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**Urban and Transnational Politics in America: Novus Ordo Seclorum?
By Gustavo Cano, UCSD-USMEX
September 2004**

Novus Ordo Seclorum: A New Order of the Ages

*"Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl song has come and gone,
and the majestic roll of circling centuries begins anew . . .
the Iron age shall cease, the Golden race arise . . .
and shall free the earth from never-ceasing fear."*

**Virgil's Fourth Eclogue expressing the longing of the world for a
new era of peace and happiness. First Century B.C.**

Introduction

To what extent American cities are evolving towards a model in which their government is (or is not) adapting its structure to their growing Mexican immigrant population? What are the main factors for such transformation to take place? What is the role of the Mexican government in the process? This paper addresses these questions from two different perspectives, one local, and one transnational.

From a local perspective, the paper addresses the government structure of the 14 most populated cities, or with a significant potential of population growth in the near future, by Mexican immigrants: Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Houston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Raleigh, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, and Seattle. This with the aim to determine to what extent the recent population growth of Mexican immigrants, and immigrants in general, has (or will have) an effect on the government structure of these cities, and to what extent the current structure is dealing, or is able to deal, with the issue.

From a transnational perspective, the questions are addressed through the consideration of three stances. First, I analyze the implicit efforts of the Mexican government to facilitate the incorporation of Mexican immigrants into some particular aspects of mainstream America through the delivery of the Mexican Consular ID (Matricula Consular) in an urban setting. Second, I analyze the recent efforts of the Mexican government to approach local and state authorities in the United States through a program of Informative Conferences, sponsored by the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME in Spanish), within the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I also address the potential influence on local politics and policies by the members of the Advisory Council of the IME (CCIME in Spanish). Finally, I analyze the motivations of the Mexican state governments in contacting directly U.S. local authorities regarding immigrant issues.

Research for this paper suggests that some governments of American cities already count with (or have started a) structural transformation to address directly their immigrants' issues. Nevertheless, the creation of these offices is not a necessary condition to deal efficiently with their immigrants' concerns. The most important factors that lead to the creation of these offices are a strong and growing presence of foreign born population, high levels of community-based organization among immigrants, and the interaction of these organizations with some level of local government, like the Office of the Mayor or the City Council.

Regarding the role of the Mexican government in the process, the interaction between different levels of Mexican government and local governments in the United States leads to the empowerment of the host society as a whole and, in particular, to the empowerment of the immigrant community. With the exception of the use and acceptance of the Mexican Matrícula Consular in the U.S., most of this interaction is highly informal, and the influence of the Mexican government in the process of structural change of city governments is more a matter of long-term strategic appreciation than a short-term oriented goal.

However, transnational relations have initiated a “new order of the ages” in the relationship between local governments and its immigrant population, in the sense that certain type of actions from the home state does trigger mechanisms of empowerment that will certainly influence the relationship between the host state and its immigrant population. Indeed, an important conclusion of this work is that the interaction between local and transnational politics explains different levels of empowerment of the home community in the host society.

From a theoretical standpoint, this paper emphasizes the importance of incorporating research work on transnational politics into the mainstream research body of urban politics. This is the third paper of a series of four that show different theoretical and empirical perspectives of the term “political transnationalism.” In the first paper, “Organizing Immigrant Communities in American Cities: Is This Transnationalism or What? (Cano 2004b), I argue that the term “transnationalism” has been transformed to a point in which it is extremely difficult to sustain the broader sense of the concept beyond its generic roots. Categories such as “political transnationalism,” “anthropological transnationalism,” or “sociological transnationalism,” provide a more feasible working frame in comparison to the use of the term as a catch-all paradigmatic umbrella.

In the second paper, “The Virgin, the Priest, and the Flag: Political Mobilization of Mexican Immigrants in Chicago, Houston, and New York” (Cano 2004c), I examine the transnational character and power of the Catholic Church in the mobilization of Mexican immigrants through religious and nationalistic symbols, and argue that the Mexican community cannot be considered anymore a monolithic group, whose political behavior is one and the same all over the United States. In the fourth paper, “The Institute of Mexicans Abroad: The Day After... After 156 Years” (Cano and Délano 2004), the authors argue that political transnational relations between the Mexican government and Mexican immigrants in the United States are not new, however, these relations vary across time, depending on political and economic circumstances that involve U.S.-Mexico relations. They also emphasize the role of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad in the last stage of the historical process.

In the first and second papers, political transnationalism is addressed from an organizational perspective, at a meso level of analysis. In the fourth paper, the term is addressed from a macro and meso levels of analysis, whereas the current paper addresses the term from a macro perspective, in which the interaction between two governmental bodies (one from the host state, and another from the home state) leads to different levels of transnational relations around and about a growing immigrant population in the host state.

Data for this work was obtained from telephone interviews with City Hall officials or Mayor's Office personnel of the 14 American cities; a set of interviews performed by Ms. Gabriela Cobos in 2003 to Mexican state officials in charge of addressing issues of their migrant population (Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, and Zacatecas); the archives of the Area of Analysis of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City; and analysis from secondary sources from these American cities and several Mexican states. The interpretation of the Cobos interviews remains the author's responsibility.

