

TRANSNATIONALISM IN NEW YORK CITY
A STUDY OF REMITTANCE SENDING BY ECUADORIAN MIGRANTS

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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Table of Contents

Abstract	Pg. 2
Introduction of Research Question and Hypothesis.....	Pg. 3
1. Migration and Remittances Theory	Pg. 6
2. Migration and Remittance Sending: the Ecuadorian Case.....	Pg. 17
3. Methodological Approach	Pg. 26
4. Findings and Analysis of Qualitative Data.....	Pg. 32
5. Policy Recommendations.....	Pg. 67
6. Conclusion.....	Pg. 71
7. References	Pg. 75
8. Appendices	
a. Appendix A: Questionnaire in English and Spanish	Pg. 79
b. Appendix B: Interview Questions in English and Spanish	Pg. 85

Abstract:

Based primarily on 21 interviews of Ecuadorian immigrants carried out in New York City, this thesis presents findings that look at the tradeoffs migrants face when they send remittances. In addition, the data collected provides insights on the reasons behind their decisions and the broader implications of remittance sending for this particular immigrant group. This information is presented within the larger context of migration theory and explores the phenomenon of recent Ecuadorian migration. The study reveals the prevalence of remittance sending among Ecuadorian immigrants and the potential for sending collective remittances. The findings from the small study also point out areas for further research about this growing immigrant community in New York. With this in mind, a set of policy recommendations largely based on the participants' feedback are presented for the Ecuadorian government and civic groups to improve the level of organization and unity within the Ecuadorian community in New York City and facilitate the transfer of resources to their communities back home.

Introduction:

In the past twenty years, more than two million Ecuadorians have left the country (close to 20% of the population), initially heading for the United States and in the past 5-10 years, increasingly for Spain and other European countries. Many of the migrants are forming part of new transnational communities, maintaining ties with their home communities even as they adapt to their new environment and in many cases, permanently settle in the host country.

A majority of these immigrants are also remittance senders, and currently, the resources they send are the second largest source of income for the Ecuadorian economy, estimated in 2005 at a little over 2 billion dollars (IADB 2006, 26). The objective of this project was to look at a specific segment of the Ecuadorian migrant population in New York City and document their remittance sending patterns, through qualitative research focusing on a group of 20-25 first generation immigrants. The research was driven by the following research question: *What are the tradeoffs of sending remittances for first generation Ecuadorian immigrants and what are the main factors that influence this process?* This multilayered question can then be broken up into more specific questions that address the key components.

What tradeoffs do migrants face? This question drives at the key motivation for coming to New York City in the first place. If most first generation migrants' motivation is to help out their families financially and perhaps build up some savings in order to improve their livelihoods in the home country, the proposed hypothesis is that they are willing to give up a large proportion of their income for that purpose, rather than investing it in their lives in New York City. This could be observed through their choice

of housing, access to health care, access to education opportunities, basic spending habits and overall financial decisions.

What is the rationale behind these choices? Every individual migrant will have personal circumstances that influence their patterns of remittance sending, and any hypothesis must take into account the individual situations and try to place them within broader patterns. There are different factors that exert pressure on the migrant, such as repaying the debts incurred to be able to migrate, pressure and expectations from family members and friends, personal sense of responsibility and desire to contribute, and also pressure from the migrant community in New York City. If the entire combination of factors is present, the hypothesis indicates that the likelihood of remittance sending would be high.

What are the broader implications of these decisions? When migrants devote part of their income to remittances, the hypothesis implies that there is a direct trade-off between the amount of money sent and the additional services and expenses that a migrant could incur in the United States, be it on health care, education, improved housing or other daily expenses. If many of the immigrants are not at a high income level to begin with, the effect of sending remittances could be a reduction in their standard of living in New York City.

With regards to remittances, does the amount diminish over time, and does that indicate less attachment to the home country and desire to return? Does confidence in the home government affect the individual's decision to send remittances? Does sending less remittances enable migrants to have more choices for improving their standard of living

in the host society? Does this imply that transnational activities such as remittance sending inevitably have costs for the sending or receiving community?

These questions will not be answered definitively by the small sample in this study but they are part of the broader picture. With this in mind, this research will be presented within the context of a discussion on theories of migration and transnationalism as well as the general literature and theories on remittances which will be covered in the first section. The second chapter will cover the background to the phenomenon of Ecuadorian migration specifically, covering the recent history as well as the main economic, social and political factors that propelled this migratory flow. Chapter three will lay out the methodological approach, focusing on the field research carried out as well as outlining the major constraints. Chapter four will present and analyze the data obtained and place it in context with general information about Ecuadorian immigration to the United States. The final chapters will include the policy recommendations for the Ecuadorian government and civic organizations, followed by the conclusion.

Chapter 1:

Migration Theory and Remittances

Background and Literature Review:

The theoretical framework for this work draws upon migration theory on a broad level but more specifically on theories of transnationalism. In addition, relevant material on the study of remittances has been included to address all the key elements of the hypotheses proposed in the following chapter. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller's work, *The Age of Migration*, provides a comprehensive introduction to the evolution of theories of migration. Their discussion of economic theories, such as push-pull theory and neo-classical theory expose the limits of a one-dimensional approach to migration. Neo-classical theory as explained by G.J. Borjas only analyzes the reasons for migrating as economic, in which the individual attempts to maximize utility in their choice of country of destination, informed by "migration offers." In this argument, the state should step back and allow market forces to dictate migration flows until they reach equilibrium (Borjas in Castle and Miller 2003, 23).

Push-pull theory, by contrast, examines factors in the sending country that make migration an appealing choice, like demographic growth, high unemployment and low living standards that would be identified as "push-factors." In addition, there are "pull factors" in the receiving country, such as demand for labor, good economic opportunities, and political freedom that would draw migrants in. This theory still has relevance, and in the case of Ecuadorian migration, it is very helpful in highlighting reasons for migration, such as the economic crisis that started in the early 1980's, increasing unemployment,

and lack of opportunities for upward mobility (Ayala Mora, 1993, 112). Meanwhile, the increasing demand for workers in the service sector, the garment industry as well as in construction served to “pull” migrants towards the United States (Castles and Miller, 2003, 22). As these immigrants get settled and start to send remittances, these resources also serve to “pull” other family members and influence others to migrate.

Other migration theories that emerged, ranging from dual labor market theory to the historical-structural approach remain limited in their analysis. Dual labor market theory adds institutional factors to the neoclassic approach, and highlights the importance of race and gender to try and explain labor market segmentation. The historical-structural approach bases its analysis on Marxist theory and describes current migration flows as “links of domination (that) were forged between the core economies of capitalism and its underdeveloped periphery,” (Ibid, 25) that would perpetuate Third World dependency on the First, without giving much importance to the individual decision to migrate. Although these theories include additional factors that are important to consider, they still do not account for the full range and complexity of the migration process.

Migrations systems theory has evolved as a way to include various disciplines and capture a more complete view of the phenomenon. Its basic principle is to look at migration movements as resulting from the interaction of macro- and micro- structures. Macro structures are identified as the world economy, interstate relations, and other forces at a national and international level (such as those included in the historical-structural approach). Micro-structures describe the social networks developed by migrants themselves within the host communities and also include intermediate meso-structures, which link the two together (Castles and Miller 2003, 28). Overall, the

objective was to examine migration from a multidisciplinary approach and recognize that there is no single factor or even set of factors that could explain every aspect of migration patterns.

The New Economics of Labor Migration, proposed by Oded Stark and David Bloom, broadens the approach by looking at the family as the unit of analysis for migration. The individual migrant is part of an entity that shares the costs and benefits of the migration decision, by entering into a “mutually beneficial contractual arrangement,” (Stark and Bloom 1985, 174.) Families are able to benefit from the ability to share income from different sources, which becomes a form of coinsurance. This theory does not diminish individual agency and decision-making, but states that the “behavior of individuals should be analyzed in the context of a decision-making unit operating as a group,” (Stark 1991, 5). Based on this approach, “intra-family exchanges, such as remittances, are thus integral to migration, not unintended by-products of it,” (Ibid, 3). From an economic perspective, this theory creates an important link between a purely quantitative approach to labor migration and the more sociological view that examines human behavior and the ensuing decisions.

Transnationalism and its application:

Transnationalism theory has emerged from this process as the latest example of migration theory. It is based on the increasing globalization of communication, technology, and transportation, which enables migrants to maintain close links with their home communities and establish cross-border activities with relative ease (more so if they are legal immigrants). The debate about the most precise definition for

transnationalism is still ongoing and has several variants, but each brings valuable insights to the discussion. Alejandro Portes describes transnationalism activities as “those that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants,” (Portes 1999, 464). He describes transnationalism from above as directed by groups of power, governments, and corporations and transnationalism from below as originating from the individual and community perceptions at the base of society.

This is a useful differentiation that exemplifies the levels of influence that determine the nature of transnational migration. Another definition that is put forth by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton states that transnationalism entails “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement,” (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1993, ix). In this case, the emphasis is placed on the community of immigrants that form these ties and how they make use of this framework to both accommodate to and resist the difficult circumstances of their migration experience (Ibid, 4).

Transnationalism is placed then at a community level, and the work of Peggy Levitt with Dominican immigrants in Boston as presented in her book *Transnational Villagers* further elaborates on this concept.

Levitt focuses on transnationalism in the middle, at the level of community participation and engagement where the web of networks is thickest and transnationalism is stronger. She clearly defines the different levels of transnationalism from being a transnational migrant, someone whose economic, social, and political affairs routinely take them back and forth across borders, to an inhabitant of a transnational social field,

someone who has not necessarily even migrated but lives in a space that is permeated by transnational activity (Levitt 2001, 9) This specific situation may be the most precise to describe what many Ecuadorians, both in New York City and back in Ecuador, experience as a result of migration.

Transnationalism is often exemplified by remittance sending, not solely limited to the money and financial goods that immigrants send but also what Levitt introduces as social remittances, the “ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from host to sending country community.” (Ibid, 54) These remittances are harder to quantify than currency but they are very important elements of transnational communities. For the purpose of this research study, the understanding of social remittances is very relevant for the Ecuadorian community, given the concentration of migrants from specific regions in the country and even from the same towns that are now in New York City and the larger Metropolitan Area. Furthermore, Levitt takes the concept of social remittances and makes it useful for looking at migrants and identifying the degree to which different groups of immigrants interact with the host society. This is an important aspect that is included in this research for this case and Levitt’s three broad patterns, which are described below, are fitting for the project.

