

Multiples uses of ICTs by Mexican immigrants organizations in Chicago¹.

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Abstract:

This paper is about how organizations focused on Mexican immigrants in Chicago have been used the ITCs (Information and Communication Technologies. Shouldn't they be then called ICTs? Please double check). Our goal is to identify the organization and structure of the spaces created by Mexican diasporas in the Internet (called *webdiasporas*) and verify which particular group makes use of them, which narrative elements are used for identification and positioning in the transnational, intercultural and multi-territorial contexts. To do it, we used semi-structured interviews with members of Mexican immigrant organizations and a content and discursive analysis of their websites, Facebook pages and others web platforms used by them – in a qualitative approach. We find that the *webdiaspora* is a reflex of personal and presential movements and actions of these organizations and serves, at the same time, as communitarian and an institutional media. As the cultural manifestations or activities of these groups, it serves as a tool of education about Mexican roots and a way to revive the past in original country.

Keywords:

Immigrants organizations, ICTs., Webdiaspora, Hybrid identity, Mexicans in Chicago.

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Introduction

The most primary empirical analysis leaves no doubt about the expressive presence, in the web, of diasporic communities of ethnical, cultural, national and/or social. There are numerous sites, blogs, electronic magazines and newspapers, groups, communities and social networking pages, elaborated, maintained and attended exclusively by members of these communities. To this massive presence we refer to, as explained later, as "*webdiaspora*". These virtual spaces can contribute to facilitating diaspora identity construction and have been gained importance as a communication platform, a workplace, a site of play, a location for political debate, a mobilization tool, and indeed as a necessity in all spheres of daily life.

In Chicago (USA), semi-organized and institutionalized Mexican immigrant organizations have a virtual space used by their members for the reordering of experiences and social and subjective diasporic practices. We believe that these Mexican *webdiasporas* can contain narrative elements that are used for identification and positioning in the intercultural, multi-territorial and transnational context and also they are suitable for construction or imagination of the community's history (origins, performance, status etc.). According to Heike Mónica Greschke (2012: 210), "populations in migration, along with their specific use of communications technologies, [...] are predestined to produce new forms of sociality, unfolding them in the everyday lives of individuals and become promoted and shape by them".

So, the goal of this article is to understand: how *webdiasporas* reinforce intercultural and multi-territorial perspectives, influencing process of identity formation and belonging within the immigrant organization? What does it mean for a community to connect on the global communication network as the Internet? How can be ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) mobilized to facilitate transnational communication across space and time in situation involving diasporas? And what is its

reverberation on the content to organization and/or its members?

To answer these questions above, we contacted 10 immigrant organizations in Chicago². Our focus was cultural and artistic organizations or other kind of organizations that promote and/or maintain activities related to cultural and artistic events. As we know, these groups are diverse and have been expanding their spheres of action to include others aspects – as cultural, labor, human rights and faith-based – besides the initial philanthropic activities and preserve the national identity, like promotion and defense of human and labor rights.

The 10 organizations were chosen after consulting with staff members of the: *Consulado General de México en Chicago*, *Red Mexicana de Organizaciones y Líderes Migrantes*, *Casa Michoacán / FEDECFMI*, *National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)*, and Google searches. We did the semi-structured interviews with one or two members of each association, for a total of 15 interviews³. All interviews were conducted face to face (in the communities' headquarters, the members' house, at the University of Illinois in Chicago or in a cafe), recorded and transcribed. The interviews included a battery of "open questions" – that served as a guide⁴. Besides, we did a content and discursive analysis of websites, Facebook pages and other web platforms used by

² They are: Museo Nacional de Arte Mexicano de Chicago, Mexican Dance Ensemble, Casa Juan Diego, CALMEC / Calpulli Ocelotl-Cihuaotl, Ballet Folklórico of Northwstern, Clubes Unidos Guerrerenses del Medio Oeste, Casa Michoacán, Telpochcalli Community Educational Project (TCEP), Sonnes de México Ensemble and Pilsen Neighborhood Community Council.

³ The names of those interviewed for this article have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

⁴ For example: What technological tools related to communication do you have knowledge of and practice? When do you put a new content in the website of the organization what is your main goal? How often do you update the community webpage? Do you track their social media impact with specialized software to know how many people visited the page, how many clicked on a certain tab, the demographic profile of internet visitors or Facebook visitors, etc.?

them – in a qualitative approach, using the methodology proposed by Bardin (1977) and Fairclough (2011).

