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## **New Websites – The Internet as a European port for Latin American immigrants**

### **Abstract**

Migration has become an important factor of economic, demographic and social structures in global information society. However, events of the past decade make it very clear that current migration policies and integration strategies are unable to cope with the outcome of accelerating and increasingly widespread migration. But, before more efficient immigration regulations can be introduced, the framers need in-depth knowledge of migration triggers and of the factors which shape migrant identities. A rarely discussed component of this is the relationship between information and communications technology, and migration.

My research concerned how migrants use the Internet in their quest for new homes as well as after they resettle. One platform is the online migration industry, where applications may be accessed for fees and where prospective migrants can get in touch with one another to seek advice.

Before analyzing this relatively new phenomenon, I will first briefly review the most important points of existing theories on the relationship between ICT and migration.

Then, I will outline the typology of new and redesigned migration-related businesses triggered by the Internet and operating for profit. Finally, I will take a closer look at *social capital as a product*, a strategy that I will present in the context of migration to Europe by Latin Americans.

### **Looking at international migration processes in the context of Information Society**

Migration flows in global information society

A completely new kind of mobility evolved in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, triggered by the growth of global networks linking both local communities and national economies. While the mass immigration waves between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the First World War moved primarily from Europe to America, the migration movements which started after 1945 have become increasingly intense and affect every portion of the world (Castles and Miller, 2009). The Mexican minority in the United States, the Turkish community in Germany, the Chinese residents of Canada, the Indians re-settled in the United Kingdom and the Algerian immigrants to France are just a few examples of this new kind of migration. Global mobility entails significant economic and social change in both the sender and the recipient countries,

and raises significant questions about the notion of the nation-state with its rigorous adherence to its cultural traditions and national identity.

The patterns of current migration are vastly different from those of the past century, not only in scope and direction, but also in context. The United Nations former Secretary General Kofi Annan described this change as follows: "Owing to the communications and transportation revolution, today's international migrants are, more than ever before, a dynamic human link between cultures, economies and societies. Penny-a-minute phone cards keep migrants in close touch with family and friends at home, and just a few seconds are needed for the global financial system to transmit their earnings to remote corners of the developing world where they buy food, clothing, shelter, pay for education or health care, and can relieve debt. The Internet and satellite technology allow a constant exchange of news and information between migrants and their home countries. Affordable airfares permit more frequent trips home, easing the way for a more fluid, back-and-forth pattern of mobility" (Ros, González, Marín and Sow, 2007, p.5.).

The former U.N. Secretary-General was referring to the effect which the new technology paradigm, called *informationalism* by Manuel Castells, has had on migration processes, a paradigm shift grounded in the technological breakthroughs beginning in the 1970s and reshaping the whole structure of the society. Castells describes informationalism as "a technological paradigm based on the augmentation of the human capacity for information processing and communications, made possible by the revolutions in microelectronics, software, and genetic engineering" (Castells, 2004, p.9.).

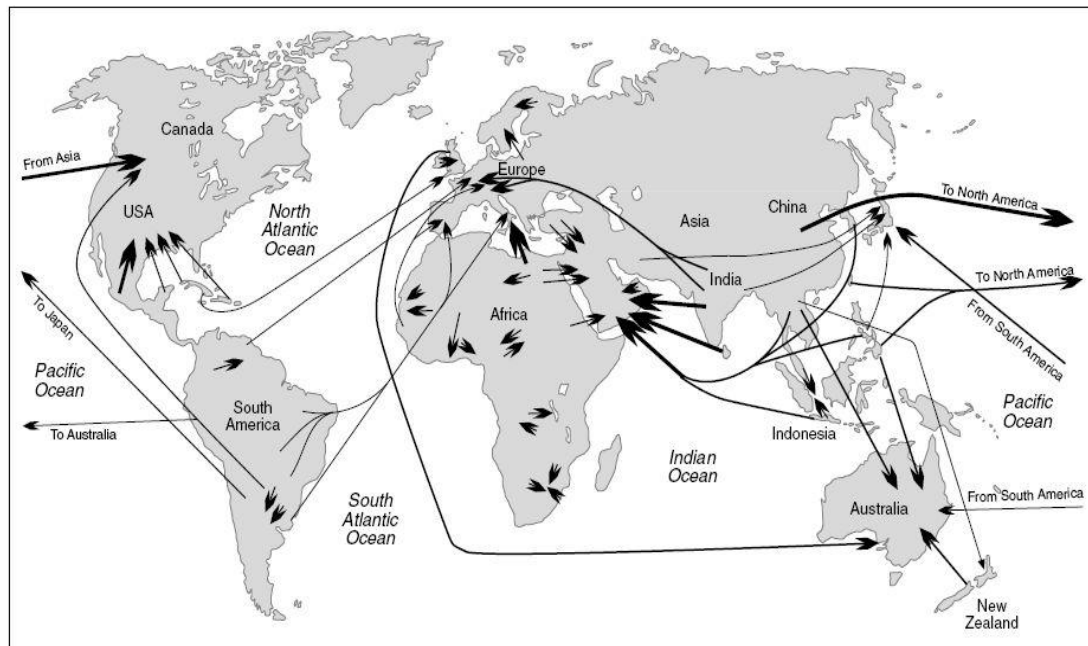
The present context of international migration involves a new phenomenon in which network systems have replaced the vertical-hierarchical structure of industrial society, and spatial flows have superseded geographical places, creating a world of timeless time and globalization, which challenges even the concept of a sovereign and circumscribable, that is, limited nation<sup>1</sup>. These changes can be summed up in the concept of *global information society*, and they form the basis of the new model that Kofi Annan called "a more fluid, back-and-forth pattern of mobility".

The effect of the new technological paradigm on migration processes does not merely consist of a global extension of mobility and the emergence of new recipient and transit countries. One of the most dominant tendencies of present migration is the acceleration of flows, that is, the rapid growth in the number of migrants. In 1965, 75 million people lived outside of their country of origin, while in 1990 the number reached 120 million. In the nineties it grew to 135-140 million, reaching 191 million in 2005 and 200 million in 2007. In other words, in the course of 30 years the number of migrants more than doubled, which means that by now 3 percent of the population of the world lives abroad and experts forecast further increases (Castles and Miller 2009; Castles, 2000; Borkert, Cingolani and Premazzi, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson defines nations as imagined political communities which are characterized by being sovereign and limited. (Anderson, 1983) As global processes cross borders they put these two keystone concepts of nation into question.

## Global migration flows since 1973



The thickness of the arrows indicates the approximate size of the flows (Castles and Miller, 2009)

This huge number makes it clear that global migration has reached a level that is able to change economic, demographic and social structures. So, it should not have surprised anyone that the questions of immigration and emigration became important points on the agendas of international politics in the nineties.

