Looking out for Paisanos: Latino hometown associations as transnational advocacy networks

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Looking out for *Paisanos*: Latino hometown associations as transnational advocacy networks

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Migrant organizations are part of everyday associational life in the US. These organizations range in size and scope with interests that include the home and host country. In particular, one form of migrant organization, the Latin American hometown association (HTA), has taken as part of its purpose to aid in development and civic projects within their sending communities. HTAs have identified problems in the home country and take the initiative in solving the problem at hand which has at times allowed them to circumvent the government. Overtime, this ability to solve problems has granted migrants new political access in the home country. The work by HTAs has pressured the government to act on creating new policies that guide how it implements development projects to communities in need. This paper addresses how Latin American HTAs work towards transnational mobilization. Some attention is also given to the critiques of HTA organization.

**Keywords:** hometown associations; migration; social movements; Latin America; transnationalism

People around the world are forced or opt to migrate due to social and economic inequalities, political instability, violence and established social networks in order to seek a better life (Brown & Bean, 2005). The US is one of the most important global immigrant destinations, especially for immigrants coming from Latin America (Congressional Budget Office [CBO], 2005). Immigrants are confronted with the need to adapt and cope with their new environment, situation and culture in order to reduce stress and increase their social and economic success. One way immigrants have adapted to their new environment is by participating in social networks of co-nationals or migrant organizations.

Hometown associations are voluntary associations formed by migrants seeking to support their communities back home, maintain relationships with local communities and retain a sense of community as they adjust to life in their new home countries (Mooney, 2003; Moya, 2005). The significance of HTAs for community integration, hometown development and civic engagement has been highlighted (Delgado Wise, Márquez Covarrubias, & Rodríguez Ramírez, 2004; Popkin 2003). These organizations operate at times similar to that of non-governmental and mutual aid groups or social movement organizations (SMOs).

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Over the past decade there has been significant growth in the number of HTAs in the US states like California and Illinois that have the highest concentration of these organizations, where 86% are found in metropolitan Los Angeles and Chicago (Escala-Rabadan, Bada, & Rivera-Salgado, 2006, p. 134). In seventeen US states, HTAs have increased from 441 that existed in 1998 to 623 in 2003 HTAs (Escala-Rabadan et al., 2006, p. 134). In 2005 it was estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 people participated in Mexican HTAs. A report by the Migration Policy Institute showed that there were as many as 3000 Mexican HTAs operating in the US. Additionally, the government of El Salvador was developing a database that listed more than 268 Salvadoran associations (Migration Policy Institute, 2008).

HTAs have demonstrated the capability to finance structural and social improvements in their communities back home and establish economic legitimacy via the funds these group pool together as an organization that shape local, state and federal policies. The work of these organizations can include the creation of individual HTA development projects, short-term aid such as disaster relief, or through government matching-funds programmes.

The participants in these organizations accomplish this in part from outside their home countries as ‘members’ of another society. The question outlining this paper is how HTAs pressure ‘home country’ government from ‘outside’ to comply with pressure to aid their respective sending communities? We use in this paper a variety of historical, journalistic, electronic sources and sociological content to make our case. The following sections include a description of the organizational structure of HTAs. This is followed by a brief history of this organizational form. Then, we discuss using social movement models to explain HTAs actions and transnational work.

Organizational structures of HTAs

The organizational structures of HTAs are diverse. For instance, in Mexican HTAs the migrants create a leadership committee of volunteers that gathers a list of potential participants and donors from their particular hometown living in the US. Elections are held to place participants in different positions within the organization. Organizational meetings are held on a monthly basis (Zabin & Escala, 2002). The organizational structures can be informal or as sophisticated as federated or coalition structures that can include more than a hundred HTAs (Fox & Bada, 2008; Zabin & Escala, 2002).

Individual HTAs can have a formal structure that includes an elected president, vice president, treasurer as well as other officers. Most HTAs have a much lower level of formality, episodic and without a master plan. The work of HTAs is accomplished through volunteers with flexible conceptualization of what is a member (Waldinger, Popkin, & Aquiles Magana, 2008). The level of collaboration between HTAs and their respective hometowns has been defined as hierarchical (Orozco, 2000). HTAs communicate their decisions to the hometown or cooperative where both sides work as counterparts in developing projects.