Immigrants organizations and media

In 1990, the United States had 19.8 million immigrants. That number rose to a record 40.7 million immigrants in 2012. “Today there are four states in which about one-in-five or more people are foreign born – California, New York, New Jersey and Florida” (Krogstad y Keegan, 2014). The state of Illinois is one of 15 states of the country with the highest share of immigrants in their population (it is in 10th position in the ranking). According to the statistical profile of the foreign-born population is based on Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project tabulations of the Census Bureau’s 2012 American Community Survey (ACS), in 2012, immigrants made up 13,8% of Illinois’ population.

Chicago has a long immigration history. The Mexican immigrant communities were originally formed in the second half of the 19th century, but they have proliferated since the early 1980s in the city. Nowadays, there are about 600 Mexican (or Hispanic, in general) groups in the city and metropolitan region. Although each of the Mexican community organizations have different priorities, goals and ideologies, they have generally favored three types of activities: 1) the mobilization for the legalization of undocumented migrants; 2) the search for solutions to problems and inherent in the residence in this region – education, health, culture, housing, addictions, crime, city services, among others; and 3) the Mexican political agenda –right to vote from abroad and have representation in the Congress (Góngora et al., 2005: 02).

Other studies (Bada, 2014; Escudero, 2007) show us that their degree of organization, sophistication and expansion is related with the kind of insertion in the host society and with the local opportunity structures in which immigrants organizations and their leaders. In a big and

urban city like Chicago, we have others factories that contribute to development of these organizations: the great number of Mexican immigrants and the existence of community-based organizations and foundations, the strategic location of international airports, better public transportation and the relative easy and chip access to technological advances, such telephone, Internet, fax machines etc. Besides, in the late 1980s, Mexican state changed its policy on incorporating emigrants – “In 1991, [former president] Carlos Salinas met with Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley and the Mexican expatriate community in the West Side neighborhood of Little Village, the Mexican capital of the Midwest” (Bada, 2014: 04). Since then, the Mexican government has implemented new programs and policies to incorporate the Mexican Diasporas.

Gentrification and displacement has produced many demographic changes in the city of Chicago and the Mexican community has not been immune to those changes. Today, the Mexican immigrant community is one of oldest in the United States and still maintains an important presence in some of the original colonies of the early 20th century, especially on the far south side, but neighborhood demographics have shifted.

The Mexican community from the Hull House, Halsted, and Taylor areas were displaced. [...] Some families moved to the newest Mexican colonies of Pilsen and Little Village, others to the established communities of South Chicago, South Deering and Blue Island, while still others moved to Mexican areas in suburbs and towns, like Cicero, Berwyn, Blue Island, Elgin, Joliet, and Aurora (Jirasek y Tortolero, 2001: 49).

Mexican cultural influences in Chicago are fairly common, for example in culinary aspects, in speech of people on streets (Spanish language), stores with typical products, colors, symbols etc. In sum, “these communities have relevant role in strengthening the bonds of friendship, familiarity and union of those involved as well as the celebration of its origins too” (Escudero, 2007: 305). They

usually have a central function in cultural identity of their members. "Being part of a collective identity is a primary psychological need of the immigrant" (Brinkerhoof, 2009: 36). This "diaspora identity" results from a mix of characteristics from the homeland, the host country, and lived experience of immigrant. In the host society, the process of socialization and integration are significant factors and they resulting in a hibridy identity, not a fixed end – they are constantly produced and reproduced.

In this article, we use the Stuart Hall's cultural identity concept. The author (2005) understand that cultural identity is, nowadays, fragmented, provisional, sometimes contradictory, and compose into a representation system located in a space and a symbolic time. To the hibridy identity concept, we use García Canclini (1998). According to this author, here in a nutshell, the concept of hybrid becomes an explanation of the proposed socio-cultural identity (especially about the Latin America) built from a cultural blend between traditional and modern, popular and cultured, massive and individual.

To Brinkerhoof (2009), diasporas face various motivations for why they would mobilize around a diaspora hybrid identity and direct that mobilization toward the homeland, the host society, or both. Between them, are: individuals' behavior, psychological empowerment and motivation (can be based solely on a sense of belonging, in response to feeling of marginalization in their adopted societies etc.). "The national consciousness is inevitably marked by immigration" (Park, 1922: 49).

So, in an organic and contextual process, is almost natural that, at any moment, appear in these communities have the necessity to communicate more effectively on three different levels: 1) between their members; 2) with the other communities; 3) with the host and homeland societies. It is the configuration of each specific reality that serves as a parameter for understanding the meaning of each local community communication experience.

