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## **Mexican Immigrant Communities in the South and Social Capital: The Case of Dalton, Georgia**

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***Abstract.*** During the 1990s, the South became a major new destination for Mexican and other Latino settled immigration. This paper contends that as Mexican immigrants have moved in sizable numbers to atypical destinations, they have also mobilized social capital and funds of knowledge from the historical concentrations of Latino settlement (i.e. Los Angeles and Chicago) to new areas, such as the South. Using qualitative and descriptive quantitative data collected in Dalton, Georgia, a small city located in the southern Appalachia region, this article shows how previously accumulated social capital and funds of knowledge are facilitating settlement with collective and individual level consequences. At the community level, this access to social capital is compressing the timing of the migratory cycle, accelerating incorporation. At the individual level, one significant outcome is the rapid rise of ethnic entrepreneurship, which in turn fosters differentiation within the immigrant community.

## **Introduction**

Spearheaded by Mexican immigration, the South has become a major new destination for Latino settlement. During the previous decade the region's Latino population increased dramatically, fostering the rise of many newcomer communities, particularly in non-metropolitan areas. These settlements are part of a new geography of Mexican immigration to the United States (Durand, Massey and Charvet 2000) and are integrated in a system of settlements (Durand 2001), which includes historical destinations as well as nontraditional ones, like those located in the South. The interconnection between the localities of such a system has been evidenced by studies showing that substantial numbers of new arrivals to southern states are in fact secondary internal migrants, coming from the large historical concentrations of Mexican immigration, such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2001).

As we have argued elsewhere, this redistribution of the Mexican population to the South and other regions of the United States has multiple and complex local consequences. It is altering the bipolar racial structure of many communities, transforming the ethnic make up of social classes, affecting public and private institutional dynamics as they incorporate newcomers, while also changing local politics. At the same time, the new presence of Mexicans and other Latinos is also transforming the symbolic definition of receiving localities as Spanish, Catholicism, Latino music and cuisines become part of public spaces and the region's landscape. The arrival of these newcomers is creating new inter-ethnic and linguistic tensions, as people discuss the pros and cons of bilingual education, while also giving way to new economic dynamics, through the rise of immigrant entrepreneurship. Thus, while the economic hegemony of the United States has pushed the international limit farther south, Mexican migration and settlement in places like Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama seems to have moved the social and demographic boundary in the opposite direction, turning many towns and small cities in those states into border communities (Zúñiga et al 2002).

This paper deals with yet another dimension of this process of redistribution of the Mexican immigrant population to the South and other new destination regions: that of the redeployment of social capital accumulated through migration. We contend that as Mexican immigrants have moved in sizable numbers to atypical destinations, they have started to mobilize social capital and other resources from the historical concentrations of Latino settlement (i.e. Los Angeles and Chicago) to the new areas of settlement. Although they are newcomers to these areas, Mexicans and other Latinos with a long history of migration to the United States have accumulated reservoirs of social capital and funds of knowledge elsewhere, which they tap into as they settle into new destinations. Thus, as they move to small and medium sized localities of

the South, migrants also transplant with them part of that social capital in the form of portable human and cultural capital.

How does this process of use and redeployment of social capital affect settlement and incorporation in new destinations? What are the collective and individual level consequences of the availability and use of social capital in atypical areas of settlement? In order to answer these questions, we analyze the case of Dalton, Georgia, one of such new destinations located in the southern Appalachia region. During the 1990s, Dalton experienced a rapid and massive influx of Mexican and other Latino immigrants. Attracted by jobs in carpet manufacturing and poultry, Mexican newcomers flocked to this small city becoming almost one quarter of the county's population by 2000 and turning its public school system into a majority minority district in 2001. Despite the fact that they had only begun to arrive in Dalton in sizable numbers during the late 1980s and early 1990s, by the end of the decade, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and other Latinos owned more than 60 small and medium size businesses, had organized soccer leagues which grouped hundreds of players and were running for public office. In this article, we contend that previously developed social capital and funds of knowledge in the historic homelands of Mexican immigration were facilitating settlement in new destinations, such as Dalton, suggesting that newcomers were weaving connections between old and recent areas of settlement. A web of active ties, through which immigrants mobilize social capital and other resources, is now linking localities like Dalton with other places in the South, with Los Angeles and Chicago and hometowns and regions in México.

