

## The Weight of Social Assets: Argentinean Migrants in Spain

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*Abstract:* Using diverse conceptualisations of social capital, this paper analyses qualitative data obtained from interviews with Argentine migrants to Spain and returnees. Findings show that, unlike other Latin American migrants to Spain, this group of Argentines approached the migratory experience as a 'nuclear family'. In general, respondents tend to develop diversified networks, avoiding the constraints experienced by the 'typical' migrant. A number of factors including citizenship status, feelings of entitlement, cultural affinity and physical features were crucial for the interviewees' migration experience. In general, most interviewees also pointed out that they tend to have more trust in institutions and the community as a whole in Spain than in Argentina. On the other hand, they also suggest that solidarity and friendship ties were stronger in Argentina than in Spain. *Keywords:* migration, social assets, Argentines, Latin Americans, Spain.

A review of the literature reveals that the concept of social capital has several different meanings, which often refer to diverse interpretations and ideological stances. Indeed, social capital is a very dynamic notion that can be approached from various different angles. As Pena López and Sánchez Santos (2007) argue 'despite lacking a solid definition, the emergent notion of social capital is a central element in the debate on development' (p. 1).

This paper explores how two diverse conceptualizations of social capital apply to the migratory experience of a group of Argentine migrants to Spain and returnees. Introducing 'migration' as a variable into the analysis of social capital certainly appends an additional challenge. This occurs because factors such as cultural background, perceived discrimination in the host country, psychological predispositions towards the migratory experience and country of origin have all to be taken into account. It is therefore crucial to be cautious when it comes to generalizing as different immigrant groups tend to construct and develop social assets in different ways. Thus, it is argued that certain special characteristics make Argentine immigrants to Spain to build and develop social capital in a unique manner.

### **Bourdieu and Putnam: two approaches, one concept**

Social capital is not a new concept. For example, the origins of social capital can be traced back to classic authors, including Karl Marx (1969) and Emile Durkheim (1933). More recently, the concept of social capital becomes fundamental in Bourdieu's work. Using a Marxist perspective, the French sociologist pays particular attention to the social relationships and the extent to which they are recognised, accepted and legitimized in certain *fields* (Bourdieu 1986, 1992). Although Bourdieu concedes that economic relations, ultimately, regulate all social relations, he challenges the economic determinism of classic Marxism. The core of his work emphasizes the crucial relevance of cultural, linguistic, symbolic and social capital

in understanding social relations. According to Bourdieu, social capital relies on the resources and capacities that draw from the networks (institutionalized or not) that individuals build as they deal with different situations during their lives (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). These personal relationships, which may include family and friends, have crucial implications in terms of power relations as they determine to a large extent the position of the individuals within the various *fields*, which are the institutional and social arenas where people struggle for the different forms of capital. These *fields* represent the spaces where individuals usually make efforts to improve their positions and they tend to be organized according to hierarchies (Bourdieu 1980, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The *fields* are constituted by a number of structures and networks and individuals may occupy different hierarchies in different *fields* according to the place where they are situated at a given time. Thus, individuals tend to hold differential power capacities at different *fields* (Gaventa 2003; Navarro 2006).

Drawing from a different theoretical tradition, Putnam (1993a) defines social capital as 'those features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam 1993a, 167). Putnam (1993a) presents networks of civic engagement and participation as a precondition for an effective government, because they foster more powerful norms of generalized reciprocity. Civic engagement facilitates coordination, communication, and collaboration among members of society.

Unlike Bourdieu, Putnam (1993a) does not employ the concept of social capital to explain social struggle and structural inequity. Putnam states that networks are mostly based on solidarity and mutual trust, and high social capital usually corresponds to a well-functioning economic system and a high level of political integration (Putnam 1993a). Putnam points out that associational involvement encourages political discussion and the exchange of political information, and also promotes civic virtues like political engagement. He argues that the health of public institutions depends, in part, on widespread participation in private voluntary groups, those networks of civic engagement that embody social capital (Putnam 2000, 336).