Among the 600 Mexican groups in Chicago and metropolitan region, there are several that have published their own media outlets, including newspapers, magazines,

newsletters, flyers, and bulletins. The largest groups even have a radio station and TV channels or independents programs and advertising in these kinds of electronic media⁵. The origin of the immigrant press' history is in these communities. Such as ethnic media, foreign media or foreign language media, diasporas or colonies vehicles (among a several of other terms), these publications are not characteristic of any specific country or nationality. In several nations that received especially large immigration's flows are records of such immigrant-led media. In the case of Mexican immigrants, in the United States, we have, for example, Hispanic media, Chicano media or Spanish-language media – that will be understood both as the Spanish – and the English – language media outlets that target immigrants and descendents of immigrants from Latin American countries (especially Mexico)⁶.

With the development of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), almost all of them has websites, Facebook pages, blogs, emails' newsletters, mailing lists or others sort of communication on the Internet. Information technology usually offers a host advantages for diasporas: for forming communities – virtual and otherwise, providing solidary and material benefits, negotiating hybrid identity, and facilitating objectives based on ethnic identities, these products narratives and performances of the subject.

⁵ To learn more about immigrant press in the United States, see: Park (1922); for "Hispanic media", "Chicano media" and "Spanish-language media" in the United States, see: Leal (2007), Font (2008) and Gutierrez (1977); for "Hispanic TV" in the United States, see: Jiménez (2008) and Conor (2008); for "Hispanic radio" in the United States, see: Miranda & Medina (2008).

⁶ According to Jiménez (2208:2-3), "at one hand, as the development of an ethnic media, created internally, primarily by the own Hispanic community, as an attempt to provide resources to facilitate cultural accommodation in the U.S. at the same time than maintaining cultural bonds with their host countries. Or at the other hand, as the development of a niche media created from the outside, by entrepreneurs, who can be members of the community as well, or media corporations, trying to reach an attractive marketing target in terms of population and expenditure".

At the beginning of this millennium, Manuel Castells (1999) related the emergence of ICTs with the formation of the network society, here, briefly, a new form of social organization made possible by the emergence of information technologies within a temporal coincidence with a need for change economic and social. Thus, as another media, among all emerged over time, the Internet and also wireless communication, 3G and 4G – members of ICTs – are changing the way we communicate and consequently our behaviors, locally and globally, reaching various levels, from the very technology relationship, the economic organization and social appropriateness (Cardoso, 2007). Between the consequence of this, is the importance of understand the world with mediated communication technologies

This sharing space of flows has the interaction with the media, precisely key feature of the Internet, that has been conceived as a tool to build individual projects developed from different dimensions. Why? Because she is “in its constitution, flexible, interactive appropriation, endowed with ubiquity, global, accessible and does not depend on past and affordable power” (Cardoso, 2007: 25).

In this way, Internet can provide cultural exchange or which García Canclini (2005) defines as interculturalism and represents a set of compensatory policies around cultural identities. The recognition of the “other” allows contact relations and cultural exchange to take effect in different groups so precisely they can rework it, thus ensuring its inclusion in post-modernity and logic of globalization. The idea about interculturalism of the author refers to the mix of individuals and societies – what happens when the differences are in situations of negotiations and reciprocal exchanges.

Therefore, Internet can create a situation in which several systems and several nearby spaces coexist – all based on subjectivity and cognition. These are locals of convergence between various sociocultural realities forming the aforementioned network society. Is what Haesbaert (2007: 19) understand by multi-territorialism. “Much

more than losing or destroying our territories [...] are in most cases experiencing intensification and the complexity of the process of (re)territorialization more multiple, multi-territory”.

Finally, in the case of immigrant organizations, the Internet is a mobilizing tool for the various types of supports. It involves both networking resource for assembling and communicating among individuals and groups and facilitates the formation of shared identity necessary for collective action into an intercultural and multi-territorial process. The result is that ICTs eventually gather the features conducive to the diaspora surpass national or ethnic range present in its own complex constitution to encompass transnational aspects that the globalized world requires. About transnationalism, Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992) suggest that the term immigrant evokes images of permanent rupture, uprooting, abandonment of old partners and painful learning a new language and new culture. Thus, a new kind of immigrant population is emerging, composed of networks, activities and partners that involve its lives from the place of origin and place of acceptance in a single social field. Here is the transnationalism's concept.

The concept of *webdiaspora*

An amalgamation of human mobility with media culture based in ICTs which results in the interaction, summarized in the concept of *webdiaspora* or *digital diasporas*. The term involves websites, blogs, forums, communities and inserted own pages on social networks (Facebook, for example) and others notorious resources used by diasporas to make use of communication technologies, especially the Internet. Through this, is possible to maintain ties with their country of origin or to facilitate integration in the host country, to use it like a vehicle for information on specific aspects of the migration process (legislation, planning travel and contacts, institutional vehicle, for example)

or source of general news, among other features. But is fact that its content provides members material and solidary benefits, based on a shared homeland identity, and opportunities to explore and express alternative hybrid identities.