The formation of affinity groups by Latin American migrants and their efforts at forming ties between the US and the community back home is well understood. First, the community that created this particular form of migrant organization was accomplished by Mexican immigrants from the state of Zacatecas (Delgado Wise et al., 2004). Delgado Wise et al. (2004) point out that the migration pattern between Zacatecas and the US spans a hundred years which can account for why this particular social network led to the creation of HTAs apart from other forms of organizing. We can look to
several other forces at play, one involving a long history of Zacatecan migrant initiative at funding construction projects. Second, in the 1970s, the Zacatecan Government began to reach out to migrants in the US calling for remittances as a method for alleviating the political and economic crisis facing the state. This outreach eventually led to a matching-fund programme between the state and Zacatecan migrants. Third, migrants have long sent money to the communities back home individually and through organizations, at times in partnership with Mexican consulate programmes (Fox & Bada, 2008; Iskander, 2010). Finally, HTAs emerged within a wave of migrant organizing across sectors (i.e. unions, community based organizations, mutual aid) from 1970 through the 1990s (Escala-Rabadan et al., 2006).

A brief history of HTAs

HTAs can autonomously and collectively serve communities back home – specifically by providing a way for migrants in the US to support socio-economic projects to be implemented in their hometowns. HTAs are involved in development projects to build up the infrastructure, health and education needs of their communities back home. The history of many of these groups begins as early as the 1960s and in the case of Mexican-origin population we can point to similar organizations present in the US throughout the last century such as Mexican mutual aid societies and other organizations focused on the home county (Iskander, 2010).

Orozco and Lapointe (2004, p. 7) state that Latin American HTAs ‘have pressured governments to meet higher standards for transparency and accountability by making specific demands for the projects they fund’. HTAs hold accountable the actions of the governments by mandating them to produce clear budgets and project implementation deadlines, so that all funds are accounted for. The ability of these organizations to pool resources has influenced government action at all levels of government in the case of Mexico. Fox and Bada (2008) indicate that HTAs have given a voice to rural communities in Mexico at the state and federal political level. HTAs have bargaining tools (i.e. project funds) to negotiate projects of interests with the government.

For example, the Mexican government has responded to HTA pressure to participate in migrant projects (Jáuregui Casanueva, 2007). HTAs from the state of Zacatecas, Mexico, were the first to lobby the Mexican government for matching funds. One result of this pressure was the creation of programmes like the ‘Iniciativa Ciudadana tres por uno’ (Citizens Initiative 3 for 1) where HTAs register with the Mexican Consulate in order to be eligible to receive financial assistance from matching funds that includes local, state and federal government money for social and economic projects (Delgado Wise et al., 2004). Migrant organizations propose a project for funding and implementation in their hometown and are evaluated by federal, state and municipal governments (Fox & Bada, 2008). Goldring (2002) states that HTAs leverage their earnings as organizations which are gathered through donations and fund-raising efforts in the US which come from wages. These funds are held and coordinated in Mexico by the committee selected by the HTA.

The Salvadoran community in the US provides an alternative way of understanding HTA formation. Salvadoran migrants in the US fled violence in the home countries and began to send money back after 1970. The increase in this type of exchange between the Salvadoran community in the US and their home country where migrant remittances as well as migrants did travel back home as the civil war came to an end. In this period Salvadoran HTAs began to flourish as did the impact of remittances on Salvadoran society which provoked increased attention by the government.
HTAs as advocacy networks

The boomerang model

HTAs can be understood as a unique form of transnational advocacy network (Keck & Sikkink, 1998) as they are formed by co-nationals working across national borders. HTAs are filling the socio-economic gap between the state and its citizens in the migrant’s country of origin. The HTAs like international groups have come to support human rights efforts on the ground. This falls in line with the boomerang model which stresses that grievance groups such as domestic human rights organizations have their calls for change blocked (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). These domestic grievance groups are left with the avenue provided by ties created through transnational advocacy networks. Through network ties between the aggrieved groups, domestic and international organizations work to influence the target state (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 13). These organizations identify problems in the home country and initiate a process that circumvents governments in order to solve community grievances and social problems.