Bourdieu and Putnam introduce different approaches to the concept of social capital. Bourdieu's main focus concentrates on the social struggle and social conflict that take place in different *fields*. Putnam identifies civic engagement as a significant element in reconstituting trust and solidarity and therefore, in the rebuilding of social relations. While Bourdieu understands social struggle as a means to improve the position of individuals and their accumulation of power, Putnam is concerned about issues of social cohesion and integration, which lead him to search for alternatives in order to avoid social fragmentation.

### **Social assets and migration**

The field of migration studies is large and there are a substantial number of studies that address the relationships between social capital and migration. In general, these works describe social capital as a conglomerate of interpersonal webs that work as a resource to alleviate the cost and risk of the migratory endeavour in several domains. Migrants and potential migrants rely on these networks that include rela-

tives, friends and acquaintances at both the sending and receiving countries. In this context, resources refer to information, psychological support and financial help (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey and Aysa 2005).

Likewise, asset-based approaches have been increasingly used to understand the resource endowments and capabilities migrants accumulate and transfer across generations. Asset-based frameworks refer to a wide range of resources, including *tangible* (financial, physical, human) and *intangible* (social, civic and political) capital (Dani and Moser 2008; Ginieniewicz 2011a; Moser 2007). The *asset accumulation framework* (Moser 2007, 2009) analyses levels of correlations between individual and household characteristics and poverty, emphasizing the relevance of the global socio-political context (Moser 2009). Originally developed to address issues of poverty and vulnerability, this framework has been recently utilized to analyse migration issues.

Pointing specifically to social assets, Dani and Moser (2008) consider them to be the most important source of finance and information for 'out-migration'. Social assets are presented as a key element in maintaining transnational links and promoting investment in facilities and local communities as well as in education for family members back home. The authors also point out that social assets determine the extent to which the money remitted to the home society will benefit the community. Interestingly, several asset-based studies have made it evident that both migrants' diverse socio-economic origins and the uneven development of hometown associations in the sending societies have an impact on the development of social assets (Anarfi and Jägare 2008; Azam 2008).

This paper introduces the concept of social assets and identifies its relevance to work on Argentine immigrants to Spain. The significance of social capital on migration studies is well documented, especially concerning the issue of remittances. However, little is known about the interaction of social capital with other forms of assets beyond remittances. This paper presents insights to analyse social assets from a broader perspective. Using a transnational asset accumulation framework, it explores the interaction among social, cultural and human assets. By doing so, it aims to increase understanding on how culturally determined characteristics, education and family structure are related to social relationships and how these processes affect Latin American immigrants, particularly Argentines, in Spain.

### **Argentina and Spain: a case for 'asset circulation'**

In the 1880s, in order to populate the nation and promote economic growth, Argentina promoted an open immigration policy, which brought to the country two million Spanish migrants. Later on, as a result of the civil war in Spain (1936-1939), another wave of Spanish migrants arrived in Argentina (Ginieniewicz and Castiglione 2010; Moya 1998; Novick and Murias 2005).

In the mid-1970s a relatively significant number of political refugees from Argentina arrived in Spain to escape from the military dictatorship. Two other important migratory waves of Argentines reached Spain in the late 1980s and late 1990s, both a result of the extreme socio-economic decline of the sending country. In contrast, since Franco's death in 1975, the socio-economic situation in Spain gradually improved. The country became part of the EU in 1986 and experienced

particular economic success (Banco de España 2006; Malo de Molina 2007).

As Spain's economic boom became evident, part of the offspring of those Spanish migrants in Argentina along with other Italian descendants decided to emigrate to the land of their ancestors, which, according to the existing legislation, allowed them to become European citizens. Figures suggest that around half of the 300,000 Argentine-born migrants who now live in Spain hold European citizenship, mainly Spanish or Italian (Actis and Esteban 2007).

Recent evidence indicates that the number of Spanish immigrants arriving in Argentina has increased significantly since 2008, when a severe economic and financial crisis hit the European country. The current relative economic bonanza of Argentina, which was not significantly affected by the global financial crisis, combined with high rates of unemployment and debt in Spain, generated a 'reverse migration' towards the Southern country.<sup>1</sup>

Several studies hypothesize that, for both Argentines and Spaniards, cultural affinity (or cultural assets) have played a significant role in pondering possible destinations to emigrate. Thus, certain cultural codes and language have been identified as significant reasons for choosing Spain and Argentina (Cook-Martin and Viladrich 2009; Ginieniewicz and Castiglione 2010; Moya 1998).