Levitt describes “recipient observers” as migrants who work at home or within their migrant community, a majority whom tend to be women and have few contacts with mainstream society. They do not interact frequently with their new environment and can be described as passive observers who learn about their new community mostly from sources such as the media (Ibid, 57). The second pattern observed is that of “instrumental adapters” who have a pragmatic approach and are more fully integrated through their

employment, transportation, and interaction with mainstream society. They acquire new skills and adjust their interpretations of society in order to equip themselves better to meet the challenges of a new life. Finally, “purposeful innovators” are aggressively seeking new ideas and practices. They want to get ahead, rather than just get by; adapting and changing is beneficial for them. These migrants creatively add to and combine their experiences to expand their cultural repertoire (Levitt 2001, 57). They may be the most outspoken carriers and transmitters of social remittances.

These categories are useful in observing how social remittances can reflect the level of integration of a migrant into the host society. They can also serve to identify the possible replication of class, race, and gender stratifications from the home community to the host society. Migrants arrive with a specific tool kit, a composition of education and social capital which can greatly affect the opportunities they can access in their new environment and their ability to take advantage of them. Social capital is defined as the resources an individual is able to procure based on his/her relationships with others and refers to “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit,” (Putnam, 1993). In essence, based on a migrant’s starting kit, “if you arrive with more, you end up with more” (Levitt 2001, 200). The level of social capital can also greatly influence a migrant’s relationships with members of his/her community and can unsettle and rearrange traditional class and racial hierarchies.

Levitt concludes by noting the ambiguous returns that migration can bring. Material well being for most migrants will improve, but in the host community they may be at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, with few options for upward mobility.

However, when compared to the home community, they are doing extremely well economically. From that perspective, it is hard to turn back when family and community members are depending on the remittances migrants send. Also, if opportunities in the country of origin seem limited, as is the case with Ecuador, immigrants feel they have fewer options. If remittances become essential for economic survival, as is increasingly the case for many families, that dependency could create a predisposition for migration at a larger scale (Bendixen & Associates 2003, 5)

In the home community, signs of development may be present, but if they are solely fueled by remittances, it creates an incentive to migrate while losing hope and lowering the level of expectations for opportunities at home (Ibid, 6). In essence, this brings to light the debate on the long term effect of remittances. Are they ultimately beneficial and do they promote development or could they even be harmful, both for the individual and the community?

Background on Remittances:

Most of the literature on remittances has focused on the increasing importance of these flows of resources, especially for certain countries in Latin America. The amounts have greatly risen in the past decade and the trend seems to continue (De la Garza and Lowell 2002, 4). The expansion of Hometown Associations and their involvement in collective remittances and development projects in home communities has sparked a lot of interest in the development potential of remittances, especially in Mexico. Much research has been carried out on remittance senders' behavior, how they are sending the remittances, what financial channels they use and specifically on how remittance receivers are using these additional resources (Orozco 1997, 47).

There is a growing amount of research in this area, and regional organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank as well as national governments, like the Mexican government, have invested in acquiring more accurate information and data about remittances. There is a clear interest on behalf of the receiving countries to have a more precise record of the funds coming in and what they are being used for. Based on recent surveys, a large percentage of remittances, approximately 80%, is used for household expenses, such as health care and education (Orozco 1997, 52), but around 6% is kept as savings. In the Ecuadorian case, 61% of the money is spent on household expenses, and about 8% on savings (Bendixen & Associates 2003, 28). Some governments, such as the Mexican and Salvadoran governments, are eager to channel the use of remittances for development, or what some refer to as productive uses, either through collective remittances or by encouraging migrants to invest their resources in their home country, in the financial market, or by starting a small business, for example (Orozco 1997, 53).

However, collective remittances remain only a small part of the overall remittance market. In 1999, they were estimated to comprise barely 1% of all remittances sent to Mexico and Central America but the amount was expected to grow to be 3-5% of the total over the following 10 years (Torres 2000, 63). Despite this growth, over 90% of remittances are sent to individuals or families and are meant for private use. The development of Hometown Associations has been largely a result of individuals from the same town or region pulling together their resources to help out their communities back home with specific projects, such as a soccer field, a well, or rebuilding the local church. This was a direct response to the lack of services and basic infrastructure that the home

governments failed to provide (De la Garza and Briant 2002, 220). At the same time that these HTA's provided resources and in some cases collaborated with the government in joint projects, the members themselves uniformly emphasized that they were not trying to take over the responsibilities of the state (Burgess, 2005 and Popkin, 2003). National and local governments should not assume that if collective remittances are used in development projects that they are meant to replace government investment in social services and basic infrastructure. In the case of Ecuador, there is very limited evidence of collective remittances and the government does not have a specific program to encourage this activity (Bendixen & Associates 2003, 42). However, there is some anecdotal evidence of increasing organization amongst certain Ecuadorian communities that have been in the New York Metropolitan Area for a longer time. This information will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Therefore, the debate continues as to what extent state governments should try to influence how remittances are used and whether remittances can be a sustainable source of income. There is still much research to be done but it must be highlighted that in the discussion, many scholars point out that the most effective strategy for attracting remittances is for the governments to focus on improving their macro-economic situation and making the home country market more appealing (Waller Mayers 2003, 65). In the long run, remittances may subside and have more costs than benefits for society as a whole, if they lead to dependency in the receiving community, drain migrant sending areas of its labor force, and encourage consumption levels that cannot be sustained in the long run (Ibid, 66).

Migration Theory and the Ecuadorian Case:

The work of David Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*, focuses on Ecuadorian migrants from Azuay (southern province in the highlands) who now live in New York City and provides a valuable account of the history of Ecuadorian migration from this specific region. He discusses current theories of international migration and how the case of Azuayan migration could strengthen these theories if it falls under their parameters. He also raises the possibility that current theories need to be modified to include this new case but also proposed that, “Azuay represents, in fact, a novel type of international migration not conceptualized by past macrosocial-level theory,” (Kyle 2000, 46). His approach is especially valuable because it is so relevant and specific to this case. Kyle focuses on the communities of origin, identifying migration patterns and the economic, social and political causes that motivate migrants and concludes that “migration is a social process with a strong internal momentum that reinforces itself over time,” (Massey et al 1987, in Kyle 2000, 83).

Kyle describes very thoroughly the steps that led to the migration decision, which occurs not only at the individual level, but as a result of interactions at the household, village and even regional level (Ibid, 197). Ann Miles’s ethnography of a family in Cuenca (capital of Azuay) whose oldest son migrates to New York very clearly illustrates this point. Although it was the young man’s individual choice, the entire family discussed the situation, and pulled their resources together, by drawing on family friends and acquaintances to ultimately facilitate his journey to Queens (Miles, 2004). As a result of this collective process, he also felt the collective pressure to send remittances in order to make the family’s sacrifice worthwhile. He also fits the description of most Ecuadorian

migrants from this region, younger men, more skilled and educated than their non-migrant counterparts (Kyle, 2000, 195).

Kyle arrives at some interesting conclusions regarding the reasons for Ecuadorian migration which go beyond the economic factors that may provide an initial push towards migration. He identifies transnational migration as a periphery centered dynamic, because there is no active recruitment from the host country and the social networks and market relations that support this migration also help perpetuate the process. Ultimately, transnational migration is rooted in economic processes of capital accumulation (class) but is also entangled with ethnic and gender discrimination (Ibid, 198). The questions that Kyle poses and his conclusions are key to having a better understanding of the broader picture of Ecuadorian migration and situate the migrants in New York within that context. However, he focuses on migration from Azuay and El Cañar (region also known as El Austro) which started earlier than the most recent migration and has several specific factors that differentiate it from the more general wave of Ecuadorian migration. These factors will be addressed more fully in the following chapter.

Chapter 2:

Migration and Remittance Sending: The Ecuadorian Case

Ecuador is the second smallest country in South America, quite densely populated with 13.4 million inhabitants, and divided into three mainland regions by the geographic barrier of the Andes Mountains with the addition of the Galapagos Islands as the fourth region. The coast (Costa) is the largest and most populated area followed by the highlands (Sierra) where the capital, Quito, is located, and also the city of Cuenca, capital of the province of Azuay. The Amazon region (Oriente) is largely underdeveloped and much less populated but is the largest territory and produces the oil that is Ecuador's main export (Ecuador General Information, accessed March, 2005)

Recent Ecuadorian history provides some of the main motivating factors that led to the current migration trend, which started around 25 years ago in the provinces of Azuay and El Cañar, a southern region also known as El Austro. During the 1970's, the discovery of oil created an economic boom that fueled high spending and borrowing by the military government. It invested heavily in ambitious infrastructure projects, as well as in the expansion of education and health services. Unfortunately, the oil boom generated spending that caused high inflation and led to increasing debt accumulation in the 1980's as the price of oil dropped. Many of the resources spent on expanding state infrastructure were ineffective and the 80's were a time of serious economic crisis and readjustments. The oil boom had also fueled an expansion of the middle class and the increasing urbanization of the Costa and Sierra (Ayala Mora 1993, 116), which placed

more pressure on the central government to respond to public protest over lack of job opportunities and government services.

Since the return to democracy in 1979, Ecuador had four democratic transitions before entering a very unstable political period in 1996, after which there have been nine presidents, only three of them democratically elected (CIA Factbook, accessed March 2005). Burdened by foreign debt and dependence on oil exports, with a price that fluctuated wildly in the 1990's, the economy was not able to support the increasing government bureaucracy and social services, including heavy subsidies on key commodities such as gas and electricity (Kyle and Ling 2001, pg 10). In addition, the continuous accumulation of power and wealth amongst the traditional leading families allowed them to control most of the political parties and, as result, take turns running the government. Corruption was encouraged by these arrangements and took on scandalous levels during the presidency of Abdala Bucaram, (1994-96) who attempted to implement neoliberal reforms despite his populist rhetoric. He was forced out by popular protests but his exit did not lead to any substantial change in policy.

Jamil Mahuad was elected in 1998 and he faced a severe economic crisis, in his own words, the worst in seventy years (Gerlach 2003, 159). It had been ongoing since the 1980's and was exacerbated by the country's dependency on oil for over fifty percent of its budget, the high levels of foreign debt (that required payments of 40% of the total budget), the lack of an efficient tax system and the inability of any government to implement long lasting economic reforms. This was aggravated by the natural disaster of El Niño, which caused devastating floods and landslides that left over 20,000 people homeless in 1998 (Ibid, 160).

Despite this scenario, and the past experience with previous presidents, Mahuad tried to impose belt-tightening measures that cut social spending and removed subsidies in order to reduce the fiscal deficit and meet IMF conditionalities. At the same time, he was helping out bank owners (who had funded his campaign) who had mismanaged their customers' money due to corrupt practices and lack of regulation. The banking crisis reached a climax in March 1999, when the president took the drastic measure of freezing bank deposits (Beckerman and Solimano 2002, 5). The public reaction was demonstrated in constant protests and the president had to deal with strike after strike during 1999. By the end of the year, after suspending payment of the Brady bond debt in September, with inflation rising at increasing rates, and the currency devalued by 500%, President Mahuad proposed the dollarization of the economy on January 9th as a solution (Gerlach 2003, 132).

