

Mexico in its Newest Frontier: Mexican Immigrants in Anchorage (Alaska): Migratory Networks and Social Capital[±]

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Abstract

Mexican migration to the United States of America has experienced many changes through history. In the beginnings the destinations points were the states on the border and Illinois. The naturalization of Mexicans in the USA has made it possible for them to move easily to places where they can have better job opportunities, which at the same time allow them to improve their life quality. As the social networks move to different places they involve more people in them at the same time.

[±] We began research for this article in 2005, conducted a sample survey and oral interviews with selected Mexican community leaders between 2006 and 2008, and have utilized the 2010 US Census results for Alaska and Anchorage. The 2010 Census shows that Latinos (Hispanics) make up 5.5% of Alaska's population (much less than the 16.3% of the entire US population and that it is the fastest growing minority in the state. Anchorage (a city 291,826 in the 2010 census) has seen the Latino population grow to 39,249 from 25,852 in the 2000 Census—a gain of 52%. Most Latinos look to Mexicans for leadership because they constitute more than half of all Latinos in Anchorage and the rest of the Latinos come from 14 non-Mexican areas. (See Tables 1 and 2.) Importantly, the only official Latin flag in Alaska is the one that flies at the Mexican Consulate in Anchorage.

Here we analyze how Anchorage can be seen as the “last frontier” for Mexicans trying to find better jobs, with or without legal documents, thus expanding the geographic of Mexico’s impact on the northern most major city of North America. A growing number of migrants to Anchorage have led to a basis for attracting more relatives and friends, as they seek jobs in this “new” destination.

The City of Anchorage is significant in 2010 for two reasons: It holds more than 40% of the total population of Alaska; and more than 56% of the Hispanic population. Mexican immigrants in Anchorage represent most of the total Hispanic population in the city (55%). Our main interest in studying the situation of these Mexican immigrants is to describe the kind of job that they do in Anchorage, their migratory status, identify their social networks, and examine social context of the Mexican community.

We have applied our survey developed since 2006 to a sample of the Mexican immigrants in Anchorage, with the purpose of knowing their situation in this place, how they arrived there, and their perceptions of the local opportunities. Subsequently, we conducted extensive personal interviews with members of the Mexican Community and found that who arrive in Alaska have spent time in another state of the United States.

We focus on how Mexican migrants to Alaska learn how to participate in the labour markets, obtain their legal documentation (or, if they are in the process or have done so), how they decided to move to Anchorage, and then within it. Frequently, these immigrants have access to social networks and that is how they get the information they need to establish themselves in this “last frontier” for Mexican migrants in North America.

Introduction

Mexican migration to the United States of America has experienced many changes through history. In the beginnings the destinations points were the Border States; California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas; as well as Illinois (Durand *et al.* in Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2008). With the adoption of new security measures regarding the migration issue, Mexican immigrants have started to change the crossing points, and even the destination places.

The naturalization of Mexicans in the USA, benefited by an amnesty with the approval of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986 (better known as Simpson-Rodino Law) has made it possible for them to move easily, once they obtain their legal documents, to places where they can have better job opportunities which allow them to improve their level and quality of life. These reasons have direct implications on the destinations of the new immigrants. As the social networks move to different places and at the same time they involve more people in them, the people who decide to go to the U.S. trying to find better jobs, even without legal documents, make contact with their relatives, friends, other people they know, which nowadays are located in different states of this country (Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005; Massey et al, 2009).

We can see that not only the destination places of the Mexican immigrants have changed, but even migration itself has experienced changes. This means that now the immigrants themselves possess different characteristics than they had before. In the present they do not just work in the fields, but as time goes by, often we can find Mexicans employed in the services industry, especially in those areas which require low skilled workers, and in different activities, such as the processing of fish and seafood in general, as waiters and waitresses, and in hotels, among others.

After the annexation of former Mexican territories to the United States in 1848, in the late XIX and early XX centuries, Mexican immigrants settled in the US for short term periods, during which they worked in the expansion of railways over the United States. Later in the XX century, we can mention the *Bracero* period (1942 through 1964), in which Mexican workers were required in the agricultural fields. In general, they went to work, save money and then went back home, which made it possible that people who decided to migrate to the US were mainly men, who left their families in Mexico and after a while they returned home. But, as the time passed this has changed.

Now, Mexicans arrive to the US with the purpose of staying there and settling down, as they seek a way to take their family with them (Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005). This change in Mexican migration to the US is happening along with the diversification of labour markets Mexicans have had access to during the last decades. Now that entire families migrate, they try hard seeking a job which can allow them to have a higher lifestyle which is an important reason for them to move to places where they can

have access to better job opportunities. In recent years it has been possible to see that people have migrated to new destinations; for instance Idaho, Iowa, Georgia, New York, Indiana, Utah, Nebraska, Arkansas, Minnesota, North Carolina (Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005; Massey *et al.*, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2008; Gouveia *et al.*, 2005; Griffith, 2005; Donato, *et al.*, 2005) and Alaska (García, 2007; Wiest, 2006; Komarnisky, 2006).