In terms of financial assets, or remittances, data are only available for the last decade. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), which tracks the financial assets sent to Latin America, unlike other countries in the region, the money remitted by Argentines to their home country represents a very small portion of the country's GDP.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of social assets, it became evident that both Spaniards and Argentines looked at each other's country when economic and political 'pushing factors' made them emigrate. There is significant evidence to suggest that individuals who have friends and/or relatives are more likely to emigrate than those who do not. Those who face the endeavour of moving to a new country, tend to rely on people who can be trusted. As Massey and Aysa (2005, 5) point out, 'each person who migrates raises the prevalence of migration in the community to generate more social capital, which induces more people to migrate, which raises prevalence even more to generate still more migrants and more social capital, and so on'. All in all, the exchange of (financial, cultural, and social) assets between Argentina and Spain was fluid, steady and significant.

In a recent work, Avila (2008) analyses the structure and composition of migrants' networks and their relationships with the processes of insertion in the receiving society. The author compares the networks developed by Argentine, Dominican, Moroccan and Senegalese/Gambian migrants to Catalonia, (Spain) and finds that Argentines tend to develop more segmented and relatively heterogeneous networks compared to the other groups. The author argues that Argentines in Spain are prone to 'disperse assimilation' ('asimilación dispersa'), and given that many hold European citizenship (or have the capacity to acquire residence documents in a relatively straightforward manner) the institutional and social barriers they face in the receiving society are minor or non-existent. Their opportunities for integration are therefore considerably higher than other groups of migrants (Avila 2008).

## Data and research methodology

The results presented in this paper were drawn from 19 interviews with Argentine migrants to Spain conducted in Barcelona in September 2008. Interviewees had been living in Spain for at least three years. Data were also drawn from interviews with 30 Argentines, who had returned from the Spanish cities of Barcelona, Madrid and Palma de Mallorca, conducted in Buenos Aires between January and April 2009. All the respondents in Buenos Aires had returned to Argentina at least one year prior to the interview.<sup>3</sup>

Out of the 49 interviewees, 45 per cent were women and 55 per cent men; 14 per cent arrived in Spain between 1975 and 1982 and the same proportion between 1983 and 1992; 40 per cent arrived between 1993 and 2002; and 30 per cent arrived between 2003 and 2008. Slightly more than half of the interviewees held European citizenship; the sample also included a similar proportion (about 23 per cent) of individuals who either had work permits or were undocumented.

This paper is based primarily on qualitative data. While some quantitative results were included in the findings, it is important to keep in mind that these figures were drawn from a very small and non-representative sample of Argentine migrants to Spain and returnees. Additionally, I used a snowballing recruitment technique to find the respondents. Thus, the results presented in this paper should by no means be considered 'representative of Argentine migrants to Spain and returnees'. Given all the characteristics mentioned above, the findings presented here have to be taken with great deal of caution. In view of the sample size and the research design it is important to stress that this paper will not be able to address causation among the variables. Yet, I consider the results a step forward in the exploration of the way Argentine migrants to Spain build and develop social capital in the receiving country.

### *Arrival and settlement*

About half of the respondents (N=49) arrived in Spain alone (Table 1); 56 per cent of them (N=25) left their partners in Argentina. Of those who travelled to Spain with a relative (41 per cent), about six out of 10 did so with their partners.

**Table 1:** How did you arrive in Spain? (N=49)

Status	Total
Alone	51 %
With a relative	41 %
With friends	8 %

Recalling his decision to immigrate to Spain, one interviewee said:

Although we made the decision together as a family, I arrived here alone. I came just before the 2001 crisis; my wife and children stayed in Argentina. I didn't know anybody in Spain. I had never been to Europe before although I held Spanish citizenship because my grandfather immigrated to Argentina before the First World War I obtained citizenship in the mid-1990s because Argentina has always been very unstable. You never know there.... So I came

here, got a job and brought my family over within two months. I never thought it would be so easy to settle down (Javier, M).<sup>4</sup>

Another respondent also explained how he made the decision to move to Spain:

The way I decided to come to Spain was very strange because I almost got a job through the Internet... I am an industrial designer and applied for a job from Buenos Aires. I exchanged a couple of emails with my potential employer and although I had to do well in the personal interview I had a good feeling about my chances. I discussed it with my wife and we decided I should go. So, I came to Barcelona and got the job. Of course, before the interview they had asked me if I had European citizenship, which I had. Soon after I got the job, I brought my wife and children (Daniel, M).