The *webdiaspora* concept is not new and, historically, its emergence occurred from the dissemination and popularization of the Internet and the development of multiple types of online services.

At the end of the 1990s, a number of institutions joined forces with the new 'e'-technologies (e-administration, e-democracy, e-education, e-healthcare, e-culture, e-tourism), which gave rise to the first presence on the Web of associations run by migrant populations. If the earliest websites were produced by IT professionals, we soon saw the diffusion of the Web in all of the diasporic communities and at all levels. The last ten years witnessed the use of both Webs 1.0 and 2.0 in these communities as well as the widespread appropriation of the various social-networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) (Diminescu, 2012: 01).

Also according to Diminescu, it is an immigrant community that is organized and operates particularly on the Web, in which its practices and interactions have been "improved" by the digital development.

It is a collective dispersed, heterogeneous and its existence is linked to the development of a common direction, a direction not defined by one or all, but that is constantly renegotiated through the evolution of this collective. (Diminescu, 2008: 572).

The author complete that it is an unstable space, not by the feature of fast of Internet, but because it is redesigned every newcomer – *webdiaspora* can choose to shrink or to enlarge not by members' exclusion or inclusion, but by the relationship between them.

To Claire Scopsi (2009: 86), since 1997, it was possible to find the term *digital diaspora* in some papers on the topic immigration English – which, in general, referring to “immigrants connected” – in a simple web browser. With the passage of time and evolution and spread of ICTs, especially the Internet, other concepts and terms have emerged to address the issue of immigrants in the Web.

We put here as the definition of webdiaspora sites are produced by transnational communities from a scattering of places, organized around one or more shared cultural elements (language, religion, ethnicity), explicitly designed for community members around the world by migration and eventually, the population remained in the homeland, contributing to awareness of a bond of identity, his public statement and its implementation for shares of claim, representation and economic and cultural development for the benefit of its members (Scopsi, 2009: 92 – Our translation).

Tristan Mattelar (2009) says that the researches about *webdiaspora* have placed more effectively in academic English-speaking world in the late 1980s, as an important laboratory from which socio-cultural changes produced are identified by logic of globalization. To this author, diasporas, for their constant cultural negotiations are, in many ways, emblematic in a world where cultural identities are reinventing themselves all the time under the force of transnational flows. Coinciding with the increased power of the internet in the late 1990s, the issue of diaspora sparked the development of increasingly important literature on the complex relationships that link these populations with ICTs.

According to Monnier (2012: 270-271), the concept of *webdiasporic* presents some difficulties due to the very concept of diaspora, “fluid and controversial”. According to the author, it involves sites produced by transnational communities from a local dispersion, organized by one or more shared cultural elements (language, religion, ethnicity), explicitly aimed at community members dispersed

around the world by migration. These virtual pages, the population seems to remain in the “homeland”, contributing to the awareness of an identity and bringing other benefiteres of its members.

In fact, we can relate the *webdiaspora* concept to media practices involving immigrants in the Web, in combination or not, that are intended to generally express positions based on transnational multi-territorial and intercultural situations originated by the displacement. It is composed by communication products “from and to” immigrants that result from complex migration processes as a resource for social interaction and sharing, where the information flows ultimately results in broader purposes – for example, the construction a diasporic identity, maintaining social ties (real or imagined), the participation of citizens trading rights, among others.

Today, it is accepted as a synonym for *webdiaspora* words and expressions as e-diaspora, *webdiasporic*, *diaspora networks*, *digital diaspora*, among others. However, considering Scopsi:

*The fact of members of a transnational community to publish sites cannot be seen as a single criterion for classification of webdiaspora, under penalty of having to consider any site involving immigrant communities as such. Identity and cohesion can help us to get out of this vicious cycle*⁷ (Scopsi, 2009: 91 – Our translation):

Several studies about this subject confirm diasporas' use of the Internet to experiment with and express hybrid identities. Some good examples are: Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010), Brinkerhoff (2009), Cogo, El-Hajji and Huer-tas (2012), Constanza-Chock (2014), Diminescu (2008),

⁷ According to Dana Diminescu (2012:02), e-diaspora is more appropriated. “We prefer the term ‘e-diaspora’ to that of ‘digital diaspora’ because the latter may lend to confusion given the increasingly frequent use of the notions of ‘digital native’ and ‘digital immigrant’, in a ‘generational’ sense (distinguishing those born before from those born during/after the digital era).