Statistical data suggest that in Alaska, the services industry and its traditionally low wages has expanded in the last decade, this means that more low skill jobs have been created. This situation creates an increasing necessity of immigrants, because they are the people who are willing to work for those wages. Lina Mariscal declares that Mexicans have answered in a positive way to that call, and they are entering the labour markets in Alaska, such as hotels, restaurants, construction and fishing, because even the minimum wage in Alaska is higher than in other places of the U.S (O'Malley, 2006; Neville, 2010).

According to the US Census 2010, Mexican immigrants in Anchorage, represent 55% of the total Hispanic/Latino population in the city. This is the main reason of our interest in studying the situation of the Mexican immigrants in this area.

In 2010 there were 10.8 million of unauthorized migrants living in the United States, and 62 per-cent of them were from Mexico (Hofer et al, 2011). According to Lina Mariscal, Honorary Consul of Mexico in Anchorage in 2006, it is possible that Alaska has the same trend (O'Malley, 2006). In Alaska for 2010 there were 11,526 Mexicans (<http://www.census.gov/>), and around one third of them have no legal documentation. This number is higher than the one estimated by the Census for the total of the people with no legal documents in the entire state.

In general, people who arrive in Alaska have already been in another state of the United States, and many times after they obtain their legal documentation or they learn how to participate in the labour markets, they decide to move to places where they can have access to better jobs and higher wages. Frequently, these immigrants have access to social networks and that is how they can get the information they need to be able to move to a different area. Migratory networks are a main element for immigrants, even more if they are going to a place they do not know.

In the early 1970s there were just a few Mexicans in Alaska. But by the mid 1970s, Mexican immigration influx was permanent and in large numbers compared to the immigration wave before the beginning of the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System in 1974. Mexican immigrants, as well as people from other countries, were attracted in Alaska due to the offer of high paid jobs in this state. Even though the advertised jobs in Alaska were on the construction of the Pipeline, as soon as people started to arrive in large waves, other kind of services were needed. Thus more restaurants, hotels, schools, supermarkets, among many other services were built up. This is a reason for Mexican immigrants not just to remain in the state, but to continue arriving there after the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System was finally built in 1977.

Context of Anchorage

Anchorage is located in South Central Alaska, which consists of its land boundaries including the shorelines and uplands of the Gulf of Alaska. Anchorage is a consolidated city-borough, which is officially called the Municipality of Anchorage and it is also a census area. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Anchorage is the largest city in the state of Alaska, composing more than two-fifths of the state's population, which in 2010, was 291,826.

Anchorage is Alaska's center of commerce, due to the Port of Anchorage, Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport and Alaska Railroad. All of these combine to make Anchorage the primary cargo distributor in the state, according in Alaska's Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development.

The average daytime summer temperatures in this city are approximately 55°F to 80°F (12.7°C to 26.6°C) and average daytime winter temperatures are about 5°F to 20°F (-15°F to -6.6 °C). Average January daytime low and high temperature in Anchorage are 7°F to 21°F (-13.8°C to -6.1°C), with an average snowfall of 0.70 inches. Although we have information of these average temperatures, the weather on any given day or for an entire season can be very unpredictable (Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau).

Aside from the winter cold, which most Alaskans do not mind, there are two primary nuisances associated with the seasons: in the summer, mosquitoes, which are worse out in the bush than in the city itself; in the winter long nights and very short days. Since Anchorage is at such high altitude, for months in mid-winter, residents go to work in the dark and return home in the dark. Those who do not study or work next to a window can go all week long without seeing the sun. This situation can cause many residents to become depressed, especially those who are foreign born. In our field research some Mexicans mentioned that they wanted to move out of Alaska because they have had enough long winters with no sun, and they were starting to get depressed at that time.

Map 1. Anchorage, Alaska.



Source: <http://maps.msn.com>

Mexican and Latino Communities in Anchorage

The immigration trends of the Hispanic/Latino community in Alaska parallel the ones in the U.S. making this ethnic group the second largest minority in the state. The common language is Spanish which binds the different cultures representing this group. It is also this language that ties them historically to some of the very earliest Spanish explorers of this Great Land (Alaska's Cultures).

Early Latinos migration in Alaska started during the late forties and early fifties, and they went in Alaska to work at the Military Base. After the war was over, soldiers were sent in Alaska to do their military service.

The Guide in Alaska’s Cultures (2003-2004:77) expressed that “[...] Hispanics and Latinos [...] are now travelling in Alaska in search of employment, mainly in fisheries and cannery plants around the state, and to be with family members. Alaska’s history is rooted in a few Spanish explorers and will continue to grow culturally as the Hispanic community becomes larger”.

Table 1 shows Alaska’s significant population of Latin American descent, in which we can see that even though Latinos are concentrated in the Anchorage area, they are also settled along the whole state. It is worth noting that as the rest of the population, Latinos responded to the economic attraction of Alaska’s largest city. Also we can see how the Latin American population increased in the majority of the cities: in 2000 Anchorage had 14,799 Latin Americans who grew in 2010 to 22,061 (See Table 1).