Part one of this paper provides a discussion of the concepts of social capital and funds of knowledge, calling for an understanding of their spatial dimensions. Part two discusses the methods and sources of data we use in this study. They stem from five years of continuous

involvement in Dalton, Georgia, both as observers and participants of the process of immigrant community formation and development. Part three examines the deployment of social capital and funds of knowledge in this new destination, distinguishing between collective and individual level consequences. By way of conclusion, we summarize the main findings and offer a brief comparison with other new destinations in the South.

## **Framework**

Social capital is still a concept in flux and a notion that elicits different meanings. The sociology of immigration has generally settled on definitions that emphasize the economic and non-economic benefits that individuals receive and use through their membership in social networks. Thus, Bourdieu and Wacquant, following Weber's notion of social class, contend that "[S]ocial capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1992: 119). In a similar vein, Portes defines social capital as "[t]he capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures" (1995: 12). Social capital facilitates the actions and the satisfaction of the interests of social actors (Coleman 1988). Studies of international migration have used the notion of social capital to explain why and how individual and household decisions about migration are highly dependent on access to the social capital stored in support networks (Massey et al. 1987), while researchers in the emerging field of economic sociology have resorted to this concept to show how economic activity (i.e. entrepreneurship) is embedded in larger social contexts, which in turn facilitate or block such

activity (Light and Rosenstein 1995).<sup>1</sup> From a methodological standpoint, social capital is seen as variable playing a significant role in producing particular outcomes (i.e. social mobility, types of assimilation and incorporation, and even educational achievement).

While the concept of social capital emphasizes the capacity of social actors to draw resources from networks, the notion of funds of knowledge refers to information, expertise and skills—frequently incorporated as individual human and cultural capital—but which are collectively created as part of the adaptive strategies of low income populations. According to Vélez-Ibáñez, funds of knowledge

include information and formulas containing the mathematics, architecture, chemistry, physics, biology, and engineering for the construction and repair of homes, the repair of most mechanical devices including autos, appliances, and machines as well as methods for planting and gardening, butchering, cooking, hunting, and of “making things” in general. Other parts of such funds included information regarding access to institutional assistance school programs, legal help, transportation routes, occupational opportunities, and the most economical places to purchase needed services and goods (Vélez-Ibáñez 1988: 38)

Elements and pieces of these funds of knowledge are developed and exchanged through social networks of kin or residentially clustered households. Social theorists have long recognized that these exchanges are governed by expectations and norms of reciprocity and trust

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<sup>1</sup> Analyses of the negative effects and limits of social capital can be found in Coleman (1988), Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), and Menjivar (1997).

(Schutz 1962; Simmel 1981; 1999; Vélez-Ibáñez 1988; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992).

Although they are not privately held or controlled, access to these funds of knowledge is typically based on group and network membership.

Having used these concepts to advance our understanding of the economic sociology of migration, researchers have been less explicit about the spatial or *toponimical* dimension of social capital and funds of knowledge, that is, about their “physical and social location” (Fernández Kelly 1994: 89). Although migration studies terminology is full of terms denoting space—origins and destinations, sending and receiving areas—the geographic embeddedness of migratory flows, networks and social capital and its consequences for social organization are often ignored. We contend that understanding the geographic embeddedness of social capital and funds of knowledge provides insights about the ongoing process of dispersion of the Mexican population in the United States and the formation of settlements in nontraditional immigrant destinations, including the South. This process of dispersion or diasporic migration of Mexicans in the United States is coupled with a pattern of high concentration of this immigrant population in a few regions. By the mid to late 1990s, about 50 % of Mexican immigrants were still concentrated in Southern California, Texas and the Chicago metropolitan area and nearly 80 % in the border states of California, Arizona, New México and Texas, plus Illinois (Schmidley 2001; Durand, Massey and Capoferro forthcoming).

These combined patterns of concentration and dispersion (Durand and Zúñiga 1998) suggest a new and more complex social geography of Mexican immigration—one that includes places of origin and transit within Mexico and historic as well as new destinations in the United States. We argue that this social geography can no longer be conceptualized in terms of the bipolar imagery of sending and receiving areas. The multiple and multidirectional connections

established by migrants and stay-at-home individuals and families suggests the image of a cobweb with various strands linking localities in the interior with Mexican border states and areas of immigrant concentration, such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston, which in turn are connected to a myriad of new destinations. These atypical areas of settlement are already becoming directly connected with communities of origin in Mexico as migrants are bypassing California, Illinois and Texas all together to move to states like Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000). This can be gauged not only from data on the trajectories of Mexican migrants in the South but also from observations of the new transportation infrastructure of bus and van companies connecting places like Dalton and Atlanta, Georgia, with hubs in Houston and Monterrey and then with heavy migratory states, such as San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas.