Many new migration-related questions were raised in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, and the French riots of 2005. Beliefs in integration and selective migration strategies have been undermined as well. It has become clear that the politics of total assimilation is no longer able to sustain the myth of “one culture – one nation”, and that the tactic of keeping illegal migrants out while welcoming high skilled foreigners is not sufficient to filter out terrorists (Castles and Miller, 2009).

It is not possible to elaborate more efficient immigration policies without scrutinizing the reasons and dynamics of the migration movements and the factors which shape the identities of migrant groups. The study of ICT usage by migrants – that is, the investigation of how information and communication technologies affect mobility – is a relevant aspect of this task.

### ICT and migration

In contrast with traditional immigration gateways such as Ellis Island, the Internet, satellite television, mobile phones and other mobile services are the harbors through which contemporary migrants approach their new homes. These technologies help

them take the first steps toward their destination countries and allow them to keep in touch with their friends and family after their arrival (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010).

In this portion of the study I will analyze two phases of migration – getting information before departure and maintaining relationships after arrival – and I will touch on the connections between migrants established and/or maintained through information and communication technologies.

One of the most significant changes in the current nature of migration compared to the mobility of the eras preceding global information society, is the manner in which geographic distance between the home country and recipient country become blurred by spatial flows, as Castells calls them. Owing to the intense contacts with family members and friends living at home, migrants are present simultaneously in both countries. This complicates the traditional sociological definition created on the basis of place of origin and social status (Ros et al, 2007). The concept of migration has become more complex: it means more than just leaving home and adapting to the society of the recipient country, and acquiring its norms and habits. While new migrants establish contacts with other migrants and the natives of the recipient country, the bonds with their family and friends living at home remain part and parcel of their everyday lives thanks to frequent communication through ICT (Diminescu, Jacomy and Renault, 2010). Migration literature calls these persons *interconnected migrants*, which means that due to ICT the social environment of the migrants is composed both of the society where they are newly resident and of the social networks of the home country maintained through technology, in which old and new relationships are mixed (Ros, 2010). Instead of the old diametric oppositions (mobile/immobile, either here or there, presence/absence) the concepts which correspond to this situation are interconnectivity and mobility. The approach of “immigrate and cut your roots” has given way to the concept of “circulate and keep in touch” (Diminescu et al, 2010, p.75.).

One of the most important features of migrants defined by their social networks is *transnationalism*, described as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations (family, and economic, social, organizational, religious and political life) that link their societies of origin and places of re-settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders” (Diminescu et al, 2010, p.23.). This phenomenon leads to a new approach to citizenship. The traditional definition, which embodies members of a nation as persons originating in the same culture and living in a territory limited by the same borders, has had to be expanded to include the model of individuals participating in the nation-state without living in its territory. In other words, a transnational migrant is a person who participates simultaneously in the political, economic and cultural life of more than one society, so the context of the acts and decisions of the migrant is linked to events in physically distant places as well as the person’s place of local residence (Borkert et al, 2009).

This also applies to migrant communities. Diasporas are groups which have become dispersed in response to some traumatic event or force, or their own motion, which places them in one or more locations outside of their home country. They retain their collective ethnic identity and maintain close bonds to other dispersed communities from the same ethnic background, as well as with their home country and the recipient

society. A firm relationship with the home country and a collective identity are crucial characteristics if a migrant group is to be considered a diaspora, for these are the features which distinguish them from other dispersed groups (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010). As a consequence, it is rather difficult to assimilate them, since maintaining their own national values in the new country is inherent to the concept of a diaspora. In this respect, they are opposed to the idea of the nation-state (Clifford, 1994), and this resistance is supported by ICT opportunities, which has led to the emergence of *digital diasporas*, that offer additional support to the diaspora identity.

The three technologies that have played key roles in the formation of the connected migrant, of transnationalism, and of the digital diasporas, are the remittance services, mobile phones and the Internet.

The growth of the amount of international remittances is a good way to demonstrate how migrants become “a dynamic human link between cultures, economies and societies.” In 1970, 2 billion dollars was transferred to different countries of origin by emigrants, while in 1995 the amount was 70 billion dollars (Castles, 2000). This amount is more than the sum of international aid received by the developing countries, meaning that migration has a role as a possible Third World economic development strategy (Koslowski, 2002).

A new fund-transferring service has appeared in the recent years alongside the traditional bank and Western Union remittances, thanks to the marriage of the banking system and mobile phones. In the electronic network of mobile money, with a bank account, a bank card, a PIN number, and a mobile phone, money can be transferred through text messages to the accounts of people in other countries who have the same banking services. SMART, the biggest mobile phone company in the Philippines which is also present in the destination countries of the majority of Philippine emigrants, has millions of clients who use this fund transfer service. This type of fund transfer is much less costly than traditional transfers and in turn leads to the further growth of the amount sent to developing countries (Hamel, 2009).

However, migrants have been using their mobile phones primarily to keep in touch with their friends and family living in the home country. A survey of the media preferred by migrants for their communications revealed that before the 1990s, the most popular communication channel between migrants and their families was the written letter. As the only way to make an international phone call was to use public phones with their inherent lack of privacy, this option was less popular than the more traditional form of contacts through the mail. By today, this has changed completely.

With the rapid growth in mobile phone usage (at present approximately fifty percent of world’s population has mobile phone access (Hamel, 2009)) and the appearance of international phone cards, a continuous communication channel has opened between migrants and their families. Thanks to cheap international phone calls which can be made in private, family members living in two different parts of the world can follow each other’s life in a day-to-day basis.

These intense contacts affect the communication infrastructure of sending countries as well as the recipients, because a part of the inflow from fund transfers is spent on electrical equipment, phone services and telephone handsets. A survey of Mexican seasonal workers in Canada revealed that 90 to 100 percent of families whose

members had been working in that North American country for more than ten years, spent a part of the funds they received on communication technology (Hamel, 2009).

The Internet is the other most popular tool, outside of mobile phones and international phone cards, for maintaining contacts between migrants and their home countries. The Internet offers increasingly diverse opportunities to establish and maintain socio-cultural, individual and collective identities. In addition to email and web telephone services, diaspora websites and social networks have become increasingly important tools for maintaining relationships.