Table 1. Anchorage Population				
Race	2001		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Anchorage Population	260,283	100%	291,826	100%
White	188,009	94.02%	212,398	72.8
Black or African American	15,199	5.84%	22,494	7.70%
American Indian and Alaska Native	18,941	7.28%	36,062	12.40%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	14,799	5.69%	22,061	7.60%
Mexican	7,246	2.78%	11,526	3.90%
Puerto Rican	1,652	0.63%	2,703	0.9%
Cuban	343	0.13%	521	0.2%
Other Hispanic or Latino	5,558	2.14%	7,311	2.5%

Source: Data from US. Census Bureau 2000-2010; <http://www.census.gov/>

We can see that the difference in quantity between Mexicans and the rest of Latinos is quite wide (See Table 2). And this group follows the same trend in Anchorage, where they are around 50% of the Hispanic/Latino total population. This is an important reason to study Mexicans as community which are able to influence Anchorage, demographically as well as economically and culturally. This city enriches itself by hosting this group. For

instance, Anchorage’s society is pretty aware of the presence of *tortillas* and Mexican food in general, as well as knowing that speaking Spanish gives them better job and income opportunities.

Table 2. Number of Hispanics or Latinos by Ethnicity		
Hispanic or latino ethnic origin	Number of individuals in 2000	Number of individuals in 2010
Central American (excluded Mexican)	1,201	2,509
Chilean	124	223
Colombian	440	867
Cuban	553	927
Dominican	877	1,909
Guatemalan	181	508
Honduran	143	272
Mexican	13,334	21,642
Panamanian	235	446
Peruvian	278	611
Puerto Rican	2,649	4,502
Salvadoran	477	938
South American	1,145	2,345
Spanish	174	1,091
Other	5,919	4,700

Source: Guide in Alaska’s Cultures (2003-2004) and US. Census Bureau 2010.

Since the 1990s, the Hispanic/Latino community has moved from the third-ranked minority group to the second largest. It also noted that this group has the second fastest growth rate in Alaska which is at 45.2% in the last decade. (The Guide in Alaska’s Cultures).

The Hispanic/Latino Communities in Anchorage are becoming increasingly important for the city in all its different aspects, economic, social, politic, in general. Among the Latino leaders in Anchorage, we can find many Mexican immigrants who are working to improve the quality of life of these immigrants there.

Mexican immigrants in Anchorage

There is a Mexican family in Anchorage, which is the first family Mexicans seemingly recognize has having settled as permanent immigrants in Alaska. They arrived there in 1953, and they helped many other immigrants to settle in this city. As Carlos told us in an interview: *“Llegué en 1968, nada más con mi maletita, sin conocer a nadie. Era*

muy difícil encontrar latinos. En las tiendas, de repente escuchaba hablar español y así conocí a la familia Hernández, y me invitaron a quedarme en su casa mientras conseguía trabajo y me acomodaba” (2008). This family owns a fur store in down town Anchorage.

Also, in a 1973 pioneering work by Raymond Wiest related to labor migration from Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, the author points out that “some Acuitzenses also find work in construction or in bakeries in Alaska”. In one of his works Wiest found that the first migrants from Acuitzio were attracted in Alaska due to the offer of high-paid work on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (cited in Komarnisky, 2006: 40).

During the 1960’s oil was discovered on the North Slope of Alaska, soon after that drilling began and the plans of building a pipeline from Prudhoe Bay south roughly 800 miles to the ice-free port of Valdez (Brown, 2011) were rapidly made. In 1974, construction began, and people who were seeking high-paid jobs started to arrive in Alaska.

Numerous advertisements appeared stating that the wages that would be paid in the construction of the pipeline could reach \$1,200 weekly. (Tower, 1999 cited in Komarnisky, 2006: 40; Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, 2009).

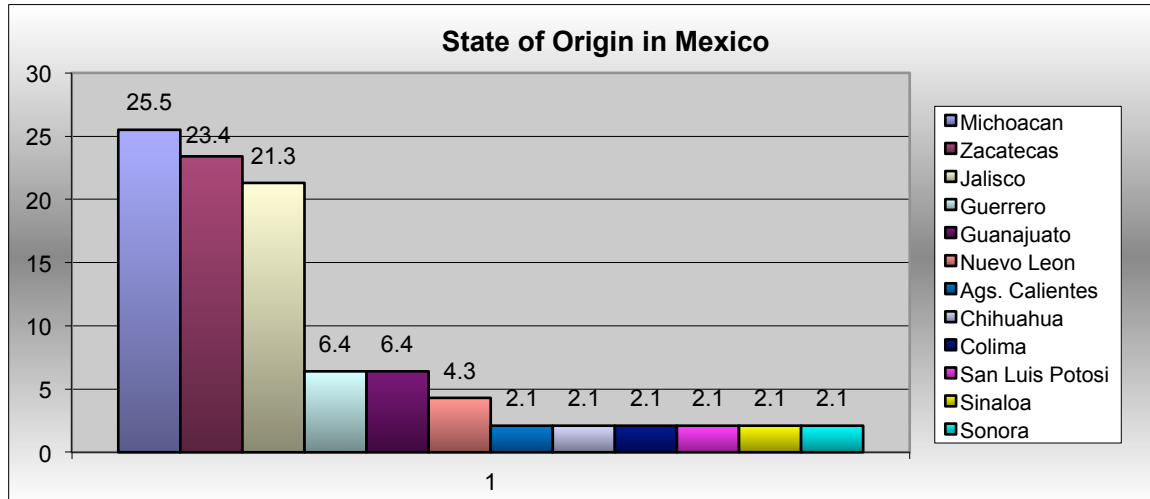
A reason that allowed so many people to go and get a job in this state, was that either skilled or unskilled workers could work in there, from heavy equipment operators, pipe fitters, welders, truck drivers and surveyors to laborers, cooks, bakers, housekeepers, and assorted camp followers. The pipeline was completed in 1977 and by this time, “more than 70,000 men and women had worked on its construction” (Hannigan, 2008) many of whom were Mexicans.