The author is currently a Guest Scholar at the Center for US-Mexican Studies, and the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, in the University of California, San Diego. The author would like to acknowledge and thank Gabriela Cobos (Institute of Mexicans Abroad, IME, Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Aranzazu Alonso (Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economicas, CIDE, Mexico City), and Alexandra Délano (Oxford University) for their invaluable assistance in the preparation of the final draft of this paper. Finally, the author gives special thanks to the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, for their support in the drafting of this work.

This paper has four sections. In the first section it presents a theoretical overview about the role of transnational politics within scholar work on urban politics. The second part exposes the city government structure in accordance to their level of openness towards their immigrant population. The third section deals with the efforts of different actions and levels of the Mexican government in enhancing a transnational relation with the United States. Finally, it concludes with a section of final remarks from both, theoretical and empirical standpoints.

Urban and Transnational Politics

Mainstream literature on urban politics has traditionally focused on topics such as the nature and the structure of city politics and governments (Banfield and Wilson 1967, Caraley 1977, Kemp 1999), the process of urban growth and decline (Peterson 1985), regime politics (Stone 1989, Keating 1991), urban political economy (Imbroscio 1997), budgeting and financial issues (Ladd 1994, Rubin 1997, Judd and Swanstrom 2004), urban planning and development (Turner and Kolo 1997), politics and urban administration (Morgan and England 1999), the emergence of Metropolitan America (Harrigan and Vogel 2003), the challenge of governance (Peterson 1994, Vogel 1997, Box 1998, Judd and Swanstrom 2004), and comparative studies of urban politics and/or municipal governments (Banfield 1965, Bernard and Bradley 1983, Abbott 1987, Savitch and Thomas 1991, Briddges 1997). To mention the most important.

The role and importance of immigrants within urban politics has been addressed mostly through scholarly work on race and ethnic minorities (Pinderhughes 1987, 1997; De Leon 1989; McClain and Stewart 2002; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 2003), political machines (Ross and Levine 2000, Harrigan and Vogel 2003, Judd and Swanstrom 2004), community empowerment (Torres 1991; de la Garza, Menchaca, and DeSipio 1994), and neighborhood politics (Clavel and Wiewel 1991, Bennett 1997), also to mention the most relevant. Most of this mainstream literature focuses mainly on the voting appeal of the immigrant community.

During the 90's, academic research on transnationalism and globalization appeared on the urban politics scene. Most of these works address the transnational process of immigrants in New York City (Smith 1995, 1996, 1998; Foner 1997, 1999; Guarnizo, Sanchez, and Roach 1999; Mollenkopf 1999; Cordero-Guzman and Grosfoguel 2000; Cordero-Guzman, Smith, and Grosfoguel 2001), and the dynamics of globalization and global cities (Sassen 1988, 1991, 1996; Robinson 2002). Mainstream literature in urban politics currently begins to incorporate the influence of new immigrants and transnational processes into the political dynamics of city and metropolitan areas (MP Smith 1999, Judd and Swanstrom 2004, Cano 2004a). Within the field of study of political transnational processes, a series of works point out that the state is by no means out of scope (Goldring 1998, Guarnizo 1998, Graham 2001, Cano 2002), and that it is important to consider the historical links and relations between the sending and the receiving countries (Mexico-U.S., for example) to understand the singularities of transnational life and politics of incorporation of the immigrant groups (Cordero-Guzman and Grosfoguel 2000, Cano and Délano 2004). However, there are practically no works that include local and transnational political considerations from a comparative perspective in American cities.

This paper argues that the relationship between Mexican and U.S. states in a transnational framework is given not only at a federal government level, but also at a local and state level. Moreover, this relationship generates transnational processes that exert influence on the immigrant community of the sending state, and on the local government structure of the receiving state, within a context of urban politics. This leaves the door open for mainstream literature in urban politics to begin considering transnational issues as a major component in the study of politics and policies of global cities and metropolitan areas.

For the purposes of this paper, Mexican immigrants are those persons who were born in Mexico, who live in the United States, and who are non-citizens. The essence of the process of transnationalism is "living here and there" (Suárez-Orozco and Páez 2002). In Spanish the term acquires a more complete meaning from a perspective that emphasizes the process of "being": "ser y estar, aquí y allá." To be (the essence of being as a human being) here and there, and to be (physically being) here and there. From a perspective of political transnationalism, at a macro-level of analysis, the interaction between home and host states around immigrant issues is a solid contribution for the immigrant community "to be here and there."

There are three basic components that characterize a transnational relationship among states: the acceptance or openness of the host state; the interaction between both, home and host states; and the capacity and willingness of both states to share a common agenda around the immigrant community living and working in the host society. Whenever the immigrant population represents a significant share of the whole society (Mexican immigrants in some U.S. cities, for example), local governments have the option to address directly, indirectly, or not at all, their immigrants' concerns. Home governments, with the aim to address their migrants' concerns, also have the option to perform outreach actions towards their counterparts in the host state. Whenever both states interact constantly, whether the host government is addressing directly or indirectly their immigrant population or home and host governments are acting together around immigrants' issues, both states become capable to work out a shared agenda about the concerns of the immigrant population in the host society.