The ten fastest growing international communication markets, 2000-2005 (González, 2008)

Country	Minutes (m) 2000	Minutes (m) 2005	Change 2000-2005	Mobile Growth
Nigeria	66.0	530.0	703%	61,857%
Ecuador	55.5	291.5	425%	1,178%
India	527.1	2,295.0	335%	2,344%
Pakistan	98.6	405.1	311%	5,473%
Kuwait	158.7	530.3	234%	284%
El Salvador	128.0	409.0	220%	211%
United Arab Emirates	1,123.6	3,346.4	198%	215%
Bolivia	27.2	80.1	195%	316%
Senegal	50.0	147.2	194%	724%
Venezuela	239.0	695.5	191%	131%

Notes: Data are for switched traffic only.  
Source: TeleGeography research

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A survey of the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme studied the different roles that web 1.0 ( individual websites and forums) and web 2.0 (social networks, blogs and the like) applications play in the lives of migrants and their communities (Diminescu et al, 2010). They concluded that the web 1.0 sites (websites, homepages, and forums) addressed to migrants, link the diaspora with the home country, while web 2.0 sites (social networks, blogs) foster migrants’ connections both with people of the home country and the recipient country – facilitating the formation of transnational social networks. In short, the two different web paradigms pertain to two different types of community. Diaspora sites create social structures built from above, whose focus is the common ethnic identity and the collective experience of being separated from the country of origin. These sites generally contain reports from home and offer advice about integration in the recipient country. Blogs and social network sites are the opposite. They promote the formation of groups built from the bottom up, centered on individuals and not communities. They are organized on the basis of the common interests, backgrounds and experience of their members, and – instead of transmitting information – they emphasize participation in the network. The two digital paradigms do not preclude each other: often components of web 2.0 (member profiles in the forums, YouTube links, etc.) appear on web 1.0 sites. The same

can be said about the two different types of community, since the individual can belong to a diaspora and form his or her own transnational social network at the same time. As Castells says, new social forms do not replace the old ones but complement them, so the main point of the transformation is not the disappearance of the old models but the growing number of new ones.

Information and communication technology play an important role in migrants' lives not only after they settle in the recipient country, but also during the migration process itself. ICT is present in every phase of migration: in the decision making, through the journey and during the first steps toward integration following arrival.

Migrants acquire relevant knowledge from three sources: from migration networks, the migration industry and from government entities that regulate migration. Thanks to ICT, the networks and the industry have grown significantly stronger in recent decades, enabling migration processes to become relatively independent of the governments. The outcome is that the number of migrants has been increasingly steadily although government objectives are generally to restrict international mobility (González, 2008).

*Migration networks* are the units of social relations involving people who have relevant knowledge about migration. They can be made up of families, friends, and acquaintances of migrants and the staffs of migration organizations (Elrick, 2008). When studying migration processes a growing number of experts rely on the network approach, since it allows immigration and emigration to be represented as complex and dynamic social products. Instead of defining migration simply as the consequence of individual decisions or economic and historical phenomena, the experts can thus interpret migration as the result of all of these factors (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010). Migration flows often do not stop despite changes in economic-political situations or restrictive regulations introduced by a destination country or region. So, in the course of time networks become self-supporting and maintain the dynamism of migration. This is the outcome of the *social capital* which accumulates in the network. In other words, migrants acquire information and other kinds of support from the members of the network, which both reduces expenses and cuts migration risk (Gödri, 2008). Accordingly, a place where networks have been evolved is more attractive to migrants than a location with no similar system, even if the economic and regulation conditions of the latter may be more favorable.

*The migration industry* is the other engine of migration alongside the networks. The industry consists of enterprises, services and businesses, which facilitate and support international migration in order to make a profit. Agencies offering legal services, travel arrangements, communications and fund transfer services form part of the industry as do employment agencies and human traffickers (Hernandez-León, 2005).

Thanks to the new and growing number of agents and strategies, migration information sources offer significantly more information than in the past. Migration theory alleges that the more information that is generated about a destination, the higher the chance of migration and the lower the risk level (Demiralp, 2009). But producing more information does not necessarily mean that the knowledge transmitted is accurate. News coming from the industry and networks are not always synchronized with official immigration policies. So, government entities should pay

more attention to the information being offered if they are aiming for more efficient regulation. One possible tactic could be cooperation with the two other sources (González, 2008).

Since in today's world, relevant news from competent government entities and migration industry businesses tend to be disseminated online, the Internet became the most widely used information and communication technology in the migration process. At the same time, the Internet also serves to maintain contact with migration networks. Decreasing media prices due to the rapid spread of ICT allows migrants to study their destinations and immigration conditions there before they actually depart (González, 2008).

Mobile phones are particularly important during the travel phase of the migration process and primarily for illegal migrants. In a study by Schapendonk and Moppe of illegal immigrants migrating from Black Africa, each was asked whether s/he had a mobile phone during the journey – crossing the Sahara and Mediterranean Sea – in order to keep in touch with other migrants and the family.



The appliance signals if water appears near to the route of the user and estimates the distance from the spring



The Transborder Immigrant Tool in use (Dominguez, 2007)

Other technologies in addition to mobile phones have become more and more popular in illegal migration. For example, human traffickers from Senegal use GPS devices to assist them in making the journey from Mauritania to the Canary Islands (Hamel, 2009), while the Transborder Immigrant Tool developed by BANG Lab<sup>2</sup> helps illegal migrants from Mexico crossing into the United States to navigate the desert. This tool is essentially a GPS tracker installed in a mobile phone, which besides indicating the right direction tells migrants where they can find water, food and shelter. The majority of deaths occurring when crossing this border are the result of an immigrant getting lost in the desert and/or running out of water (Dominguez, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> BANG Lab is the think tank of Ricardo Dominguez, researcher of Calit2 (California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology), University of California.

The role of ICT in border control has become as important as it is in the illegal strategies developed to cross these borders. The prerequisite for effective border security is the adequate information flow between border offices, other government security entities and different countries. Border security does not particularly depend on new software, but on correct management strategies. Efficient control needs fast and uniform databases and a smooth information flow from country to country. In the United States for example, the border control information technology budget received an additional 722 million dollars in 2003 (shortly after September 11, 2001), which reflects recognition of the fact that tighter immigration policy legislation is not sufficient to control illegal immigration. The weakest point in government controls today are in areas not connected to border control information networks.

In the second part of this study I hope to analyze the businesses operating in the migration industry, more specifically the ones that base their activity partly or entirely on the Internet. Then, I hope to show how the online migration industry has become a relevant segment of current international migration flows, because such an analysis can help us to understand the nature and development of these processes.

### **The online migration industry**

About the migration industry in general

As already mentioned, the migration industry consists of private and specialized services offered by profit-oriented businesses to facilitate the international migration of individuals. This industry is made up of human smugglers and traffickers, employment recruiters, firms that offer loans or handle international money transfers and travel services, persons producing authentic and counterfeit documents, organizations providing legal counseling and telecom equipment suppliers (Hernandez-León, 2005).

Migration intermediaries were already significant factors in the structure and economy of the immigration flows arriving from Europe to America in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Harney argues, “bureaucrat, notary, lawyer, innkeeper, loan shark, mercante di campagna<sup>3</sup>, harbor city runners, agents, and even train conductors depended on the emigration trade. On the other side of the ocean, the scale of remittances, the uninterrupted traffic of immigrant and repatriate, all the auxiliary food trades, (seasonal migrants) and the network of financial and commercial exchange justify treating Southern Italy and the Italian community overseas as one society and one informal economy” (Hernandez-León, 2005, .5.). The migration industry also played an important role in spurring the Mexican immigration flow to the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The intermediaries were the link between the Mexican labor force and the economy of western South America.