In an interview for *El Universal* (2005a), Daniel Esparza, who is from Zacatecas, said that he calculates there are about 8 to 9 thousand Mexicans in Anchorage, of which 70.1 per cent are from Michoacán, Zacatecas and Jalisco, in that order—see Graph 1.

Esparza also stated that since 2000 there has been a new wave of Mexican immigrants whose homeland is Oaxaca, Guerrero or Chiapas. He also said that when he went for the first time in Anchorage to a celebration of Mexican independence there were about 30 *paisanos*. “At the moment it is possible that almost 600 Mexicans get together in a

*quinceañera*² party”. Esparza told that the arrival of *zacatecanos*,³ and of Mexicans in general, started to increase during the 1970s, when the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System was installed.

Graph 1. State of Origin in Mexico



Source: Based on a survey applied during the author’s fieldwork research

Then, the number of Mexicans in Alaska started to descend somewhat due to the departure of those who could not handle the low temperatures. By the time we conducted field research, about 300 Mexicans gathered for a weekend *baile*, nothing special just to have fun, in which there were Mexican bands or *grupos musicales* which came from other cities in the US, such as Los Angeles, to play for the Mexican community in Anchorage. Also, during the Spanish mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, more than 200 Mexicans, along with other Latinos, attended with their families.

Hugo Forrest (2008) stated in our interview him that when he arrived IN Fairbanks⁴, Alaska, in 1972, there were no housing facilities, the only thing they could do was to pay to have access to bed facilities; “[...] *me fui a rentar una cama, en esa época en Fairbanks no rentaban apartamentos, no había, casas no había, ni hispanos [...]*”.

During an interview we conducted with Daniel Esparza, he told about how the immigration of people willing to work in the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline

² In Mexico is a tradition to celebrate girl’s XV anniversary. The meaning of this celebration is that the girl has just become a woman, and she is introduced to society.

³ Persons from Zacatecas, Mexico.

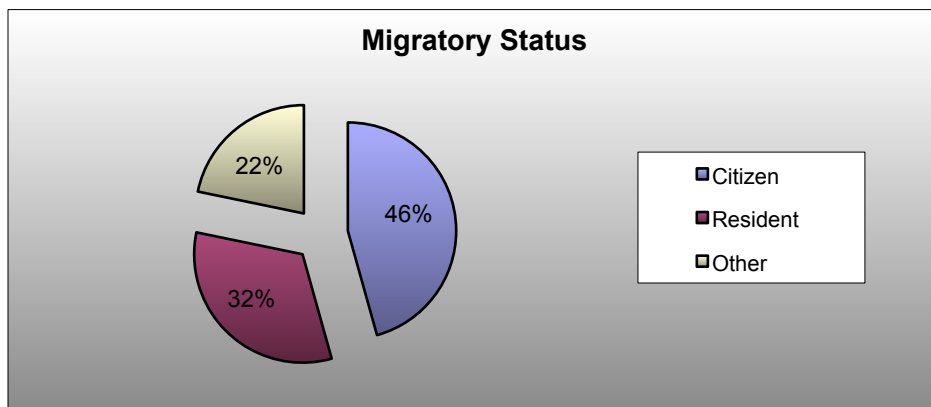
⁴ Fairbanks, Alaska, is the city where the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System was constructed during the 70’s, thus, this is the city where immigrants arrived seeking for a high paid job opportunities.

System urged the development of other economic activities. For instance restaurants and hotels were built to fulfil the needs of immigrants, more grocery stores and schools started to be necessities for this people too. All of this worked as a natural circuit in which services were created to take care of the increasing necessities of immigrants, and afterwards, more people were needed to do the job, to give services to other people.

During the fieldwork stage of this research as well as bibliographic research, we found out that most of the Mexican immigrants arrive in Alaska after they had lived for a time in at least one other city of the continental USA, and they usually obtained information about Alaska from relatives, friends, or countrymen.

During our fieldwork research in Anchorage, we found that the majority of Mexican immigrants have legal U.S. migratory status--they are either citizens or residents. This does not imply that in Anchorage there are not undocumented immigrants, as we can see in Graph 2.

