

Transnational Social Resilience in La Costa Region of Chiapas, Mexico

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RCIS Working Paper No. 2016/2

March 2016

SERIES EDITOR

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RCIS Working Paper

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ISSN: 1929-9915



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ABSTRACT

This paper tells the story of how a group of fishermen became resilient in response to a community crisis in their village caused by the depletion of shrimp stocks, and how they are building transnational social resilience through the creation and operation of an Ecotourist resort to improve their lives, and insure their future well-being. Social change is taking place in some communities in the La Costa region of Chiapas, one of the most impoverished states in Mexico, where people opted to emigrate to the US and came back charged with individual and collective social remittances, and new personal narratives which have helped them and their community adapt and change while constructing transnational lives. The development of El Centro Turístico El Madresal in Ponte Duro, Chiapas, provides an informative case study in how to use the tools of social resilience conceptualization within a transnational context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank Gregorio Ayala for his support in the translation and editing of the English-language version of this article. She also wishes to thank Daniel Villafuerte Solis of *the Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centro América, Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas*, María Eugenia Anguiano of *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*. Last but not least she acknowledges the Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement (RCIS) for receiving me as Academic Visitor, especially to John Shields, Harald Bauder, and Susan Barrass.

INTRODUCTION

Chiapas is a latecomer in supplying migrants to the United States. In the year 2000, about 20 of its 120 municipalities had no contact at all with the precarious labour markets in the US, and overall relatively few migrants from the region went to the US to find work. Yet by 2005, ZIPAZ, a peace-building Civil Society Organization, found that between 300 and 500 thousand people had migrated to the US from the region (CONAPO, 2002; <http://www.sipaz.org>). Since *chiapanecos* (people from Chiapas) had a low participation rate in the Bracero Program (1942-1963), they did not have well-established social networks to sustain their mobility to the North (Durand, 2003). The factors explaining migration out of Chiapas are primarily related to the *Zapatista* uprising and the negative socio-political conditions it created between 1994 and 2003, the fall of international coffee prices beginning in the early 1990's, the devastation created by Hurricanes Mitch (1998) and Stan (2004), the unexpected impacts of domestic social programs, and the negative effects of neoliberal reforms on the population of the region (Aquino, 2010, 2009; Anguiano, 2008; Jáuregui y Ávila, 2007; Martínez, 2013; Vila Freyer, 2013; Villafuerte, 2008; Villafuerte and García, 2014, 2008, 2006). Based on the analysis of a case study documented in this paper, we found that people from Ponte Duro, a small fishing community on the

La Costa region, began to move to the US in the early 1980's pushed by the critical conditions created by the depletion of the shrimp fishery which the community depended upon for their livelihood.

This paper explains how a group of fishermen became resilient in the face of the crisis in their community caused by the depletion of shrimp and how they are constructing social resilience through the creation and operation of an Ecotourist resort to improve their lives and future well-being in a transnational context. Ponte Duro is a small fishing town in the La Costa Region of Chiapas founded in 1932 when 65 families were given land to form their *ejido*¹. According to the last census its declining population reached 1,778 people in 2010, down from 1,902 in 2000 (INEGI, 2011). As the community was settled along the coast, for over 50 years the men in the community have always counted on easy access to seafood to make a living, mainly from commercial shrimp fishing, using the residual protein to feed their families. In the early 1980's shrimp stocks became depleted and in attempting to address the crisis they opted for two solutions: 1) emigrating to the US, and 2) recovering their way of life through the construction of shrimp 'nurseries' for shrimp farming and for seeding the shrimp back into the sea to rebuild wild shrimp stocks.

Almost 40 percent of Ponte Duro's households have had experience with international emigration. Male emigration began as early as the 1980's, when Central Americans evading their own political problems moved north through Chiapas to reach the US, well before neoliberal policies were enacted or socio-political crises developed in Chiapas itself. Migration quickly became a personal and familial opportunity for impoverished families, and turned out to also be a communal opportunity to enhance their well-being. When major hurricanes hit the community in 1998 and 2004, local residents counted on social networks in the US for help and funding from the massive emigration of men who were looking to rebuild their lives, households, and community through remittances.