In this context, historical destinations have assumed a new role: they have become sites where Mexicans have accumulated valuable labor market experience and exposure to U.S. institutions and where immigrants maintain contacts and access to funds of knowledge by virtue of network membership. This role is even more salient because, as it is the case in Dalton, many of those who have arrived to this and other localities in the South particularly during the late 1980s to the mid-1990s are secondary migrants coming from Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston. The funds of knowledge and social capital accumulated in these places, we argue, are being transplanted to new destinations, facilitating settlement in areas without a tradition of Mexican immigration. This process has collective and individual level consequences. At the collective level, one such consequence is that the overall process of immigrant and ethnic community formation appears to evolve faster and even undergoes a kind of time compression. Such time compression takes place because newcomers do not have to start accumulating social

capital from “scratch” and “invent” entirely new institutions and traditions. They can in fact use those transplanted or drawn from the reservoirs of social capital—the historic U.S.

concentrations of Mexican population.

At an individual level, sizable numbers of successful cultural, sport and business entrepreneurs may appear more rapidly and even become a visible segment of the immigrant settlement, therefore contributing to its internal differentiation. In Dalton, more than 60 Latino businesses populate the town’s economic landscape: from the largest restaurant of any kind to newspaper companies and small supermarkets. These businesses include those that provide services to the ethnic community as well as a growing number that cater to local Anglo and African American residents. Much of the entrepreneurial and sector specific skills have been acquired or drawn from previous places in the individual’s migratory trajectory.

We realize that this transplantation of social capital is not the only factor affecting incorporation into Dalton and other places in the South: the nature of local and regional labor markets, the demographic characteristics of newcomers and established residents, the age of migratory streams and the legal status of immigrants are some of the variables shaping the experiences of Mexicans and Latinos in this part of the country. In the remaining sections we show how this mobilization and transplantation of social capital affects Mexican immigrant settlement in Dalton, Georgia.

### **Sources of data and methodological issues**

This analysis is based on five years of observations, data collection and participatory action research in Dalton. Since 1997, we have conducted hundreds of hours of unobtrusive observation and participant observation in immigrant neighborhoods, ethnic stores and

restaurants, churches, schools, soccer fields, community celebrations and private parties, workplaces, political and civic events, shopping centers, parks and other public spaces. Most of these observations were undertaken with the purpose of understanding the process of incorporation of Mexicans into Dalton. In addition, we have completed two-dozen individual interviews with Mexicans and other Latin American immigrants, U.S. born Latinos, African-Americans, and Anglo residents of different social and occupational backgrounds. The interviews followed a variety of formats—including the life history model and thematic interviews focused on particular issues (i.e. inter-group relations). We have also conducted several group interviews following the focus group model.

In the fall of 1997, we implemented a self-administered survey to the parents of Latino children enrolled in Dalton's public schools. Mothers and fathers answered questions about their migratory histories and trajectories, household characteristics, social networks, current and previous job experiences, their children's schooling, perception of social mobility and plans for the near future. Although the responses of the nearly 850 individuals who returned the surveys do not constitute a random and representative sample—all those without children in public schools were left out of the sampling frame—together they produced a quantifiable portrait of the Latino immigrant population, which matched our ethnographic observations and interviews.<sup>2</sup>

Still, the methodological strategy that has made our Dalton experience particularly distinctive has been an approach similar to what is known as participatory action research. The observations and data collection activities outlined above have been intimately connected with a

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion of procedures and limitations of this survey can be found in Hernández-León and Zúñiga (2000), and Zúñiga and Hernández-León (2001).

community development initiative called the Georgia Project. The project began when a group of Dalton civic and public school leaders contacted the authorities and faculty at Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico in search of the academic and cultural expertise to meet the educational and institutional challenges that Latino immigration had brought about in their community. By the time these leaders traveled to Monterrey, in December of 1996, Latino pupils were already one third of the student body in Dalton public schools. Contacting a Mexican university was clearly an unusual step, one that can be explained by at least two factors: first, the lack of responsiveness to these leaders' calls for assistance from state institutions, such as Georgia's Department of Education and local universities, and second, their access to the joint venture ties between the largest carpet manufacturer in Dalton and industrialists in Monterrey, who in turn had links with the university's president.