The impact of the economic crisis on the population's standards of living was also dramatic; by 1998, 70% of Ecuadorians had fallen below the poverty line and 45% were indigent, unemployment was at 15% and 56% of the workforce was in the informal sector (Ibid, 157). The middle class was also affected, and rising levels of unemployment and lack of confidence in the government and its ability to create opportunities for its citizens motivated the increase in transnational migration, in particular to the United States and Spain. In many cases, the migrants had to make use of smugglers (Kyle and Ling 2001, 11). Many Ecuadorians also started migrating to other European countries and to Canada, and at a much smaller level to Venezuela. Estimates of the actual number of immigrants that left Ecuador after 1995 ranged from 1- 2 million, the equivalent of 8-16% of the total population, and the main destinations were Spain and the United States (Ibid, 15). The

broad gap in migration numbers reflects the difficulty in reaching an accurate estimate since many of the migrants were undocumented and migrated through illegal routes or traveled as tourists and overstayed their visas. Many of the earlier migrants came from El Austro and have congregated in New York City and the wider Metropolitan Area (which covers 31 counties in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York) but the current wave comes from all parts of the country and from different segments of the population as well.

At this point it is necessary to provide specific information on the nature of migration from El Austro, which started earlier and resulted from a different set of circumstances. The province of Azuay and its capital, Cuenca, had exposure to international trade and migration due to the Panama Hat trade that spanned over a century, from the 1850's to the 1950's. These hats got their name because they were transported through the Panama Canal and were used during its construction, but they were originally made in Ecuador. Part of the reason they became so popular was that they could be folded up and tucked away and would regain their shape afterwards. The weaving process involved many households and this trade linked an otherwise isolated region in Ecuador to international markets in many countries of Latin America, in the United States and Europe, especially through importers and middlemen in New York City, making the Big Apple the main destination for future immigrants. When the trade collapsed in 1947, as much as a quarter of the labor force in Azuay and Cañar lost their jobs (Kyle 2000, 82).

In the early 20th century, as the cacao trade expanded and was followed by the banana boom, rural peasants from El Austro engaged in seasonal migration to the Coast and by the mid twentieth century some Azuayos had moved permanently to the banana

plantations and to nearby coastal cities. Colonization of the Amazon region offered the possibility of acquiring land and this appealed to some peasants (Astudillo and Cordero, 1990, 8). Some of the merchants and other middle men, on the other hand, decided to explore possibilities abroad, especially in New York, where they had previous contacts. This took place in the 1960's, and by the 70's other middle class and even upper middle class migrants followed suit, especially since obtaining legal residency in the United States was not very difficult.

Concurrently, the inflationary effects of the oil boom had greatly affecting fixed wage workers and at this point mass migration from this region took off. Initially the trend started in rural communities, but as these emptied out of young men, the semi-urban areas near Cuenca were affected. The "exodus fever" continued to spread throughout the entire province as transnational networks, based on family or community ties, developed and facilitated the migration decision (Ibid, 13). Given the lack of alternative economic activities, mass migration really took off in the 1980's and went beyond the initial group of young men to include young women, especially spouses and other family members, as each migrant got settled in and was able to help a family member afford the journey. By 1990 the local press reported that the Azuayan Migration Ministry was processing 100 passports daily and within the past three years, "thirty thousand people had left the region...roughly equivalent to 20 percent of Cuenca's population." (*El Mercurio* article, May 30th, 1990 as cited in Kyle 2000, pg 64).

To this day, middle men in el Austro continue to be at the center of the migration process in their new role as migration merchants, facilitating the illegal migration process by offering loans, taking care of the paperwork and negotiating with the different local

authorities, and establishing contacts with *coyotes or pasadores* (smugglers) in Central America and Mexico. Many rural migrants would not be able to afford the \$7,000 – \$10,000 journey if these migrant merchants were not willing to take on the risky venture of providing capital and guidance for the journey (with generous returns in high interest rates, of course) (Jokisch and Pibilsky 2002, 78).

Most of these migrants found their way to New York, where family and transnational social networks would facilitate their transition. For the communities from the Austro, the network of family and friends in New York enabled the newcomers to find jobs quickly so they could pay back their debts and learn how to navigate and get used to the city. This is similar to the experiences of other Ecuadorians and other Latin American communities in general, such as the Colombians, especially due to the closeness and interconnectedness of life in New York City (Guarnizo, Sanchez and Roach, 2003, 245-246).

After nearly three decades of Ecuadorian immigration to New York City, in particular from el Austro, there is a common perception in Ecuador that the Big Apple has a huge Ecuadorian population, approaching half a million people, and while accurate estimates are hard to come by, according to the 2000 US Census, there are 114,900 Ecuadorians in New York City and 176,567 in the Tri-state Area (Brown, February 2006). However, there is some debate over the accuracy of the census data and one reason the number may not be very precise is that the form in 2000 asked Latino immigrants to fill out their country of origin by hand and this may have caused confusion or led many Latinos to be placed under the broader “other Hispanic” category (Logan in Brown, Feb. 2006). Census data in the United States estimated the Ecuadorian population

in the entire country at 284,000 but if there was confusion in response to the question about country of origin and if the limitations of the census in accessing the undocumented population are taken into account, this number most likely underestimated the Ecuadorian population. In 2004, the New York City Planning Department reported that Ecuadorians comprised 27% (132,790) of the 490,000 estimated undocumented immigrants in the city. This estimate already surpassed the total Ecuadorian population counted in the 2000 Census (Ramirez 2004).

An adjusted figure based on the census information placed the Ecuadorian migrant population in the United States at 396,400, the 8th largest Latino group. According to these figures, sixty-three percent (249,732) of these migrants have congregated in the New York City Metropolitan Area (Logan in Jokisch and Pribilsky, 2002, 78). This was a significant increase from the original census data, and numerous reports on the subject brought up this issue not only for the Ecuadorian community but also for other Latino immigrant groups, such as Colombians, Guatemalans and Salvadorans (Suro 2002)

Even without precise statistics, the presence of a large Ecuadorian community is evident in New York by the number of restaurants, stores, Ecuadorian banks that offer transfer services and sell property back in Ecuador, an electronics chain store that targets that community as well as the number of courier and transfer agencies, and internet and phone service providers that advertise specifically to Ecuadorians. Music, sports equipment and grocery stores in the Queens neighborhoods of Jackson Heights, Corona, Astoria and East Elmhurst carry Ecuadorian products, often second only to Mexican products. According to the latest information from the New York City Department of

Planning, 58% of the Ecuadorian population in the city lives in Queens, and the neighborhoods with the largest percentage are Corona, Jackson Heights and Elmhurst (NYC Department of City Planning 2000, 25). In these neighborhoods and also in Jersey City and West New York, the density of transnational enterprises clearly illustrates the presence of migrants and their interactions with their home communities. On Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights, it is possible to deposit remittances in an Ecuadorian bank account, videoconference with your family to let them know about the deposit, and purchase a domestic appliance at the Ecuadorian store that will deliver the product to your family in Ecuador within days, all of these transactions carried out in Spanish.

A clear sign that there are Ecuadorians in any neighborhood is the presence of an agency of the largest Ecuadorian enterprise in New York: Delgado Travel. The first agency was founded by Hector Delgado in 1973, and he has become famous due to the success of his business. Delgado Travel Agencies not only handle travel arrangements, but also money transfers, offer courier services, telecommunications, subscriptions to Ecuadorian magazines and newspapers, and there is also a radio station sponsored by Delgado that combines Ecuadorian oriented programs with others aimed at the broader Latin American community. Delgado has 100 offices worldwide and 3000 affiliates and it charges an average of 3% per 200\$ remittance (Delgado Travel website, February, 2006), a reasonable fee considering that in 2003 the average rate to send to Ecuador was 5.12% (Solímáno, 2003, pg 35). Delgado is well known by the Ecuadorian community and it had a 40% share of the remittances market from the United States in 2003, although there was increasingly more competition, especially among other transfer services, such as Western Union and Vigo (Bendixen & Associates, 2003, 24).

The huge success of this Ecuadorian business is linked directly to the dramatic increase in remittance sending and travel back and forth to Ecuador. In the early 1990's, the remittance flows increased gradually and reached \$500 million in 1996, and by 2004 the amount grew by more than 300% to the estimate of \$1.74 billion (Inter-American Development Bank, 2004) and shows no signs of slowing down. The latest figures for 2005 indicate an amount over \$2 billion, while pointing out that it may be underestimated by 10%, since part of the flows are still sent through informal channels (IADB, 2006). Almost two thirds of remittance receivers reported that their relative/s left Ecuador less than 5 years before, and that the main reasons for their departure were directly linked to the economic crisis, the banking crisis and political instability (Bendixen & Associates 2003, 6).

This background information can help form a broader picture of the main motivations and the context that propelled so many Ecuadorians to leave their country and head to the United States and Europe, despite the level of risk and high initial cost. In part due to the more recent dramatic increase in Ecuadorian migration and the high percentage that is undocumented, there is also a lack of information, both at the academic and journalistic level, about this community. Therefore, most of the research for this thesis was focused on obtaining data directly from Ecuadorian immigrants, through a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The following section discusses the research questions and the methodological approach to this work.

Chapter 3:

Methodological Approach

In order to carry out the qualitative research that is the core piece of this work, a methodological approach was developed guided by the main research question, but also keeping in mind the constraints inherent in this kind of research. These will be discussed in more detail at the end of the section.

The focus of the field research was on the Ecuadorian migrant community in New York City because it is the city with the largest concentration of Ecuadorians outside of Ecuador and it is an area that the researcher was familiar with and where there were multiple contacts. The more specific focus of the study was on Ecuadorians sending remittances back home, and the assumption made was that they would mostly be first generation immigrants. The pool ended up including a few first generation migrants who were no longer sending remittances to Ecuador and could provide a means for comparison.

The initial approach was to contact previous work colleagues and in November, 2005, the researcher visited her former work place and presented the project to the field staff and was able to answer questions and give them an information sheet to pass out to potential participants. Many of the field staff at this non-profit worked with immigrant parents in the public schools and had contacts with Ecuadorians who were ideal candidates for this research and they in turn also knew other Ecuadorians in similar situations. Simultaneously, several Ecuadorian civic organizations were approached, to contact Ecuadorian migrants through the events and activities they plan and to start

identifying key informants such as community leaders and organizers. The initial contacts at these organizations provided some contacts for participants but not as many as had been anticipated.

Therefore, a snowballing technique was the primary method used to come up with the list of respondents. The initial sample was constructed from three different sources: the first one through former job contacts, which included other NGO's and CBO's that work with immigrant communities. The second source was the Ecuadorian Civic Associations, pre-selected by looking at size and presence within the Ecuadorian community and also self-selecting among those that demonstrated interest in the project. The third source of information was the personal contacts of family and friends that live in New York City. An additional strategy pursued was to visit several Ecuadorian restaurants and banks in an effort to find participants in a more random way, but this approach was not as successful. This sample was therefore not expected to be representative of the Ecuadorian community in New York but there was an effort to achieve gender balance and age diversity within the respondents. It was also important to make sure that at least half of the respondents were remittance senders, and that component was not difficult to achieve.