In a transnational relationship, the immigrant community living and working in a host state is the direct target of the political interaction of the host and home states, and the result of this interaction can be translated into policy implementations by the host government towards the immigrant population. On the one hand, the actions of the home state will enforce their ethnic origin beliefs (being there, being Mexican) and, on the other hand, the acceptance of the host state of such actions becomes a solid step towards the incorporation of the immigrant into the mainstream host society (being here, living in the U.S.).

The Local Perspective

Regarding the relationship between the Mayor's office and the immigrant community that lives within the limits of the city, there are three types of cities. First, we have the cities that are open to contact their immigrant constituency. New York, Houston and, to a lesser extent, Chicago are the cities that form this group. These cities count with strong proportions of foreign born population (see table 1), and the majority of this population was born in Latin America.

TABLE 1

City	Total Population, Millions	Foreign Born / Total Population	Not Citizens / Foreign Born	Latin America Born / Foreign Born	Foreign Born Pop. Increase 1990-2000
New York	8.00	35.9%	55.4%	52.6%	28.4%
Chicago	2.89	21.7%	64.5%	56.3%	16.9%
Houston	1.95	26.4%	73.5%	73.3%	17.8%
Los Angeles	3.69	40.9%	66.3%	65.9%	38.4%
San Francisco	0.77	36.8%	42.7%	65.9%	34.0%
Seattle	0.56	16.9%	53.3%	13.2%	13.1%
Denver	0.55	17.4%	77.0%	70.5%	7.4%
Dallas	1.19	24.4%	81.1%	81.1%	12.5%
San Diego	1.22	25.7%	57.2%	44.0%	20.9%
Las Vegas	0.48	18.9%	66.1%	66.6%	10.3%
Phoenix	1.32	19.5%	79.5%	79.4%	8.6%
Atlanta	0.42	6.6%	75.8%	49.6%	3.4%
Raleigh	0.28	11.7%	76.9%	45.6%	5.0%
San Antonio	1.14	11.7%	58.9%	79.3%	9.4%

Source: United States Census 2000, Demographic Profiles, Table PD-2.

Bold: Top four in each category.

Second, we have cities that address immigrants' issues under a set of agencies or Mayor's offices, but they do not count with a specific agency or office for that purpose. Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco, and Denver are part of this group. Los Angeles and San Francisco count with high proportions of foreign born population, and most of this population was born in Latin America. Denver and Seattle register lower proportions of foreign born population; Seattle's foreign born are mostly from Asia, and Denver's are from Latin America. Denver has also registered an increase of 135% of their foreign born population between 1990 and 2000.

Finally, we have the cities that do not have in their formal structure an agency that deals directly or indirectly with immigrant issues: Dallas, San Diego, San Antonio, Phoenix, Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Raleigh. The foreign born population of Latin American origin is significant for all these cities, and Dallas and San Diego count with important proportions of foreign born population. In this block, the following cities have

registered high levels of growth in their foreign born population between 1990 and 2000: Raleigh (134%), Phoenix (127%), Dallas (95%), Atlanta (94%), and Las Vegas (83%). For all the cities, with the exception of San Francisco, more than half of their foreign born population is non-citizen.

First Block

In New York City, the Mayor's Office of Immigration Affairs (MOIA) "promotes the full and active participation of immigrant New Yorkers in the civic, economic, and cultural life of the city by fostering communication and connection between city agencies and immigrant communities."¹ The office's main goals are to create access to city services for immigrants, to build bridges between immigrants and city agencies to ensure appropriate outreach and service delivery, and to advise the Mayor and city agencies on legislative and policy issues regarding immigrants.

MOIA performs its duties at three different levels. From the perspective of an immigrant, the office offers to explain which city services he/she can access; it also helps the immigrant to find a community-based organization where someone speaks his/her home language, and offers help in getting information about the immigrant's applications from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). MOIA offers community-based organizations serving immigrants to find the appropriate city agencies to assist them with referrals or resources, to arrange an appointment with appropriate city officials to address a concern in their community, and to identify the languages spoken by staff at various city agencies. Finally, MOIA can help city government agencies to identify community-based organizations serving particular communities in the city, to assess how immigrant communities can fully utilize the agencies' programs, and to assist them in accessing translators through the volunteer language bank.

In Houston, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (MOIRA) was created on May 19, 2001. The policy of MOIRA "is to encourage access by all persons residing in the City of Houston, regardless of nation of birth or current citizenship status, to the full benefits, opportunities, and services which are provided and administered by the City of Houston."² MOIRA advises the Mayor on immigration issues, analyzes federal and state legislation affecting immigrants, informs and educates the public about immigrant and immigration policies, acts as a liaison between immigrant communities and city government, and publishes user-friendly and multi-lingual literature to assist immigrants.

Also in Houston, it was also established the Mayoral Advisory Council on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (MACIRA). The purpose of this advisory council is "to assist MOIRA and the Mayor in formulating and implementing programs, services, policies and legislation that promote nonbiased and nondiscriminatory practices in the delivery of services and benefits for immigrants and refugees." The advisory committee is highly independent in its actions, and has 25 members representing different segments of the community including representatives of the BCIS, Community-based Organizations, and the City Council. Indeed, the creation of MOIRA and MACIRA in Houston was modeled after Harold Washington's Mayor's Commission on Latino Affairs, and the

¹ http://www.nyc.gov/html/imm/html/aboutimmaffairs/about_imm_affirs.shtml

² <http://www.ci.houston.tx.us/citygovt/>

Mayor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs, in Chicago, during the 80's (Cano 2002).