This indirect and initial sponsorship on the part of the carpet industry in Dalton played a fundamental role in getting the project started. In fact, it provided its different programs with political legitimacy and support, giving us access to actors and research sites, which would have been rarely available to outsiders otherwise. The involvement of carpet companies in sponsoring an educational and community development project was not unusual. It actually followed on the footsteps of a tradition of "good corporate citizenship," which presented the intervention of elites in community affairs as a rightful endeavor (Flamming 1992). It is worth noting that this sponsorship did not represent a hindrance to our research nor prevented the initiatives of the project from encountering resistance and clashing, sometimes with school authorities and on occasion with the middle management of the carpet industry itself.

The Georgia Project included four different initiatives—all of them endorsed by an agreement signed between Universidad de Monterrey and Dalton Public Schools in the Spring of

1997: a bilingual teacher program to bring graduates from the university to Dalton, the design of a bilingual education curriculum, a Latino adult education and leadership initiative, and a summer institute for local teachers to learn Spanish and Mexican history and culture in Monterrey. These programs have been analyzed in greater detail in Hamann (1999; 2002) and Zúñiga et al (2002). The purpose of this background is to show that through our research and the programs we designed together with other colleagues, we have been not only observers but also participants of the processes of sociodemographic, ethnic, cultural and political change resulting from Mexican migration to this locality of the South.

Just as important is the fact that we have also become participants of the complex process of institutional response to these transformations. What are the consequences and contributions of our intervention as Mexican scholars in Dalton? As we have argued elsewhere, this intervention—backed by a university: provided institutional legitimacy to otherwise highly contentious positions and debates (i.e. the defense of the use of Spanish in public schools); contributed schools and other entities with cultural knowledge as they responded to the challenges of immigration; and performed the roles of interlocutory dialogue and mediation between diverse members of the Latino community and local authorities and business leaders, helping to establish direct channels of communication between these actors and fostering the creation of a Latino immigrant organization (Zúñiga et al 2002). In addition, our research and institutional activities in favor of the social and political enfranchisement of Latinos in Dalton also lent prestige and status to the immigrant community, frequently rendered invisible because of racial, class and linguistic barriers and prejudices. In sum, these different methodological stances and opportunities have allowed us to blend traditional and less conventional strategies

for data collection, to combine observation and participation, and to become local actors while remaining outsiders.

## **The Mobilization and Transplantation of Social Capital**

### **Primary and secondary migrants to Dalton**

One important point of the departure of this paper are the origins, trajectories and years of migratory experience of Mexicans living in Dalton. Nearly 70% of the parents surveyed through the public schools are originally from the historic region of migration, comprised by the states of western and north-central Mexico, where individuals, families and communities have accumulated a great deal of migration relevant social capital. Phillips and Massey (2000) have in fact dubbed the communities this region “engines of migration.” An additional 11% of these parents are from the border states, an area with historical and geographical ties to the United States. Thus, although these Mexican men and women are true newcomers to Dalton—72% of them have been in this small city fewer than six years—they are seasoned migrants to this country. Two additional data support this contention: 62% of the fathers and 50% of the mothers were already living in some other U.S. locality before moving to Dalton, mostly in California, Texas or Illinois. On average, fathers and mothers had accumulated more than nine and five years of migratory experience in the United States respectively by the time they had arrived in Dalton (see Table 1; also Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000). As a result, these immigrants have amassed U.S. labor market and migration specific human capital, exposure to this country’s institutions and network and social capital resources, which connect them to their homelands in Mexico but also to historic destinations in the United States.

**Table 1 about here**

Mexican immigrants to Dalton also show within group differences regarding trajectories and time spent in the United States—proxies for migration relevant human and social capital accumulated in this country. The survey of Hispanic parents conducted in 1997 allowed us to identify, albeit indirectly, a group of “true” newcomers, namely, those who had moved only recently and directly from Mexico to northwest Georgia in their first U.S. trip, and to differentiate them from the more seasoned immigrants. The sample of 846 parents can thus be divided between migrants who resided in Mexico before arriving in Dalton (47%), and the remainder who moved to this city from California (15%), Texas (11%), Florida (7%), other parts of Georgia (4%), Illinois (3%) and other places in the United States (13%). This latter group—53% of the sample—represents the secondary migrants who were already living and working in the country before choosing Dalton as a new destination.