These intermediaries make up the legal side of the spectrum of migration industry activities. The present day migration industry consists, for instance, of travel agencies,

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<sup>3</sup> “Mercanti di camagna” were rich merchants and financial intermediaries in Italy in the 16-19<sup>th</sup> century.

banks and media suppliers on the legal side, while the clandestine side includes illegal services like human trafficking and document forging. Although governments do not have absolute control over migration, immigration policies often offer the groundwork for the development of these businesses. Restrictions for example generally lead to the proliferation of illegal activities (Hernandez-León, 2005).

In general, migration networks and the industry complement each other, but if migrants do not have contacts or if their network is not strong enough (because the people who have already settled in the recipient country are poor and marginalized) or if its members are not reliable (because they exploit newcomers) the migrants tend to turn to the industry for help (Hernandez-León, 2005).

#### The online presence of the migration industry

Although the initial goal of the migration industry was to help migrants get to their destination, over recent years its scope of activity has become much broader. Since the proportion of immigrants living in the developed countries has grown significantly, a variety of businesses see them as attractive targets. New services have appeared to foster the international flow of money and information, the “back-and-forth mobility” of migrants, and to contribute in general to the growth and acceleration of the migration process.

With the spread of the Internet the majority of these services have become available online, and many are actually based on the web. The websites of migration industry services can be categorized in the basis of the following topics:

- Visas and citizenship, other migration law issues
- Jobs
- Study
- Travel
- Dating
- Overall migration sites<sup>4</sup>

It is definitely worth taking a closer look at these websites. Although the categories are related to the essential steps of migration – and as such reflect the general breakdown of online industry activity – they can differ to conform to the needs of each migrant group and migration flow. In order to refine the general classification, I will analyze certain English and Spanish language websites side-by-side. That will illustrate how the different language websites manage different migration contexts, to which the industry adapts in diverse ways.

Sites which provide information about visas in general are created by migration law offices. Some of these sites describe only the legal requirements for migration to the popular recipient countries while others offer more than mere information services.

Once a potential migrant has registered with [www.migrationexpert.com](http://www.migrationexpert.com) he or she can fill out a visa eligibility assessment which shows whether the potential applicant meets

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<sup>4</sup> Although the search for rental accommodations is one of the most important steps following an arrival, I cannot include it in this analysis since there is no online segment of the migration industry that specializes in this field.

the requirements to receive a visa of the type considered (work, business, student visa, etc.). If the answer is negative, the applicant can read more about other types of visa. If they do not qualify for any, after completing an online migration interview, the potential applicant can get in touch with office staff by mail, phone or in person. The charge for an online consultation is 150 dollars for 30 days. A 60-minute phone call or personal consult also costs 150 dollars. The consultation service of [www.immigrationandvisas.com](http://www.immigrationandvisas.com) operates with more or less the same logic. The difference is that here there is also a charge for the visa eligibility assessment.

Besides functioning as online service platforms, these sites are also advertisements for law offices, in other words, they are a complex money-making tool for the businesses that run them. There are also many websites that do not offer personal online consultations: they only give information about basic questions in connection with visas. These sites do not charge for services and rely on advertisements for their income. Generally the advertisers are language schools, businesses specialized in international phone calls, job search websites and other migration industry service providers.

The concept of [www.extranjerossinpapeles.com](http://www.extranjerossinpapeles.com) (foreigners without papers), a Spanish migration law site is another interesting example of the new strategies of migration industry. The site maintained by the office of a Granada attorney, Vicente Marín Zarza who also offers online counseling (video conferencing on Skype) and explanations about visas, work permits and other immigration law topics. This website includes a forum allowing visitors to the site to share information with each other and voice their opinion and experiences on questions like distance relationships, residence permits, expulsion, or marriage between persons from different nations. As we will see further on, this creation of social platforms is a strategy used often in other sectors of the online migration industry.

Websites offering work are among the sites most heavily frequented by immigrants. Searching for a job is one the most important steps after arrival, and sometimes it even precedes migration. Generally, highly skilled people do their job-searches in advance while low-skilled migrants tend to look for work after arriving at their destination.

Beside general job announcement websites, in recent years, sites aimed specifically at immigrants have appeared. According to the mission statement of [www.theimmigrationjobs.com](http://www.theimmigrationjobs.com), the goal of the website is to offer “an opportunity to employers to find highly skilled employees and to job-seekers to find well-paid and interesting jobs all over the world.” After registration, the applicants are asked to fill in a questionnaire on their qualifications and professional experience, and give the parameters of the job they are looking for. It is even possible to upload a short video presentation. The resumes are saved in the database in which firms seeking employees can browse. The applicants can also search through the job offers, which specify location, salary, position and profession. These posts advertise positions like assistant restaurant manager, biopharmaceutical development project coordinator and aviation electronic technician. In addition to its income from advertisements, the site makes money on the business services: an employer gives the parameters of the desired employee and website staff selects the ideal candidate from the database. If the

person offered really fits the requirements the company pays 295 dollars to the website.

[www.globalchoices.co.uk](http://www.globalchoices.co.uk) and [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com) might be considered the precursors to the job sites mentioned above. The target group of these websites includes future skilled immigrants, or more specifically, students who have not quite finished their studies. Both of the sites offer internships, summer jobs, volunteer programs and English teacher positions abroad. Their goal is to help future professionals to begin their international careers.

So the job offer websites are generally addressed to skilled immigrants, but there are also some sites where the jobs offered do not require higher level skills. [www.workabroad.ph](http://www.workabroad.ph) and [www.jobs4immigrant.com](http://www.jobs4immigrant.com) for example, are in this latter category. Workabroad.ph offers jobs to Filipinos all around the world, while jobs4immigrant.com publishes ads for immigrants in Canada. The scale of jobs on both sites ranges from administrative to managerial positions. Another common characteristic of the two sites – as opposed to sites focusing mainly on skilled migrants – is that both contain information regarding visas and the profiles of the destination countries.

[www.workea.org](http://www.workea.org) is one of the few job offer websites published in Spanish whose target group consists specifically of migrants. It is interesting that the site, focused on the immigrant community inside Spain, contains more advertisements for people with a college or university degree than for persons who have merely an elementary education. Workea.org is not the only site where the difference between the concept behind the English and Spanish language sites is apparent. If the Latin-American Google sites use a Spanish translation of English words such as “working abroad,” the first results in the English search engine will be skilled immigrant sites while in the Spanish language Google, diaspora portals and overall migration pages will appear. These sites offer information on visas, popular destination countries and illegal migration. This means that the same words have completely different connotations in English and Spanish and reflect two very different forms of mobility.