Migration has been a source of personal resilience, which, in the form of social remittances, became the basis for transnational social resilience as well. Migrants' personal ability to cope with the risks implicit in irregular immigration to the United States transformed them into flexible and adaptable workers and human beings. They learned to survive while walking through the desert for days, to work at any job they could find, to live in irregular legal situations, and, most importantly, to sustain transnational lives. As returnees they saw themselves through different lenses and their personal narratives go beyond the fisherman identity they parted with. They also became equipped with new cultural competencies that let them establish personal and collective goals, and to achieve them by pushing their community to change. In so doing, former

¹ *Ejido* is a communal land system in which a group of peasants and their families received individual parcels of land for agricultural purposes, based on a prehispanic tradition and reproduced by government policy between 1930 and 1991 after which the program was ended.

migrants are leading other local residents through a social resilience process to create a productive project known as The Ecotourist Centre El Madresal, within which both men and women are constructing new identities and narratives. The social transformation enterprise can be seen within the framework of what Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) have labelled social remittances, which in fact sustain the social resilience (Hall and Lamont, 2013) of the local families participating in the El Madresal cooperative. The El Madresal project is changing the identities, cultural narratives, and social capacities with which the members of the co-op are constructing a permanent source of personal and communal wellbeing.

To analyze this case in more detail this paper will first build a theoretical framework based on two different sets of arguments: that of social resilience and that of social remittances. In doing so, we will be able to analyse the dynamics of continuity and change in Ponte Duro from an individual to a communal basis. Setting up our argument within the social remittance frame helps us identify the transnationalization process undergone by the Ponte Duran families as a process of social transformation (Castles, 2007). Even if Ponte Duran live within the extreme marginality characteristic of this region of Mexico, they have been able to connect with the lower levels of the US labour markets. Emigration and return represent for them an improvement in their well-being, and the narratives attached to a, real and/or imagined, upward social mobility that is spreading to younger and more educated generations which support the emigration circuits from the community to 16 different destinations in the US.

The second part of this paper will deal with the case analysis resulting from our field research work that employed quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the impact of migration on Ponte Duro², emphasizing the social resilience built on the social remittances migrants brought back home. My argument is that the social resilience of the Ponte Duro community rests upon social remittances brought back by migrants and used by their families who are changing their personal and collective narratives and identities through the creation of a successful productive project, the *Centro Ecoturístico El Madresal*. In this project men and women are becoming partners, leaving behind their identities as fishermen and housewives. I conclude the paper with an exploration of the concept of social resilience within a transnational framework.

SOCIAL RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL REMITTANCES CREATING AN ARGUMENT FOR A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

I will sustain our analytical framework building on Hall's and Lamont's (2013) uses of social resilience, and connect it with Levitt's and Lamba-Nieves' (2011) work on social remittances. These two perspectives help bring together the

² The case is built on a fieldwork conducted between July 12 and 25, 2012. We surveyed 221 households, knocking every door in the town between 9AM and 7PM. We also carried out 17 deep interviews, 12 of which were with members of El Madresal Cooperative.

abilities of individuals and communities to adapt and change based on personal and collective processes of cultural transmission that take place in a transnational context created by migrants and migration, that are central to the creation of development projects boosting community well-being.

To begin with, I consider migration as a personal and social resilience process, using Hall's and Lamont's definition. As they observe:

[we use social resilience] to denote an outcome in which the members of a group sustain their well-being in the face of challenges to it. We define "well-being" broadly to include physical and psychological health, material sustenance, and the sense of dignity and belonging that comes with being a recognized member of the community (Taylor 1994). (...) We see resilience in dynamic terms, not as the capacity to return to a prior state but as the achievement of well-being even when that entails significant modifications to behaviour or to the social frameworks that structure and give meaning to behaviour. At issue is the capacity of individuals or groups to secure favourable outcomes (material, symbolic, emotional) under new circumstances and, if need be, by new means. (...) Resilience is not only about being persistent or robust to disturbance. It is also about the opportunities that disturbance opens up in terms of recombination of evolved structures and processes, renewal of the system and emergence of new trajectories. In this sense, resilience provides adaptive capacity (Hall and Lamont, 2013, 2).