Yet moving directly from Mexico to Dalton does not necessarily mean a complete lack of migratory experience. Some of the individuals in this group had in fact conducted at least one U.S. trip and had moved back to Mexico to then migrate to Dalton. The next step to identify the “true” primary migrants is to look at the timing of their U.S. move. To this effect, we have further divided Mexico-Dalton migrants in three subgroups: individuals who made their U.S. move before IRCA (1986), in the immediate aftermath of this legislation (1987-1992) or in recent years (during or after 1993). Table 2 shows the results of this descriptive analysis.

**Table 2 about here**

On average, only 38% of those who undertook a direct Mexico-Dalton move arrived in the United States after 1992. More significantly, the columns by sex in Table 2 demonstrate that the recent flow of direct arrivals to Dalton (1993-1997) is largely composed of women, suggesting that primary migration is in fact driven by family reunification. This finding indicates that in Dalton true primary migration has been intimately connected to secondary migratory strategies. The individuals who arrive directly from Mexico with little or no sojourning experience are often the wives, daughters, sisters and nieces of the more seasoned migrants. These true “novices” are part of the families, kinship networks and regions, which are the effective depositories of social capital. To consider their trajectories, the timing of their moves and their migration relevant human and social capital in isolation from the groupings and spaces mentioned above is to forget that migration is a collective experience and social capital a collective resource. These “novices” are also part of the diasporic migration described here.

How do this extensive diasporic experience and the ability to draw from funds of knowledge and to mobilize social capital affect settlement and incorporation in a new destination like Dalton? In the remainder of this paper we analyze the collective and individual level consequences of this process.

## **Collective level implications**

The first and most significant collective level consequence is what we call the compression of the migratory cycle in Dalton. The observations and survey data collected there suggest that the largely Mexican immigrant settlement in this city seems to have gone through the stages of destination and community formation in an accelerated fashion. A brief overview of some social, demographic, economic and political characteristics indicates that the immigrant settlement is indeed more mature than the average number of years most parents have been in Dalton would suggest.

Although single men make up an important yet difficult to quantify segment of the Mexican population, families are clearly a sizable component of the community. The presence of large numbers of children attests to this claim: according to the 2000 Census, 37% of Latinos in Dalton are less than 18 years of age. Latino children are now the majority (51%) of the students attending Dalton's public schools and are already nearing one fifth of the county's school system. On the economic front, the existence of more than 60 businesses owned by Hispanics lends credence to the idea that the immigrant settlement cannot be conceptualized as a homogeneous community of blue-collar workers. Clearly, a segment of the newcomer population has undertaken entrepreneurship and self-employment as the path for social mobility. Besides restaurants, bakeries and small supermarkets catering to the tastes and needs of fellow immigrants, Latino entrepreneurs own real estate agencies, jewelry and furniture shops, taxicab companies and newspaper and advertising companies.

The large numbers of Spanish speaking newcomers have supported the establishment of two radio stations, the move of Latino professionals into the city, including lawyers and doctors, and the rapid mobility of some immigrants into white-collar and management positions in

factories, banks and auto dealerships. At same time, the political incorporation of Hispanics has begun in earnest as leaders of both parties have started to court members of the 1.5 generation, immigrants have launched runs for positions in the public schools' board, and have assumed the presidency of PTA's. In this context, it is not surprising that in our in-depth interviews several socially mobile members of the 1.5 generation expressed a desire to run for mayor of Dalton.

There are obviously several contextual factors that help explain this accelerated maturation of networks and process of incorporation: Dalton's urban-industrial labor markets providing year-round jobs, a favorable reception on the part of the city's elites, and the 1990s environment of high growth, which turned this town and its region into a full-employment economy (Hernández-León and Zúñiga forthcoming). Yet any understanding of this compression of the migratory cycle is not complete without taking into account the fact that Dalton is for many a secondary move and that this locality and the South are now connected to the historic homelands of Mexican immigration in the United States. The networks linking these regions have actively channeled individuals and families to Dalton. A carpet worker and former Los Angeles resident recounted during an interview how his own move to Dalton had resulted in the migration of more than 100 family members, political relatives and *paisanos*—all of them based in Southern California. In another case, a former Chicago resident sponsored the migration of her sister and nephews from that city to Dalton, primarily to get one of these children out of gang trouble.

