

North-South Migration: The Impact of International Immigration in the Municipality of Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico

Marisa Raditsch

Abstract

This article examines the socio-cultural and economic changes caused by international retirement migrants and lifestyle migrants from the United States and Canada, who settle around or live seasonally in the lakeside village of Ajijic, Mexico. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews reveal perspectives on whether the effects of the migrants' presence are considered favorable or unfavorable to the traditional community. The sample consists of three groups: a) Mexicans (some of whom have roots dating back generations in Ajijic) who own or manage businesses, work or go to school; are stakeholders in their community; and have regular contact with immigrants; b) public servants (Mexican public sector employees); and c) experts. The study finds both positive and negative local perceptions about migrants from the "Global North," which tend to be favorable in terms of generating employment and contributing to the community; and unfavorable in terms of rising costs of living and some changes in local culture. It is suggested that measures should be taken to better take advantage of the presence of migrants who may introduce human and financial capital into the community.

Key words: International retirement migration, perception of migration, lifestyle migration, North-South migration, Mexico

Marisa Raditsch, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Introduction

In the midst of the heated Mexico-U.S. immigration debate, a much smaller but nonetheless significant inverse migration flow is usually overlooked. Previous studies have examined the phenomenon of International Retirement Migration (IRM) to the central Mexican area of Lake Chapala and elsewhere. Most studies on the topic are centered on the characteristics of the immigration, and while some focus on the local impact of lifestyle migrants' activities, they do not consider the native residents' perspectives. This article focuses on the way the traditional community of Ajijic, Mexico perceives lifestyle migrants from the United States and Canada who live in and around the village.

The presence of the migrants in Chapala has profound social effects when considering both the foreigners' adaptation to their new environment and the adaptation of the local population to the foreigners and the changes that this implies for the locals. Economic activity, various manifestations of "foreign culture," and charitable contributions made by the immigrants are some of the direct causes of the changes that can be felt in the municipality of Chapala. Some concrete examples that demonstrate the activities of the foreign community in Chapala are: the *Feria Maestros del Arte* handicraft fair that takes place annually in Chapala and is sponsored by a nonprofit organization established in both Mexico and the United States; the grocery store Super Lake in the town of San Antonio Tlayacapan, which provides a large selection of special imported products; the live projections of operas and other musical works from New York that are screened in the Diana Theater of the nearby city of Guadalajara; and the increase in prices that has taken place in Chapala's real estate sector.

According to Hunt (2008), retirees from the United States seek a lower cost of living and a better quality of life. Most retirees want to live in places where there are pre-established communities of compatriots with whom to socialize, and they demand products, services and amenities in Mexico that they might not be able to access in their places of origin. Sunil, et al. (2007) emphasizes that retired migrants tend to choose less developed countries as destinations, contrary to the pattern of employment-seeking migration from poor to rich countries, which was previously commonly associated with traditional migration flows. There are four main reasons for immigrating to Mexico: financial circumstances, the natural environment and climate, a sense of community and friendship, and a better quality of life. Some factors that influence the decision are the quality of life in their place of origin, cultural adaptation, personal identity issues, financial security, lower cost of living, access to amenities and access to healthcare. Truly (2002) points out that retirees from the last decade have had a significant impact on the cultural landscape and socio-cultural integrity of the Lake Chapala area.

Lake Chapala and its surrounding villages were traditionally based on a local economy of fishing and farming. At the end of the nineteenth century, prior to the Mexican Revolution, the area gradually transitioned into a holiday destination for Mexico's elite; most famously, Porfirio Díaz, Mexico's controversial president of 35 years, who is recognized for his role in installing transportation infrastructure and generating economic development. In 1917, a bus route to Guadalajara was established, and by 1926, a highway was built connecting Chapala to the city. Indeed, it was during this period that a railroad and more hotels were constructed and a steamboat was implemented, all of which facilitated both commerce and tourism to the area from the nearby hub of Guadalajara. One of the great attractions of the area was its thermal baths, which historians agree are the main reason that foreigners began to frequent the area. Consequently, the notion of the Chapala area as a place to improve health and experience relaxation remains to this day the major reason why it is a popular destination for the international retirement community.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or GI Bill, as it is more commonly known, has also been considered to be a small but significant catalyst of the immigration of US citizens to Mexico. Through the GI Bill, veterans returning from World War II were eligible for a series of benefits, including those that covered university tuition fees. According to one of the expert interviews (D. Truly, Ajijic, 1 May 2012), a small number of veterans came to the University of Guadalajara, where they are said to have made arrangements with members of the administration to attend classes and use leftover benefit money to cover living costs. Furthermore, it is of historical significance to consider the 1950s "Beat Generation," a literary and artistic movement best known for authors such as Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, who travelled to Mexico in search of adventure and cheap drugs. Finally, during this same time some US citizens, who sought political liberty from McCarthyism in the United States, came to Mexico as long-term residents (Croucher, 2009).