Greschke (2012), and Mattelart (2009). All of them contain experiences reports about this subject that are result of empiric researches made by a lot of different authors, around the world.

The Mexican organizations and their *webdiaspora*

From 10 Mexican groups who we work with in this research, all of them are on Internet, with websites, Facebook and Twitter pages and Instagram (those are the most used platforms). Besides, in the interviews, we can see they are connected with trough smartphones or computers (personal or of the organization, in computer centers, for example). Some of them also usually use messages programs, emails' newsletters, chats and Skype conversations. We note that although there is this massive presence on Internet, sometimes, it is not effective. It means: the first contact with all groups were made by Internet (email or Facebook page). But in some cases, especially with the small organizations, we didn't have return or the return by email took a long time. It was necessary to call to present the research and try to book the interview. Besides, in some cases, we sent an email and the return and all the pos-conversation were by phone.

It is very clear about all interviews, that the priority of the most of groups in the use of ICTs are disclose the events, promote the organization and inform members and/or public in general about what is happening into the community. This kind of disclosure occurs mainly in two ways: 1) a previous inform to the announcement the event and information as time, location etc.; 2) an event coverage, indicating how it was, who participated, photos, videos etc. So, theses virtual spaces can be considered a community media but an institutional media too. With low costs and with easy handling (we will talk about this later), they are, in almost time, the only resource that the

organization has to have voice, to appear, to transmit their information and their knowledge about Mexican cultural aspects and, at least, to be known in the city.

Question: The group is in the Internet. In which way and why?

Marcos (from a cultural organization): Yes, we have websites, Facebook, Twitter and all that. Well, today having a presence on the Internet is as important as having a telephone in your home. It is an input and output of information. Facebook did not exist when we started the group and for some time we didn't carry the implementation of Facebook, was thought as a social thing, we did not see its economic potential, but it has become our main source of communication with our audience.

It is interesting to see that, in one case – involving an organization that works with cultural activities, but maintains relationship with a local church – the reproduction of the most important cultural manifestations to preserve their Mexican identity is reserved for the members of their shared migrant community. The narrative below, of one of the interviewees of this group, is illustrative:

Raul (from a cultural organization): We celebrate here Las posadas. It is an event that begins December 16th and goes to the birthday of Jesus, which is December 25. [...] And, we show during nine days how the parents of Jesus followed the way, how they suffered as immigrants in a land that was not theirs and they did not belong to that part... And this is our history too, because we are not part of here, we are immigrants... And this celebration, made by the church near here and because we are part of it, we also participate... Each year, I believe about 300 or 350 people joined together, per night. Then the community meets these nine days, the children from here, their parents and us. And as part of the culture we also [...] this was created to form the community. If you go on the first night, you don't know anyone, right? But

there is the opportunity to chat a little bit with whom is besides you, say goodnight, sing a song together, listen to stories... So, you come back on the next day, and sits elsewhere, you know other people. At the end of the nine days, you will know the whole community. And this is a win, giving you the opportunity, the confidence to know, to participate in the needs of people which are your needs as well. This is a way how we join our community here in Chicago. [...] But we do not put this event on our website because it is not the way we create the community. We do not want to publish it because people who are not part of the community would come. And it is not what we want. We want new people, yes, but people that are identified to the celebration and participate in it, knowing and feeling part of it. Then the virtual page of the church may publish it, but we cannot. But other events we disclose, yes, of course.

When access the virtual spaces of these organizations, we can have an idea of the group's features, for example: their structure, the intensity of their involvement with cultural Mexican, their popularity, their connections with the others organizations and with the home country etc. To construct them, the organizations use photos, texts, videos and others web resources to ensure that the page is always updated. "Our members cannot access our page and see nothing happening", said Marta (from human-rights organization). On the one hand, it shows that people are care, concern and engagement to maintain the community informed about what is happening – showing a kind of professionalism with *webdiaspora* –, on the other hand, the content usually to show the reverse.

Although most of them are professionals in their activities and recognized – inside and outside of the community – for their cultural manifestation, the same professionalism does not happens with their material of the Internet. Home videos and photos, simple texts, and even amateurs layouts of their pages are common. Of course, there are exceptions (in case of more structured organizations), but the most of them try to reproduce in their virtual spa-

ces what they see in mainstream virtual space media, but not with the same resource. So, the result is, especially in case of the websites, amateurs pages, difficulty to keep it upload, and a preference to more simple models and platforms, as Facebook. "We use only Facebook because is faster and easier", said Esmeralda, from a cultural organization. "We have a lot of problem with our website, we do not have people to upload it all the time. So, we prefer to use Facebook or Twitter", said Marta (from human-rights organization).