In Chicago, the Commission on Human Relations has an Advisory Council of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, which is formed by eight Advisory Councils that are representative of a wide array of constituency groups across the city: African Affairs, Arab Affairs, Asian Affairs, Gay and Lesbian Issues, Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, Latino Affairs, Veterans Affairs, and an Advisory Council on Women.

The duties of each Council, in accordance to the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance are: to design educational and enforcement programs for the implementation of policies to eliminate discrimination; to act as a liaison between city government and community organizations to promote cooperation between the two; and to cooperate with other advisory councils in the remediation of practices and actions that have a discriminatory impact on council constituents. The Advisory Councils are composed of 21 members appointed by the Mayor to three year terms.³ The City of Chicago, through the Department of Consumer Services, offers protection from unfair and deceptive practices by immigration consultants. The Office of the Mayor also opposes anti-immigrant initiatives that may be proposed in Congress, that is, initiatives that single out immigrants for different treatment simply because of their immigrant status.

In general terms, these three cities count with a structure that allows government access for immigrants as immigrants. However, many times, an open structure to immigrants does not mean that immigrants have solved their problems. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, many policy restrictions on immigrants were imposed at every level of government in the U.S. Moreover, the bureaucratic procedures may result practically impossible to overcome by immigrants, regardless of whether the city has an open structure for them.

Finally, some structures may be focused only on one particular aspect of immigrant life, such as discrimination issues in Chicago, through its Commission on Human Relations, but little progress is shown in allowing a strong interaction between an organized immigrant community and local authorities. Like their own Chicago model back in the 80's, when the Mayor's Commission on Latino Affairs, and the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs were highly independent in their actions and had real possibilities to render community empowerment within the government structure of the city.

Second and Third Blocks

Government cities in the second block are well aware of the role and importance of immigrants for the city, and some of them consider creating an office that would deal with immigrant issues following the Houston, Chicago or New York models. In any instance, these cities do deal with immigrant issues through different agencies and programs within the city government structure.

On March 2004, Los Angeles Mayor, Jim Hahn, and City Councilmember Eric Garcetti announced plans to create the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. This office would coordinate and promote the utilization of city services by resident immigrants and

³ <http://www.egov.cityofchicago.org/city/>

encourage their full and active civic, social, political, and economic participation in the City's life.⁴ The City of Los Angeles certainly deals with immigrant issues through a network of departments, bureaus, boards, and commissions.

The City of Seattle addresses immigrant issues mainly through the Department of Neighborhoods, and the Human Services Department (HSD). The Department of Neighborhoods "works to bring government closer to the residents of Seattle by engaging them in civic participation, helping them become empowered to make positive contributions to their communities, and by involving more of Seattle's under-represented residents, including communities of color and immigrants, in civic discourse, processes, and opportunities."⁵ The HSD, through the Division of Community Services, provides resources and direct services to low-income and homeless people of Seattle, which includes immigrant and refugee communities.

The HSD has also adopted a set of community goals to guide their actions, under the premises that all people in Seattle have a right to: food to eat and roof overhead; supportive relationships within families, neighborhoods, and communities; a safe haven from all forms of violence and abuse; health care to be as physically and mentally fit as possible; the education and job skills to lead an independent life.

In San Francisco, the mission of the Mayor's Office of Community Development (MOCD) is "to partner with the community to strengthen the physical, social and economic infrastructure of San Francisco, particularly its lowest income neighborhoods and communities."⁶ This office counts with twelve different programs that provide a wide array of services to immigrants from African, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latin American, Arab, Filipino, and Chinese origin. The services offered to immigrants are, among the most important: to provide job development/placement; to provide employment, labor, housing, immigration, public benefits and naturalization legal services; to provide vocational training; to provide bilingual job preparation, and bilingual training; to provide legal services in the areas of domestic violence; and to provide home health care training.

San Francisco also counts with the Immigrant Rights Commission, whose mission is "to improve and preserve the quality of life and civic participation of all immigrants in the City and County of San Francisco."⁷ The Department of Human Services, through the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants, provides cash benefits for "lawful" non-citizens, 65 or older, who do not qualify for other programs of assistance due to their immigration status.

In Denver, the Agency of Human Rights and Community Relations (HRCR) was established in 1948, in order "to empower communities to address local issues, to promote equal opportunity and to protect the rights of all regardless of race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age or disability."⁸ The agency addresses issues of older adults, women, Denver police and Denver sheriff alleged misconduct, people with disabilities, volunteerism, domestic violence, Denver Sister Cities International, and

⁴ <http://www.ci.la.ca.us/>

⁵ <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/>

⁶ <http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/>

⁷ *Idem.*

⁸ <http://www.denvergov.org/>

racial, ethnic and religious minorities. The mission of the agency is “to serve as a link between Denver citizens and City government and between government agencies for the purposes of seeking out citizen participation in City issues, forecasting community issues, and empowering people to solve their own problems through governmental and private sources.” Denver also counts with the Legal Immigrant Program, which facilitates legal immigrants in getting vouchers for a food pantry, additional cash assistance for food, bus tokens, emergency assistance payments, and eviction assistance.