The present study's general objective is to showcase an aspect of North-South migration that is not frequently considered; that is, the impact of these flows on the receiving community, according to the opinions and experiences of the members of the receiving community. Research questions directing this study are: "What impact do foreigners have on the lives of the people native to Chapala?" and "What are some of the perceptions of community stakeholders, public servants and experts towards the economic and socio-cultural transformations in Chapala, due to immigration?"

International Retirement Migration (IRM)

According to a Migration Policy Institute report (2006), there are four tendencies that reflect the growing importance of international retirement migration in the United States. The first one of these factors pertains to demography, or the fact that the baby boom generation is in the process of retiring, raising the proportion of retirees to those who are active in the workforce. The report points out that the US Census Bureau calculated that between 2000 and 2030, the population over 65 years of age will more than double, while the total population will rise by a mere 29% (Migration Policy Institute, 2006: 5). The second tendency highlighted in the report leads to a growing concern that Medicare, Social Security and private retirement plans will not be sufficient to provide an acceptable living standard during retirement, especially when considering the high cost of medical and nursing care, especially with life expectancies on the rise. Insecurity about being able to afford these costs while maintaining a comfortable lifestyle has led some retirees to explore other options, such as living abroad, where prices are generally lower. A third tendency has to do with information and communication technologies, as well as relatively inexpensive direct transportation. These factors lower both the social and the economic costs of living abroad, since retirees can both remain in contact with friends and family in the United States and afford occasional visits there while taking advantage of amenities that would be out of their price range at home. Finally, the last tendency outlined in the report has to do with the host countries to which the retirees immigrate. Economies and communities of popular retirement destinations can be greatly affected by international retirement migration flows. This is due to the economic activities that retirees engage in, such as buying or renting homes, employing local workers and consuming goods and services, all of which may cause greater investments and more foreign visitors to come to the area. In an example from internal migration (Longino and Crown, 1990, in Migration Policy Institute, 2006), interstate migration plays an important role in redistributing wealth among states within the United States. On the other hand, it is known that international retiree migration tends to inflate housing prices, resulting in the crowding out of the traditional community from areas in which immigrants typically settle.

Truly (2006) elaborates on the role played by NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), which entered into force in 1994, in granting access to products and services previously unavailable in Mexico. Additionally, Truly (2002) considers the role of advances in transport and communications, the increased possibilities of mobility for retirees, and NAFTA itself as systemic changes in society that greatly affect not only the size but also the type of migration flows to the Chapala area. Some of these changes can likewise be observed in the form of multinational

corporations that did not exist previously in Mexico, which have aided in breaking barriers that formerly prevented certain types of migrants from moving to the area.

An alternative to IRM: lifestyle migration

Authors such as Talavera Salgado (1982) have long pointed out that members of the foreign community do not immigrate to the Chapala area simply to increase their purchasing power; rather, they often also do so with aims to gain financial profit: foreigners open their own businesses (restaurants, hotels and real estate agencies) as well as build new housing developments or work to promote the concept of immigration to Mexico among their peer groups and networks in their country of origin. This example of financial benefit that goes beyond higher purchasing power helps introduce another aspect of the conceptual framework for this article: that of lifestyle migration. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) define lifestyle migration as "the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential of a better quality of life" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009: 2). Additionally, the authors pinpoint that "umbrella concepts" (among them retirement migration, leisure migration, second-home ownership, amenity-seeking and seasonal migration) were previously used to refer to this type of migration, but that these conceptualizations fall short of uniting the diverse elements of what they consider to be a more complex and broader phenomenon.

