size or sub-ethnicity composition. Mendlovic (2010) based on 64 participants; Pinto (2012) based on qualitative and quantitative questionnaire and interviews with approximately 300 participants but only from the Magen David community. However the three studies point to convergent trends and shared conclusions.

⁸ In the United States, education in private communal institutions has, until recent decades, been the exception, rather than the rule, as most Jewish families sent their children to public schools. Today, the somewhat heightened levels of Jewish education have to be understood in light of changing trends in the Jewish world, including the demographic growth of the Orthodox sector, which tends to favor comprehensive private day school education. Less than 15% of these schools are non-Orthodox, 20% are Modern Orthodox, and 60% are Haredi. It is estimated that there were 60,000 students in Jewish day schools in 1962, while by 1982-1983 the student population had increased to 104,000 (10% of the Jewish school-age population), and in 2000, it reached approximately 200,000; that is, nearly one-quarter of all Jewish school-age children were attending day school. Recent studies show that today's total enrollment nationwide is 242,000. In 1998, the numbers were 20% non-Orthodox, 26% Modern Orthodox and 47% Haredi. The growth in ultra-Orthodox or Haredi school enrollment, including both Hasidic and non-Hasidic schools, reflects high birthrates and contrasts with Modern Orthodox schools, which are essentially holding their own. At the same time, there has been a severe drop (35%) in Solomon Schechter (Conservative movement) school enrollment. In 1998, the first year in which the AVI CHAI foundation examined student enrollments, the Schechter attendance totaled 17,563 students in 63 schools nationwide. This year, their school enrollment is just 11,338 students in 43 schools (cf. AVI CHAI Report on

Education, 2012).

⁹ Gidi Greenstein of the Reut Institute presentation at the Global Jewish Peoplehood Roundtable, Jerusalem 2012.

¹⁰ A similar conclusion was reached comparing Jewish adults in the US and in Israel in DellaPergola (2010).

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