The main difference between cities in the first and second block is that the latter do not count with an office that specifically addresses immigration issues, but they do address immigrants concerns, needs, and problems through programs to fight poverty, or agencies that deal with community building, neighborhood issues, human rights, discrimination issues, etc. Indeed, the cities of San Francisco and Seattle profess the idea that there is no need to make any distinction within the formal government structure regarding the immigrant status of their citizens, mostly because things are working well in the current conditions, and non-differentiation among their citizens makes it easier for government agencies to assist their immigrant population.

Government cities in the third block are also well aware of the role and importance of immigrants for the City; however, for some of them, the proportion of foreign born population is not as important as for other cities. Some of these cities do deal with foreign country issues through different agencies within the city government structure. For example, Atlanta counts with the Office of External Affairs and International Relations, which “directs the international economic and cultural initiatives of the City of Atlanta through liaison with local, national and international agencies, including the diplomatic corps, trade and consular offices, the Atlanta Sister Cities Commission and the Advisory Council of International Relations.”⁹

However, some Mayors’ Offices of these cities assert that immigrant issues should be addressed by the federal government, or they channel inquiries about immigrant issues to the office of the state Senator or directly with the state Governor. It is true that most of these cities count with minor proportions of foreign born population; nonetheless, it is interesting to note how the official structure of their government hardly reflects the existence of immigrants at all. In any instance, city governments have the ability to change relatively easier and faster than state or federal governments, and things can come and go in a blink of an eye. On the one hand, Houston was a type-three city just four years ago, and now it is one of the leading local governments in terms of attention to immigrants. On the other hand, nothing guarantees that Seattle and San Francisco will keep up with the leading work addressing immigrants’ needs and concerns under the current rationale and government structure.

The Transnational Perspective

Under the premise that the Mexican immigrant community is the central focus of transnational actions between different levels of the Mexican and American governments, this section exposes three cases of such relationship. Firstly, I analyze a transnational action itself, which is the issuing of the High Security Mexican Consular ID by the Mexican government. Secondly, I examine the outreach actions of a transnational governmental institution, the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. Thirdly, I

⁹ <http://www.atlantaga.gov/>

address the continuous efforts of Mexican state governments to establish transnational relations with local American governments.

Mexican Consular ID

The Matrícula Consular is a consular registration tool that provides evidence of Mexican nationality, and enables consular officers to provide protection and access to consular services, as well as to help relatives and Mexican authorities to locate their nationals overseas. The registration of foreign nationals abroad is a practice recognized by international law in accordance to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and Optional Protocols in 1963. The Vienna Convention is officially endorsed by Mexico and the United States, among other countries. The issuing of these ID's by the Mexican consulate network around the world began in 1871 with a format of certificates. Through time, the Matrícula Consular ID's format has changed. Since March, 2002, the Mexican government began to issue the High Security Mexican Consular ID card (Matrícula Consular de Alta Seguridad –from now on the Matrícula Consular)

There are two basic differences between the Matrícula Consular and older versions of the document. The first difference is that the new "high-tech" version incorporates cutting-edge technology, holograms and other embedded designs to prevent its forgery. The second difference is that the Matrícula Consular is accepted as an official ID card by the bank system and local and state authorities: up to July 2004, 178 banking institutions, 1180 police departments, 377 cities, and 163 counties acknowledged the Matrícula Consular as a valid form of ID.¹⁰ At least one state authority in 33 states of the Union recognizes the Matrícula Consular, and in twelve states the Matrícula Consular is accepted to obtain a driver's license. Between 2002 and 2004, more than 2.2 million Matrículas Consulares had been issued by Mexican Consulates around the world, almost all of them in the United States.¹¹

The acceptance of the Matrícula Consular by law enforcement agencies is highly related to the consequences of the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Center in New York City. After the attacks, American authorities at every level needed to enforce new security dispositions in aspects related to the issuing and tracking of reliable personal IDs in the United States. Local, state, and federal authorities needed to be certain of the real identity of any individual within their jurisdiction. Undocumented immigrants were a huge puzzle on this matter.

The worst nightmare of a local police department in the United States is a major terrorist attack to occur in their jurisdiction. Having reliable ID's of the whole population became a first, natural step in order to reinforce new federal dispositions on matters of national security. The Matrícula Consular explicitly asserts to police departments all over the country that the bearer is a Mexican national who lives in the United States. It is a reliable document to verify the holder's identity, which accomplishes one of the basic goals of law enforcement agencies in their fight against terrorism. Moreover, this reliable information is extremely appreciated by the police departments of the most populated urban centers, with large clusters of Mexican nationals, where it would be very difficult, in terms of human and financial resources,

¹⁰ <http://www.sre.gob.mx/ime/> : "Most Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Matrícula Consular (MCAS)" Institute of Mexicans Abroad, Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹¹ Ibid.

for the police to verify on its own the identity of each and every Mexican immigrant they deal with.

The reliability of the Matrícula Consular also opened the door for Mexican immigrants to participate in the U.S. banking system. This incorporation was highly appreciated by the financial institutions, mostly because local banks were having access to a cash market of more than 10 billion dollars per year. Moreover, on September 18, 2003, the U.S. Treasury Department announced the results of the "PATRIOT ACT Section 326 Notice of Inquiry," in which it sought the comment on whether financial institutions should be prohibited from accepting foreign government issued identification documents other than passports as an acceptable form of identification. After receiving 23,898 comments on the issue, 82.7% requesting no change in the regulation, the Treasury concluded that it would not seek changes to the existing rules regarding the acceptance of foreign issued identification documents, such as consular IDs.