Another respondent, who had no documents at the time of her arrival in Spain, said:

I came to Barcelona with a friend who had a Spanish passport and family in Galicia. We lived in a small town in that region and I met some Spaniards who helped me get a job in a bar. I stayed there for quite a long time and I finally got my work permit. Then I came to Barcelona because it is a much bigger city and resembles Buenos Aires. Once I got the work permit, everything was much easier. I gained confidence and started talking to everybody to find out about jobs and opportunities. Spain is pretty much like Argentina, but getting and changing jobs is much easier here. You do not need to beg your family and friends for a job (Analía, M).

In reflecting on how he developed his networks in Spain, an interviewee pointed out:

Barcelona is very similar to Buenos Aires but much safer and more organized; I feel comfortable and I always try to meet new people, particularly Spaniards who can help me find better jobs and give me tips about life here (Gabriel, M).

Only six out of the 49 interviewees (12 per cent) said that they sent money to Argentina at least once since their arrival in Spain. Two of them sent money on a regular basis and four did so occasionally. In general, respondents pointed out that the decision to migrate was a personal one and that they did not therefore feel compelled to send money back to Argentina. Moreover, for those who have partners and children, this nuclear structure was what they considered 'family'. They tended to put their parents, brothers and sisters in a more peripheral sphere. One of the respondents who occasionally sent money to Argentina said:

The decision to immigrate was mine, very personal, and I do not feel any economic obligation to anybody in Argentina. In my family, my parents are divorced and my brothers live alone. I am very close to them but in seven years, I sent money only once: was because my father went through an expensive type of surgery and I felt I had to contribute but I do not send money on a regular basis (Francisco, M).

Interestingly, in most of the cases, family reunification took place soon after the arrival of the first migrant in the host country. In connection with this situation,

very few interviewees reported sending remittances to Argentina. Those who did so, only sent money occasionally and often for very specific reasons.

### Trust

When asked about their perceptions regarding the levels of trust in both the receiving and sending societies, 47 per cent considered that the level of ‘trust in the other’ is similar in both societies; 45 per cent said that the level of ‘trust in the other’ is higher in Spain than in Argentina (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Perceptions about the levels of trust in ‘the other’ (N=49)

Levels of trust	Total
People’s trust in ‘the other’ is greater in Spain than in Argentina	47 %
People’s trust in ‘the other’ is similar in both countries	45 %
People’s trust in ‘the other’ is greater in Argentina than in Spain	8 %

Some interviewees recognized that higher levels of ‘trust in the other’ existed in Spain. At the same time, some of them also suggested that friendship ties tend to be weaker in Spain:

In Spain, I see a sort of paradox because even though people trust *the other*, nobody would talk to you. I lived in Spain in the 1980s, then I left; when I came back in the 2000s I noticed that Spain had become a very individualistic country. People are very concerned with consuming and making money. In Argentina, among your friends, you still find more solidarity in day-to-day practices. In Argentina, there is definitely more friendship. For example, you do not need to call in advance to go to someone’s house: you just show up. Your friends are always ready to help you, to assist you, to listen...But at the same time, in Argentina you can get mugged around the corner at any moment and that is why you cannot trust strangers (Roberto, M).

One interviewee further analysed her perceptions regarding friendship in Spain and Argentina:

In Spain, you trust the community or a person you do not know. Unlike Argentina, if you have to do business with someone you do not know in Spain, you trust in that person. However, I think that feelings of friendship are stronger and more entrenched in Argentina than in Spain (Alicia, R).

Another respondent expanded on the issue:

In Spain, you trust people regarding safety: you do not feel threatened all the time; your belongings are safer. But at the same time, you do not really talk to your neighbour; you do not know who that person is. I did not have what I call ‘real friends’. I was pretty much alone. My Spaniard co-workers were polite but we never became friends. There is trust but no proximity. I felt there was a sense of community but no personal and close friendship like in Argentina (Natalia, R).