These two patterns reflect the models of expatriates and economic migrants. Expatriates or “expats” – the target group of most of the English language job offer sites – are people who do not want permanent homes in the recipient country and intend to keep their original citizenship. This category includes highly educated people working abroad, young adults studying in foreign universities and lifestyle migrants. The latter are elderly people who want to spend their retirement years in a country with a warm climate. In contrast, people who leave their country for socioeconomic reasons want to stay for good in the new country and become citizens.<sup>5</sup> They are the target of Spanish language migration sites.

Another migration engine besides work is study. As already mentioned in my previous point, students going to school abroad qualify as expatriates. This is reflected in the

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<sup>5</sup> In spite of the differences between the two types of migrant, statistics do not make a distinction between expatriates and those who migrate for socioeconomic reasons. According to the UN definition, immigrants are people who stay in a foreign country for more than 12 months. From this point of view, people in both categories can equally be termed immigrants (Castles and Miller, 2009).

nature of the sites as well. These websites are very similar to those ones analyzed above which advertise jobs and internships to prepare young people for future international careers. There are many Spanish language websites in this category, but most of them are run by Spanish and not by Latin-American businesses.

[www.studyabroad.com](http://www.studyabroad.com) and [www.globalsemester.com](http://www.globalsemester.com) publish announcements of summer universities, language courses and one-or-two semester training programs in western countries. In its section called “Programs at Sea” studyabroad.com offers semesters organized aboard ocean liners, which cost approximately 22,000 dollars. The site offers information on insurance and the documents necessary under a menu point called “Travel Essentials.” In other words, the clients applying to this site are considered travelers and not migrants.

Regarding the size of this target group, according data published in [www.internationalstudentloan.com](http://www.internationalstudentloan.com), in 2009 there were 670,000 foreign students studying in the U.S. and 260,000 American students attending schools abroad. These numbers tell us that studying in a foreign country has become an important force of international mobility and an increasingly significant sector of the migration or expatriate industry.

The online presence of migration businesses that offer travel services is not surprising. It can even be attributed to the fact that this segment of the industry is relatively small, since even economic migrants seek out the cheapest tickets offered by major airlines and travel agencies whose target groups do not consist especially of migrants. However, that does not mean that the airlines and travel agencies have no contacts with the migration industry, for they are some of the regular advertisers on the websites targeting migrants.

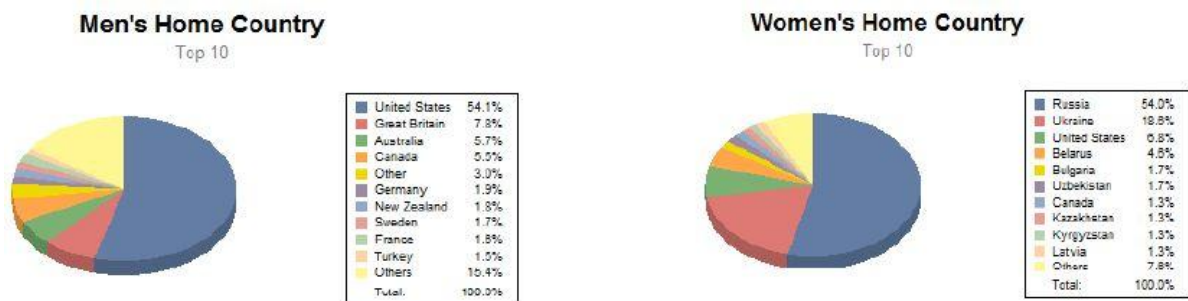
That there is little information about the illegal ways of moving from one country to another is to be expected. But, little does not mean none at all. Leaving the English and Spanish language sites for a second, it is worth mentioning the French language [www.senegalaisemnet.com](http://www.senegalaisemnet.com) where visitors can read detailed descriptions about illegal entry from Senegal to Europe. According to the itinerary published on this site, “mass disembarkation in the Canary Islands is a good option for young Senegalese. In contrast to the news in the western press, it is not dangerous at all if safety instructions are adhered to.” The trip which departs from towns north of Dakar (Kayar, Mboro or Saint-Louis) costs 240 euros. The fare on the motorboats, which can carry 50 passengers, is 90 euros per person, while the charge for food, the petrol and safety equipment is 150 euros. The sea is controlled by the police and the army – according to the website the members of the latter can be bribed if necessary. The author of the article warns “passengers” not to bring their documents with them (thus, if they are arrested they cannot be returned to their country of origin, since their citizenship remains unknown) and to have a lifejacket with them in case they have to jump into the ocean and swim ashore.

These websites are all examples of formal migration businesses. However, the industry has an informal segment, which has gained a great deal of popularity in recent years. It consists of dating sites where men and women can search for partners by nationality. These relationships sometimes end in marriage and entail the migration of one of the spouses – generally of the women. These women are termed *mail order brides*.

The women initiating contact on these websites are usually from Asia, Latin America or an ex-Soviet country, who seek to marry mainly Americans in search of better living conditions. As far as the readers of these sites are concerned, they are generally men seeking women who believe in traditional values. Research on the topic has found that these men are really seeking to maintain control over their wives, and are not searching for a lasting and loving relationship (Scholes, 1997).

A study made by [www.goodwife.com](http://www.goodwife.com), which is one of the most popular mail order bride websites, revealed that more than 50 percent of the men using international dating sites are Americans and more than 50 percent of the women are from Russia. The average age of the women who marry is 30, while the average age of the men is 40. 40 percent of the marriages end in divorce, which is lower than the American average.

Man and women using mail order bride sites by nationality



S Source: *Survey of Cross-cultural Marriage and Divorce. Results and Findings*

[www.blossoms.com](http://www.blossoms.com) is one of the oldest international dating services. The website, which is the descendant of Cherry Blossoms, a newspaper founded 35 years ago, has approximately 75,000 users. After registration, visitors can browse among the profiles and the attached photos in the database, giving the parameters – age and nationality – of the desired partner. If the user does not want to include prospective partners from certain countries, that nationality can be blocked. The site has a separate migration menu point, which offers a telephone information service as well as a sample of the fiancée visa needed to enter the United States.

Cupid Media is one of the biggest international online dating agencies. Most of its sites – like BrazilCupid.com, ChineseLoveLinks.com, FilipinaLove.com and BlackCupid.com – focus on nationality and race. As in blossoms.com, in [www.latinamericancupid.com](http://www.latinamericancupid.com) one of the optional parameters is nationality. Although the site does not have a menu point about migration, one of the questions which has to be answered during the registration process is whether the user is ready to move to another city or country, if the new relationship requires it.

I have termed the websites that offer information about more than one destination country “overall migration sites.” Usually these sites are targeted at expatriates and function as information platforms that combine services within the above-mentioned categories with news items.