The Matrícula Consular has also drawn the attention of federal and state legislators and members of city councils. Their views have been expressed in different directions, such as the initiatives against the use of the Matrícula Consular by certain members of Congress (Tancredo R-CO, Hostettler R-IN, Gallegly R-CA, Culberson R-TX); the initiatives of the New York State Assembly that favors the use of the consular ID in banking business within the state; or the initiative proposed by Chicago's aldermen Edward Burke (D-14) and Daniel Solis (D-25), where they recommend the city to accept other countries' consular IDs as a way of valid identification, as long as these documents show high security features, similar to those of the Matrícula Consular, which is already accepted as a valid ID by the City of Chicago. Additionally, insurance companies, such as *Blue Cross*, accept the Matrícula Consular as a valid form of ID when doing business with them Mexican immigrants.

The acceptance of the Matrícula Consular by law enforcement agencies, the banking system, and insurance companies, as well as the reaction of federal agencies, and legislative branches at national, state, and local levels on the matter, shows that the acceptance of the Matrícula Consular is favored by the majority of American authorities that have to deal with issues regarding reliable means of identification for individuals that live in the United States. Indeed, the Matrícula Consular is a win-win instrument, through which many American institutions and authorities, as well as Mexican immigrants, and the Mexican government are benefited. As long as the Matrícula Consular continues to prove its reliability and security, the host state and society will keep on accepting the document as an official form of identity for millions of Mexicans living and working in the United States.

The IME

The Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME in Spanish), within the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is the first Mexican institution that brings together all the relevant actors, at government and community levels, in Mexico and the United States, in order to discuss the problems, necessities and solutions related to Mexican immigrants living and working in the United States. Within the IME structure, its Advisory Council (Consejo Consultivo del IME -CCIME), and the continuous organization of Informative Conferences, represent the ultimate institutional outreach effort towards American authorities that deal with Mexican immigrants on a regular basis.

Although the Informative Conferences have been organized in the past by the Program of Mexican Communities Abroad (Programa de las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior, PCME, 1990-2003), the IME's conferences that are directed towards members of the U.S. public administration, have the aim to bring them closer to the Mexican reality, and to introduce them to public policies and programs that the Mexican government has to offer on behalf of the Mexican immigrant population in the United States.

In the first IME Informative Conference for Public Elected and Designated Latino Officials, (October 26-29, 2003) among those who attended the conference there were State Legislators, U.S. Representatives, City Council members, Judges, Mayors, and County officials from Georgia, Texas, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, California, Washington, Arizona, Utah, and New York. The agenda for this event was pragmatic and straightforward; there were meetings with Mexican officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, and Mexican members of the Congress. They also attended conferences that dealt with different topics, such as the structure and objectives of the IME, financial and housing facilities (in Mexico) for Mexicans abroad offered by the Mexican government, relations between local U.S. governments and Mexican consulates, and organization issues among Mexican immigrants in the United States.

Some attendants pointed out the following items as the most important things they had learned in the conference: the existence of Hometown Associations and their functions, the importance and high amount of remittances that Mexican immigrants send back home, the large Mexican consular network in the United States, the position of the Mexican government regarding Mexicans voting abroad, the high level of concerns from the Mexican government towards their migrant population, the high security features of the Matrícula Consular and the economic impact of Mexicans in the United States. Moreover, they expressed a strong interest in developing a good working relationship with government officials from Mexico in order to share issues of common concern, and work towards joint solutions.

The Mexican government reaches directly to this group of elected and designed officials with the aim of improving a mutual understanding between authorities in both countries about the most important issues that have to do with the Mexican immigrant community in the United States. The most relevant outcome of this type of conferences is the creation of an informal network between Mexican and American officials that facilitates the dialogue between authorities when problems arise, and need resolution. For this to happen, it is essential for the IME to come up with a follow-up strategy in order to enhance this new relationship with American authorities.

The CCIME is the Advisory Council of the IME, and is composed by 105 Mexican, Mexican-American, and Mexican-Canadian representatives, 10 members of Latino organizations in the U.S., 10 specialized advisors and 32 representatives of the state governments in Mexico. The main objective of the CCIME is to issue recommendations to the Mexican government about a wide range of topics related to Mexicans living abroad. Since its creation in March 2003, the CCIME has held three meetings and issued more than 200 recommendations.¹²

¹² CCIME's recommendations are available at www.sre.gob.mx/ime/.

The potential influence of the CCIME on American authorities has to do more with what they don't do, than with what they do. The more pressing issues for the Mexican immigrant community in the United States, for example, the legalization of their migration status and the defense of their labor rights, cannot be solved solely through the Mexican government's unilateral actions. Certainly, the legalization issue has more to do with the U.S. government's actions (i.e. a regularization program), or bilateral agreements between Mexico and the U.S. (i.e. guest worker programs). To address labor rights issues also involve U.S. local and state authorities. However, the CCIME members have some comparative advantages that can be developed in order to contribute in a meaningful way to the solution of these problems.