In his comments, one respondent highlighted the differences between the institutional systems:

In Spain you generally trust more in the other but I think this has to do with trusting institutions. If the institutions are reliable, people become more reliable, too. For example, in Spain, the rules are the same for everybody and they do not change and if they do change they tell you one year in advance, so you know what is going to happen. In Argentina, one day you have a law and the next day it changes. Nobody trusts the institutions (Osvaldo, M.).

The same interviewee further elaborated on the issue of trust in the institutions, particularly regarding the payment of taxes.

In Argentina, people feel that it is convenient to evade taxes because the state gives them very little. Most of the money people pay goes straight into politicians' pockets. They steal the money, literally. In Spain, it is worth paying, it makes sense. Of course, the system is stricter and evading taxes is a serious crime. But on top of that, there is a lot of trust involved in paying taxes. For example, the first time I showed my bank that I had paid taxes, I was given an overdraft credit ten times higher than the amount I had paid. Although for me this is now 'normal', at that time, I could not believe it. These are the things that build trust and confidence in a society (Osvaldo, M.).

In general, most interviewees reported that individuals tend to trust more in the community as a whole, as well as in the institutions in Spain than in Argentina. Data also suggested that their perceptions of solidarity and friendship ties were reverse. They considered the strength of these kinds of ties as stronger in Argentina than in Spain.

### *Social assets: the migratory enterprise as a nuclear family project*

The findings presented in this paper were drawn from a very small and non-representative sample; yet, they closely reflect the IADB reports, as very few interviewees remitted money regularly to Argentina. In general, remitting money to Argentina tended to be an unusual occurrence among respondents and was mostly associated with particular circumstances in which relatives and/or friends needed specific financial help. In other words, remitting money was not the main objective of the interviewees' migratory venture, as it is for many migrants from other origins. Although the reason to migrate may have been similar (economically-driven), particularly in the late 1980s and 1990s (Actis and Esteban 2007; Ginieniewicz 2009), I argue that the decision to not remit money to Argentina is closely related to the way Argentine migrants in Spain construct and develop their social assets and family relations.

Although the majority of respondents arrived alone, the choice to migrate seems often to have been a 'family decision', taken by the couple and eventually the children. Unlike other Latin American migrants to Spain among whom migration entails a potential means to achieve upward social mobility for the whole family in the sending country, in the case of Argentines, the decision to immigrate to Spain was rarely conceived as a project that included the extended family. Interviewees struggled their way up in the *field* of migrants relying on their nuclear family.

It is also significant to highlight that, unlike other groups of Latin Americans, Argentine migration to Spain did not go through a process of feminisation (Actis and Esteban 2007). In general, Argentines immigrate to Spain with their partners and children, a fact that is reflected in the gender balance of the migratory flows (Actis and Esteban 2007). Findings drawn from this study confirm this tendency, as most interviewees who had partners and children tended to arrive in Spain with them, or proceeded to the reunification soon after their arrival. This represents a significant contrast to other groups of Latin American migrants. As previous studies conducted among Ecuadorean (Pedone and Gil Araujo 2008) and Bolivian (Bastía 2009) migrants to Spain have shown, grandparents often play a significant role in supporting women migrants by providing childcare for the children left in the sending country. Situations that involved 'transnational motherhood' or migrants' parents looking after their grandchildren tend to be more unusual among Argentine families.

In general, when the interviewee was single, she/he took the decision to migrate alone; when she/he had a partner, the decision was agreed with the nuclear family and a quick reunification (in weeks or a few months) was usually aimed for. This also represents a significant contrast to other groups of Latin Americans among which reunification tends to be completed once social networks have been expanded and consolidated in Spain, perhaps after years of separation (Jariego 2009; Pedone and Gil Araujo 2008). Arguably, this also leads to a somewhat different form of building social assets, as Argentine migrants tend to uproot their nuclear family from Argentina to Spain and replicate the characteristics of the family prior to departure to the receiving society. In this context, it is relevant that many Argentinean migrants to Spain hold European citizenship, which simplifies the reunification process.