A traditional community's perspectives about lifestyle migrants in a particular town or area have been explored in other regions that are increasingly becoming immigration destinations for affluent people seeking adventure coupled with higher purchasing power, among other things. O'Reilly and Nudrali (2009) studied local Turkish peoples' perspectives on British immigrants in Didim, Turkey. In this study, lifestyle migration was viewed by Turkish locals as an expansion of tourism both temporally and spatially. The traditional Turkish community was found to have a positive attitude toward the financial impacts brought about by investment and in-migration, but held negative views about privileges granted to the foreign population, who have a higher purchasing power, and harbored worries about becoming second-class citizens in their own country. Some members of the Turkish community were concerned about the impact of economic growth on the local environment, while others had doubts about the amount of control that migrants had over the local economy. Likewise, they looked down on British culture and considered that the immigrants had little respect for local cultural values.

Examples of how the foreign community has impacted the traditional one around Lake Chapala are found in Methvin's (2009) study, which focuses on the healthcare sector. Evidence of immigrants engaging in philanthropic

acts in favor of the traditional community is visible via NGOs such as *Niños Incapacitados*, an initiative by members of the foreign community to supply resources for children in need of specialized treatment and medical devices; *Pasos Milagrosos*, which provides equine therapy free of cost to disabled children; or the Red Cross International Volunteers. The ability of the *Cruz Roja* to continue operating, according to Methvin, is due to the donations above operating costs for clinical services, which compensate for below-cost donations from members of the host community. Methvin concludes that this implies a symbiotic relationship that favors development for the whole community.

The study context: conceptualizing immigrant numbers in Chapala

The municipality of Chapala is located in the state of Jalisco, along with important tourist destinations, such as Puerto Vallarta and, to a lesser extent, Guadalajara. According to the 2010 Mexican census data, 48,839 inhabitants lived in the municipality of Chapala, spread out between five villages. The municipality is best known for Chapala, the largest lake in Mexico, from which its name is derived. Although exact data on the number of foreigners who live in Chapala is difficult to come by, according to the U.S. Consulate of Guadalajara, approximately 20,000 people who live in and around Chapala are U.S. citizens. However, this may include the children of Mexicans born in the United States whose families come from the Chapala area. The Canadian Consulate in Guadalajara, on the other hand, has stated that there 2,000 registered Canadians living in the Chapala area, but because not all Canadian citizens register with the Canadian government as advised, government estimates place the actual number of Canadians at more than double.¹ That estimate is reflected in data on the foreign population in Mexico that holds a valid immigration form as provided by the National Institute of Migration of the Ministry of the Interior of Mexico, which reveals that in 2009, there were 2,945 Canadians throughout the state of Jalisco. In the same year, there were around 10,223 U.S. Nationals in the state of Jalisco with a valid immigration form. Since not all immigrants live there on a permanent basis (the so-called *golondrinos* or "snowbirds" live there part-time and return to their countries of origin for several months in the summer), and as many immigrants are not officially recorded, it is difficult to determine a more exact figure. In the National Census of Population and Housing INEGI (National Institute of Statistics and Geography), country of birth, place of residence five years ago and the reason for emigration are three factors taken into consideration, but the census only reflects the number of foreigners who were in their homes at the time the census was taken (Rodríguez Chávez, 2010).

Methodology

This research discusses how the local citizens of the municipality of Chapala in Jalisco, Mexico perceive migrants who live in the community, most of whom are retirees from the United States and Canada. More specifically, it seeks to discover their perceptions on changes in the community that have been generated by the presence of the immigrants. It explores some of the dynamics and social changes that occur when two communities – one receiving community and another that is made up of a group of people from different countries and who have a much higher purchasing power – live together, and how these migrants impact the lives of the local people.

This qualitative study is based on a literature review and in-depth, semi-structured interviews that were conducted as part of the fieldwork, from March to May of 2012. The majority of the interviews took place in and around the municipality of Chapala. There were a total of 24 informants, but three interviews were omitted due to lack of relevance. Seven interviews took place in the town of Chapala, two in San Antonio Tlayacapan, 13 in the town of Ajijic, and two in the city of Guadalajara. Five interviews were conducted with foreigners in English and the rest were conducted with Mexicans in Spanish and later translated. Twelve of the interviews took place in conjunction with Ms. Vaira Avota, a graduate student from CIESAS (*Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social*) in Guadalajara, who was conducting the interviews for her Master's thesis. Group interviews were conducted for reasons of convenience: some of the informants did not have much free time, and although each researcher had different questions for the informants, questions from both were related, giving more depth to the results. Similarly, it was thought that, if informants would be interviewed twice within a short span of time, this could affect the quality or length of the answers. The main informants were recommended by locally-based academics; once the interviews had been completed, informants were asked to suggest another person whom they considered to have a substantial opinion or perspective that could enrich the study. The use of snowball sampling was not considered to be particularly problematic, as the size of the possible informant pool was relatively small, due to its primary focus on entrepreneurs and government employees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions that sought to encourage interview partners to share information they considered important or relevant, without biasing their answers. Most of the interviews with entrepreneurs took place in their places of business, while the interviews with government employees were carried out in their respective work places. The content analysis method was utilized to organize the results from the interviews. Topics that had been brought up by interview partners were coded in the interview transcripts and grouped according to categories, so as to be able to detect common themes and patterns.