Although it is not stated in their duties as members of the CCIME, they can certainly exert influence on local and state authorities regarding issues that affect the life of Mexican immigrants as a whole, such as labor rights, fair access to education, health, housing, and justice; issuance of driver's licenses for immigrants, etc. The legalization issue is definitely more complicated, and it is difficult to expect any mobilization on the matter from the Mexican immigrant leadership without a national coordination in the United States. In any instance, the question about 'how and when' to get organized in order to perform activities that address directly the problems of Mexican immigrants in the United States seems more a question of timing, than a question of political will.

Probably the best time to get organized with those aims is once the CCIME members' term ends in 2006. This first generation of CCIME members will have the necessary and sufficient experience to elucidate what battles are worth fighting for, and what battles need more time before getting started. Additionally, there will be no official or institutional link with the Mexican government, which will be a positive asset whenever facing raw attacks from anti-immigrant groups, or even American authorities, under the argument that the Mexican government is intervening in domestic U.S. affairs.

In the meantime, some CCIME members are already addressing organizational and strategy issues for the near future. Some of them are working on the formation and development of personal networks among Mexican government officials, and local and state authorities in the United States, as well as developing contacts with church, community leaders, Mexican American organizations, and non profit organizations that deal with immigrant issues. Others already have a local advisory council of their own, that works close to the Mexican Consul of their jurisdiction, and who certainly exerts their point of view about who to invite to the Informative Conferences organized by the IME, and who will have a strong word in the succession process within their jurisdiction. Others will work more on behalf of the interests of the Mexican American community than on behalf of the Mexican immigrant community. Others will do nothing. The final question here is if these future former CCIME members will have the skills and political will, beyond their local organizational and lobbying potential, to form a national organization that would work on behalf of the interests of the Mexican-origin population in the United States.

CONOFAM

The National Coordination of State Offices to Address Migrants' Issues (Coordinación Nacional de Oficinas Estatales de Atención a Migrantes -CONOFAM) was founded in

September 2000, and is formed by 29 Mexican state offices¹³ that deal with the issues that affect migrants from their localities in the United States. The main objectives of the CONOFAM are to create programs and projects to promote the economic development of the migrants and their communities of origin; to set up preventive health plans for the migrants and their families; to strengthen cultural and trade links between the communities of origin and Mexican hometown associations in the U.S.; and to prevent further migration through the economic development of the communities of origin of potential migrants.

In general terms, these offices act with a moderate coordination at a national level, they mostly address the migrants' issues of their own states, and most of them depend on the Governor's office in budgetary terms. There are three types of state offices that deal with migrants' issues. The first category is formed by offices with strong and highly experienced institutional organization, a relatively sound budget, and a steady set of efficient outreach programs for their migrants in several cities in the Union, and their communities of origin. Offices from Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Zacatecas are part of this group.

The second category is formed by offices with a great growth potential; they are relatively well organized, with a fair budget, and they have implemented or are about to implement some outreach programs for their migrant population and/or their communities of origin. Offices from Distrito Federal, Durango, Estado de Mexico, Hidalgo, San Luis Potosi, and Veracruz are part of this group. Finally we have the group of offices that are in the preliminary learning stage of dealing with their migrant population in the United States. Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Baja California, Campeche, Chiapas, Coahuila, Colima, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Querétaro, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, and Yucatán form this group. For these categories, there seems to be a direct relationship between the size and organizational level of the state office, the size of the migrant population of the state, the amount of remittances that they generate, and their capacity to form Hometown Associations and State Federations.

All these state offices are officially part of the CCIME. However, most of these offices have a relationship of their own with other offices within the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the Mexican consulates in the U.S., and with other federal offices in the Mexican government. Their participation in the CCIME meetings has been highly marginal, mostly because they have the right to express their opinion, but have no vote on final resolutions of the CCIME. Indeed, they do exert their influence on Mexican migrants in the United States through an extended network of home-related hometown associations and state federations, and address directly American local and state authorities through periodic programmed visits of state officials, mainly the Governor.

Some state offices, like Jalisco and Guanajuato, count with an extended network of state-linked (and sometimes state-sponsored) offices in the United States that address not only the relationship with their migrants, but also relations with the home-origin business community, local and state authorities, politicians, and businessmen. Jalisco pays special attention to the process of "twinning" between American and Jalisco cities. However, in every case, with or without large numbers of immigrants in the U.S., the

¹³ Out of 32 states within Mexico.

activities of the members of the CONOFAM are highly dependent of the agenda of each state's governor.

As stated in the theoretical section of this paper, the essence of a transnational relationship among states is comprised by the acceptance or openness of the host state; the interaction between both, home and host states; and the capacity for both states to share a common agenda around the immigrant community living and working in the host society.

The issuance of the Matrícula Consular by the Mexican government, its use by the immigrant community, and its acceptance by different premises within the host society, creates a continuous interaction between the host and home states, and the Consular ID is already within the agenda of both societies, practically at every level of government. The formal efforts of the IME to outreach American officials through the Informative Conferences, the attendance of these officials to the conferences, and the potential influence of the CCIME in local politics and policies, conform a solid transnational process oriented to create the necessary conditions to share a common agenda between Mexican and American officials, basically regarding issues that have to do with Mexican immigrants in the U.S. Finally, the Mexican Governors' informal efforts to establish or enhance relations with local governments in the United States, as well as the formal strengthening of their relationship with the Mexican immigrant community, is the first step towards a major involvement of Mexican state governments in the process of agenda sharing with American authorities regarding issues of their migrant population.