The unit of analysis was the individual migrant. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each one after they filled out a questionnaire that included a section about their migration from Ecuador, their city/town and region of origin, the reasons that propelled their decision, and how long they have been in the United States and in New York City in particular. The second section had questions about their current situation,

their employment history in the US, whether they send remittances, in what amount and with what frequency.

After filling out the questionnaire, the researcher carried out an interview based on open-ended questions which also asked where they live, how many times they have moved, and what factors are most important when making their housing choices. There were also questions about their current access to health care and education services. A third section addressed their future plans in New York City with questions regarding plans to take ESL classes or accessing other types of education. This part also included asking them about their plans to return to Ecuador, whether they are able to visit, if they would like their family to come to the United States if they are not here already.

Within the open-ended questions there were also a number of questions related to the political situation of Ecuadorian migrants and which addressed the migrant's perception of their identity (do they see themselves as Ecuadorians first, or Latino or Latin American?) There were also questions about the role of the Ecuadorian government. This created an opportunity for the respondents to express their opinions and state how they feel about the Ecuadorian government and its involvement or lack of involvement in promoting and advocating for their rights.

An element of the research also included reaching out to representatives of the Ecuadorian government, either at the Consulate in New York City or New Jersey. The objective was to obtain the government's perception of the numbers of Ecuadorian migrants, the kinds of services they receive and request from the consulate, and what the general policies of the Ecuadorian government are towards their immigrant population. One set of questions would have inquired about the kinds of events the consulate

organizes (cultural, artistic, political, for fundraising), whether they collaborate with any of the civic organizations and the level of participation in these activities. On a more political level, do they perceive that Ecuadorian migrants are interested in becoming dual citizens? Additional questions would address the topic of upcoming presidential elections. For the first time Ecuadorians abroad can vote and the consulates are in charge of the information campaign and of the registration process.

In addition to the official side of interviews the researcher also reached out to the CBO's and NGO's, especially immigrant organizations such as the NY Immigration Coalition, to ask them about their perception of the situation of Ecuadorian migrants in New York City. From their view, how many are undocumented? What services do they have access to and where are the major areas of need? Have they noticed an increase in the numbers of Ecuadorians they serve in their organizations? Once again, a portion of these interviews were open-ended in order to allow the interviewee to describe the nature of their organization's work and how it tied in to the researched population.

These interviews were conducted during the first four months of 2006, on a series of weekend trips to New York City and via telephone from Boston. When in New York, the researcher was flexible and could go to any borough in New York City and also ended up making one trip to West New York, New Jersey. When possible, interviews were carried out in a public and central location either in the neighborhood where the migrant lived or near their place of employment, and this was the case for about half of the interviews. On a number of occasions, the migrants welcomed the researcher into their homes or we were able to meet in the public school where they volunteer. When

necessary, it was also possible to conduct interviews by phone, especially if was for the purpose of a follow up.

Constraints and limitations:

There were a number of important constraints and limitations on this research, the main ones being the limited time available for the researcher to carry out the project as a full-time student and the limited amount of monetary resources available for travel and other expenses. Weekend visits allowed a degree of flexibility for the researcher and participants but it also left out potential participants whose day off was during the week.

These findings were limited by the sample size and the nature of how the list was compiled. Respondents may have been the ones with the most time and flexibility in their schedules to allow for an in-depth interview of this kind, perhaps excluding those that are working seven days a week or have unusual schedules. This does not diminish the validity of the research, but it was an important factor to consider throughout the project. While there is great potential and much research to be done around Ecuadorian migration, this specific project did not compile significant amounts of quantitative data, but rather collected a substantive amount of qualitative data on the remittance patterns that this group of migrants adopted and how this influenced their spending habits and life choices in New York City.

Given the large number of undocumented Ecuadorians, part of the difficulty in any kind of research involving this community had to take into consideration the hidden nature of much of this population. The researcher encountered a lot of hesitation on the part of potential participants and a good number chose not to take part. The lack of

monetary compensation was an additional deterrent, especially for migrants who worked six or seven days a week. For those who did take part, the researcher exercised additional discretion and restrained from prying too much into their current situation but allowed them to disclose as much information as they were comfortable sharing. By the end of the interview, most of the participants had shared information about their citizenship status, including details about their journey to the United States, the costs involved and emotional effects of the decision.

One minor constraint was overcome by access to the internet. Despite multiple efforts, including repeated calls, e-mails, faxes and a visit to the consulate, the researcher was not able to obtain an interview with Ecuadorian authorities. Consular officers explained that they were even busier this year because of the efforts to register Ecuadorians to vote and insisted that they would not be available for any kind of interview until the end of April. However, the consular website had enough information about the official position of the Ecuadorian government and the different projects that they are engaged in, at least on paper. This experience supported the participants' perceptions and opinions on the role of the Ecuadorian authorities.

The results of the 21 interviews with first generation immigrants provided a great deal of qualitative data about a relatively small pool of Ecuadorian immigrants, not expected to be representative of their entire population in New York City, but a valuable source of new information and insights on this rapidly growing and expanding migrant community in New York City.

Chapter Four:

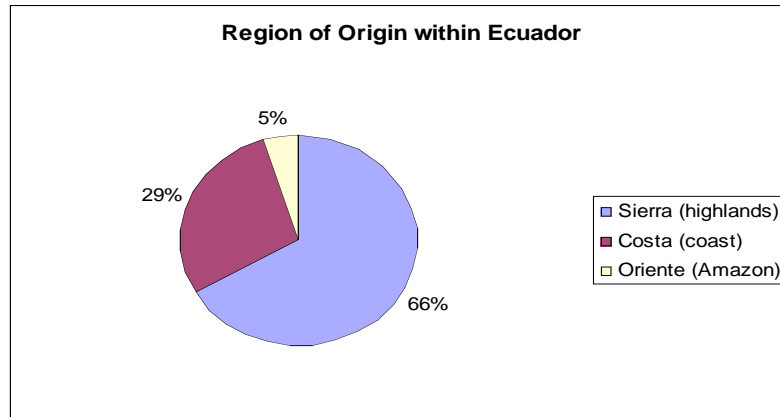
Findings and Analysis of Qualitative Data

Summary of the Results from the Questionnaire

During four trips, the researcher carried out 21 interviews with first-generation Ecuadorian immigrants, and all the participants also filled out a questionnaire, which provided basic demographic information and remittance sending data. The ensuing interview was semi-structured and covered some of the questions in the survey in more depth and addressed additional topics as well. The results from the questionnaire are presented in the following section and will be compared to available data on the Ecuadorian community, based on data available through the United States 2000 Census and on a broader survey carried out in Ecuador among remittance receivers by Bendixen & Associates in 2003, on behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank. However, there is no comparable pool of data specifically focused on Ecuadorians in New York City.

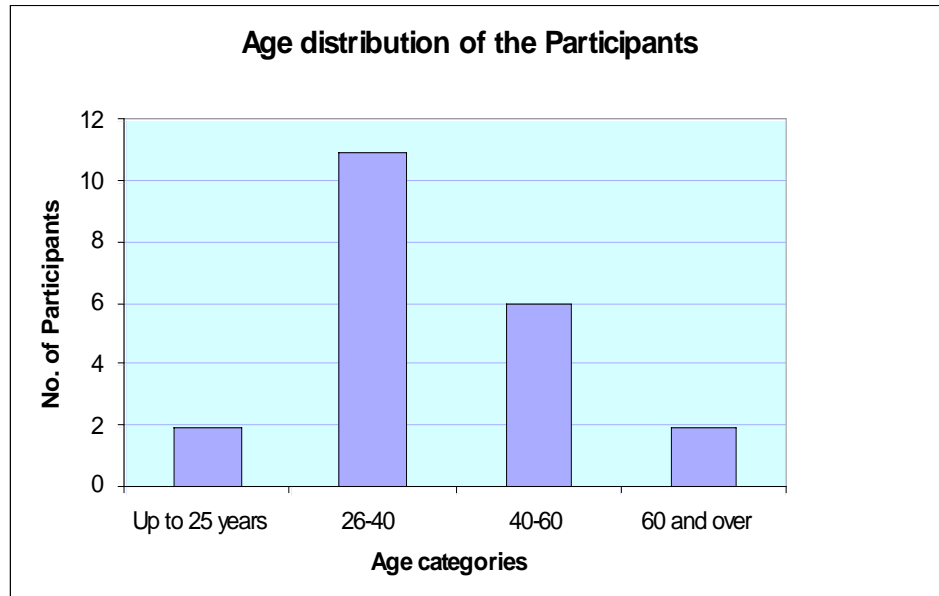
Amongst the 21 participants, the gender composition was a bit uneven, with 8 men and 13 women. The distribution of their place of origin within Ecuador was the following: 14 were from the Highlands, and within this group, six from El Austro, six from the Coast and one participant originally from the Amazon region, but who had migrated to the Coast before coming to the US. Within the New York Metro Area, seven Ecuadorians live in Queens, four in Brooklyn, three in the Bronx, three in Manhattan and four currently live in New Jersey. This was representative of the general distribution of the Ecuadorian population in New York City, since most of the community is

concentrated in Queens with approximately 40% of the total population, 23% lives in Brooklyn, 15% in the Bronx and another 15% in Brooklyn, with an estimated 150,000 Ecuadorians living in New Jersey (Carpio Amoroso 2003, 95.)



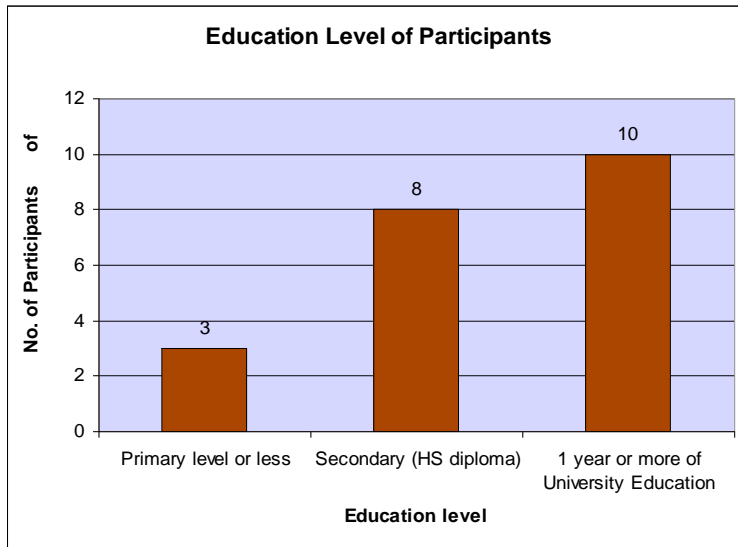
The Bendixen survey showed that Ecuadorian remittance senders were fairly evenly split between the Coast, with 49%, and the Sierra with 46% of the total and only 6% from the Amazon region. These figures included the most recent wave of immigration to Spain and since the calculations were based on remittance receivers, it excluded immigrants who no longer send remittances, or never did. In the case of New York City, the predominance of immigrants from El Austro, which is in the Sierra, would likely increase the proportion of immigrants from that region, as was the case in this sample. Among the participants from the Sierra, almost half were from El Austro. Until 2000, much of the data estimated that immigrants from this region were 51% of all Ecuadorians abroad, but that proportion diminished with the most recent wave of migrants from other parts of the country (Carpio Amoroso, 2003, 59).