FINDINGS

Perceptions on the impact of immigrants: interviews with community stakeholders, public servants and experts

For the purpose of this paper, the "traditional community" refers to Mexican nationals whose links to the Chapala area date back generations, and, to a lesser extent, Mexicans who have immigrated from other areas of the country to live in the municipality of Chapala. The "traditional community" also includes indigenous peoples, although indigenous people were not one of the foci of the study. The term has been used to further differentiate it from "immigrant community" or "foreign community" (which have been used interchangeably).

The interviews were divided into three groups: "community stakeholders," "public servants" and "experts." Community stakeholders are defined as local (Mexican) entrepreneurs, as well as students of high school and university age. This group has a common interest, which is maintaining a certain climate or standard of living that is favorable to their continued wellbeing. Public servants are government employees working on the local, state and federal levels. The experts interviewed for this study were: Diego Petersen, a journalist; David Truly, a migration scholar with specialized knowledge on the immigration of foreign retirees to the Chapala area; and Terry Vidal, longtime resident and director of the Lake Chapala Society for several years.

Perceptions on economic impact

Community stakeholders, public servants and experts discussed many points in common, but each group also had different priorities. Overall, public servants tended to have a mostly positive opinion about the presence of the immigrants, whereas the community stakeholders were much more critical regarding certain issues. This general lack of criticism on the part of the public servants is not surprising, especially when considering that migrants' activities favor the economic welfare of the municipality on different levels and public servants' discourse is probably meant to reflect an immigrant-friendly stance. An employee of the National Institute of Migration (INM, or *Instituto Nacional de Migración*), which had opened an office in Ajijic in 2011, due to the high demand for processing of migratory documents in that area, made the following observations:

"Many North Americans and Canadians live here; other groups are just minorities, because there are very few of them. It's the Americans and Canadians, mostly retired, who use their pensions here. As far as I can tell, that money is contributing to the growth of Chapala. I can tell you that there are two shopping centers,

neither of which existed here just four years ago. You can see the development of products and services. Many roadside restaurants have opened between Chapala, Ajijic and Jocotepec. There's Italian and German food; even other types of businesses that are growing more and more. The real estate section, as I have noticed, is driven by the sale and purchase of real estate, which is part of the economic flow, a flow of money I have observed since I was assigned here." (Interview, Chapala, 18 April 2012)

A similar focus on positive economic impact was discussed by María de la Luz Rico, Director of the Municipal Archives of Chapala, who noted that the municipality receives economic benefit from the presence of the foreign community, albeit not differentiating tourists (which frequently tend to be Mexican) from immigrants:

"Chapala is a touristic place, so it depends on tourism, whether you open a business, sell something or work in a business such as the hotel or restaurant industry. Most people in Chapala make their living off of fishing or tourism. Thanks to the fact that we have the largest number of foreign residents here in our municipality, there is an increase in employment, whether as a gardener, a chauffeur or a domestic worker. There is an economic spillover due to the foreigners, so it is a good thing that Chapala has foreigners, because they foster employment." (Interview, Chapala, 9 April 2012)

Entrepreneurs held more divided opinions about the presence of the migrants. They were positive regarding economic spillover, which should be evident given the instrumentality of the immigrants for maintaining their livelihoods. Nevertheless, most entrepreneurs also considered negative aspects associated with the immigrants' presence:

"It's good that there are many foreigners, because we also live off of tourism. Directly or indirectly, all of us live off of tourism. If there are more foreigners, there is more cash flow; it's a chain. But, for example, land has become more expensive; the prices are very high precisely because of that - and the price of goods as well. It makes your cost of living more expensive." (Interview, Ajijic, 10 April 2012)

Some complaints and problems were discussed regarding lifestyles perpetuated by the migrants. With a certain level of purchasing power comes a heightened ability to consume goods and services; Sofía Márquez criticizes the consumerism and materialism shown by some migrants, and the effects that this has on people who interact with them directly:

"This place has lost much of its image, as well as the charm of Mexican life. Not that this is necessarily bad, but everywhere there is excess. When a domestic worker goes to a house to work for a foreigner and sees everything one can have, it's like a shock. Many people don't see it like this, but it's a culture shock, to go inside a house and see so many things. How can they have so much, how do they do it? We don't need that many things!" (Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

Angélica Reyes, on the other hand, points out changes in remunerated activities:

"Yes, there have been many changes; for example, my father used to work as a fisherman alternating with this [the loom workshop], and prior to that he also fished. Along with the growth of the town, has come more pollution, along with [pollution from] places that have nothing to do with the town. But yes, there is more pollution and various excellent species, such as the pez blanco – and other species of fish that were a part of our diet – have disappeared, because we grew up eating fish, right." (Interview, Ajijic, 10 April 2012)

Additionally, multinational corporations that cater to the immigrant population opening in the area were seen with skepticism, as Silvina Martínez noted:

"Wal-Mart arrived, but it came with its own people. They don't use the people from around here. They brought their own construction company. That is not an income for us. Wal-Mart and all of the other businesses have brought people from outside, so it's coming to an end. If the Americans construct something, maybe they will hire people from here, but since labor in Ajijic and the Riviera is more expensive, they bring it in from other places, where it is cheaper. This lowers the income of the people." (Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

The most common issue that entrepreneurs addressed is that that they suffer a high degree of economic dependence on migrants, and that their economic stability is dramatically affected during the low season when their client base greatly decreases. Tony Andalon, the owner of a butcher shop in San Antonio Tlayacapan, discussed this issue:

"Here it goes by seasons. From November until April, lots of foreigners come to spend the winter in Mexico, and then they leave. Even when it's low season, there are more foreign clients than Mexican ones. It's not that bad, but they do buy less than usual. Prices have increased a lot." (Interview, San Antonio Tlayacapan, 13 April 2012)

The effects of the cyclical element, common to international retirement migration, were illustrated with more depth by Angélica Reyes, regarding her family's traditional weaving business:

"The low season starts for us after Easter Week. The foreigners start to leave – I don't know why they leave during that time. So then the person who cleaned three houses, loses two bosses, and only has one boss. It starts a chain. My mother says that during that time, we earn enough to pay our employees, the telephone, the electricity and that's it. And I tell my mother: 'At least we have enough for that.' Because we are not something essential. We're not the milk [supplier], we're not the tortilla [supplier] - something you need because you gotta eat. Being something that is not essential, but being able to keep going, that's something. We're not something necessary. Like, nobody says, 'I will get anemia if I don't have my single quilts!' Right? A pharmacy is something essential, a doctor, but not us. We are able to continue; slowly, but still." (Interview, Ajijic, 10 April 2012)

Sofía Márquez co-manages a family business with her siblings and their respective spouses. The business, which was established 25 years ago, manufactures and sells *ropa de manta*, embroidered blouses, and jewelry. Sofia emphasizes how difficult it is for her to determine the impact of foreigners in Chapala, whether positive or negative. She knows that Ajijic is a unique place that is distinct from other communities. Furthermore, she considers the economic spillover from the migrants to be one of the main reasons why she never had to immigrate to the United States.²

"I have family who live on the other side of the lake and when I go there with my father I realize that that is how Ajijic used to be when I was a child: Without foreigners, without touristic infrastructure and economic infrastructure. The bad thing is that there are no jobs, so the majority of the people who live there had to emigrate to the United States, while we are still here. My father did not have to leave. I believe that is a good thing. The economy moves so quickly, due to the influence of foreign capital that comes with all the economic spillover, that people can keep their families here, although many of my relatives are in the United States. But I can work here. My siblings have lots of work here, and they had the opportunity to go to school and to university. We are a large family. Of six [siblings], only one went to the United States. In other circumstances, if the rest of us had not found work here, we probably would have emigrated as well. Somehow we have been more rooted to this place." (Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

Perceptions on social and cultural impact

Francisco René and Pablo, the students that were interviewed, perceived that migrants appreciate Mexican culture and participate in local Mexican cultural events:

*"At Carnival, in February and March, every Sunday there are men who dress up like women – not vulgarly. They make detailed masks and typical Mexican skirts with blouses, and they go through the streets dancing, and sometimes people run in front of them...we have a band and a parade. Now the gringos get involved, too. They even dress up! They decorate lots of cars, and the foreigners take part. They take part of things here in town. They have adapted well. There comes a point when they get to know everyone so well, that they like to be a part of this as well. They make their own floats."*³ (Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

Overall, interviews revealed that stakeholders see immigrants as contributing to the economy and being involved in matters that are important to the community at large, as well as other issues that are directly related to them, such as the ecological health of Lake Chapala, by creating environmental awareness or protesting the proposed construction of a casino in town. One of the experts, Diego Petersen, journalist and part-time resident in the municipality, also held a balanced opinion about the migrants; he considered the common discourse on indigenous people as mere servants of wealthy foreigners to be tendentious, explaining that the indigenous people he interacted with, who mobilized against the construction of a casino nearby, were mostly entrepreneurs and mechanics, instead of domestic workers and gardeners, as was popularly alleged.

David Truly discussed the problem of insecurity and its effects on immigration to the municipality of Chapala. In the same way that it affects tourism, organized crime has very important economic implications for the Mexican context. A recent upsurge in violent crime in the municipality may have reduced the number of migrants, but Truly considered this to be a temporary problem. Furthermore, he analyzed the philanthropic reputation of the immigrant community in Chapala:

"It's different than a tourism destination. People come here and they stay here. Whether they live for only three years, or six years, or ten years or twenty years, they're staying longer and we learned a long time ago with tourism that the longer they stay, the more involved they get in the community. If they like it, the more concerned they are about its future. [...] A lot of people here have time on their hands and they want to do something good. A lot of them, financially, they're well off. So they want to give something back."

(Interview, Ajijic, 1 May 2012)

Community stakeholders also expressed concern about the high incidence of alcoholism perceived among migrants, as well as recreational drug use. Despite this, no one interviewed showed a purely negative attitude towards the immigrants.

Silvina Martínez expressed much frustration about the lack of effectiveness of *Amigos del Lago, A.C.*, a local NGO supported by members of both the foreign and traditional communities, which is dedicated to finding solutions for problems pertaining to pollution in Lake Chapala, as well as raising awareness about the issue, with which she was involved as its treasurer.

"In reality, one can't do much, because of third party interests. We seek conservation of the lake and all that...the harmony of everything that's around the lake. But since nobody works together, there is very little one can do. [...] We have a German friend who is president of Living Lakes,⁴ and she says that one day we have to change, when we no longer have our ecosystem, our water. It's a huge monster that we try to change, and it is very difficult."(Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

Francisco René views the migrants as people with good intentions, while he considers the locals as too ambitious. *"The majority comes to help...the Amigos del Lago are almost only foreigners...they get people from here, like my mom, but it's really mostly foreigners. People from here seem to ruin the project. That's why my mom left."* (Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

The interviews with community stakeholders and public servants indicated that all of the interviewees held positive opinions regarding the foreign community's efforts in favor of the community at large, especially through recognizing the important role that social organizations initiated and run by foreigners play in the community. From scholarships for students, cultural and educational programs and healthcare support programs to initiatives in the areas of environmentalism, street children and animal shelters, most informants demonstrated profound gratitude for the services and assistance that immigrants bring to the community.

"They have brought education, that's true; culture has changed so much. There are music schools, an art school, we have painters; you can tell by [the centers against] animal abuse, there are charitable institutions that don't even exist in Guadalajara, organizations dedicated to children, education, disabled people. Since the beginning, they have done good. It's good for the community. They also give scholarships. These are the good things they have brought. It is evident in the people; that is, in the education for

children by foreigners, which is very different than for a child who does not have education, or who quits school.”(Interview, Ajijic, 11 April 2012)

As previously mentioned, the interviews with public servants revealed an especially positive attitude towards the impact of the immigrant community in the municipality. In one such example, Magdalena González Cruz, Director of DIF Chapala (National System for Integral Family Development, a public institution dedicated to social assistance) discussed a program called *Pro Niños Incapacitados*, which is funded and administered by the immigrant community and works together with DIF to broaden its reach.