A common characteristic for these three examples of state-based transnational actions is the empowerment of the actors that intervene in the process. The use of the Matrícula Consular has empowered the Mexican community, as well as the police departments that welcome the card as a valid form of personal identification, and the banking system as a whole. The IME's Informative Conferences have empowered the attending officials to improve their understanding of their Mexican constituency back home, and have also empowered the Mexican government in creating extended networks among American authorities and Mexican-origin leaders. These networks certainly will be of great service whenever dealing with the concerns and necessities of more than 10 million Mexicans living and working in the United States. The visits of Mexican Governors to American cities empower their migrant communities through the legitimization of their leaders in a local political context, and empower the Governors themselves through the legitimization of their leadership within their immigrant constituency in the locality. Also, receiving local governments get a real notion of the potential force of their Mexican immigrant constituency through these actions, and legitimize themselves within the Mexican community as friendly authorities, even though sometimes real policies from these governments may not be that friendly towards their immigrant population.

Final Remarks

From an empirical perspective, most U.S. cities deal with large numbers of Mexican immigrants who, counted or not in the Census, are part of the revenue-budgeting-expenditure process in the city. Problems and benefits emerge from this situation and, in general terms, problems need to be addressed and solved. The existence of immigrant-oriented offices in the city government facilitates the solutions to some problems, and

facilitates the contact between the sending and receiving states. Outreach efforts from the home government to contact host government officials are also an important part of the process. If a common agenda is consistently reached in dealing with immigrant issues, both states are developing transnational relations that will be reflected in the implementation of pragmatic, problem-solving policies by the host government towards the immigrant population. During the process, the government structure of both states may be continuously adapted to the new reality.

However, the implementation of immigrant-oriented policies, or changes in the government structure of the host state, do not depend exclusively from this relationship. High proportions of foreign born populations, highly developed organizational skills and large numbers of community-based organizations among immigrants, and the constant interaction of these organizations with some level of the local government, like the Office of the Mayor or the City Council, are decisive factors in the opening process of the government structure in addressing the concerns of their immigrant population.

In Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, all these conditions are met. In Houston, the lack of large numbers of community-based organizations is compensated by high standards of organizational skills among Mexican, Mexican American and Central American local leaders. In Seattle and San Francisco, neighborhood and community organizations of a wide variety of immigrants have a strong presence in City Council business.

Other cities do not count with important proportions of foreign born population, or they do not count with a strong network of community-based organizations, or there are no official instances within the structure of the local government to generate an interactive relationship with their immigrant community. For these cases, mostly for those that count with important proportions of foreign born populations (Dallas and San Diego, and to a lesser extent Las Vegas and Phoenix) to talk about addressing directly their immigrants' issues and concerns, or to initiate a transnational relationship with the home government, seems to be more a matter of political will than a matter of natural, structural adaptation of the local government in view of its immigrant reality.

Political decision-making is essential for transnational relations to produce any type of results. The issue of the Matricula Consular by the Mexican government had its political considerations in the decision-making process of its implementation. The interaction generated between American public and elected officials who attend the Informative Conferences and Mexican government officials; the next step of the CCIME members regarding their role within American local politics and policies; the decision of some Mexican state Governors to officially visit American cities, or to initiate the process of Sister Cities programs among cities in both sides of the border; they all are actions that require political calculations and considerations to be done before, during, and after the action takes place.

There is no evidence that any level of the Mexican government has yet exerted any influence in the decision-making process of restructuring the local government regarding the needs and concerns of its immigrant population. However, transnational relations have initiated a "new order of the ages" in the relationship between local governments and its immigrant population, in the sense that certain type of actions from

the home state triggers mechanisms of empowerment that will certainly influence the relationship between the host state and its immigrant population.

Indeed, an important conclusion of this work is that the interaction between local and transnational politics explains different levels of empowerment of the home community in the host society. Mexican immigrants from Mexican states that constantly address the needs and concerns of migrant population in some U.S. cities are better positioned in host and home politics, than those Mexican immigrants whose state government do not address their concerns in a systematic way, or whose local government do not have a functional structure to address their needs and concerns. Mexican immigrants who live in American states or cities that accept the Matrícula Consular as a valid personal ID are better off than Mexican immigrants who live in states or cities that do not accept the Consular ID.

Finally, from a theoretical perspective, a “new order of the ages” is arriving into mainstream literature on urban politics, in the sense that the inclusion of transnational perspectives will be essential to explain different levels of empowerment among different immigrant communities in a city or group of cities. This is, the study of “transnational urbanism” (MP Smith 1999) deserves more attention on the part of political scientists. Moreover, the study of the interaction between local and transnational politics around an immigrant constituency has a promising future within the fields of the structure of city politics, regime politics, urban planning and development, urban administration and budgeting, the political dynamics of urban and metropolitan areas, studies of municipal productivity, community values, the relationship between City Councils and City Hall, and the role of the foreign born labor factor in the economic and political development of global cities. Only time will tell...

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