Graph 2. Migratory Status

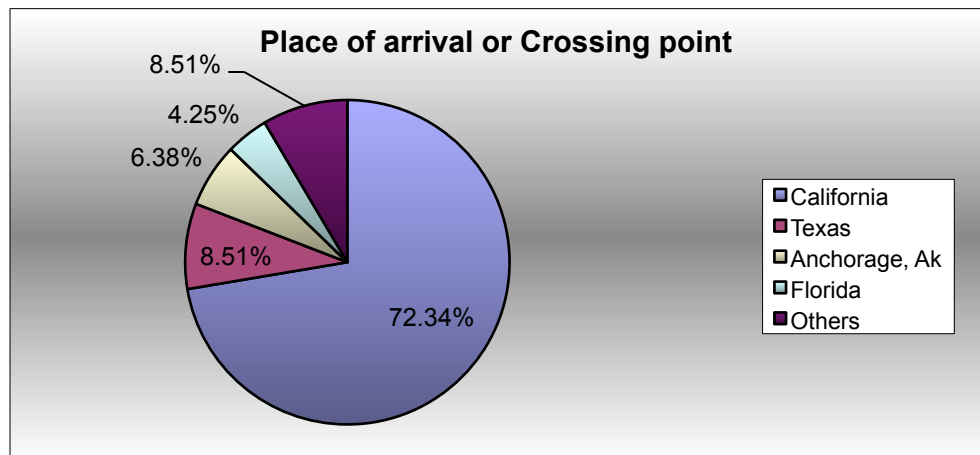


Source: Based on a survey applied during the author's fieldwork research

Graph 2 shows us that the migratory status is indicative of Mexicans being immigrants of second insertion; they have learned how to behave in the American society as well as in the labor markets in this country. As well, as they have spent many years living and working in the United States, thus, they have had the opportunity of legalize their migratory status. In Graph 3 we can see the crossing points of Mexican immigrants. This shows that they spent some time in another place before deciding to move to Alaska.

There have been changes in the traditional profile of Mexican migrants during the last decade. Now we can find migrants not only from agricultural areas, but people from urban, and some industrialized areas have been incorporated to the migratory process, since migrating can be more profitable than maintain the jobs they had in their places of origin (Mendez, 2008).

Graph 3. Place of arrival or Crossing point to USA



Source: Based on a survey applied during the author's fieldwork research

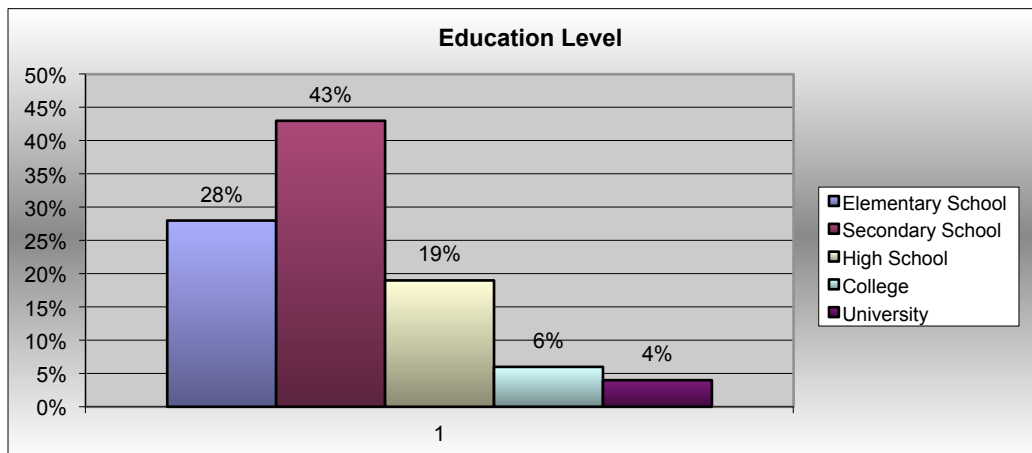
The education profile of Mexican migrants to the United States has also changed. According to Mendez (2008) 37.6% of Mexican immigrants in the US have a high school degree, and 7.4% have a higher level of education than high school. Also according to Widmaier and Dumont (2011), 30% of immigrants holding a university degree work in intermediate or low-skilled jobs. In our fieldwork research we have found a similarity with this information.

Graph 4 shows the educational level of Mexican immigrants in Alaska, which reveals that most of the Mexicans who reside in this city finished at least their secondary school studies. This means, that they are at least able to read and write, which makes it easier for them to learn the English language, so they can communicate with non-Hispanic people in this city.

Work and entrepreneurship of Mexican immigrants in Anchorage

As we have noted before, Mexican immigrants in Alaska mainly work in the services and food industries especially in restaurants whether as waiters or waitresses, bus boys, in the kitchen as cooks, and dishwashers. Many of these restaurants and small businesses are actually owned by Mexicans. Other Mexicans work painting businesses, they clean houses or offices too.

Graph 4. Education



Source: Based on a survey applied during the author's fieldwork research

But Mexican workers mainly work in the construction area. And some have been employed outside Anchorage in salmon canneries or other seafood processing, where 75% of all workers in that industry were non-residents of Alaska (Hadland et al., 2006 in Komarnisky, 2006: 42). These are among the diverse activities Mexicans are willing to do and are actually doing.

When we talk about a Mexican or Mexican immigrant community in Anchorage, it is necessary to talk about the Latino community in many aspects. Even though Mexicans and other Latino people can be very different, they have to work as a team of Latinos because that's the way other people identify them.