The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 73 years of age and the distribution within the group was two under the age of 25, eleven between the ages of 25-40, six between 40-60, and two participants were over the age of 60.



With regards to the level of education, three (14%) participants had only primary education or less, eight (38%) were high school graduates and ten (47%) had some university education. Within this last group, some of the participants were currently studying or had plans to continue their education in the near future. This contrasts quite dramatically with the overall level of education in Ecuador, where 57% of the population has a primary education or less, only 24% have some high school education and 10% have some level of university education (Bendixen & Associates 2003, 14). The Bendixen survey noted that remittance receivers and senders had a higher level of educational attainment than the general population, with 33% having a high school diploma and 18% some university education (Ibid, 15). In this sample, the percentage of participants with some level of university education seemed overrepresented. This may have occurred because one of the selection methods for participants was through the

researcher's initial contacts within the Ecuadorian community, who are mostly university educated and their contacts were likely to have similar levels of education.



The labor history of the immigrants was a topic covered during the interview and reflected a high mobility within certain segments of the labor market, specifically the service sector, construction, and the garment industry. At the time of the survey, three participants were working in child care, three worked cleaning homes/office buildings and one of them also delivered newspapers, one was a cashier, one was a limo driver, two men worked in customer service, one man is a carpet installer and another is a union official, and one man is self-employed as a jeweler. Three women were staying at home, but they had all worked at some point, another was working as a waitress, one had part-time employment as a school crossing guard. The youngest participant was a full-time student but had worked at an office before starting college.

All the immigrants had changed employment multiple times and sometimes had switched between several sectors. A majority of the women started out working in

garment factories and ended up trying out other service sectors jobs, especially child care and house cleaning, but also sales and restaurant work. The men had also started out in factory or construction work and almost all had worked in a restaurant. A participant from Cuenca mentioned that many Ecuadorians he knew sought out agricultural work during the summer and moved to different parts of New York or nearby New England. He had worked near Providence in the previous summers himself, but could no longer do it because he had not been able to renew his driver's license. He was a psychologist who had been practicing in Ecuador before deciding to come to New York, and his wife and daughter were still back home.

The mobility between jobs was due to a number of circumstances, one being the lack of job security, especially in the garment industry, the pursuit of higher wages, or family circumstances. One woman mentioned that she lost her job due to the "increase in free trade," (Interview 2, January 28, 2006). Five of the women stopped working when they became pregnant but three of them have returned to the labor market or plan to do so as soon as their youngest child is in school. Other jobs were seasonal, such as construction work with asbestos, agricultural work, and the summer job one man had in an ice factory. All the men who had done restaurant work did not do it for very long. They described it as difficult, especially because of the treatment from other employees and the owners, even when they were Ecuadorian.

A majority of the immigrants found work initially through Ecuadorian friends or family members. As they settled and started expanding their own networks they sought out better employment or activities that were more suitable for them. Once again, the importance of other Ecuadorian and Latin American contacts in finding new employment

was noticeable. The immigrant who had been in New York for over forty years was the only one who mentioned finding work through the New York Times employment section, but this happened after he had already been in the city for several years.

The income level figures for the participants were based on their own estimates of their net earnings, based on their weekly or monthly paychecks, so the results were approximate amounts, but the income level of 12 participants (57%) was clustered within two categories, under \$10,000 and between \$10,001 and \$19,999. The survey also asked for an estimate of the household annual income, and when comparing it to the poverty thresholds for 2004, only three households fell below this threshold and the participants from these households were unemployed or their partner was unemployed. Beyond this, it is difficult to make an accurate assessment because the information was not specific enough, and it was not the objective of the survey to obtain such detailed numbers.

However, in the interviews, eight participants described their economic situation as unsatisfactory or tight (*situación apretada*) and only four participants were satisfied with their economic situation. Eight of the immigrants also described their work schedule as strenuous, having to work six or seven days a week and not being able to take vacations or not willing to do so because it could mean losing their job. Of the two individuals who did not provide any income information, one was unemployed and the other was a housewife and could not (would not) provide information on her family's annual income.

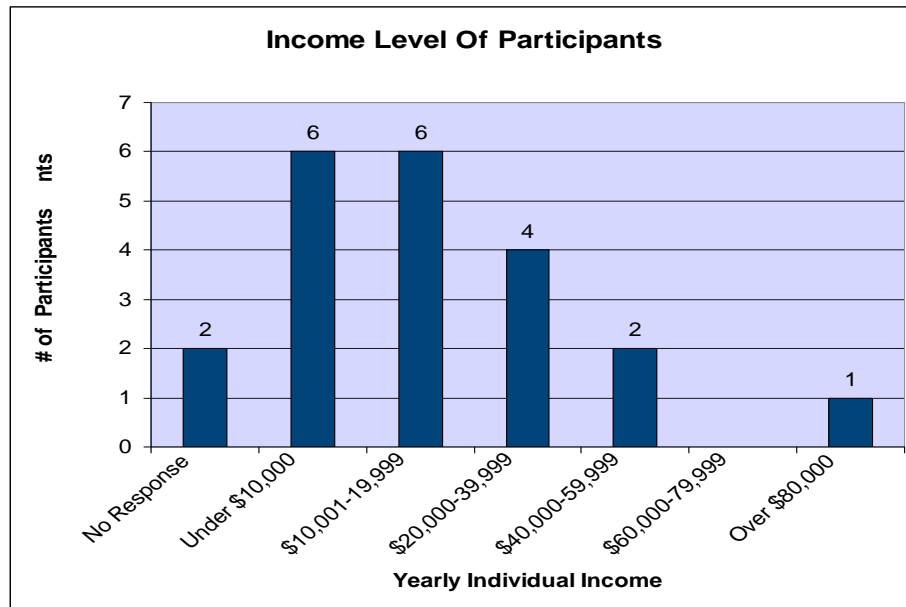
The questionnaire did not ask about the citizenship status of the participants because it is quite a sensitive topic, but during the interviews, it became fairly clear what the situation was for each participant, even on the few occasions when some of the

immigrants did not allude to it directly. Amongst the 21 participants, there were twelve undocumented immigrants, six were permanent residents and three were United States citizens. For those who were undocumented, their status was a major factor that affected their employment options and life choices. Of the twelve, only one of them had been able to visit Ecuador since they had first come to the United States. They felt they had little choice but to stay and work as long as possible, hoping for an amnesty or to save enough money to return and feel economically viable in Ecuador.

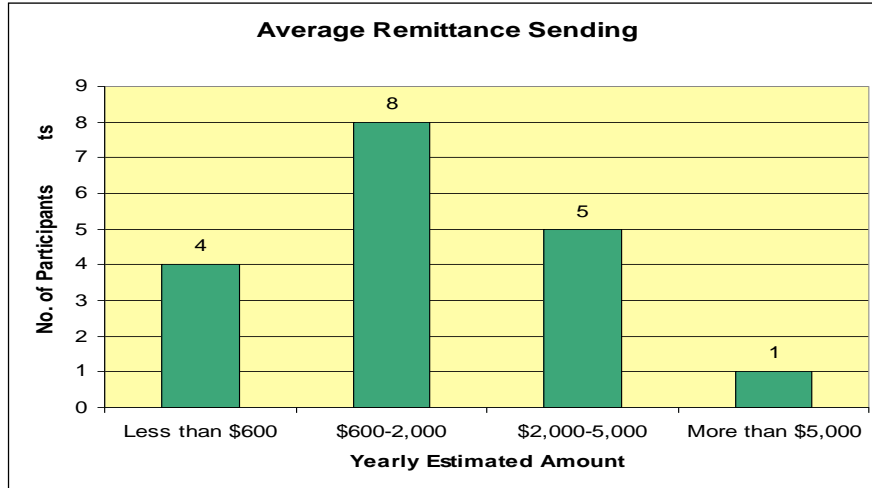
However, there was no direct correlation in this sample between income level and citizenship status. Two of the three individuals with the highest income in the sample were undocumented immigrants and at the other end of the spectrum, two of the three households that were under the poverty threshold were headed by permanent residents. This may be due to the small sample size and the higher education level of the participants, including those who were undocumented. Studies of the overall undocumented population in the United States estimated that unauthorized workers make an average individual income of \$12,000 compared to \$20,400 by legal immigrants (Passel 2005, 30). A more representative sample could perhaps highlight that the current trend is for recent undocumented arrivals to access lower wage jobs or enter fewer sectors of the labor market that enable employers to maintain the same wages, or even lower them. This was evident in 2002-2003, when the median wage for Hispanics declined by 2% (Kochhar 2005, 22).

The most recent estimate by the Pew Hispanic Research Center placed at 650,000 the number of undocumented immigrants in New York State, 7% of the national total and New Jersey had 350,000, 4% percent of the total (Passell, 2005, 11). As mentioned

above, the New York City Planning Department estimated in 2004 that 27% (132,790) of undocumented immigrants in the city were Ecuadorian.



When it came to remittance sending, all the participants had sent remittances at some point, and only three of the immigrants were no longer sending any money. One woman could not do so because of her current economic situation, another had sent money to her mother until she passed away and the third had send remittances to his wife until she and their two sons joined him in New York. Of those still sending, twelve were sending less money now than a year ago, and five were sending the same amount; only one interviewee was sending a larger amount. Those who sent remittances to their children or spouses sent the largest amount as a percentage of their individual income, 50% of her income in one case, 25% in another, and three sent about 10%. Immigrants sending money to their parents and siblings sent between 2- 10% of their individual income. The following graph outlines the average amount sent per year.