As the case under study shows, fishermen from Ponte Duro worked hard to build shrimp nurseries in order to restore the living conditions they have counted on for family and community reproduction. When the project reached its limits, and counting on the social remittances brought by returnees, as well as with federal and state government support, they turned to the Ecotourist business as an alternative source of employment. In so doing, they kept their traditional organization of collective work and adapted to what the new circumstances demanded from them, and in the process they transformed what their traditional personal and social reproduction has meant for them.

We need to move beyond the Hall and Lamont framework, however, to understand how the social transmission of change rested on the adjusted subjectivities migrants brought back home directly and indirectly, a process that involved the transnationalisation of the community (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004). Early emigrants from Ponte Duro provided denser social networks to the community in a transnational context, created new social narratives, and shaped new collective imaginaries. These three characteristics have provided advantages for their families' wellbeing, even if their mobility resting on an irregular basis meant enormous personal and family risk. Most migrants' experiences shape the cultural narratives that the migrants carry from and back home, and most cultural narratives exist, stand, and are reproduced within their dynamic social networks. It is at this point where Levitt's and Lamba-Nieves'

(2011) understanding of social remittances is useful to ground the cultural characteristics that migrants use to portray both transnational lives and social adaptation to change.

Hence, as identified above, the migratory process and social resilience stand not only in ties to families, friends and acquaintances in a national context; persons and communities also count on those ties to get connected to job opportunities, to find funding for mobility, and to sustain contacts with their hometown from abroad. Their social remittances also facilitate the transfer of resilience on a personal to a community basis in their communities of origin and destination. The construction of transnational social resilience keeps families and communities connected, adaptable, and changing to achieve their wellbeing.

As Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011, 2) observe:

We enter this conversation by revisiting the concept of social remittances. First, we argue that people's experiences prior to migration strongly influence what they do in the countries where they settle; this, in turn, affects what they remit back to their homelands, which becomes clear when we analyse migration through a transnational lens. The ideas and practices migrants bring with them actively shape who and what they encounter in the countries where they move, which then shapes what they send back (...) We also find it useful to distinguish between individual and collective social remittances, i.e. between social remittances exchanged and deployed by individuals and those that circulate and are harnessed in collective, organisational settings (...) The potential for social remittance impact to scale up and scale out: not only do social remittances affect local-level organisational culture and practice, they can also influence regional and national changes (...) Moreover, individual and collective social remittances also strongly influence the way organised groups relate to state structures and foment 'state society-synergies (as quoted in Evans, 1996).

As the case analysed in this paper illustrates, people from Ponte Duro have been resilient when coping with the crises in their community in two very different ways: 1) by attempting to recover their previous economic conditions through the construction of shrimp nurseries, and, 2) by migrating to the US and subsequently returning to their communities, sharing with their families and friends their personal experiences and transformation to foster new forms of community development.

In doing so they have also adapted to transnational lives, individual and collective social remittances, and are scaling up and out in the construction of synergies with different levels of government to foster a development project. This social transformation process (Castles, 2010), in which communities move and integrate into more productive niches in international labour markets, is taking place in the most impoverished environments both in Mexico and in the US. *Chiapanecos* are experiencing material improvement even as they move from the most deprived economic environment in Mexico, to the lowest labour

positions of the American labour market. While their labour market position in the US is extremely precarious and low paying, in contrast to their previous position in Mexico, in many respects it represents an advancement in their quality of life, work conditions, and work opportunities. This process creates new individual and collective identities and imageries constructed on transnational footings, and it helps transform these migrants into agents of change within their community.

CRISIS, MIGRATION AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN PONTE DURO

Ponte Duro / Manuel Avila Camacho is a community located in the municipality of Tonalá, on the Coast region of Chiapas. According to the oldest of its residents, it was founded between 1928 and 1932 by 63 families who received 20 hectares each to create an *ejido*. In the year 2012, when our fieldwork took place, there were 450 families and 145 *ejidatarios*. The most important economic activity has been fishing, and the most important source of revenue has been the sale of shrimp. Ponte Duro's residents relied heavily on a seafood diet, complementing this with domestic agricultural products. It has been a marginal community with families living very close to absolute poverty levels. Historically less than one percent of the population had a formal job with access to social security. However, in 2012, 93 percent of the families had access to *Seguro Popular*³, the social program created by President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) to grant access to health care, and 88 percent of households received *Oportunidades*⁴. At the time of our fieldwork, families lived on an average household expense of about \$4 to \$7 USD a day.