Political access

Tarrow (1998) indicates that international organizations can provide opportunities for collective action for domestic SMOs. Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco (1997, p. 59) define a transnational social movement (TSMO) as ‘clusters of relatively marginalized actors to promote some form of social or political change’. These authors conceptualize mobilizing structures within TSMO sectors where informal individual citizens, other groupings and professionals not affiliated to any SMO all begin to exert influence informally through a transnational network. It is also important to consider the varying pathways to working transnationally that can include informal groups to more established organizations (von Bülow, 2010). Tarrow’s (1998) discussion of newly acquired political access in regimes previously lacking such access increases the potential for mobilization as useful in understanding the access garnered by HTAs. Migrants can use HTAs as vehicles for lobbying home country governments. HTAs hold a significant degree of economic weight given the aid given to their communities back home. Over time governments have geared programmes towards developing matching programs to support the development work of HTAs groups as in the case of Mexican HTAs. Governments use their connections to these organizations as ways to reach out to migrants living abroad and pull them into home country politics as in the case of El Salvador (Baker-Cristales, 2008). Additionally, we can look to how the Mexican state and political party members reached out to the Mexican community in the US. In the case of Mexican migrants, the politicization of transnational social space included the campaign tour by presidential candidate Cuahtemoc Cardenas in 1988, visits by state governors and municipal presidents sponsored by the federal government, and advocates for expatriate voting rights lobbying for Mexicans abroad to make the effort to vote for president in Mexico (Goldring, 2002, p. 57).

Iskander’s (2010) explored the notion of a ‘synergistic loop’ between sending country and migrants abroad. She found that in the case of Mexican immigrants that formed HTAs from the state of Zacatecas, they gained credibility in Los Angeles and Zacatecas as legitimate brokers for HTA projects. This legitimacy was garnered in part through ongoing engagement with the Mexican government. The result of this engagement was that it reinforced this migrant community’s participation in local projects. This loop can spillover and begin to include US-based groups as in the case found in North
Carolina, where the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro’s fund was established for the Patronato Mezquital. This is a Mexican HTA that represents more than 200 families from Mezquital, Durango. The fund was created to support this HTA’s fund-raising effort to support the building of a nursing home and a retirement centre (Perry, 2006).

The resources necessary for participation in transnational organizing are not easily acquired by SMOs in the global South (von Bülow, 2010). This puts available funding from organizations in the global North at a premium. SMOs in countries such as Mexico must jockey for the support of TSMOs. This can place SMOs in a delicate situation where they are in a disadvantaged position found in the donor–recipient relationships experienced by many non-governmental organizations (Macdonald, 1997). Therefore, the ability of migrants in the US to pool together donations developed into leverage that can circumvent some of the long-standing clientalistic relationships explored by Latin American scholars. Although we address this later in the paper, migrants may circumvent governments, but this does not ward off the possibility of reproducing clientalistic relationships between the migrant community and the home country they left (Fox & Bada, 2008, p. 447).

Through this transnational space migrants gain status (Goldring, 2002) and use it to challenge the Mexican government in ways they could not if they stayed in their hometowns. For example, the Zacatecan clubs in Los Angeles challenged the notion that they could serve as a mere source of money for Mexican government community projects without having access to how money is to be spent or which project will be selected. Migrants in the US have, over time, developed the organizational strength and status to enter into discussion with the Mexican government as partners working on a particular project (Iskander, 2010).

**Investing in the homeland**

Social movement models can be used to understand HTA development work in the homeland. Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco (1997) describe the significance of like-minded individuals that maintain more consistent ties to one another, have a wealth of knowledge about the issues at hand that they share in common and have other forms of contacts. Connections to more regional TSMOs allow activists to overcome disadvantages to participation in civil society and contribute to organizational survival (Smith & Wiest, 2012). In this case, we can see how this applies to HTAs as migrants begin to form more established organizations. They focus on particular goals and perhaps form co-national groups out of some other cause facing migrants in the US (Martinez-Saldana & Pineda, 2002), or other organizations spur the development of HTAs (Fitzgerald, 2003). Finally, we also observe the formation of formal HTA transnational umbrella organizations that bring together the interests of HTAs. There are varying levels of formality within the HTA field which includes informal hometown groups, formal club organizations and the development of HTA coalitions (Federaciones).

The model outlined by Smith and colleagues (1997) above speaks of Tarrow’s (1998) questions as to how both sides of a ‘transnational chain’ develop and to what extent have domestic groups created community with resources from abroad. The transnational chain that Tarrow speaks of is rooted in part in migrant solidarity building in the US and nostalgia about their paisanos (compatriots) back home that emerges through social activity. von Bülow’s (2010) stresses the significance of understanding the embedded nature of transnational collection action. She argues we must understand
how social networks precondition collective action and how these ties affect action (von Bülow, 2010). For some groups their organizational history began as participants organized around weekend volleyball or soccer games with co-nationals and family where news about their related hometowns would be discussed. For example, news about a community member’s death would motivate the pooling of money in order to send the deceased back home for burial.