Most of the migration industry activity websites have a traditional, offline archetype: the mail order bride sites are the descendants of the newspaper advertisements submitted by migrants searching for a wife from their country of origin<sup>6</sup>, and the visa websites are equivalent to the traditional law offices. The job sites are the modern version of labor recruiters. But overall migration sites are not the simple online presence of what was an originally offline service. They are a new segment of the industry, a product of the Internet.

The presentation of [www.justlanded.com](http://www.justlanded.com), a site available in 12 languages, has 2 million visitors a month. It describes its profile as follows: “The challenges of moving, settling in and making a new life in a new place can be difficult. We aim to help make this easier. Whether you're an exchange student, professional or pensioner – our information, resources and services will help you settle abroad.” The site offers information on 52 countries including topics such as visas, jobs, rental homes, how to buy an apartment, insurance, finances, language studies, education, business, travel, local culture and moving. It also offers links to businesses which offer related services in the different countries. Besides the country guide, there is a menu point for job and housing offers and another for expat social sites. The latter allows users to create profiles, have their own walls and search for friends among the community members using criteria such as city, sex, age and languages spoken. This service has the same function as the forum of [extranjerossinpapeles.com](http://extranjerossinpapeles.com) which I will analyze in detail in the next section of this paper.

[www.livingabroad.com](http://www.livingabroad.com) helps international companies in relocating their employees. As the site says, “information and connections are key to making the move go smoothly, helping the family adjust, and knowing how to present a professional image – in a foreign culture – that reflects well on the company”. The service consists of network-building and providing information on destination countries. The descriptions, covering some 150 possible destination countries, include details such as customary business attire and etiquette, the local media and pets. The guides offer comprehensive information including school details and how a spouse can continue with his/her career, all in a complete package. As regards network building, the subscription service OurWorldConnect is a private online network which enables a family that is moving to the new country to get in touch with other network members who live in or are moving to the same place.

While the target group of Just Landed and Living Abroad consists of expatriates and employees of international companies, [www.internationalliving.com](http://www.internationalliving.com) is addressed to people who want to invest in real estate or retire abroad. The site provides

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<sup>6</sup> During the great migration wave to America at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many immigrants married after seeking out one another through the mail or newspaper announcements. Given the demographic differences between men and women (there were many more male than female immigrants), the marriage taboos of some ethnicities (for example immigrants of Punjabi origin were not allowed to marry white people under the laws of their home country), and respect for their cultures of origin required international searches for spouses. The phenomenon of the picture bride meant that the spouses exchanged photos of one another and did not meet in person until their actual wedding (Sinke, 1999).

information about the ten healthiest countries of the world, the quality of life of each, and the places with the most agreeable climates.

In contrast, the Spanish language overall websites offer practical information about popular destination countries and also focus on topics like discrimination against immigrants and the risks of illegal migration. They draw attention to the difference between economic migrants and expatriates: while International Living provides information about climate, the Spanish language pages talk about racism.

The two biggest overall Spanish-language websites are [www.mequieroir.com](http://www.mequieroir.com) (I want to leave) and [www.aemigrar.com](http://www.aemigrar.com) (Let's emigrate!). Their concepts and structures are quite similar. Both of them offer information on the destination countries that are most popular with Latin American migrants (the USA, Canada, Australia, Spain, the UK, and Italy), immigration conditions, legal requirements, the local job markets, and services. These topics can be found in English language expatriate sites, too. But they also differ sharply from the expatriate sites in that they provide general, not site-specific, descriptions and offer advice on the different phases of the migration process, a feature I will discuss in greater detail.

This section of my discourse has been an attempt to analyze new services offered by the migration industry as well as to look into the way traditional segments have changed to accommodate the online environment. By comparing English and Spanish language sites I have endeavored to show that while the various types of migration websites have common features, many of their characteristics differ sharply to fit very different migration contexts.

I will now focus on a phenomenon that that I have already touched on repeatedly, the social applications of migration sites. The social applications are platforms where migrants can get in touch with each other through the industry's websites. Although English language sites also offer opportunities for social networking, I intend to look at the phenomenon in the context of Latin American migration through the forums of [mequieroir.com](http://mequieroir.com), which is the biggest site aimed at Latin American migrants.

### **The social capital brought about through migration industry websites and its role in Latin American migration to Europe**

I already mentioned the significance of social capital in connection with migration networks in the first part of this study, for the personal ties and assistance available through them are some of the most important factors in shaping migration flows. The information and other kinds of support migrants offer each other foster mobility, and "people who have contact with persons who have emigrated or have experienced migration, and thus have access to migration-related social capital, are significantly more likely to choose migration themselves," (Gödri, 2008, p.12.).

As I wrote in the second part of this study, migration networks and the industry generally complement each other. In other words, migrants get information and help from relatives, friends and acquaintances who have relevant knowledge about migration, as well as from profit oriented businesses. These two engines of migration have always interacted, but in the online migration industry's websites they interlock

in a completely new way. The forums and the groups that come about on the social sites help individuals to develop and broaden their migration networks. Therefore, the social capital appearing on these sites is actually an industry *product*.

In recent years the business world has focused on virtual communities. Most of the firms running online activities have some contact with this kind of collective: they tend to target independent virtual groups or create their own communities (Max and Race, 2008). Over the past ten years new business patterns have emerged as the outcome of the new online community building strategy. The innovations go far beyond merely establishing new ways of contacting target groups: “Communities affect the very nature of some products; they even can affect how marketers define their businesses. For a magazine publisher, is the product the online magazine or the online community? .... New business definitions may emerge around the notion of owning a customer segment across the full range of its interests and needs, rather than focusing on owning products and services.” (Armstrong and Hagel, 2000, p. 90.).

Migration industry websites are the very examples of this *online magazine-online community* strategy. These sites (especially the overall sites that do not have their own services) are really thematic online newspapers which share information and use the social-capital expansion platform to attract as many potential migrants as possible – which in turn further heightens the popularity of the site and attracts even more advertisers. So these enterprises actually gather migration industry consumers together – converting them into a virtual community – and sell them to other industry players.

I have now chosen to analyze this phenomenon in the context of Latin American migration flows arriving in Europe, specifically in Spain. I selected this group because living conditions in their countries of origin are a much stronger push factor than would be the case for people migrating from one developed country to another. As a consequence, the information needed for migration and the other advantages derived from social capital are more relevant factors and have a higher value in supporting their mobility.

Before actually analyzing this new phenomenon I will touch on the forums available through [mequieroir.com](http://mequieroir.com) to illustrate the context of Latin American migration in Spain, which give an insight into the function and significance of the forums.