#### *Cumulative causation vs. diversification of networks*

Substantial empirical evidence supports the notion of 'cumulative causation' of migration (Massey 1990) (Palloni et al. 2001), showing that *potential* migrants are prone to immigrate where they have friends and/or acquaintances in the receiving country. Nonetheless, the development of social assets can hardly be considered an even and homogeneous occurrence, due to the fact that many variables such as migratory origins, expectations and settlement conditions, among others, can affect this process (Garip 2008). I argue that the conceptualization of 'cumulative causation' may not necessarily apply to Argentine migrants to Spain, given that factors like linguistic and cultural affinity (Ginieniewicz and Castiglione 2010), citizenship status, expectations attached to the migratory endeavour and family structure also play a significant role in the decision to migrate.

Qualitative data drawn from this study corroborates what quantitative studies have previously found (Avila 2008): In Spain, social assets work differently among diverse groups of migrants and, in the case of Argentines, social networks seem to be more diversified. Avila (2008), nevertheless, suggests that the diversification of networks among Argentine migrants to Spain is strong, and almost exclusively related to the legal status of many Argentines in Europe. I would hold that although those Argentine-born citizens who reside in Spain and hold European citizenship

certainly have a 'comparative advantage' (or a 'valuable asset') to support their migratory project, the Argentinean networks in Spain have a more complex background than only this issue.

Argentines do not exclusively rely on co-nationals and seem to avoid some of the typical networks migrants tend to become part of. Arguably, becoming part of different, and more diversified, networks provides them with more assets in the *field* of migrants. I believe that the higher diversification of networks among Argentine migrants to Spain is due to both the assets brought from Argentina and those incorporated following their arrival in the new country. As many Argentine migrants to Spain were relatively highly educated (Actis and Esteban 2007; Ginieniewicz 2009) they became part of certain networks that allowed them, in many cases, to avoid the 'typical migrant job'. Yet, the human capital previously accumulated is not enough to explain the diversification of social networks. Migrants arriving in Spain from other Latin American or Eastern European countries also attained relatively high educational levels and their social networks tend to be more homogeneous compared to those of Argentines.

It has been argued (Ginieniewicz 2011a) that Argentines in Spain tend to be less discriminated against than other groups and that they hold certain 'psychological predispositions' that lead them to articulate certain *feelings of entitlement* in the host society. Moreover, cultural affinity, similar consumption patterns and even a similar phenotype were also suggested as factors that promote the rather smooth process of integration of Argentine migrants in Spain. Most importantly, all these circumstances have also boosted a differential construction of the image of the different groups (García 2004; Ginieniewicz 2011a; Retis 2005).

A number of studies have emphasized that country of origin is a relevant variable in the analysis of Latin American migration to Spain (Actis and Esteban 2007; Cacopardo, Maguid and Martínez 2007; Ginieniewicz and Castiglione 2010). There is agreement among these studies that, in general, Argentines receive a better treatment from Spanish society than other Latin Americans. A number of hypotheses have been proposed to explain this situation. First, about half of the Argentines in Spain hold European citizenship; this proportion is much higher than any of the other Latin American nationalities. Second, Argentines in Spain are represented by a significant number of professionals and hold higher levels of education compared to other Latin Americans (Actis and Esteban 2007; Ginieniewicz 2009). Third, in the last 150 years Argentina and Spain have had a two-way migration history that is unique and distinctive. Fourth, Argentines are, after Ecuadoreans and Colombians, the third largest group of Latin American origin living in Spain. Individuals from these other countries tend to be considered 'relatively recent' immigrants in contrast to Argentines, who have been living in Spain since the late 1970s. Arguably, this circumstance transforms Argentines in a 'more settled' community, with more permanent and diversified networks.

I argue that the combination of all the above-mentioned factors strengthened interviewees' confidence to explore different, and unknown, networks. As Bourdieu (1980, 1986) points out, social networks are critical in deciding the strategic *position* of individuals in the different *fields*. The diversification of social assets responded to the Argentine migrants in Spain's natural, and even unconscious, strategy to advance their interests. Arguably, the strategies Argentine migrants im-

plemented to improve their social position in Spain were relatively similar to those used in Argentina, which, in turn, promoted a quick understanding on how to take advantage of their social assets.