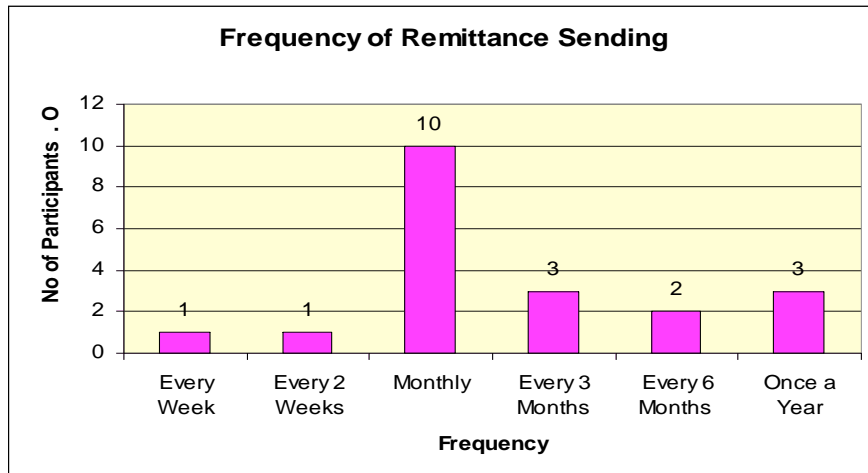
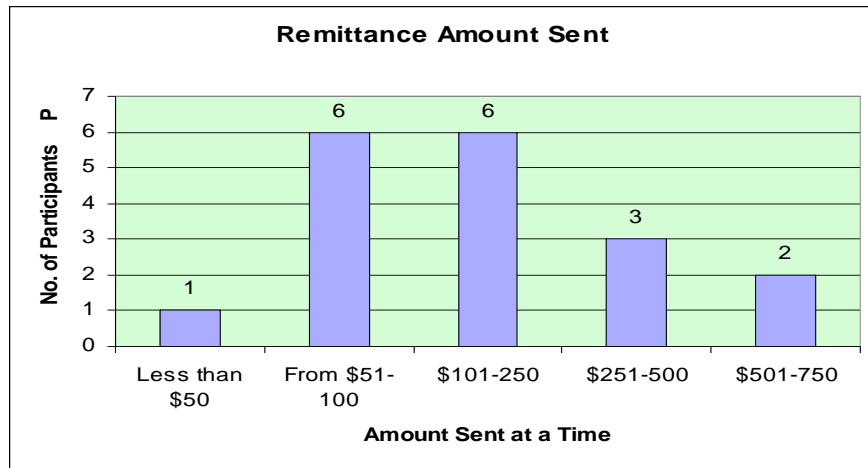


According to the Bendixen survey, the average amount of remittances sent by Ecuadorian immigrants was \$1,400 per year. This information concurs with the data collected from the participants, although the remittance amounts in this case were not as detailed. These surveys also cannot include all the fluctuations that may occur with remittance flows, in part based on special requests, emergencies or events such as birthdays and other holidays that would increase the amount sent on certain dates.

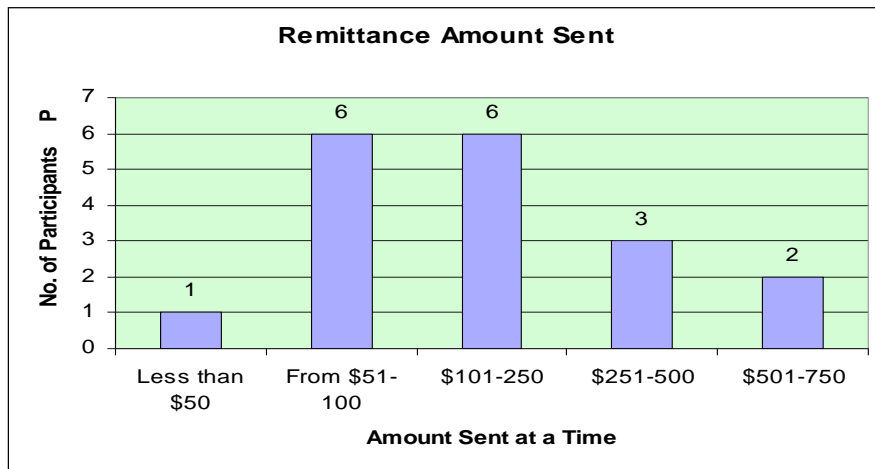
The survey also contained data on the frequency of remittance sending and on the average amount sent each time. Ten of the participants sent money on a monthly basis. The three who send remittances once a year send it as holiday gifts, but the rest of the participants indicated that the money was being used for everyday expenses, including education, medical care, housing, and food. In every case, the senders knew what the money was being used for, but none of them mentioned that the remittances were meant for investment purposes or to make a large purchase. In one case, a participant had been saving her money in an Ecuadorian bank as capital to start a small business but after the banking crisis in 1999, she lost most of the money and since then, had not been able to

save up. Another woman mentioned that aside from the remittances sent to her daughter, she and her husband were saving to buy a house in Ecuador.

The Bendixen survey noted that receivers got remittances on a monthly basis 46% of the time, and 10% only once a year (Ibid, 21). In this case, 47% of the participants sent money every month and 14% once per year, results closely matching the larger survey.

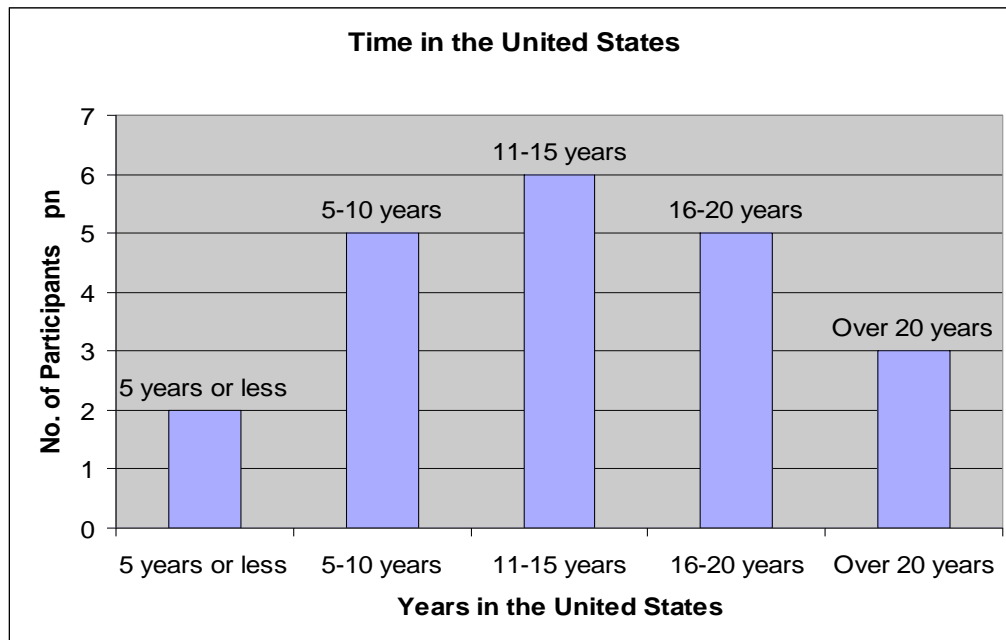


Fifty seven percent of the participants sent remittances on a regular basis through Delgado Travel. It has a wide presence in New York City and has been very successful in catering to the Ecuadorian community. All the participants have used Delgado Travel at one point or another but some have started to switch to other options. Two immigrants (9%) send their remittances through an Ecuadorian bank, two (9%) have switched to the agency Vigo, since it offers better rates, and three (14%) others still use friends and relatives as couriers or send a money order through the mail. These are very similar results to what is outlined by Robert Suro in “A Survey of Remittance Senders and Receivers”, where he notes that 70% of remitters use transfer agencies, (such as Delgado) 11% use banks or cooperatives and 17% still use informal means (Suro 2005, 24.)



Although the most noticeable surge in Ecuadorian immigration has taken place within the past 5-7 years, most of the participants have been in the United States for a longer period of time. Only two participants came to New York less than two years ago, five have been here for close to ten years, six between 10-15 years, five have been here between 15-20 years and three Ecuadorians have been here longer than 20 years. Almost

half of the participants (ten) came to New York when they were in their 20s, six came in their early to mid 30's, and three came as teenagers, to reunite with their parents. In one case, when she was 11 years old, one of the participants thought she was coming to New York only for the summer, and her father decided that she, her siblings and mother should stay, against their wishes.



Overall, the information collected through the questionnaire provided a solid background for the participants that allowed for some comparison to larger pools of data, even when the other surveys were not focused on Ecuadorians in New York City. Despite the small sample size, the results are fairly representative, especially in the areas of individual income level, distribution within New York City, remittance sending amount, frequency and sending mechanisms, even when compared to remittance sending from Ecuadorians in the United States and Europe as was the case in the Bendixen survey. The following data is much more qualitative in nature and brings up additional themes that will try to give depth and further breadth to the questionnaire data.

Findings from the Interviews

Each interview took place immediately after filling out the questionnaire, and the initial questions asked for some background on the immigrant's migration history, what their occupations had been in Ecuador and what motivated them to come to the United States. For most of the participants it was a combination of factors; eight participants came by request of their parents, often after a long period of separation but only four came through the legal path of family reunification. In the other four cases, the trip was funded by family members but not through legal means. Six participants mentioned that the primary reason to migrate was to find work and realize the "American Dream," which was compounded by the lack of job options and general economic difficulties in Ecuador, which were often accompanied by family debts and other obligations. Four of the interviewees said that the primary motivation for migrating were personal reasons, one woman wanted to find her missing husband and divorce him, another wanted to recover from a past relationship and help her family pay off a debt and yet another man was encouraged by his family to migrate so that he would not marry the girlfriend that they did not approve of.

Three immigrants wanted to try their luck and viewed their migration as an adventure. One of them even described his journey through Central America and crossing the border as a vacation since he got to visit many countries and pretend he was a tourist. One participant came as a student and was sponsored by his state employer in Ecuador, but when the government changed to a military dictatorship, they requested that he return and he chose to stay in New York, where he felt he had better options.

Twenty of the participants (95%) had Ecuadorian friends or relatives in New York already, who helped them get established, find their first job and place to live, if they did not end up living with them. One woman was the first in her family to come and initially had little trouble finding work, and after she had been in the United States for some time, her father, uncle, and more recently her sister and daughter have come to New York as well. As a result of this information, one of the themes that was discussed at length was the importance of ties with other Ecuadorians and the advantages and disadvantages of relying on those connections.

One of the questions asked the participants how many family members were in United States with them and the total was 179 members for the entire sample. One participant had no relatives here and one had 29, but the total number helps to illustrate the size of the family network that the immigrants are part of, and in this example does not even include Ecuadorian friends and co-workers. In some cases, the immigrants' entire social network was composed of Ecuadorians. Some of them had connections with other Latin Americans and two were more integrated with mainstream society, but the importance of their ethnic community cannot be underestimated. For some immigrants it was a source of comfort to be around compatriots and be part of a familiar setting; they saw the community as a source of support.

At the same time, a majority of the interviewees expressed certain disappointment with the behavior of friends and other connections who may have offered a helping hand initially. However this assistance at times was limited and friends and family members made it clear to the newcomer that it was necessary for them to find their own way and to do it quickly. The lesson was that each individual had to strive for their own survival.