HTA projects work to alleviate poverty and provide much needed services to their communities back home. The leverage that HTAs garner through pooling together money in the US provides for infrastructural and social service needs. Orozco and Lapointe (2004) state that rural communities are the most marginalized as their infrastructures are weak. Typically, a government’s modernization plans are not aimed at rural areas. HTAs have provided the vehicle for rural communities to take initiative and determine the development of their towns. According to Fitzgerald (2008, p. 150) the members of HTAs have stated, ‘By achieving the industrialization of our town, all of its problems can be resolved’. The members aim to resolve their own problems by collectively organizing and taking action for a common goal.

HTAs have rehabilitated the infrastructure of rural communities by paving roads, improving sewage system, water quality, power and telecommunications, and refurbishing community buildings. Some examples include the work by the Zacatecan HTAs representing San Juan del Centro rehabilitated its school project and Jomulquillo initiated a microenterprise project by forming a women’s sewing cooperative to alleviate the lack of jobs (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009). The Jomulquillo HTA microenterprise project is a women’s sewing cooperative, which meets the lack of jobs available in the community. Only about 12% of the women participate in the economy as wage earners. However, the microenterprise project faces various issues. One, in regards to sustainability, is that the success of the project is based on the profits made by the cooperative. This project has struggled making a profit. Two, the project faces some challenges in gaining outside funding necessary to make a profit (Orozco & Lapointe, 2004). Three, the microenterprise projects are far from employing a large number of employees.

In light of the discussion above Keck and Sikkink (1998, p. 23) stress the significance of leverage politics where activists take the active stance to pressure target states to change policy. Activists measure their effectiveness as an organization when changes to policy are accomplished. Keck and Sikkink (1998) state that ‘leverage politics’ involves more powerful actors’ attempts to change the conditions of a weaker group through the utilization of advocacy networks. Although this may not have been the original intention of these organizations as in the case of Mexican HTAs, the result was that the Mexican government succumbed to pressure felt by the growth of these projects in rural communities. HTAs have to this extent ‘mobilized’ shame (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 23). In effect, HTA work can discredit weak or inept government policy pressuring them to reach out to these organizations thereby creating new policies that target sending communities which would hold with the Keck and Sikkink model. The added feature being that this work is negotiated through an ‘outside’ actor rather than a domestic group clamouring for change.

It has been argued that Mexican HTAs pressured their government to match the level of economic weight these organizations have in their sending communities. Alternatively, we can look at El Salvador, where the government sought support from the HTAs based in Los Angeles, California. The country lacked financial support from foreign investors, international banks and aid organizations. The government attempted to navigate a fiscal crisis by reaching out to migrants in the US and allowing for these
individuals to maintain residency status in El Salvador. Popkin (2003, p. 349) points out that this encouraged relationships between HTAs and the municipal level government and provided decision-making authority to migrants in the US over community projects. For example, three Los Angeles hometown associations have been able to use their financial power to leverage local-level officials to pressure for support of community projects (Popkin, 2003). Another example involves HTAs in California from the town of Santa Elena where they provided economic and political support as leverage in lobbying the local government of Santa Elena, which resulted in their complete control of the development projects (Popkin, 2003). El Salvador initiated the programme Unidos por la Solidaridad, (which is similar to the Mexican government’s Citizens Initiative matching-funds programme (Waldinger et al. 2008). Waldinger et al. (2008, p. 850) pointed out that ‘By offering funds to Salvadoran immigrant organizations abroad, the Salvadoran government hoped to enhance local development in El Salvador through increased collaboration between the immigrant organizations and local and national government officials in El Salvador’.