“I believe that their presence here is positive, because they give us a lot of support. Lots of them belong to different types of support associations for children or for the elderly, and they provide donations. Here [at DIF] we have a program called Pro Niños Incapacitados, which is sustained by an association of Americans. They serve sick children; any type of health problem. They provide [financial] resources [and transportation] for children who require rehabilitation. It is a very good program. We [at DIF] are the means to bring children with health problems, although they themselves promote the program and they themselves reach out to more people. Every two weeks, they serve at least 50 children, and they are here all day. They don't leave until they have tended to everybody.”(Interview, Chapala, 18 April 2012)

Summary of findings

Interviews with community stakeholders, public servants and experts revealed that, in general, a positive perception exists about the impact that immigration has on the traditional community, and no extreme opinions were expressed about them. The entrepreneurs affirmed that the presence of the foreign community creates employment, moves economic capital to Mexico and reduces the need for local Mexicans to emigrate to look for work elsewhere. Furthermore, they frequently brought up examples of these efforts (NGOs, fundraising for healthcare and children's rights, as well as support for art, cultural events, music and education) and how they benefit the community. One informant noted that within the town of Ajijic, there is a more open-minded attitude towards minorities, especially acceptance towards the LGBT community, which was implied to have spread throughout the traditional community. The students that were interviewed observed that many immigrants seemed to appreciate Mexican culture more than the traditional community does, since immigrants frequently become involved in traditional events. These same students regarded English language skills to be a great advantage and, in many cases, a necessity to guarantee economic success in the area.

In regards to the negative attitudes that were detected in the stakeholder interviews, the following positions were noted: a lack of interest among the foreign community to integrate and acquire language skills; some undermining of Mexican cultural and lifestyle practices; certain segregation regarding English language restaurants and businesses in which signs and menus act as a barrier towards the traditional community; undermining of the traditional community due to lower socioeconomic levels as well as stereotypes that all Mexicans fall into the same socioeconomic category; that immigration of foreign nationals causes a parallel emigration of Mexican nationals even as Ajijic has potentially reached its maximum population capacity; and a growing influence of foreign culture, including consumerism coupled with a need to acquire material goods, and loss of traditional local culture. Finally, an increase in the price of goods and property, which has generated some emigration of the traditional community, due to unsustainable living costs (i.e., a process of gentrification); a real estate sector largely dominated by the foreign community; environmental pollution; changes in traditional remunerated activities; competition with labor from outside the municipality willing to accept lower wages; and the cyclical nature of the high and low seasons of migration, which jeopardize the local economy. Although many issues were considered to be negative, none of the interviews indicated instances of xenophobia or other extreme positions.

Public servants also perceived good relations and mutual appreciation between the foreign and traditional communities, noting that difficulties in understanding each other, due to cultural and language barriers, do arise. Some of the topics discussed included how the foreign community foment employment, provides cultural enrichment via artistic and musical events and activities, contributes to the growth of the municipality, both physically and economically, supports the community with charitable initiatives, provides educational opportunities such as language courses, and helps to generate a new identity for the area. Additionally, public servants noted that immigrants do sometimes become easy targets for criminal activities. Regarding remunerated activities, they observed that agriculture has practically been replaced by the service industry.

Experts introduced other topics of relevance, which they were more inclined to discuss from a macro perspective: local and traditional consumption patterns have been altered, due to the influence of the foreign community; most immigrants seek to contribute to the community with time or with money; and Ajijic has benefited specifically in the areas of cultural and educational enrichment, thanks to the foreign community. Another important aspect is that immigrants from different socioeconomic backgrounds tolerate traditional culture to different degrees, and that there is an increasing cultural hybridization from the varied immigration flows and a tendency for greater diversity of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to give an overview of the economic and socio-cultural impact of immigrants in a rural Mexican village, based on the perceptions of Mexican people in the receiving context. This study builds upon previous scholarship that addresses both international retirement migration and lifestyle migration, but is concerned with understanding how the traditional community is faring under these conditions as well gauging the implications for local development and welfare of the receiving society. It addresses a lesser-known flow of migration that is almost never considered in popular and extremely polemic discourse about migration between Mexico and the United States. The study forms part of a growing body of literature, not only in migration studies but also in tourism and development studies, in that it shows some of the impact that a group of people with high purchasing power can have on a community with comparatively very low purchasing power. Some limitations in this study are related to content and methodology, such as the lack of usage of numeric data to reinforce some of the claims made by the interview partners, or the possible effects caused by a foreign researcher approaching Mexicans to ask them their opinions on other foreigners.