The general attitude that the new immigrants perceived was individualistic and competitive, especially among those who were from a more middle class background. The exceptions were 2 participants from a rural background, who came to reunite with their family and joined a tight knit family network that was supportive and community oriented. In one case, a young woman, age 23, came to New York more than twenty years after her parents had migrated, but was now living with most of her immediate and extended family members.

This perception was further confirmed by the experience the immigrants had in participating in events sponsored by Ecuadorian civic groups or when they were members. Only one participant was still a member of a religious group, *Divino Niño, Rey de Reyes*, (Divine Child, King of Kings) which was very small and had a very specific religious purpose. Another immigrant had been a member of an Ecuadorian organization and had a good friend that was still a high ranking member of the *Comité Cívico Ecuatoriano*, the most well known Ecuadorian group (now renamed *Centro Cívico Ecuatoriano* (Interview with community leader Joseph Gavilanez, April 21, 2006)). He had a bad experience at an event twenty five years ago where he saw the monies raised being mishandled. From then on he refrained from participating directly, although he and his family still attended parties and other fund raisers. A majority of immigrants also attended similar events, especially the yearly festival in Flushing Meadows Park which celebrated Ecuador's independence day. This event was organized by the *Comité Cívico* and they were also in charge of organizing the Ecuadorian delegation at the yearly parade for Columbus Day. All the participants knew about the *Comité Cívico* except for one woman who had been in New York for less than a year.

The Comité Cívico was at the center of a controversy over the planning of the traditional Ecuadorian festival. Every year, the committee negotiates the appropriate permits with the Parks Department for the festival and, in 2004, apparently there was a discrepancy between the number of stands at the event and the number that the committee had permits for, and in 2005 the event was relocated to Harrison Park in the Bronx. However, despite much advertisement, on TV, radio and printed media, the event was cancelled at the last minute (Ecuador.US, August 2005, accessed on March 30, 2006). The full details of the situation were not clear to the media and there was a lot of confusion at the time as well as many complaints about the leadership, as voiced through *Ecuador News* and other media outlets (Vega, 2005, available at:

http://www.ecuador.us/news/archives/news/suspenden_festival_ecuatoriano_de_nueva_york/)

The precise details of the incident are not as important though, as the impression this caused amongst Ecuadorians.

When asked whether they were members of any civic organization, half of the participants mentioned this scandal as one of the reasons they were not members. The mismanagement evident from this incident and the bad publicity it caused displayed to the immigrants the lack of adequate and truly representative leadership for Ecuadorians in New York. For the participants, the leaders seemed to be pursuing individual benefit and their actions were not transparent. They felt the organization focused solely on the social aspect, hosting parties and creating an atmosphere that encouraged drinking, card playing and partying. Those immigrants attended events at the beginning but were disillusioned. Three of the participants had witnessed fights and disrespectful behavior at the events they attended. Four participants mentioned that they would like to be part of an

Ecuadorian organization that had a true social mission and mentioned examples within the Dominican and Mexican communities. One woman even said that she had contributed to a Mexican organization in her neighborhood, preferring it to an Ecuadorian one because “Mexicans really help their communities back home. You know they are doing good things,” (Interview 5, Jan. 29, 2006).

One couple that was especially critical of the current Ecuadorian leadership also mentioned a more positive example. They knew of a group of Ecuadorians from Riobamba, the capital of the highland province of Chimborazo that were very well organized, had a headquarters office in Newark and carried out social works back in their home province. Another interviewee who was employed at an Ecuadorian bank, also mentioned working with Ecuadorian groups from specific localities, such as Gualaceo, Chunchi and Biblián that had sent collective remittances. All of these are small towns that were initial sending regions more than 20 years ago. The participants spoke highly of these efforts, highlighting the unity amongst these communities and the level of organization, which resembles the Home-Town Associations that Mexican immigrants have formed. General research did not reveal much more than anecdotal evidence of this kind of organization, although it was mentioned in some scholarly pieces (Jokisch, 2002, Kyle, 2001).

Despite the negative comments about Ecuadorian civic organizations, seven of the participants indicated that they would like to be part of a similar kind of project if the leadership was inclusive and the handling of the money was transparent. Another six interviewees mentioned that they would like to attend more cultural events where the Ecuadorian community would gather, especially if the objective was to raise funds for

worthy causes back in Ecuador. Only one participant indicated no interest, because she thought most of the Ecuadorians she had met were “mediocre” and did not find additional value in engaging with the community.

This brings up the very divisive issue of class into the discussion. The participant who was not interested in participating was from an upper middle class background and she had studied English in Ecuador and felt closer to mainstream culture in New York than to the Ecuadorian community. Other immigrants who were also from a more middle class background mentioned that the civic organizations were not very representative of all Ecuadorians, and after further questions, indicated that the reason was that too many Ecuadorians from a rural, indigenous background, or from lower classes, were in these organizations.

These class distinctions were transplanted based on the rigid hierarchical structure that is still predominant in Ecuador. In New York City however, most Ecuadorians found themselves within a similar income bracket and working in the same sectors. The first wave of immigrants, of more rural origin, from small towns in El Austro, were doing relatively well and as other Ecuadorians arrived, from more urban and middle class settings, they had to start from the beginning, and undoubtedly this has created tensions among members of the Ecuadorian community. In addition, the strong sense of regionalism between the *Costa* (Coast) and *Sierra* (Highlands) also adds to the divisiveness. The list of organizations registered with the Ecuadorian consulate in New York numbered 43, many of them identified with a specific province or city, and even with specific soccer teams (Consular website, accessed April 2006). Many of the immigrants raised the issue of regionalism as a divisive factor and two of them even

joked about how the immigrants from El Austro were like a separate country unto themselves.

Jokes aside, the fact that this issue came up in almost all the interviews is very telling of the internal dynamics within the Ecuadorian community in New York City. Although it is quite numerous, it is not well organized and is not able to work together for common goals. However, the individual efforts in sending remittances over a long period of time and the interest in collective remittances by nearly half of the participants signaled the potential for organizing around that objective.

All the participants sent remittances at one point, and those that continue to do so are 85% of the sample. Ninety percent of the immigrants have been in the United States five years or longer and continue to send remittances. In some cases, the amount and frequency has diminished over time and that follows common trends in remittance sending, where five years seems to be the cutoff point for frequent remitting (Suro 2005, 24). However, the habit of sending remittances remains strong, across different income levels and living situations. Within the sample, there was an incredible variety of remittance sending patterns which makes it difficult to indicate general trends, but there were certain situations that do warrant special comment. The three families under the poverty threshold were still sending remittances on a regular basis and they all stated that they intended to continue doing so. As a percentage of their income, remittances account for approximately 10% and those three interviewees said that if they did not send remittances, they would use the money for basic expenses. One of these participants had four children, there were eight people living in her apartment and she was not satisfied with her housing situation yet she continued to send remittances every month.

The remittance receivers (80%) were overwhelmingly parents and siblings of the immigrants. In two cases, these relatives were taking care of the immigrants' children, and in another two instances, the participants sent remittances to their grown children and to other relatives. Eleven of the interviewees were sending remittances to more than one person, sometimes in more than one household. Fifteen respondents (71%) said the money they sent was used for everyday expenses, which included rent, food, and especially for the older recipients, medical care. In the four cases where the immigrants were sending money to their children, part or all of the resources were meant for education. For three remittance senders, the amount they sent was meant for holiday gifts or special occasions. None of the respondents said the money was meant to be invested or saved for any other purpose. However, one immigrant mentioned that she and her husband were saving part of their income to buy a house in Ecuador.

This couple had seen many ads in papers such as *Ecuador News* (a weekly paper targeting the Ecuadorian community) from real estate agencies in Queens that offered the option of buying homes in Ecuador. They were particularly interested in buying property in Quito, as an investment, because they did not plan to return to Ecuador permanently. This highlights the number of options that have developed recently to enable Ecuadorians to make major financial transactions. Buying real estate in Ecuador is cheaper relative to prices in the United States and is also more attractive to undocumented immigrants who have limited access to the local housing market.

Several banks, such as Banco del Austro, Banco del Pichincha, Banco de Guayaquil and Banco Solidario through Citibank, offer a variety of services for remittance senders (Carpio Amoroso, 2003, pg 61-62). At Banco del Austro, the

researcher interviewed one of the employees who handled the videoconferencing service, where immigrants could set up an appointment for them and their families to meet via video at one of the bank locations in Ecuador and the United States. Although a fairly new service, the bank was scheduling about 200 video conferences per month. At this location, immigrants could also purchase electronic goods and set aside gift certificates for a popular chain store in Ecuador, as well as open bank accounts in Ecuador, although Banco del Austro could not yet offer banking services within the United States.

However, the banks still need to rebuild consumer confidence amongst the immigrants. One participant had been saving her remittances as capital for a small business in one of the Ecuadorian banks that went bankrupt in the 1999 banking crisis. As a result, she lost all that money and has not been able to save much since. The second wave of immigration from Ecuador started shortly after the banking crisis and many immigrants are hesitant to trust banks again, especially when sending money from overseas. Also, many immigrants think the services are available only to legal immigrants, although in the case of Citibank, they have accepted the Ecuadorian *cédula* (national ID card) as an appropriate document for banking transactions since 2005 (Citibank Announces Pioneering Pilot Program to Ecuador, available at: www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/cgsd/remittances/documents/EcuadorCitibank.doc). These new strategies and renewed interest in immigrant banking are fairly recent, especially on behalf of Ecuadorian banks, and reflect the financial market's realization of the magnitude and importance of remittance sending among Ecuadorian immigrants. However, within this sample, only two participants used a bank or cooperative to send remittances, and one of them was a bank employee himself. As was highlighted in the

previous section, this corresponds with the general trend amongst all Latin American immigrants (Suro 2005, 24).

However, the more important aspect of the study was to look at general trends amongst remittance senders and try to look at the effects of the sending on their standards of living. As indicated, for the families with lower incomes, sending remittances placed a strain on their ability to cover daily expenses. One interviewee had stopped sending remittances because her family's economic situation had worsened. Around the same time, her sister and older daughter had come to the United States and the debt incurred for their travel made it impossible to send additional funds.

The costs of the trip to New York were very high for Ecuadorian immigrants who come by land or got fake documents to fly to the United States. Amongst the undocumented immigrants, six of the participants made the trip through parts of Central America and Mexico before crossing at the border and taking a plane to New York. The average price for the trip was \$10,000 and it took between one and five years for the participants to repay the debt. Six other interviewees overstayed their visas and some of them traveled with false documentation. The costs for this kind of travel were just as high if not greater than traveling by land, but the participants did not offer specific information on that matter. It became evident that for undocumented immigrants, paying back the cost of their trip was a top priority and affected the amount of remittances they sent and what they could be used for.