By working side by side, Latinos can achieve more goals, for instance in politics, than if they go at separately; and, indeed, we found that Latinos have a common approach to entrepreneurship. In Anchorage many Latinos have owned businesses, such as restaurants, newspapers, day cares, hair salons, for example. In Anchorage there are about

150 Mexican restaurants. Too, Mexican goods stores such as “Mexico Lindo” thrive alongside “El Taco Loco”.

Other businesses have focused on doing tax accounting, mostly for Mexicans and Latinos, and they have the respective licenses to do so. Let us note, too, that Mexican businesses are not just directed to fulfil Mexican and Latino needs, but these services and goods are available for everyone. It does not matter their ethnicity or nationality since they are not buying ethnic products.

In Anchorage, there are around 50 painting, taping and sheetrock⁵ businesses, and some of the bigger ones are owned by Mexican people, with approximately 10 to 12 employees each one. These companies build around 400 or 500 houses every 6 or 7 months, and it is interesting to note that not many people in the city know how this industry has formed.

As Hugo Forrest told us in an interview: *“Así que no solamente es restaurante, también tienen otros niveles en donde el mexicano o el hispano está muy bien posicionado...”* With this comment he means that restaurants are not the only kind of business in which Mexicans and Hispanics are involved.

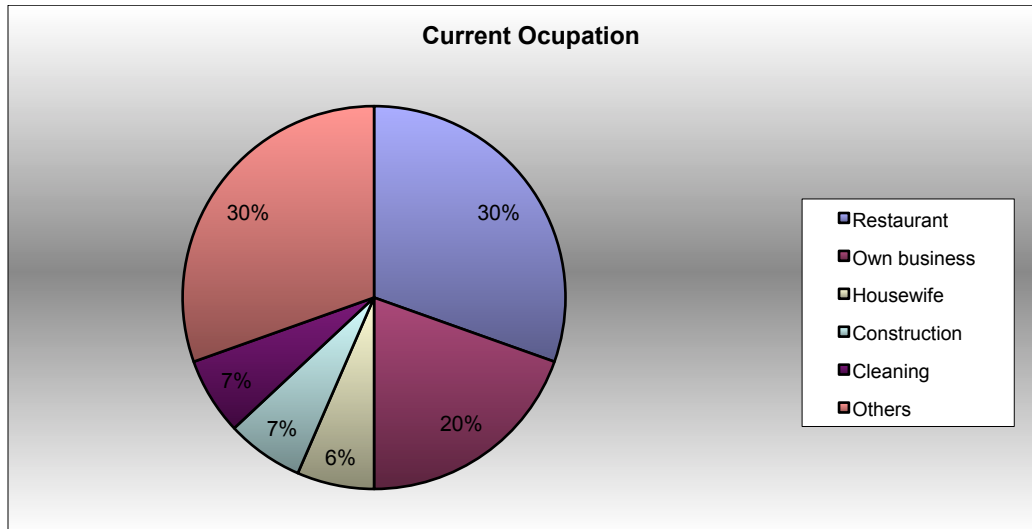
For instance, one of the first great Mexican businessmen in Anchorage was a man whose business consisted of making *tortillas* for restaurants and individual customers alike. By the 1970s he had about 20 employees. Within Mexican and Latino communities this man is known as “*Taco Loco*”. Even though he still has a goods store where many Mexican products are sold.

Because in our fieldwork we found that most of Mexican immigrants work in the services and food industries (Graph 5), it is with them that we focused our survey questions. With tourism constituting one of the most important economic activities in Anchorage, restaurants are key business for the economy of this city; and tourism requires cleaning services in which many Mexican immigrants are employed.

⁵ This is a construction activity, it consist on building drywalls. After they finish their job, painters do theirs.

Owing to the fact that many of Alaska's major corporations are headquartered in Anchorage, Mexicans have had the opportunity to move beyond janitorial and maid services to actually run their own service businesses.

Graph 5. Current occupation



Source: Based on survey data from field research

Further, one successful business often can lead to another, and Mexicans in Anchorage have branched into unrelated activities, for instance, some restaurant owners who also run painting stores, and/or they do painting itself.