Along with people, these networks allow migrants to mobilize a variety of resources and to draw from funds of knowledge and experience accumulated in Chicago or Los Angeles. Two other collective level examples illustrate this point. Prompted by one of the above-mentioned programs of the Georgia Project, Mexican immigrants have started to form an ethnic community

association to gain a voice in local political and civic affairs. Even though their participation in the leadership workshops put together by the project's staff signaled a new stage in their incorporation into Dalton, for several of them the content of the seminars echoed prior experiences in the United States. Indeed, some had been involved in hometown associations in Los Angeles while others were familiar with models of ethnic and immigrant mobilization in Chicago. As they considered strategies and models of organization, some in fact turned to contacts with politically active acquaintances in that city as a source of guidance.

Yet another example comes from Dalton's *Liga Mexicana de Futbol* (Mexican soccer league). In our view, this league and its activities constitute to date the most important organizational experience of the immigrant community. Mirroring the growth of the Latino population in Dalton, the number of clubs registered with the league increased from 10 in the mid-1990s to 45 in 2001, affiliating hundreds of players of different ages. As recognized in seminal studies of Mexican immigration, the soccer clubs and their weekly games provide the means for further networking among newcomers (Massey et al 1987). From the standpoint of this analysis what is particularly significant about the Dalton league is that much of the experience needed to bring players together and manage this organization was actually accumulated in Los Angeles. Several of the individuals who have directed and administered the league since 1996, in fact learned the ropes in the highly sophisticated Mexican soccer federations of Southern California. Since their arrival the Dalton league has become increasingly sophisticated as well, holding elections for a board of directors, renting office space downtown, keeping the clubs' fees in bank accounts, and organizing tournaments across the South. Observers and stakeholders of various kinds have recognized the sociological and political significance of the *Liga Mexicana de Futbol*. In 1998, a group of local industrialists

sponsored the construction of several soccer fields, which are used by the players of this and other leagues. On the other hand, activists from Los Angeles who have visited Dalton consider the league an important resource for further political organizing.

### **Individual level implications**

The mobilization of social capital and use of funds of knowledge accumulated in traditional destinations is nowhere more evident than in the case of individual immigrant entrepreneurs. As discussed above, dozens of small Latino business populate Dalton's economic landscape, most of them catering to ethnic tastes and needs and some branching out to the larger Anglo and African-American population. It is worth noting that many of these entrepreneurs first arrived in Dalton as carpet or poultry plant workers with little or no prior business experience in either Mexico or the United States.

Replicating a familiar pattern in the experience of immigrants in this country, some started their careers employed in Mexican or Latino owned small companies and quit sometime thereafter to start their own ventures. In so doing, these individuals sought a common avenue for upward mobility, seizing the opportunities presented by the growing immigrant settlement. It should also be noticed that this practice has not developed without conflict, particularly when the newly established entrepreneurs opened shop in town and in the same line of business as their former employers. Thus, it was not unusual to hear these businessmen and women complain about the saturation of the ethnic market, especially in regards to restaurants, bakeries and grocery stores.

Other entrepreneurs have followed a different path: they have relied on contacts and knowledge acquired elsewhere in the Latino Diaspora. Several instances attest to this point: the

cases of owners of various Mexican restaurants who ventured into self-employment in Dalton only after learning the ropes as employees in similar eateries in Los Angeles and of a number of butcher and grocery store proprietors who were able to master these trades and initiate their businesses in Georgia through networks linking them to Chicago. The most salient example in our fieldwork comes from the experience of a young man—we shall call him Javier—who now owns two small supermarkets and butcher shops in Dalton. Having moved from Chicago to this city, he quickly realized the opportunities that the rapidly growing immigrant community offered to prospective entrepreneurs. He settled on a plan to establish a butcher shop, which would cater to Mexican taste in meat cuts and other products. Turned down in his loan applications by local banks, he resorted to his sister, based in Chicago, who lent him \$16,000 as start up capital.