Another point is that most of the organizations recognize that their virtual spaces are an important communication's toll, but financial difficulties prevent increased investment. The more structured communities usually work with the Internet in a professional way. Marcos, from a cultural organization, told that the group pays, about two years, a publicist to upload its website, Facebook and Twitter. Besides, she controls the access, doing a hard work to increase them. But this is an exception.

In the case of the organizations that we worked in this research, even if they have good work structures (headquarters, employees etc.), information in their virtual pages are putted, in general, only by the administrator of the page (an employee or a member). "I write, take pictures and put in the Facebook", said Isabel (from a cultural organization); in social networks, as Facebook, the administrator usually to see repercussions of the disclosure (e.g. "Likes", comments or shares).

It is also common that the administrator announces and discloses the event in her/his personal profile, in case of Facebook or Twitter, once the her/his networks friends and contacts are similar in both of pages (her/his personal page and organization's page). "Sometimes, I don't have time, so I put the information only on my Face, because it can arrive achieve more people than group's Facebook", said Isabel (from a cultural organization). There are cases that event's participants sent some materials (photos, videos etc.), but it is not very common. Besides, it is not common to track their social media impact with specialized

software to know how many people visited the page, how many clicked on a certain tab, the demographic profile of internet visitors etc. Another situation is when the place of those immigrants usually to presents (restaurants, theaters, parks etc.) makes the disclosure of the artist involved. "In these cases, I do not put my concert on my Facebook because the place already makes the disclosure in own website or Facebook page", said Gustavo, from a cultural organization.

Another interest point is if these spaces are considered very important to disclosure the community, whenever it is possible and/or there are financial resources available, the organization chooses do advertising about an event in Chicago's Hispanic media. "When we have financial resources, yes, we do some advertising in Hispanic newspapers, radio... because we can achieve more people. But if we do not have them, we use only the Facebook", said Marta, (from human-rights organization). Sometimes, there are partnerships between organization and Hispanic media. "As our main cultural event is very traditional and important to the community, we can disclose it through partnerships with Hispanic newspapers and radios", said Verónica, from a cultural organization. Another situation is a bit curious. Sometimes, the interviewed recognize the importance of the Internet, but he/she does not dimension of its capacity of reach or power to contact. As example (from a cultural organization):

Question: Why do you maintain a Facebook page?

Esmeralda: Because it's a way to have the community informed, because through the Facebook, that we have for about five or six years, we have computer classes, then we have a bigger group that knows how to use Facebook. Also what had helped are the mobile phones with Internet because now everybody has a phone with Internet and it helps people to discover how to manage these tools. In the computer class they learn to speak in a chat, to comment something on Facebook.

[At the end of the interview, Esmeralda wanted to know how we learned of the existence of the organization and

we answered her that it was through Facebook; her reaction was:]

Esmeralda: My God! It is unbelievable. Did you see us in Facebook! Oh! How?

Situations like these, of course, are more common in small organizations. But it is also related with the technological capacity of organizations' members and their age. In general, are young people or a relative that administrate websites and Facebook pages, in a voluntary work. "I don't understand these things about Internet... My wife see these for me", said Juan, 63 years old, from a cultural organization. "I'm not familiar with these things about computer, Internet. Therefore, I have a person who puts the content in our website", said Pablo, 55 years old, from a human-right organization. And still about the technologic capacity, Internet can be seen as an education tool. "We have more than 250 volunteers working with us. Some of them are photographers, others are social communication students... Sometimes, they produce material to put in our Facebook page. It's a way for them to train and put into practice what they are learning, for example", said Verónica, from a cultural organization.

It is interesting to see that all of them groups recognize the Internet for its timeliness and completeness, but ignore completely its capacity of storage, as to be a data-base, an archive with the history of the organization. In Facebook, for example, there are not usually to see a historical of the communities, a formal profile of members, a memories' record etc.; in websites we can find this kind of information, but with an institutional aspect of the disclosure, not of the register. With exception of one interviewed (reproduced below, from a member of a cultural organization, but is a specific case because the organization has a print magazine), the interviewed people even mentioned the Internet storage feature.

Rafael (from a human-right organization): We have the magazine and there is also a web page on the Internet. We, my family and other colleagues, are very com-

mitted that everybody follows what we are doing to keep it recorded, because if our ancestors had come, we know that they existed more than two thousand years ago because they painted on the walls, and that's as I say, [...] in the magazine is all we do. [...] And as our partners send me too many things, what do not fit in the magazine, we put on the Internet.