The founders of the community and the following two generations of their descendants were dependent on fishing for survival; the third generation was confronted with the reality of depleted shrimp stocks in the mid-1980s. Collaborative work through a cooperative system has characterized both fishing and farming activities, as it is implicit in the legal structure of the *ejido*. Ponte Duro's easy access to fishing structured a way of life characterized by an unstructured work ethic in which both men and families were involved, and it also constructed their personal and familial identities. As they got used to the sea providing basic proteins, breadwinners tended to work only for a few hours a day and only for the necessary days to get enough income for basic survival. The sale of shrimp made their community wealthier than their neighbours. The

³ *Seguro Popular* is a social program created in 2002 to offer medical attention to people working in informal markets and excluded from traditional social security programs. It also mitigates against catastrophic medical expenses for people living below poverty levels.

⁴ *Oportunidades* is a human development program that grants families living in extreme poverty conditional funding (\$1.50 USD a day) to assure a minimal living. The funding is granted to women and is conditioned on regular school attendance by children in the community, and by local residents getting regular health screenings. Funding increases as children grow older and maintain regular school attendance.

community also enjoyed a comparatively good set of public assets in its rural clinic, public education from pre-K to high school, and even two paved streets.

As shown on Table 1, the population of Ponte Duro has been decreasing since 1995, first due to male emigration, and more recently by both male and female emigration. In traditional emigration counties, female migration is explained mainly by family reunification goals. However, in this community, female emigration is characterized by young unmarried women looking to achieve economic and social advancement. Both female and male emigrants are the most educated persons in the community; 32.7% of them finished high school, and a further 15.2% completed preparatory school (SRE, 2007), from a community where more than a third of the population is illiterate.

Coping With the Shrimp Crisis: Two Solutions

When the crisis of the depletion of shrimp stocks hit the community, villagers were forced to become resilient by choosing one of two basic options: 1) to follow other Central Americans on their way to the US (a model of social *resilience* which entails becoming transnational economic aliens), or 2) to attempt to retrieve their previous economic situation through the creation of man-made shrimp nurseries to be used to seed shrimp back into the sea and restore traditional shrimp stocks (a more traditional systemic *resilience* involving the effort to recover previous conditions of well-being through local-based economic innovation) (Hall and Lamont, 2013; Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013).

Although further research based on interviewing early emigrants from Ponte Duro is needed (in order to get deeper information on their motivations regarding migration, how they connected to new social networks, and how they gained access to US labour circuits), we found through our interviews a sense of the nascent transnationalisation process that occurred and which is reflected in the following testimonies:

The first emigrants were the Pineda's. They were the first family that left the town in the early 1980's (...) they began to spread the word: In the States you get good salaries, you get paid by the hour; people from here considered that their family got new things (...) And others decided to migrate as well (...) most of people began to leave in 1982 because the sea stop[ped] producing enough for making a living, we just lost our way of living. Since then we have nothing to sell. This is why people emigrate; they were looking for a better future. The future here is over; the future is in the States (Don Diego, interview July 12, 2012).

(...) There were no organised groups to leave; everyone made an individual decision, never left in groups (...) The 1986 amnesty just help them to settle, some became US residents, and they took their families with them (...) when the hurricane destroyed our community [in 1998 first, and later in

2004], those first *émigrés* sponsored people in trouble, 20 percent of the men left, maybe more, some of them are already back [once they fulfilled their migration project: rebuilding their houses]. Most of them have been out since then, almost 20 years have passed by and they have not returned yet (...) (Jorge, interview July 12, 2012).

The interviews speak to some of the factors that pushed residents to migrate to the US. Those residents who choose to stay had a different set of experiences.