Other examples of HTA activity include organizations formed by migrants from the Dominican Republic and Columbia. During the 1980s the Dominican Republic made efforts to alleviate the financial woes of the country. In this time of economic crisis, the Dominican Republic started to pay attention to the needs of their immigrants in the US because the volume and value of remittances increased during this period (Pantoja, 2005). As a result, remittances represented the second largest source of foreign currency behind tourism in the Dominican Republic. The Dominican HTAs have assisted in the alleviation of the country’s economic problems; these organizations served to function primarily as a social service organization focused on charity and disaster relief. For instance, the Dominican HTA, the Cañafisteros of Bani Foundation of Boston, aids their hometown and province of Bani by providing donations to buy essential necessities for the town, such as an ambulance, electrical generator for the clinic, funeral car and various kinds of medical and school equipment (Portes et al., 2007). Most importantly, this HTA provides $100 US dollars a month to the neediest families. However, this has caused the town to become extremely dependent on the HTA’s generosity. In the Columbian community in the US, the HTA Esperanza por Columbia which formed in the 1970s has used fundraising to provide similar projects aimed at improving infrastructure and transporting equipment for their sending community (Escobar, 2004).

The critique of hometown associations

Two-way vs. unidirectional relationships

A two-way relationship is one that exists between TSMOs and local groups that involve the sharing of resources, information and influence which flow two ways (Rothman & Oliver, 2002, p. 117). Rothman and Oliver demonstrated that social movement groups in Brazil were proactive in their search for international resources. They point out that a two-way relationship existed between anti-dam movements and international sponsors. This interactive exchange between the anti-dam movement and external support organizations did pave the way for Brazilian SMOs to position themselves strategically within a large ecological advocacy network (Rothman & Oliver, 2002). This relationship resulted in the formation of an alliance between local groups and environmentalist organizations. Similarly, Sperling, Ferree, and Risman (2001) demonstrate how local feminist social movements did not remain passive when negotiating with transnational groups over strategy and organizational focus. Also, Sperling and colleagues (2001)
state that in the case of Russian feminist advocacy groups the relationship between local and transnational groups was a negotiated process. This was not a unidirectional process as the local and transnational activists actively struggled over resources and ideas. The interaction between these two groups provided opportunities for learning about the other side and allowing the relationship to evolve. HTAs provide a unique case because you can have a situation where migrants from abroad may be operating unilaterally, is one of the critiques about HTAs as the needs and the voice of the community back home are not considered fully.

Development
The effectiveness of HTA development work has been critiqued. HTAs’ projects developed and implemented may not be fully consistent with the communities’ needs (Waldinger et al., 2008). For instance, Salvadoran HTAs where in Caserio, the Beverly Hills of Municipio, they display modernization through the construction of well-built homes and paved roads without developing adequate access to drinking water or a sewage system (Waldinger et al., 2008).

Disparity
Another criticism is that there are disparities between communities that send many migrants to the US compared to those who do not. Many of the stagnant communities do not have international migrants who remit funds. The HTAs accumulating large amount of remittances have the highest bargaining power with local authorities (Fox & Bada, 2008). The local residents also contribute to community projects via funds and labour.

HTAs network ties can be as undemocratic (Fox & Bada, 2008) as other civil society sectors (Juris, 2008). Hertel (2006) explores the lack of attention to the perspective local residents when she discusses the intranetwork conflict that emerges within human rights advocacy groups. She attributes the evolution of the alliance to the conflicts over resources, political access and the framing of movement goals. These conflicts are opportunities for change as it was observed that confrontational or blocking tactics and conflict avoidance were used to influence the development of human rights frames (Hertel, 2006). Some important questions include addressing how the community back home, as described by Fox and Bada (2008), contest and attempt to reshape their relationship to a given HTA.

Social vs. productive projects
Many of the HTA development projects are infrastructure projects that do not aim to alleviate poverty. HTAs have shifted from social to productive projects. Garcia Zamora (2007, p. 95) stated that ‘The results of these projects (social projects) are for the benefit of the overall community, unlike productive projects, which generally involve individual investments and individual benefits, making the confluence of public funds difficult’. The social projects are projects to improve the infrastructure of the community such as refurbishing schools and churches. The social projects (i.e. paving roads) are not wealth-and job-generating projects because they solely improve the community’s infrastructure and have a direct impact on the community. The productive projects create jobs for the community and have an indirect impact on the community.
HTAs that have incorporated productive projects into their efforts are the well-established HTAs from the states of the Zacatecas and Michoacán hometowns. According to Garcia Zamora (2007), the communities have recognized that the main problem in their hometowns is the lack of jobs. As a result, the HTAs have proposed to the government that they support productive micro projects. Conferences were convened such as the First Binational Conference on Productive Projects with Migrants in order for hometown association leaders and local, state and federal government officials to collaborate on how to support these projects. One major problem found was the lack of entrepreneurial culture in the Zacatecan community both in the US and the back home.