In broad terms, the results of the study show that stakeholder and public servant opinions of the immigrants are generally favorable in terms of their generating employment and giving back to the community; and unfavorable in terms of the resultant rising cost of living and some changes in local culture. As highlighted by Truly (interview, Ajijic, 1/5/2012), the 76 million baby boomers currently reaching retirement age, a reduced workforce making fewer Social Security contributions and high healthcare costs (all of these aspects specifically referring to the United States), international retirement migration is a trend on the rise. Consequently, receiving countries must prepare to confront this reality. Receiving contexts in which immigrants' purchasing power is relatively high should also consider concrete ways to tap into this resource to benefit local development.

Several authors (Croucher, 2009; Lizárraga 2008) put emphasis on the importance of focusing more attention on the manner in which Mexico could take advantage of the economic spillover caused by the foreign community, as well as introducing regulations to generate more revenue by means of taxation and increased fines for economic undertakings that take place without proper documentation or permits. Therefore, while it is evident that immigrants greatly benefit the traditional community through their NGOs, charitable work and donations, and that immigrants create a unique dynamic of life as well as positive and negative implications for the receiving community,

immigrants' relatively higher human capital and financial capital levels could be taken advantage of to a much larger extent.

Notes

¹ Data on US and Canadian citizens living in the Chapala area was acquired via telephone inquiry in 2011 to the respective consulates.

² This claim was explored through data from CONAPO (*Consejo Nacional de Población*, or National Population Council), determining that the municipalities of Chapala and Ocotlán have the lowest emigration rates among nine municipalities surrounding Lake Chapala (CONAPO, 2010).

³ A float refers to a vehicle that is decorated for a parade, usually following a specific theme.

⁴ Living Lakes, or *Lagos Vivos*, is an international network of over 100 member organizations whose goal is to protect and conserve sweet water reserves globally.

REFERENCES

- Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) (2010). *Índice de intensidad migratoria México-Estados Unidos*. Retrieved from: http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/intensidad_migratoria/texto/IIM_Generales.pdf.
- Croucher, S. (2009). *The Other Side of the Fence: American Migrants in Mexico*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Hunt, H. D. (2008). ¡Viva Retirement! Looking South of the Border. *Tierra Grande, Journal of the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University*, 15, (2): 1-5.
- Lizárraga Morales, O. (2008). La inmigración de jubilados estadounidenses en México y sus prácticas transnacionales. Estudio de caso en Mazatlán, Sinaloa y Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur. *Migración y Desarrollo*, 11: 97-117.
- Methvin, T. W. (2009). *The New Mexican-Americans: International Retirement Migration and Development in an Expatriate Community in Mexico*. The Center for Migration and Development. Retrieved from: <http://www.princeton.edu/cmd/working-papers/papers/wp0903.pdf>.
- Migration Policy Institute (2006). America's Emigrants: US Retirement Migration to Panama and Mexico. Retrieved from: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/americas_emigrants.pdf.
- Nudrali, Ö. and O'Reilly, K. (2009). Taking the Risk: The British in Didim, Turkey In: and K. O'Reilly and M. Benson, (Eds.), *Lifestyle Migration: Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences* (pp. 136-152). Farnham: Ashgate.
- O'Reilly, K. and M. Benson (2009) "Lifestyle Migration: Escaping to the Good Life?" In: K. O'Reilly, and M. Benson, (Eds.), *Lifestyle Migration: Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences* (pp. 1-13). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Rodríguez Chavez, E. (2010). La inmigración en México a inicios del siglo XXI. In E. Rodríguez Chávez (Ed.), (2010). *Extranjeros en México: continuidades y aproximaciones*. Mexico: Centro de Estudios Migratorios, Instituto Nacional de Migración/SEGOB DGE Ediciones.
- Sunil, T.S., V. Rojas, and D. E. Bradley (2007). United States' international retirement migration: the reasons for retiring to the environs of Lake Chapala, Mexico. *Ageing and Society*, 27 (4): 489-510.
- Talavera Salgado, F. (1977). La ribera norte del lago de Chapala. La otra cara de una zona turística. *Controversia*, 1, 26-35.
- Talavera Salgado, F. (1982). *Lago Chapala. Turismo residencial y campesinado*. Mexico: Antropología social científica.
- Truly, D. (2002). International Retirement Migration and Tourism Along the Lake Chapala Riviera: developing a matrix of retirement migration behavior. *Tourism Geographies*, 4(3): 261-281.
- Truly, D. (2006). The Lake Chapala Riviera: The Evolution of a Not So American Foreign Community. In N. Bloom (Ed.), *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism beyond the Border*, (pp.167-217). Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.