Domestically systemic resilience arose when fishermen tried to recover the shrimp stocks by constructing shrimp nurseries. They expected to farm shrimp in a protected environment and seeding it back to the sea when the larvae were mature. This project was initiated by a new co-op formed by 100 fishermen. Most of the 1990s found them working to attempt to bring back their former shrimp production levels, which turned out to be an unsuccessful effort. Their lack of technical knowledge, in addition to *las lluvias* (the rains), normal in hurricane-prone regions, helps to explain the co-op's failure.

Ponte Duro was seriously impacted by two natural catastrophes. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch hit the community, and in 2004, Hurricane Stan made landfall in the community. The hurricanes devastated Ponte Duro, and families that were already living in conditions of extreme poverty lost everything they had when the floods destroyed not only the shrimp nurseries, but also much of the hope residents had in the future of the community. Massive male emigration followed the catastrophe. Residents of Ponte Duro took advantage of the transnational social resilience taking place, which enabled them to make use of growing transnational social networks to help them address the emergency. Funding and other supports from relatives and acquaintances working in the US brought in much needed cash to the community, and other men decided to migrate to the US as well to find work so they could also send back remittances. The migration experience came to be consolidated in their personal narratives and became part of their collective imagery. Family remittances financed the reconstruction effort and assured the survival of the women, children and older residents left behind.

After 2004, the 56 remaining members of the co-op started a restaurant to try to cope with the crisis. They involved their wives in this project even if it was only to do what they called 'the women's work' — cooking and serving. Women joined the cooperative contributing their labour and even some personal assets to support their husband's efforts to start the new business. When the project failed, a series of fortunate events occurred which provided resources to help sustain the local economy. First, the federal and local governments were providing financing for entrepreneurs as a way of fostering economic development in small communities throughout Chiapas, in order to reduce *Zapatista* influence and *Zapatista*-led development outside the highlands. Second, this process coincided with the fact that local emigrants were returning to their communities bringing with them monetary and social resources to invest back into their community. Our survey shows that 37 percent of households have

had at least one member in the US since 2012, and as illustrated in Figure 1, return migrants tend to own more diversified assets placing them in an advantageous economic position compared with families with no returnees or with no family members living outside the country.

Individual Resilience in a Transnational Context

Along with fresh economic resources, migrants came back home with social remittances, and equipped with new personal narratives and identities. They changed their idea of themselves as revealed in their answers to questions about what they considered the most important knowledge acquired abroad:

[We, the migrants] have skills people who stayed behind have not. We have the capacity to adapt and to take risks, and most important we are willing to improve and change ourselves for the well-being of our families. The others – those who stayed behind – do not have those capabilities (...) We, as migrants, worked at many different jobs in the US, have to have the disposition and the flexibility to learn and work at any job we could find (...) We came back with those tools, and we have to use the migratory experience as an lever to foster productive projects (...) I think that migrating to the US makes you see things differently, it changes your vision of yourself (...) The experience gained from migration teaches you that you can do whatever you want, you just have to learn to take risky decisions. Because I took the risk of leaving my community, I went to the border, I walked through the desert, I walked three days in the desert, and I won (Fabian interview July 16, 2012).

[Migrating] gave me security, and organisational skills (...) I learnt to manage my money because I had to support my family here in the community, support myself in the US, and save for the future. I also learnt to work with discipline and to work a lot (...) before emigrating I used to work without any discipline and just to earn enough to survive for a few days, or a week at most (Efrain interview July 12, 2012).

What is interesting about the way individuals built their personal resilience is how they acknowledge the change brought from their migration experience, and how they integrate narratives of change into their subjectivities. Another interesting point is how they integrate their transnational lives as an organisation skill. They developed what I call *a new work ethic*. The migrants interviewed changed their socially learned and socially transmitted fishing skills and identities, based on open-air-unstructured working habits, into closed-in factory work skills, paid by the hour. This type of work has tended to reinforce the idea that wellbeing depends directly on individual effort; they learned to work 'regular' hours, and most importantly they acknowledged workplace training as a substitute for formal education and as a resource that helped them adapt to new work and social conditions. As Fabian explains:

I learned the value of training [as a substitute for education, the interviewee has a formal education level of high school]. Me, for example, the company I worked for (in the US) trained me every 3 months. I learned different positions in the company, leadership, and group management. I was studying English, and they help me to do it (...) yes, that makes us different from the people that have never left the community, from the people that have worked as fishermen all their lives, and who have never worked in an organised environment like within the four walls of a factory. You gain an openness, we are more open to change, and totally open-minded (...) I think people who have emigrated are forced to learn everything (Fabian interview July 16, 2012).