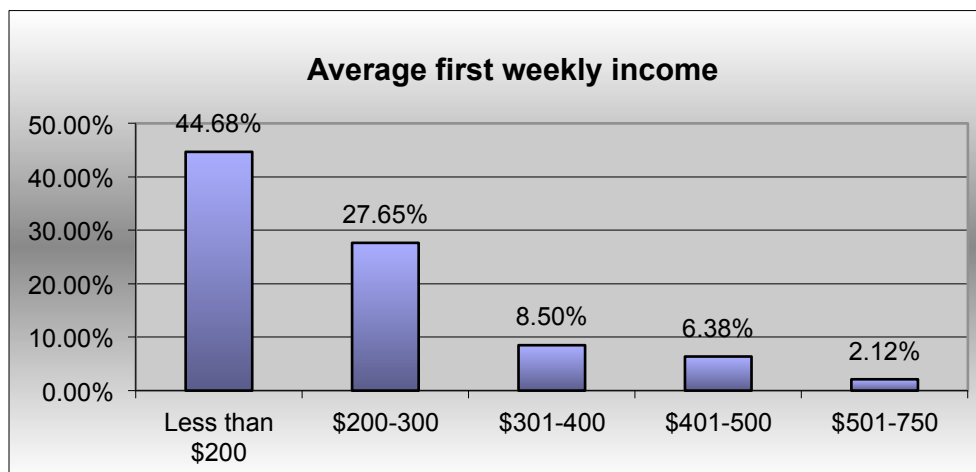
Since many people within the Mexican community in Anchorage work in the services sector, especially in those activities involved in the tourism industry, many Mexicans newcomers find themselves working in those areas too. Most of the arriving immigrants know ties them into job networks and provides important information about labor market access and wages in Anchorage. Thus, migratory networks offer other migrants not only information, but frequently they even offer housing, food and jobs (Coleman, 1990; Bordieu, 1985).

Income is the most important reason for immigrants to move in Alaska. For instance, the federal minimum wage at the national level is 5.5 dollars per hour, while in the state of Alaska the minimum wage is 7.15 dollars per hour.

For comparative purposes we have divided the average income of Mexican immigrants into Graph 6 and Graph 7. Graph 6 shows their average first weekly income. This refers to what they earned at the time they first arrived in the United States where they worked before moving on before moving to Anchorage. Graph 7 refers to Mexicans' average current weekly income in Anchorage, where wages are higher than in other regions of the country. These people often work in the same area they used to work before moving in Alaska. The difference is that the jobs they have access to now are better paid. Thus, we can see that the geographic and weather conditions are not important deterrents for Mexicans who decide to live in Anchorage. It is the level and quality of life they and their families can have that ultimately prevail for those willing to take the challenge.

In Graph 6 we can see that when immigrants first arrived in the US (not Alaska) the majority had the lowest income. The average first weekly income was from less than \$200 to \$300 dollars, and there were just a few people who were able to earn more than \$500 dollars per week. This has to do with the place they were living in, as we found in our fieldwork research. Most of this Mexican immigrants arrived first to California, and this is a state in which the numbers of this ethnic group are large, thus, there are more people willing to do that kind of job for less money. This first income was not enough for Mexican immigrants to remain in the place of first arrival, thus they continued seeking better paid jobs in order to obtain a better quality of life this has taken them to Anchorage.

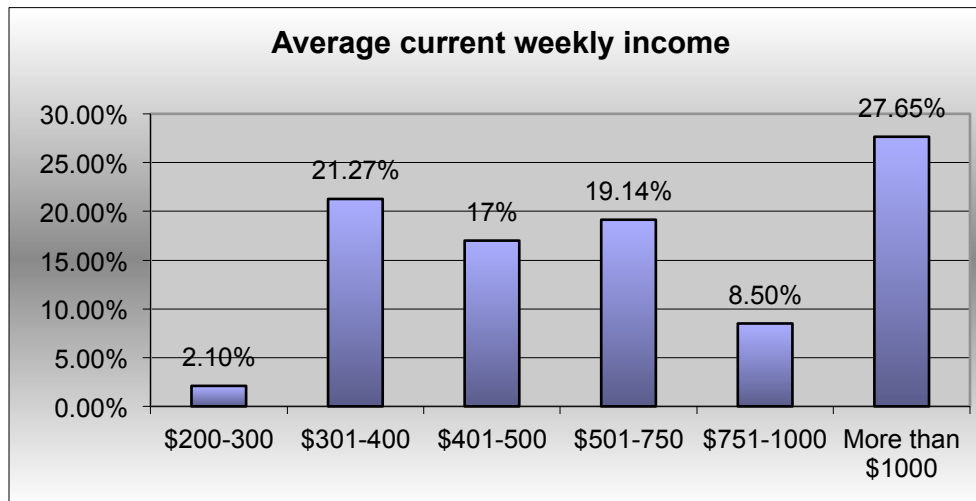
Graph 6. Average first weekly income



Source: Based on a survey applied during the author's fieldwork research

However, Alaska is a new destination for Mexican immigration. We are talking of a constant immigration wave that slowly but steady began since the 1970s. And as people began to arrive there in large numbers not so long ago, this region is in a process of constant development. This is a positive feature for immigrants because this allows them to have access to jobs in the construction sector, as well as in the services sector which is one of the most important economic strengths of this city. Now in Graph 7, we can see that there are many people who are able to earn more than \$1000 dollars a week. This shows that Mexican immigrants can have a real opportunity to improve their incomes and this goes along with the positive change they can experience in their quality of life.

Graph 7. Average current weekly income



Source: Based on a survey applied during the author's fieldwork research

Social life

Mexicans, as well as other immigrants, have different ways to gather and socialize. Each ethnic group has its own characteristics and they develop some features when they become immigrants. When they need to feel that they belong somewhere, being in a host society far away from their own land, for instance, it has been seen that people can become more religious than when they were in their places of origin. They also continue celebrate those special dates they used to celebrate back home, such as *Día de la Guadalupe*⁶ on December the 12th, and *quince años* (girl's XV anniversary celebration).