It seems contradictory because other often ICTs' use by immigrants groups, related in the interviews, is about to know what is happening in their home country, especially about the cultural manifestation involved and get contacts, besides personal relationship. When we asked: How do you keep informed and updated about what is happening to your cultural manifestation in Mexico? The common answerers were:

Marcos (from a cultural organization): Through the Internet there are much information about festivals, we know many artists in Mexico that some of them come here, bring their records... So we are in contact at all times.

Juan (from a cultural organization): We research on the Internet. I read the newspapers in Mexico, I see what is happening. I talk to friends through Skype, through e-mail. I am connected all the time.

In all the pages of the studied organizations we can find elements that referring to Mexico, like: flags, colors, the native language (Spanish), cultural symbols, Azteca's references, background Mexican music, links to Mexican official pages etc. And one particularity: in case of cultural groups, all content are positive, it means, they never reflect the difficulties that migrants or migrants communities face to survive in a foreign territory. "We only put on our Facebook positive messages. We are not involved with migration policy... We don't want negativisms in these pages", said Carmem, from a cultural organization. "Once, I put in Facebook a picture of mine... I was wearing a beau-

tiful Mexican dress, color, long... And I was very excited. All my relatives in Mexico marked it with a 'Like'. They think it was very important, see that I didn't want to lose my culture", said Violeta, from a cultural organization.

So, the own published pictures, for example, shows parties, celebrations, immigrants together, happy and smiling, many food, colors, happy music etc – during the interviews all of them told negatives experiences and difficult related to their migratory process. The exception of this feature is only when on page there is published the photo of some work of the artist interviewed, representing some suffering (paintings, poems, sculptures etc.).

Another aspect is in some of these virtual spaces we can note the insertion of the immigrant community in Chicago. One illustrative example is a cultural organization that celebrates Halloween and The Day of the Dead. "We must celebrate the culture from here also because we live here, our kids go to school, have friends... It is natural to want to make a Halloween party... But we must also talk about the Day of the Dead, show how it is... Why not?", said Raúl, from a cultural organization. In the same way, it is possible to see pictures in these virtual pages that show the performance of Mexican immigrants groups in traditional events in Chicago, for example *World Music Festival Chicago*, in Chicago Cultural Center, in musical or dance performances realized during Summer in Millennium Park, or in *Chicago Humanities Festival* (this year, for example, it has some days in Pilsen with 'Open Arts' Studios', Mexican movies, 'The Day of the Dead Exhibit Tour' etc.). And despite these events can be considered a kind of entertainment in the city, all the organizations contacted do not see their cultural manifestation as entertainment, but as way to preserve traditional and values of Mexican culture and to educate to have more sensibility and conscious about plain citizenship. It is another logic, that involves subjective feelings.

Carmem (from a cultural organization): For me it is very important to promote Mexican culture in Chicago,

the culture of our ancestors because we are far away. Our children have to learn their roots, about where they come from [...]. It is something we do not want that they ignore, but always look with pride. Holding this culture make us stronger.

Isabel (from a cultural organization): Our work keeps our culture alive. Often, people feel as then were in Mexico... When we go to presentations, people, the public reaction when we dance, sing songs and feel that people also like to have something to remember your country or where they came from . [...] They are rooted lives.

Marcos (from a cultural organization): Some children at schools, when we sing, they come and tell us 'Hey, I'm Mexican'. Wow! That is good! Sometimes, children give them ashamed to say that they are Mexicans close to their friends because they don't want to be different. But when they hear the music and feel proud, it's a way of telling us that his dad is Mexican. So it's nice.

Juan (from a cultural organization): [...] This is what I want with my art: the integration of people with artistic movement. It is contributing to major changes in society, for the awakening of the critical sense and creativity. Art should have an important place in society, because it enriches the human spirit. My business is organic, it must have a function in the city.

Gustavo (from a cultural organization): I play Mexican music in restaurants, bars and theater. But it is very different about playing in a school, for example. In these places I play as entertainment, while people talk, eat... At a school my concert is different, I work with history, traditions, values and Mexican cultural in true way.

At least, we would like to highlight the nostalgic character that some of these cultural expressions or even the origin country cause in immigrants. "When I cook Mexican food [for organization's event], I remember my mom. I learned to cook with my mom. She sold food to

keep her children. I like to prepare everything in a different way, as if we were in Mexico”, said Fernanda, from a cultural organization. Or, as said Pablo, from a cultural organization too: “Of course I want to come back to México. My dream is died in my country”.