As migrants they also become resilient in the job market. Their flexibility to adapt to any job is important, as is their ability to move from county to county seeking better economic opportunities. These became characteristic features of the new low wage migration (Durand, 2003). As these migrants were not able to count on consolidated migratory circuits yet, they travelled throughout 16 different US states searching out employment opportunities. They came to see migration as a learning process centred on taking advantage of various job opportunities.

Families left behind also learnt to be resilient in a transnational context. First, families navigated survival strategies during the time their husbands and/or sons settled in their new location and began sending money back home. Second, women assumed responsibility not only as head of their households, but also for the survival of the family and through working in fishing or small scale farming that had previously been reserved for the men. Finally, women and families also learned to develop and take advantage of transnational family linkages. They keep contact with family members abroad not only through money remittances, but also through family-based decision-making made possible through regular communication with their migrant family member by phone and/or Skype. Transnationalisation of migrants and their families' narratives began to flourish as well.

Scaling up Social Resilience

One of the reasons we chose Ponte Duro for our fieldwork was because virtually all the men in the Community Council were return migrants. In the El Madresal Co-op, 12 out of the 42 members, almost 30 percent, were also returnees, and eight of them had jobs in the co-op directorate. When asked about it, they think it is just a coincidence, even as they also acknowledge that they are scaling up their social remittances to the others. The new work ethic is now expanding from migrants to co-op members with strict bylaws, approved by the assembly in 2008, and all those we interviewed recognized this as a factor in their success.

The second point identified as a source of success is training. The goal is

‘to transform a group of traditional fishermen and housewives into entrepreneurs’ as Fabian notes. Hence, they have had to learn about working in a co-op, which means that even if all of them are owners, they have to work hard and with discipline to succeed. They have also been trained to specialize in customer service, civil protection, first aid, risk prevention, housekeeping, tour guides, waiters, boatmen, life savers, harbourmasters, etc. Their motivation and collective responsibility come across loudly and clearly in the interviews, and they are especially proud to own and be part of the daily work in El Madresal. Social change in Ponte Duro is based on the social remittances of emigrants, who have also scaled out to build synergies with government agencies to get funding and special training.

When the restaurant project failed, returnees took part in the discussion about what to do next. They took control of the co-op directive and pushed for change. They sought better negotiating abilities when dealing with government officials and secured public funding to build the Ecotourist centre. The Social Development Ministry provided two different sources of funding. One was to build 4 cabins, and the temporary employment program to provide regular salaries to Co-op members working on the construction project. In an assembly they decided to use the second source of funding as personal contribution to the Co-op and it was used to build 8 cabins instead of the four that were originally planned. To survive, they kept up with their traditional fishing activities, and created ‘commune pots’. Male Co-op members donated what they could get from the sea, women cooked, and every one ate together from the pot.

The new Co-op leadership approved harsh rules for the members forcing them to adapt to structured working conditions and penalizing violations. The transmission of the new work ethic has assured unity and it is one of the reasons people use to explain their own success. Fishermen and housewives have become equal partners and have learned the importance of collaborative work, flexible work conditions, and training. For five years, from 2007 to 2012:

1. Cooperatives began to work on schedule, and followed the schedule;
2. Defined work profiles, and trained to meet the requirements: Co-op members usually train in more than one specialization;
3. Co-op members organized and regulated their working environment;
4. They learned how to gain access to public funding and created state-community synergies to secure resources for the project (Evans, 1996);
5. Co-op members initiated a process of adaptation and transformation to integrate new identities for fishermen and housewives to transform them into owners, Co-op members and specialists in particular aspects of the business.