### *The issue of trust*

The concept of trust becomes crucial to understand ties of reciprocity and belonging among individuals. According to Putnam, trusting individuals tend to promote solid and durable relationships, which in turn have a positive effect on the strength and cohesiveness of the community at large. Trust encourages individuals to follow the law and act with honesty and integrity. This, Putnam argues, has implications in the overall prosperity of a given society. It is, therefore, relevant to explore the issue of trust in order to comprehend how, and the extent to which, there are differences in the relationships developed by Argentine immigrants, both in the sending and receiving societies (Putnam 1993b).

A significant number of respondents considered that trust was greater in Spain than in Argentina. This qualitative enquiry focused on trust as a generic term and did not measure levels of institutional trust or trust in specific groups of people. As a result, the meaning of the word 'trust' became somehow problematic because some interviewees pointed to the trust (*confianza* in Spanish) they deposited in *unknown fellow citizens* (Ginieniewicz 2011b) and others referred to trust in their friends.<sup>5</sup> In general, the qualitative data suggest that moving to Spain implied an increase in the overall levels of trust of interviewees. This reaction was twofold; on the one hand, it referred to a feeling of greater personal safety; on the other hand, it reflected a greater reliance on the community as a whole.

Putnam (1993a, 1995) argues that social capital is essential to the wellbeing of any given democracy and that voluntary associations and networks of civic engagement are key elements to underpin individuals' solidarity, trust and tolerance. Putnam, who equates economic success with horizontal relations that, in turn, promote higher levels of civic engagement and societal organisation, considers that civic engagement leads to higher levels of trust and solidarity (Beugelsdijk and Van Schaik 2004).

Interviewees perceived that the wider community and the *neighbour next door* can be trusted to a greater extent in Spain than in Argentina because the civic norms are more respected in the former than in the latter country. To a certain extent, they perceived that the foundations of the social contract were stronger in Spain than in Argentina, although at the same time they identified personal relations and friendship ties as looser in the receiving society. They believed that individualism, competition and personal trust are all quite prevalent in Spanish society.

The Spanish economic boom of the last 20 years is well-documented. Since its entrance in the EU, Spain has experienced an impressive economic development, which also attracted migrants (Amuedo-Dorantes and De la Rica 2007; Conde-Ruiz, García and Navarro 2008). However, some respondents felt that in Spain the pressure to improve economic performance has also promoted higher levels of competitiveness and selfishness, which affected human relations. Arguably, in Spain the (new) standards of a high-growth economy are eroding friendship and solidarity; in Argentina, although these values are still noted, the lack of better

economic opportunities, corruption and poverty undermine the fundamental nature of social relations.

Although respondents emphasized the importance of personal safety and *trust in the other* that they experienced in Spain, they also mentioned that the feelings of proximity and friendship they acquired in that country did not compare to those they experienced in Argentina, where solidarity and personal relations were much more entrenched. To some extent this situation represented a sort of paradox due to the fact that respondents tended to trust and rely in the community to a greater extent in Spain than in Argentina.

Like migrants from other countries, Argentines in Spain find it difficult to consolidate and develop strong ties of solidarity and friendship with the native population. Although cultural affinity may have eased their incorporation into Spanish society, respondents acquired primary socialisation in Argentina; thus, they conceived the essence of terms like *friendship*, *solidarity* and *trust* in a different way compared to Spaniards. This would support the hypothesis that social capital, as Putnam understands it, can hardly be considered a homogenous concept uniformly applicable to any group. As noted, trust and solidarity ties can be affected by a myriad of factors (LiPuma and Koelble 2009; Lancee and Dronkers 2011), particularly when analysing migrant populations. Therefore, country of origin, length of residence, previous political experiences, just to mention a few key variables, become significant elements that need to be considered.

Some interviewees also suggested that, when it came to business transactions, they had a greater trust in people in Spain than in Argentina. The relevance of trust in economic transactions has been highlighted and in general, social capital has been considered an important factor in understanding the economic success of industrialized countries (Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone 1998; Beugelsdijk and Van Schaik 2004). Nevertheless, it is also essential to bear in mind that the causality among the key components of social capital, including civic involvement, reciprocity, honesty and trust cannot be easily determined and are, as Putnam admitted, 'as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti' (Putnam 2000, 137). Therefore, *causal* explanations should be avoided; rather, it seems more appropriate to consider these factors to be *related*.