Some findings

To sum up, we would like to point that:

- a. *Webdiaspora* can be for Mexican organizations a communitarian and an institutional media, in the same time.
- b. All Mexican organizations give importance of *webdiaspora* and invest on it (according to their resources and/or structure), although they recognize the wider range of other traditional media, such newspaper, radio and TV.
- c. The *webdiaspora* is just a reflex of personal and presential movements and actions – as a “mirror” of the community. For them, is necessary to be together to establish social relations, although they can to communicate into these virtual spaces with unknown people that, in some way, have some interested in this group. In this sense, Mexican *webdiasporas* from Chicago are far from to be cyber-grassroots (CGO) – organizations present only in cyberspace.
- d. When the organizations work with artistic and cultural events, they believe that they are working for maintenance of tradition and values of Mexican culture, even they use this work to earn money or entertain people. Besides, culture, for them, is a tool of education both Mexican immigrants (and their descendants) and Chicago’s people in general, and a way to revive the past in original country – they are afraid of loose their roots.
- e. Despite all the difficulties (educational and socioeconomic level, labor explore, problems to understand and speak English, advanced age etc.), somehow, immigrants are insert and try to participate in the *webdiaspora*, confirming that immigrants are pioneers in the use of ICTs – it is a survival necessity (subjective or objective – to do practical things related by day-by-day).

- f. Whether in speech (during the interviews) or in the use of symbolic elements in the virtual space, cultural exchanges between original and host countries are visible.

Final discussion

If in 1922, Robert Park – a sociology professor from the University of Chicago, focusing on studying immigrant incorporation to US society and hired by the US government to investigate the ethnic media in the country – said that “Through immigrant press, the inhabitants of the great outside world may have a particular view on the little world of the immigrant. Read some of these foreign newspapers is like looking through the keyhole in a bright room” (Park, 1922:113), the same we can say, almost 100 years after, now with *webdiaspora*. Through the content of Mexican *webdiaspora* is possible to estimate the extent to which the immigrant Mexican people planted their roots in the United States and settled in the form under the conditions and in concrete proposals of American life.

Specific with cultural groups, it is possible to see their traditions, culture, costumes and values (even if in a subjective or until nostalgic way), although they said during the interviews that their virtual spaces have been constructed to make up practical needs of everyday life: disclose the events, promote the organization and inform members and/or public in general about what is happening into the community, to have voice, to appear, to transmit their information and their knowledge about Mexican cultural aspects and to be know in the city.

We know that the daily routine of immigrants is far from what Canclini (2005:205) calls “oasis of not belonging”. Every moment his/her own condition of subject and his/her search for new forms of belonging are put in check by issues much more practical order, for example, laws that guarantee social security and rights or who migrate back and forth between societies diverse. But at the moment that immigrant invest in their cultural aspects have

creatively faced difficulties and everything seem to be fine – after all, they are talking about what they better know, about their selves, their hometown. And it seems does not matter if this culture has not the same sense in the country of origin or in the host country has been suffering others influence in natural intercultural processes. In this sense, organized diasporas use information technology to facilitate these agendas.

So, the Internet can give to diasporas communities opportunities for continuously negotiate their hybrid identities, in a multi-territorial perspective, through storytelling, promote consensus on shared understandings, and sense making, in a transnational space. The true extent of digital diasporas's impact on diaspora and homeland quality of life or culture is impossible to measure, but it is possible to say that digital diasporas provide identity support, enabling diasporas to integrate new ideas, values, and experiences into their identity frame of reference.

We agree with Appadurai (2004), when the author said that communication involves more than instrumental broadcasting – transmission and/or representation – but it involves social connection and subjective symbolic interaction production, coupled to the theory of material flows, human, media and subjective and symbolic (his concept of *ethnoscape*). Media is not only to discourses and structures of production, but as a social practice. In the same way, we can realize – as show Fairclough (2001) – that when we analyzing the discourse of these immigrants (in *webdiaspora* or in interviews), we can understand, as conventional or creative way, the discursive practice can contribute to reproducing society (social identities and relations or knowledge and belief systems) as it is, but also contributes to transforming it.

Finally, when Mexican immigrants build these organizations and use transnational spaces (real or virtual) to help to organized them, they are contributing to a intercultural citizenship, that provides continuity of ethnic, group and national affiliations, along with fluid access to transnational [and multi] repertoires disseminated by the

media and the masses. "It implies socialize in learning the differences in discourse and practice of human rights" (Canclini, 2005:237).

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