The second reason those interviewed gave to explain their success was the on-going training they set in place. They see training as a strategic tool to change identities and transform themselves from their traditional subjectivity (fishermen and housewives), into specialized workers. With support from the Mexican Tourism Secretariat they are specializing in different areas of the business – tending bar, cooking, serving, housekeeping, receptionist, tourist guides, etc. It is worth remembering that many of them are functionally illiterate, and these courses have become their only ‘formal’ education other than learning to add and write down their names when they were children. It is useful to contrast the experiences of a woman named Daisy, a returned migrant herself, and a man called Paulino, whose daughter emigrated while he had stayed in the community. Daisy explains her trajectory as follows:

Me for example, I was in the kitchen cooking, now I am trained as a housekeeper; men now are trained as servers, barmen, and even as cooks (...) We are all equal partners, each of us has to train for a job, to specialize in our positions, and to be ready to do others jobs in case of need (...) Now we are all owners, we are all equal (Daisy, interviewed July 10, 2012).

Don Paulino notes:

Courses help us learn. When we started we had no education, we were close-minded, and we were not ready to learn. The training taught us to work as a group, we have learned to be helpful to tourists, to be respectful, and to smile because I am the receptionist (...) (Don Paulino, interviewed July 11, 2012).

When asked what his ideal position was, however, he expressed his reluctance around change:

What I really want to do is being responsible for the boat, and crossing people through the channel, I do miss the water, you know. I know that even though I am too shy, and I cannot explain to the tourists about the environment, and the trees as the other colleagues do (...) I am a fisherman, and fishing has been my life, it was a family activity, even my wife and children used to come with me, it was a very happy experience to catch something, we all celebrate it (Don Paulino, interviewed July 11, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Ponte Durans are actually traversing a twin-edged route to transformation. While many young men and women feed the migratory circuits from La Costa region in search of better opportunities in the US, a group of 42 families created a

cooperative, a productive project to create opportunities for themselves and to offer their children the opportunity to stay home to build a sustainable economic future. In the process they are transforming themselves from fishermen and housewives into businesspeople, changing personal narratives and creating opposing community imageries. Both of these paths are based on a transnational social resilience process that started when the residents of Ponte Duro faced a number of crises and disasters that jeopardized their future wellbeing as individuals, families and as a community.

The community has undergone an intense process of social transformation connecting marginal communities to the lower levels of international labour markets. And this process has launched an accelerated process of continuity and change. The success of *the Centro Ecoturístico El Madresal* is based mainly on their continued knowledge and use of the collaborative work the community has depended on since its foundation. However, the combination of social remittances and social resilience has traversed a long way from personal experiences into the institutionalization of a productive project connecting individuals, institutions and the state and creating development synergies, in the middle of which, transnational social networks appeared and have given people additional resources and alternatives for their future well-being.

The success of migrant-led development projects in Mexico has been the exception rather than the rule. This particular project's accomplishment has also integrated the way the community weaves migrants' experiences into their personal and social narratives as originators of new employment opportunities for the community and has compensated all social costs implied in the movement of people abroad while leaving their families behind. However, they are still unable to answer the question whether emigration overall has been a good or bad thing for the families and the community.

The members of the community have had to cope with the negative side of emigration: namely, families, especially children, left behind; the loss of the most educated people in the community; the abandonment of the traditional leadership role of elders in the community, among others. The positive side of emigration, on the other hand, has been that the migratory experiences are related to the training benefits, the financial rewards and the facilitation of the assimilation of change prompted by the migration process. The migration experience has resulted in integrated social learning to adapt and change the migrants' life as undocumented workers in the US, and in so doing it has also fostered the community's social transformation. In this process they are passing on their personal learning to future generations and through social learning they are shaping their community for the future.

It is worth noting that migration has meant, for Ponte Duro at least, more than money flowing from north of the border. It has also created a transnational

context (denser social networks, contact with family of which economic remittances are only one expression; while social remittances in the destination changed the subjects' own narratives) to support change. Last but not least, it is creating a new imagery for women as agents of their own destiny, both as migrants and equal partners with their husbands in the project.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Ponte Duro's Total Population by Sex					
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Total	1,661	1,840	1,902	1,866	1,778
Male	860	972	969	917	908
Female	801	868	933	949	870

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011

Figure 1

Family Assets in Relation to Migration of One of Their Members