#### Latin American migration in Europe

According to the most recent statistics issued by the Spanish Ministry of Labor and Immigration (Anuario Estadístico de Inmigración, 2009), in 2009 there were almost a million and a half Iberian-American-born people living in Spain.<sup>7</sup> In 2006 there were barely one million, and in 2000 the figure was below 200,000. In other words, in less

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<sup>7</sup> The Brazilian presence is quite low among immigrants arriving from Latin America: in 2009 just 56,000 Brazilians were registered in Spain. In other words, the majority of Latin-American immigrants are from Spanish-speaking countries.

than ten years the number of migrants from the Americas increased more than sevenfold, to become the second biggest immigrant group in Spain.<sup>8</sup>

Although the former colonist nation is not the only European target of Latin American immigrants, it is obvious that Spain is the first choice. In fact, 40 percent of all immigrants living in Spain are from Latin America, while the ratio is just 4 percent in Sweden, 8 percent in Italy and 13 percent in Portugal (Peixoto, 2005). Clearly, Spain is the center of the Latin American immigration flows arriving in Europe.

As statistics show, the phenomenon is a relatively new, just ten years old, insofar as the scope of the migration is concerned. The United States has always been the most popular migration target for Latin Americans – it still is – but restrictions of immigration policy following September 11 led many Latin American migrants to choose Europe instead. Other push factors like the economic crisis in Argentina in 2001, the financial downturn in Ecuador between 1997 and 2001, the political and social fragility of Venezuela and the escalation of the Colombian civil war all promoted growing Latin American migration towards Europe. The pull factors – beyond more developed economics – are the language, the cultural similarities resulting from the one-time colonization, and Spanish citizenship, which the descendents of Latino-Europeans have been able to claim on arrival in Spain since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Studies on the migration networks of Latin Americans revealed that most immigrants had relatives or friends in Spain before their arrival. Only 22 percent of Ecuadorians and 13 percent of Colombians had no contacts before they migrated (Aparicio and Tornos, 2005; Peixoto, 2005). However, this relatively low percentage is actually a large number of people if we take into consideration that these are two biggest Latin American communities in Spain. The number can grow if we include citizens of countries not included in the surveys and people who have Spanish citizenship thanks to their ancestors and therefore do not appear in statistics covering foreigners. In other words, the group is big enough to attract the attention of the migration industry.

Mequieroir.com

[www.mequieroir.com](http://www.mequieroir.com) was founded by a group of young Venezuelans who recognized how little migration-related information was available in Spanish.<sup>9</sup> The founders of the website, which had sixty thousand visitors a month in 2009 and since January 2010 has had eighty thousand a day (Small Carmona, 2010), offer a mission statement defining the site as follows: “Me Quiero Ir is an information-based website targeting skilled and enthusiastic young people who wish to explore possibilities abroad. In response to the lack of organized, structured, easily accessible and understandable information in Spanish available offline and online in one place, we built a site to help provide information on life in Europe, North-America and Oceania, with an emphasis on job

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics regarding the continent of origin of Spain’s foreign population show that most of the foreigners residing there come from the European Union – in 2009 more than 1.8 million EU citizens were registered as living in Spain.

<sup>9</sup> That same year, Yahoo called the site the best Spanish language website in the “Politics and Government” category (De Majo, 2001).

and study opportunities. This innovative website allows users to save on phone calls, avoid long queues, rejections and confusing Internet searches, thanks to our thorough research which is presented as reliable, easy-to-understand and centered on e-content. Me quiero ir supports an active network community focused on the issues of migration, employment opportunities and higher education in other countries. It is a comprehensive compendium of information with various dynamic applications, through which it provides a constructive dialogue presenting the value added gleaned from the experiences of other enterprising young people searching for a better future.”

But it took more than the “entrepreneurialism” of the young Venezuelans to turn the site into a success. Under the administration of its president, Hugo Chávez, Venezuela has become a country of emigrants. The search for a better future abroad is closely connected to what many Venezuelans see as the bleak future of their country resulting from nationalizations and the increasingly radical political situation brought about by excessive centralization which, they also feel, has adversely impacted public safety (Gualdoni, 2007).

In other words, the factors motivating Venezuelan emigration are not the usual ones triggering expatriate mobility – and Venezuela is not the only Latin American country where similar push factors can be found. Migration flows toward Spain generated by the Colombian civil war, the Argentinean economic crisis and the financial crisis in Ecuador are the outcome of people attempting to escape the radical political and economic situations. The status of the migrants arriving on Spanish soil and the style of the website, whose community is much more expansive than just Venezuelans, need to be understood in this context.

Although the mission statement defines mequieroir.com as “an information-based website targeting skilled and enthusiastic young people”, it is not merely a Spanish counterpart of the English-language expatriate sites. In contrast with the English language justlanded.com or livingabroad.com, it has menu points – the same as [www.aemigrar.com](http://www.aemigrar.com) – thoroughly describing the phenomenon of migration, including the decision-making process and the most important steps involved in moving and resettling.

In the section called *A global phenomenon*, visitors can read about the concepts of push and pull factors, learn about the social tensions that immigration can generate in the recipient countries and about the role of immigrants on the labor market (as well as about illegal immigration). Questions such as the meaning of selective migration policy and the history of migration to the classic recipient countries (the United States, Canada and Australia) are also covered. The menu point *Why do people emigrate?* describes Latin American migration in general, offering both statistics and migration theories. These items suggest that the website’s target group consists of educated people who would be interested in the theoretical explanation of the concrete migration process they plan to go through. At the same time, the editors of the site apparently place the same emphasis on the seamy side of economic migration as on the destinations. By this I mean that in addition to the concrete information about recipient countries – which is the main point of the English language overall migration sites – mequieroir.com also prepares future migrants for the stressful situations in which they will find themselves when arriving as economic immigrants. Instead of the

often over-idealized images that are discordant with reality, they try to give a more realistic picture of the West European countries.

Visitors to the site can fill in an online test to learn if they are really ready to emigrate and if leaving the country is the only solution to their problems. The test consists of questions such as how the respondent would react if he or she were discriminated against because of being Latin American in origin or if he or she would be willing to take unqualified work.

These two topics appear on other pages of the site as well. The section called *Reality* within the menu point *Before departure*, describes the often negative attitude of the recipient countries as follows: “There is no country in the world where discrimination does not exist at all and where people have never discriminated against foreigners. Recognizing this can help you to make well-founded decisions and anticipate possible difficulties.” Under *Intercultural adaptation* visitors can learn about the hardships of integration and of doing unqualified work. “Generally the first year is the hardest: you move to a new home, begin a new job, attend a new university and your children have to go to a new school. You will have to face many challenges. You might have to improve your language skills, undergo some special training or refresher course or attend some equivalency program before beginning school or work. Moreover, you will initially have to take a job below your expectations,” the editors write. This topic also appears under the heading *What do Latin Americans do abroad?*: “... statistics show that some of them [educated migrants] agree to take jobs or work in occupations that they might reject at home to be able to stay in the chosen country, even under illegal conditions. Very often new immigrants are ready to accept a “drop in status” to obtain “economic welfare and security.”