Nevertheless, long-established Mexican HTAs have initiated and invested in projects to alleviate poverty by targeting their project funds to businesses such as gas stations, maquiladoras and small businesses (Moctezuma, 2002). For instance, in the community of Tendeparaqua in Michoacán, Mexico, a school uniform garment shop was established (Orozco & Lapointe, 2004). Although, jobs are being created the incentive is not sufficient to retain potential migrants. HTAs have shifted to productive projects as they have already resolved their needs for basic infrastructure (Garcia Zamora, 2007). However, there is a major issue with HTAs shifting to productive development because it becomes problematic in the case of Mexico for the Mexican Ministry of Social Development, who is responsible for ‘The Citizens Initiative’ three for one which provides matching funds for hometown projects.

**Decision-making roles**

According to Fox and Bada (2008), there are various reasons many Mexican HTAs have not implemented productive projects. There may be unequal access and distribution of resources, such as land, technical training and investments. Also, not all parties agree on what kind of projects should be implemented. Local authorities want ‘public’ projects to help showcase their aid to a community. Finally, HTAs insist on being included in the negotiation and approval processes for a particular project (Fox & Bada, 2008).

In the case of Zacatecan experience many projects have a cultural and historical preservation focus which at times conflict with the state’s conception of development (Iskander, 2010). Part of the problem has to do with lack of communication between Latin American HTA members and hometown residents over the true needs of the community (Rose & Shaw, 2008). One argument is that the local resident committees created to oversee construction are weak in the sense that most of the members have poor reading skills and no training in the construction projects they are asked to manage. No clear strategy exists on the responsibilities of these committees in the process of working with their HTA (Fox & Bada, 2008). One way to conceptualize this is that for some of these organizations there is a degree of unidirectionality that exists between the HTA and the sending community. It is HTA that decides what goals are to be met and how aid is delivered given that these organizations provide the funding (Waldinger et al., 2008).

It can be argued that HTAs work less autonomously after they have accepted the support of the government. Also, that the HTAs are hindering the decision-making process of the community back home because the needs being met are those of migrants. Although, the government is aiding the HTAs, these organizations had to pressure the government to aid them. The project funds sent by HTAs secure their autonomy and hold the government accountable for their actions. The government complies with the HTAs because they need their financial support to promote their development projects and political support to gain votes from their community of origin.
For instance, when representatives of a Salvadoran HTA visited their hometown to check on the children’s park, the park was incomplete. This HTA demanded the mayor to complete the project or they would publicize that their funds ($10,000) were misused and stolen (Popkin, 2003). Immediately, the mayor complied with the demands and completed the park project as a public demonstration by the HTA would have severely harmed the mayor’s image and chances for re-election. Failure to comply, the mayor would have lost the financial and political support. As a result, HTAs seem to have more economical and political autonomy over those with power. However, there are HTAs that maintain their autonomy by not registering to receive federal aid. The HTAs that maintain autonomy from the government take part in what can be described as ‘progressive’ stance. For example, the Michoacán Club the Paracho California is a HTA located in Long Beach that focuses its funds on environmental work, including reforestation of the wooded area surrounding their community. They have refused to work with the local government because they do not want to support their political party’s agenda.

Conclusion
The paper argued that HTAs are a TSMO that participates in the civic and economic development of their home country. Specifically, in what way does HTA work pressure ‘home country’ government from ‘outside’ to comply with pressure to aid their respective sending communities? HTAs have identified problems in the home country and take the initiative in solving the problem at hand which has at times allowed them to circumvent the government. Overtime this ability to solve problems has granted migrants new political access in the home country. The work by HTAs has pressured the government to act on creating new policies that guide how it implements development projects to communities in need. What is significant here is that this is accomplished by an outside actor in the form of an HTA. The paper allows for some discussion as to the role of migrant social networks in conditioning this form of collective action. Additionally, these same networks allowed for creative methods for solving problems back home. Finally, the paper has discussed the democratic nature of these organizations and has explored the extent to which sending communities participate in development projects.

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José L. Collazo is currently a PhD candidate in sociology at Washington State University. His general research interests are immigration, labour markets and development, specifically in the US and Latin America context.
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