⁶ This is a celebration, a kind of anniversary of Virgin of Guadalupe, in México.

For members of the Mexican communities in Anchorage, going to church on Sundays is a part of who they are, it is also a way to spend some time together as a family. In this city, going to church is not only a religious thing, for as the community is still developing people take this as an opportunity to socialize with other members. For instance, when people get to church, the mass starts (in Anchorage there are two churches that offer Spanish masses; Our Lady of Guadalupe and The Holy Family Cathedral) and after mass finishes people gather in a place where there are some tables and chairs, so they can have a cup of coffee, some bread and a pleasant conversation with friends. In these conversations people talk about daily issues, that go from seemingly irrelevant, to trying to get organized for political reasons. Getting involved in the church activities gives people a higher status, because the rest of the community sees them as a sort of leaders. An example of this kind of leadership is that, when needed, people who are involved in these activities are able to contact and mobilize other people, in order to achieve social and political goals.

It is important to note that in order to achieve political goals, Mexican, and Latino communities in general, need to organize culturally first or to use their cultural histories productively. In this matter, during an interview we conducted, Hugo Forrest (2008) stated that they were trying to organize a Latin American festival in which a group of people from 15 different countries would have the opportunity to give political speeches, to show their culture, to sing. In other words to do all those representative things from each country, and that everyone else can see and enjoy. To know each other and identify themselves as Latino community through diversity and unity. By doing so, they would be able to have political strength as well.

Conclusion

The migratory process of Mexicans to Anchorage is a recent phenomenon. Mexicans started to migrate to this city in limited numbers during the 1970s, with the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Many of them arrived in Alaska seeking work in this construction project, but the settlement of so many immigrants started the creation or development of a services industry to fulfil the needs of all immigrants in this place.

Thus, Mexicans worked either in the construction of the pipeline system or in the services industry. Hotels, restaurants, schools, retail stores, among others, were built in Anchorage, so people in there could have access to everything they needed.

As Alaska is a state in which the minimum wage is higher than the federal minimum wage, people are attracted to this place, and as Anchorage is the most important city, economically speaking in Alaska, this concentrates the headquarters of many different industries such as oil and gas. It is also the financial center of the state and this implies that the services industry is also concentrated there, thus Mexicans decide to migrate to Anchorage.

When we started this research, we thought that in Anchorage we would find that Mexican immigrants there were employees of different companies, organizations and/or enterprises. But what we found in there was a different situation. There are many Mexican immigrants who are employees, of course, but there are many of them who are owners of different kind of businesses, and an important thing is that they do not just employ Mexicans but they even have “American” employees. For instance, in Anchorage there are more than a hundred and fifty Mexican businesses, especially restaurants, where we can find that the majority of the employees in these restaurants are Mexicans but there are also Americans. Who, as a side note, have to speak some Spanish because the name of the dishes are in Spanish, and also because a lot of the costumers of these restaurants are Latinos.

Restaurants are not the only kind of businesses Mexican immigrants are able to run. There are fur stores, stores of Mexican products and they own real estate companies, land properties, or painting businesses. They work on their own (having license to do so) as well.

The Hispanic/Latino community in Alaska is also trying to organize in the political realm. We found out that among the main political leaders in this city there are some Mexican immigrants who have been there for more than twenty years, and are trying to improve their and their children’s situation in that city. They are encouraging the children of Mexican, and Hispanic/Latino in general, immigrants to study college and university so they will be able to be in positions that could help their people. For instance, trying to make things fair enough for them and make racial profiling disappear from the police officers in Anchorage (Lina Mariscal, 2006, personal interview, Spanish)

Mexican immigrants arrive at Anchorage having been helped by migratory networks. This means that these people obtain at least information from relatives and friends who are already settled in this city and the kind of help they receive from their relatives or friends is the keystone for the success or failure of their adventure.

Most of the Mexicans who get to Anchorage are immigrants of “second residency,” the meaning of this is that by the time they arrive in this region they had had already some experience in living and working within the United States. This is a really positive aspect for them as due to this it is easier for many of them to develop as entrepreneurs and this allows them to create and run their own businesses. Anchorage offers a great business environment, due to its development as an economically important city. Mexicans have been able to be there and experience and impact the city’s growth in population and infrastructure as well.

Leaders of the Mexican and Latino communities in Anchorage know that they need to organize better in order to really count as a strong group. They have the need to become one large Latino block. This way they would have a stronger voice and they would be significant for political purposes. They would be able to chose, to vote for the candidate who can really fulfill their expectations. These communities at this time are not yet completely organized, but they no doubt achieve that goal in the near future as Latino political and social leaders are working constructively to do so. They know there are enough people, Mexicans and Latinos in general, to create a visible and important force, which would allow them to achieve those goals they have to give their communities the opportunity to continue improving their economic and social situation in this place--their Last Frontier in North America.

In the near future we hope to conduct a new survey and to realize more oral interviews with members of Mexican and Latino community in Anchorage. We look forward to compare the new results with those presented here, particularly, after the changes in the context of Anchorage and the rise of much new research literature about Migratory Networks and Social Capital.

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