On the basis of these descriptions Latin American migrants appear to be educated people, who choose emigration despite the possible discrimination and loss of social status in order to get away from the unstable political and economic conditions of their country of origin. As the website states in connection with Venezuelan migrants “emigration does not simply mean better economic conditions and job opportunities. They are young professionals who feel that the crisis is making all aspects of day-to-day life difficult and moving to another country is the ideal context for self-realization.”

Even though the site talks about educated migrants, not all of them conform to the classic category of skilled labor. The members of this group are much more vulnerable since for them emigration is a necessity, which is reflected by the content and style of the site and by the nature of the forums.

The topics discussed are grouped in thirteen sections including “what life is like for an immigrant in Canada,” “how immigrants live in Spain,” “what are general attitudes towards Argentinean immigrants,” “what people in general think about prospective emigrants,” “what experience people have had on returning home after living abroad”, “Europe vs. the USA – which is the better choice and why?” and “discrimination against Latinos – Myth or reality?”.

The set of forum topics covering Spanish immigration is the second most visited menu point after the Canadian one. Some of the participants are migrants who have already arrived in the new country, while others are still in the planning phase. So, there are topics related to every phase of the migration process from decision-making to

practical details such as opening a bank account or validating a driving license in the recipient country.

Regarding the origin of the members, many of them are from Venezuela but there are Colombians, Ecuadorians, Argentineans, Chileans, Uruguayans, Peruvians and Mexicans as well. The language and the issue of migration form the link between Latin Americans living on the European and American side of the ocean. Given the lack of emphasis on national identity, the people participating in the forums identify themselves as Latino migrants and not as Peruvians or Salvadorans. This Latin American migrant community is not the online counterpart of any already existing group, but is a new collective that came into being in the Petri dish of cyberspace where the cultural differences between members have lost their significance. This phenomenon differs from the digital diasporas that focus on participants' attachment to place of origin and their underlying national and transnational identities. Instead of bonding various diasporas with their nations of origin, mequieroir.com uses the linguistic community of a continent to get in touch with the emigrant groups from the same linguistic background at their meeting place. Instead of focusing on places of origin, the goal of their communication is leaving those places.

Even if there are personal narratives, the main trend of the forums is not personal. If we take a look at the most read topics, we will see that the online community of Latin American migrants rests upon an exchange of practical information that plays an important role in the realization of migration process. Fully 70 to 80 percent of the posts read most often between 2006 and June 2010 were related to various practical problems. The most typical and most frequent subjects were as follows: "I already have the Spanish citizenship, what's next?", "How can I get my degree recognized/certified", "What do I need to study in Spain?", "How can I bring my wife with me?", "How much does life cost in Spain?", "How does one go about family reunification".

On the basis of the content and frequency of these questions, we can describe the community as a collective with high member fluctuation built around the need for, and exchange of, information necessary for migration. However, the nature of the most discussed topics does not fit this definition. Those questions, which generated the most comments between 2006 and the middle of 2010, spotlighted the subjective experience of migration in Spain. The posts entitled "Spain is not a good option!", "My experience with Spain," "Why Madrid?" and "Don't go to Spain, it won't end well!" are some examples. In other words, the forum also functions as a place to discuss practical questions and share experiences.

There are also some topics that are not related directly to migration. Generally they relate to the cuisine, sports events and internal affairs of the countries of origin (particularly with regard to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Bolivian Head of State Evo Morales) and are written by participants who have already arrived to Spain. However, they are few in number they do not really change the nature of the forums. They have certainly not turned mequieroir.com into a diaspora site.

The role played by the social capital offered on the site in the migration of Latin Americans becomes clear if we compare the posts with the comments in the overall sites focused on expatriates – such as the Spanish forum of justlanded.com. The users

of Just Landed ask one another for information on the cultural characteristics of the country, language courses, tourist attractions, home rentals, and real estate but not about the concrete migration process. This does not reflect a lack of concern with the social capital available on the migration industry's websites, but does indicate that it is less relevant to their decision-making and actual emigration processes than it is for users of mequieroir.com.

Clearly, it is difficult to define the effect which the information and subjective narratives presented on the site have on potential migrants. We have no way of knowing what percent of potential migrants are frightened away by what critics have written about Spain or about how many people have found their emigration facilitated by easy access to information and community membership. However, the goal of my investigation was not to obtain exact numbers but to draw attention to a new phenomenon, born as a consequence of the migration industry's online presence, which has increased the number of factors involved in making the decision to migrate.

I think we can safely assume that participation in the forum does not reduce the probability of migration but rather increases it. According to network theory, "people who are in contact with others who have emigrated or have migrated earlier, have access to social capital which significantly increases the possibility that they too will choose migration." (Gödri, 2008, p.12.) Based on this finding, the forum, offering information to Latin Americans who probably do not have relatives or friends in the recipient country, appears to be a factor that fosters migration.

Regarding the criticism of Spain and information on the economic crisis, most of the users say that the situation cannot deteriorate to the point where it becomes comparable to Venezuela, Ecuador or Argentina. Had the majority of forum participants not come from a politically and economically unstable region, the negatives discussed on the forum probably would become more of a deterrent to potential Latin-American migrants.

This portion of my study involved an investigation into how the strategy of the online migration industry works in practice and how it allows migrants to obtain the social capital needed for migration through online communities.

As already mentioned in the summary of the previous section, the characteristics of migration websites change to conform to the context of mobility. This is equally true for the Latin American and expatriate forums about migration. Given the push factors existing in the countries of origin of the Latin American migrants, this group must emigrate to improve its quality of life. At the same time they have to face many more legal and financial difficulties during the migration process than people who move to Spain, for example, from other European Union countries. This factor heightens the value of the information and other advantages derived from social capital. Therefore, the mequieroir.com forum has become a very popular migration industry service and is definitely a new factor of Latin American mobility.

## Conclusion

My intention has been to call attention to a potential component of migration flows that emerged through the Internet, triggered by online businesses that profit from migration. The migration industry's concept of offering the chance to build *social capital as a product* is one example of how the characteristics and the factors affecting mobility change along with technological development in information society.

The first section of this study described the most important theories and concepts regarding the connection between information and communication technology, and migration. The objective was to reveal that the investigation of the bond between ICT and migration was relevant to the analysis of current migration trends.

After presenting the context and this relatively new research field, I focused on the changes undergone by the industry and the new forms that have come about, with the growth in information and communications technology turning it into one of the engines of migration. I noted that the number of services and products targeted towards migrants on the Internet by for-profit companies and the nature of the industry's new online services change to accommodate changes in migration flows.

Social capital is one of the new products analyzed extensively in the third part of this study. It is provided through web applications such as forums and social networking sites maintained by the online migration industry. As demonstrated through mequieroir.com's forum about migration to Spain, this kind of service allows migrants to obtain information that helps them through the migration process – and thus, facilitates the migration itself.

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