But with no prior entrepreneurial experience he also had to rely on non-kin networks in Chicago to acquire basic managerial skills and knowledge about the butcher trade to establish his first store in town. Javier first phoned a friend who owned a butcher shop in that city and asked her for an opportunity to work in her store. She consented to his request and for two weeks, back in Chicago, she trained Javier on how to cut the meat “Mexican style”, on how to cook *carnitas* and *chorizo* but also on how to operate the cash register and about the other services a store can offer (i.e. music, remittances, cashing checks). Once the butcher shop was in operation, his Chicago connection also proved useful in terms of locating suppliers of fresh meat in the South and obtaining further advice on how to attract and retain customers. Thus, this informal apprenticeship and his sustained contacts with this Chicago businesswoman provided Javier with the essential tools to begin a successful entrepreneurial career in Dalton. He recently opened a second store in town.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have argued that as they settle in new destinations—notably in the South—Mexican immigrants are deploying and transplanting social capital and funds of knowledge acquired in the historic homelands of this migration. The ability to actively draw information, resources and support from the networks that link them to places like Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston appears to be facilitating incorporation into parts of the South which are experiencing permanent Latino migration for the first time. This highlights the fact that although Mexicans are in general newcomers to states like Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Alabama, they have accumulated significant migration relevant social capital through a long history of sojourning in the United States.

Using the experience of Dalton, Georgia, as a case in point, we have contended that this mobilization of social capital and funds of knowledge has both collective and individual level consequences. At the collective level, there seems to be a compression of the migratory cycle as the immigrant settlement moves more rapidly than one would anticipate through the various stages of community formation and incorporation. In Dalton, Latino immigrants and members of the 1.5 generation are already venturing onto the political and civic arena. At the individual level, the ability to draw resources and to transplant experiences acquired in the historic homelands of Mexican immigration is clearly facilitating upward mobility through entrepreneurship and self-employment. Dalton's burgeoning ranks of immigrant and ethnic small enterprises attest to this point.

Here, we extrapolate claims and conclusions based on the experience of Mexicans in Dalton fully aware that not all Latino migrants in the South share the same characteristics. The research of Tim Dunn and his associates in rural Delmarva shows that Mexican newcomers

coming from Veracruz, a state without a tradition of migration to the United States, bring with them less social capital and are in a more precarious situation from the point of view of legal status (Dunn, Aragonés and Shivers forthcoming). By the same token, not all localities in the region offer the same context of reception. Incorporation into Dalton has also been facilitated by its industrial labor markets, a sustained demand for workers throughout the 1990s and the generally welcoming reception of immigrants on the part of the city's economic elite. Needless to say, agricultural labor markets and those localities where poultry and food processing dominate, such as those of Delmarva, offer a less appealing and less stable context for settlement. At the same time, the current recession casts doubts on the economic and social mobility gains of the previous decade, even in places like Dalton.

Still, the rise of new Mexican communities in Dalton and many other localities of the South calls for a better understanding of the diasporic experience of Latinos in the United States and of the ways in which their sojourning into atypical destinations is creating an increasingly complex social geography, cutting across and linking places, regions and nation-states.

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**TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE INDICATORS OF MEXICAN-BORN PARENTS IN DALTON**

	Fathers (n=396)		Mothers (n=411)	
	MEAN	STD DEV	MEAN	STD DEV
AGE	35.4	7.9	32.7	6.9
YEARS OF EDUCATION	7.1	3.2	7.4	3.0
YEARS IN DALTON	5.1	4.2	4.1	3.2
YEAR OF FIRST US-TRIP	1983	7.7	1988	6.3

YEARS IN LAST JOB BEFORE MOVING TO DALTON	5.9	5.4	4.0	3.2
YEARS BETWEEN FIRST U.S. TRIP AND ARRIVAL TO DALTON	9.2	7.3	5.3	5.9

Source: Survey of Hispanic Families in Dalton Public Schools, 1997.

**TABLE 2: PARENTS LIVING IN MEXICO BEFORE  
MOVING TO DALTON: FIRST U.S. TRIP PERIOD BY SEX (N=402)**

	MEN (N=232)	WOMEN (N=170)	BOTH
BEFORE 1986	48.9%	15.5%	29.6%
1986-1992	31.1%	33.2%	32.3%
1993-1997	20.0%	51.3%	38.1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Source: Survey of Hispanic Families in Dalton Public Schools, 1997.