In Argentina, like other Latin American countries, trust in public institutions and organisations is indeed low, and doubts about the efficiency and transparency of these structures remain quite prevalent. An on-going pattern of public corruption represents a serious threat to democracy in Argentina and citizens' confidence in public institutions and political parties has been declining over the years (Braier, Esper and Corinaldesi 2004; Jorge 2007). It can be argued that, as institutions and the community as a whole (represented by the *unknown fellow citizen*) are not usually trusted, expressions of individual solidarity and friendship become paramount. Personal solidarity and friendship, in part, tend to fill the gap left by the institutional decline.

### **Closing remarks**

This paper demonstrates that researching social capital in the context of migratory studies is a particularly challenging task due to the fact that several aspects have to

be included in the analysis. In the case of Latin American immigrants to Spain, I suggested that historical circumstances, migratory policies as well as individuals' migratory status and educational achievement may have all an impact on immigrants' construction and development of their social networks. The aforementioned list of variables is by no means exhaustive and could certainly be expanded and adapted according to the population studied. Yet, it reflects that social capital should be addressed by using a multi-dimensional framework, especially when targeting heterogeneous communities.

In the case of Argentinean migrants in Spain I argued that they develop social capital in a particular manner, which is different from other Latin American groups. Issues related to length of residence, citizenship status, *feelings of entitlement* and the *construction* of their internal and external image made of them a very particular group. Moreover, in general, Argentines arrived in Spain with a migratory project that did not include the family left back home. Following Bourdieu's conceptualization on social capital, I suggested that unlike other Latin American migrants to Spain, this group of Argentines approached the migratory experience as an undertaking led by the 'nuclear family'. Respondents tended to develop diversified networks, avoiding some of the typical constraints experienced by migrants. Hence, I argued that a number of distinctive factors including citizenship status, cultural affinity, and even a certain phenotype all became relevant to improving respondents' situation in the *field* of migrants.

Putnam's framework helps to identify the complexity of notions such as trust and solidarity when approaching immigrant groups, particularly regarding a 'dual perspective' towards both the home and host societies. Findings indicate that about half of the respondents consider that people's trust in 'the other' is similar in Spain and Argentina. Mixed perceptions about trust and solidarity could be related to the image others (both native Spaniards and other immigrant groups) built of the respondents. For a number of reasons previously described, Argentines in Spain present (and represent) themselves as representatives of both the home and host societies, which are indeed intertwined as a result of profuse and relatively constant migratory exchanges as well as close cultural and social relationships.

It is also relevant to emphasize that respondents were able to perceive the differences between the two societies and rely on 'the most beneficial' parts of them. This would indicate that they hold a sense of belonging and attachment to both countries. Respondents admired and incorporated Spaniards' trust in the *unknown fellow citizen*, which in turn reflects an ultimate trust in the community as a whole. This kind of trust was complemented by another type, typical of the home country, which relies on the respondents' inner circle and builds on friendship and solidarity. This 'dual type of trust' corresponds with the dual-perspective and double-identity developed by most Argentines in Spain.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

1. It is calculated that more than 33,000 Spaniards arrived in Argentina in the last two years. See: ‘Miles de españoles emigran a Argentina por la crisis’ [Electronic Version 2008]. Retrieved November 14, 2011, from <http://www.eleconomista.es/flash-ecodiario/noticias/2638668/11/10/Miles-de-espanoles-emigran-a-Argentina-por-la-crisis.html>
2. See Annual Report on Remittances. Multilateral Investment Fund/Inter-American Development Bank ([www.iadb.org](http://www.iadb.org)).
3. It is very relevant to mention that data presented in this study were collected before the effects of the 2008-2011 financial crisis hit Spain.
4. Migrants are identified with an ‘M’; returnees are identified with an ‘R’.
5. The qualitative instrument allowed interviewees to elaborate on their perceptions regarding trust in both societies, which –in turn- led to different (and broad) interpretations of the concept of *trust*. Although this may represent, to some extent, a weakness of the design, at the same time, its exploratory nature may open relevant avenues for future research.

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