Although it is difficult to draw more specific conclusions from the small sample while taking into consideration a majority of the factors that affect each immigrant's situation, the three categories that Peggy Levitt provides for an analysis of social

remittances were useful in looking at this sample of Ecuadorian immigrants and their interaction with the host community. Social remittances are defined as “the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from host- to sending-country communities,” (Levitt, 54). These are much harder to quantify but they are a way of analyzing the impact not only of the money and gifts that immigrants send, but also of the influence of their experiences abroad on their home community.

As noted above, *recipient observers* have a limited amount of interaction with mainstream society and “take in new ideas and practices by passively observing” (Ibid, 57); they carry out most of their activities within their immigrant community and even if their work is elsewhere, it may not afford the opportunity for much interaction. Five participants from the sample could be placed in this category, four of them were women and all five had limited language skills. In one case, the participant had not taken any classes or tried to learn English beyond the very basics. Two of the women came to New York past the age of 30 and the male participant came as a middle aged man. All five of them thought their stay in the United States would be temporary. In one case, the participant had not wanted to migrate but had to follow her husband’s choice and even forty years later, regretted migrating and wanted to return to Ecuador. All the women kept very close ties with their relatives back in Ecuador through constant communication (at least once a week) aside from remittance sending. In three of the cases, the women funded or supported the migration of other family members, including children, siblings and parents. Their social network in New York was comprised mainly of family members and other Ecuadorians. Four of them stated that they would prefer to live in Ecuador if they had the choice and expressed preference for the way of life and the values they grew

up with versus what they had been exposed to in the United States. They remained attached to the habits and way of life they had known in Ecuador.

Some participants did not fit easily into a specific category and could be seen as transitioning or evolving from one to the next. One of the women was initially seen as a recipient observer but she had only been in the United States for one year, she was in her early 20's and although she worked and engaged mostly with other Ecuadorians, she was also taking private English classes several times a week and practicing frequently with the help of family members. She had migrated with the intention of staying in the United States, because all her family was already here. In fact, she had not seen her parents in almost twenty years. Although everyone in the family was undocumented, they had been able to bring most of their family members to New York. Based on these last characteristics she could be seen as an *instrumental adapter*, an immigrant that is more fully adapted or trying to adapt to life in the United States, either through his or her work environment and who feels the need to acquire new skills (such as language proficiency) to become accustomed to the new situation (Ibid, 57).

In the sample there were five participants who could be seen as instrumental adapters, all women who came to New York in their 20's or early 30's. Four of them had children and had taken English classes through the public school system and three of them became volunteers in their local school. Two of them worked full time and two were employed part-time, and four of them were undocumented. The five women felt that their options were limited in terms of employment. Three of them mentioned that they would like to go back to school, but felt it was improbable given their economic and legal situation. These women had taken advantage of language classes and their social circles

went beyond the Ecuadorian community. Those who were not able to work full-time became members of another community through the local schools, where they met other parents, took part in the parent teacher association and went to events, trainings, and classes offered by their volunteer organization. These women preferred living in the United States, even as undocumented immigrants, than in Ecuador, because they felt that back home they would not be able to have the same level of financial independence and job options.

Three men in the sample were initially classified as instrumental adapters; they had acquired limited English skills, had been in the United States for less than ten years and two had come when they were in their 20's but the other was a more recent arrival and was already in his mid 30's. However, the three of them were still taking English classes and had progressed in their employment history from working in restaurants, factories or in agriculture to their current occupations which were better suited to their skills; one was a jeweler by trade, and the other two had university degrees. At the time of the interviews, one participant had recently opened a small jewelry repair shop in Manhattan, the other worked as a computer literacy teacher at a community based organization, and the third managed the videoconferencing service for an Ecuadorian bank. However, all three of them were undocumented and were aware of the limitations of their situation. Two of them had migrated with the intention of returning to Ecuador after a few years, and the other had already lived in Spain and thought he might return there.

The remaining seven participants were seen as *purposeful innovators*, immigrants who “aggressively seek out, select and absorb new things,” (Ibid, 57) such as job

opportunities, education, language skills and they also expand their networks beyond their family and the Ecuadorian community. Five of the seven immigrants in this category were legal residents or citizens and in this group, three of them were women. All these participants came to New York in their 20's or even younger and they all had a high level of proficiency in English. Five of these participants had a university degree or were attending college at the time. The two undocumented immigrants were employed in the transportation and "production, installation, and repair" sectors, one as a limousine driver and the other as a carpet installer; they were both at a high income level for their occupation (Passel 2006, pg 10). All the immigrants except for the youngest (who came to the United States at age 11), started working in factories, in construction, or in the service sector. One of the participants had initially worked in the asbestos industry, where he got a job through his cousin, and was later recruited by the local union to be the industry representative. He was promoted and took advantage of training opportunities within the union, which sponsored him for his permanent residency and was currently seeking his degree in Labor Studies at Cornell University.

Among this group, the four men had always wanted to migrate to the United States in order to "try their luck," "find the American Dream," or "seek better economic opportunities," as they described it (Interviews 10,15,18, and 19, February-March, 2006). They were all driven, relatively well-educated, and ambitious Ecuadorians who migrated in their 20's. They came from a middle class background, from an urban setting and in all the cases, had family or friends in New York City who helped them out initially with their first job and place to stay. Their educational and class background did not fit the profile of most of the Latin American immigrants coming to the United States since

1980, especially if you look at the undocumented population (Passel 2005, 23). Their skills, networks and background, were definitely assets that the immigrants used to improve their situation.

The women in the group had also migrated very young, and they all started learning English as soon as they came. One of them had been living in Staten Island at the time and commented that all her classmates at the public library where she took classes were Chinese, which forced her to practice in order to communicate with them. The two other participants had some university education, one was going to school full time and the other had almost completed her degree in education, but mentioned that she still needed to improve her English skills. She was working as a crossing guard for a public school in the Lower East Side at the time, and planned on completing her studies when her youngest son started going to school. All three had become US citizens, two came to New York to reunite with their parents, and one had been undocumented until she married a permanent resident. She chose to become a citizen when she realized that it would speed up the process for her mother to obtain a green card and be able to reunite with her in New York and work legally.

As was mentioned previously, all the immigrants, except for one, had family or friends in New York that helped them get settled and find a job. Although this initial help may not have been as generous as expected, most of the participants mentioned numerous occasions when they received support from Ecuadorians in finding other jobs, and also when they in turn helped family, friends or acquaintances. As an Ecuadorian, the researcher also benefited from the assistance of Ecuadorians in contacting and locating participants, and almost all the immigrants interviewed had additional contacts and

information that they generously provided. The expectation for collaboration and mutual assistance from other Ecuadorians among many of the participants was high, and may have reflected an idealized version of what life in the Big Apple was like, but in practice, nearly all the immigrants received help and assistance from the very beginning from other Ecuadorians in New York. They in turn also supported and guided other immigrants, to the extent of their possibilities, but this seemed to occur in the absence of any more official channel of information or assistance, and when the subject of the role of the Ecuadorian government came up, the responses were unanimous.

All the participants, when asked what (if anything) the government had done in favor of immigrants, replied that it had done nothing. They had many criticisms of the way the Ecuadorian government treated the immigrant community and this was closely tied to their views on the Ecuadorian civic organizations and other organized groups. On paper, the Ecuadorian consulate in New York has \$300,000 allocated for a project called “*Casa Ecuatoriana*” (Ecuadorian House) that would be located in Queens. The objective of this project was to create a center located in Queens that would cater to the needs of the Ecuadorian community (Consular website, accessed April, 2006). In 2001, the government launched the creation of the “*Fondo de Solidaridad, Ahorro e Inversión*” (Solidarity, Savings and Investment Fund) that would make \$5 million available in loans to Ecuadorian immigrants and their families for productive investments and also to pay off travel costs. This project was never put into effect (Carpio Amoroso, 53-54). None of the participants had heard of any of these initiatives or had any positive comments about the consulate in New York; it was difficult to get in touch with the office, they found the employees disrespectful, and the consular authorities they had seen or heard speak at

events had not impressed them. The researcher experienced this first hand, as multiple efforts to contact and interview the consul were fruitless.

The consulate employees offered an explanation for the recent difficulties in contacting the offices; they pointed out that this is an election year in Ecuador and for the first time, Ecuadorians abroad can vote. In order to register their intent to vote, Ecuadorian citizens must go to the consulate a minimum of six months in advance and then return on the date of the election, October 15, 2006 (Tribunal Supremo Electoral del Ecuador, available at: <http://www.tse.gov.ec/>) The consular offices along with the electoral authorities were supposed to engage in an information campaign to encourage immigrants to register, an additional task difficult to undertake when the consulate already seems unable to handle all its other duties. In addition, the registration process required coordination with the electoral authorities in Ecuador, especially in the management of funds for the information campaign.

Of all the participants in the sample, only eight (38%) had heard about the voting process and none of them knew what they needed to do to sign up. Nine mentioned they would be interested in voting, four were unsure and wanted additional information, and the remaining eight were not interested or thought it was not applicable for them as United States citizens (although Ecuador recognizes dual nationality). The only time the researcher saw posters with information about the process was at an Ecuadorian bank in Queens. This lack of information was surprising because 95% of the participants regularly buy Ecuadorian newspapers, listen to and watch Spanish language media, including Delgado Radio, which focuses on the Ecuadorian community, and live or shop in neighborhoods with a large Ecuadorian presence. The results seemed clear; the

Ecuadorian government had not been successful in informing and engaging the immigrant community in the voting process.

For a majority of the immigrants (56%), the Ecuadorian government needed to advocate for an amnesty for undocumented workers. Several of them mentioned the lobbying efforts of the Mexican government, with the example of the *matrícula consular* (consular ID) which most banks and other institutions (such as public schools) now recognize as valid ID. They thought the Ecuadorian *cédula* could be used the same way if the government would advocate for it. One participant mentioned the example of Central American countries in obtaining Temporary Protected Status for some of their citizens. Those who did not mention an amnesty said the consulate could provide more information and guidance on immigration issues. Several of the participants thought the emphasis of the government should be on creating new jobs and improving the living conditions of Ecuadorians so they would not be forced to migrate. One participant focused on the issue of providing legal representation and advocacy for undocumented Ecuadorians threatened with deportation.

All of these proposals have been issued formally by the Committee of Ecuadorians Living Abroad in a document called National Plan for Ecuadorians (consular website, accessed April 2006), but none of the participants were aware that these efforts were in place or knew of how to participate in them. The lack of organization and outreach by Ecuadorian authorities and civic organization leaders seemed to be the biggest obstacle to pursuing any of these objectives successfully. However, the role of the Ecuadorian government with reference to its immigrant community in New York City was a major topic in all the interviews and for a majority of the participants, even those

who would rather live in Ecuador, the current political and economic situation was the reason they would not be willing to return. Any attempt by the Ecuadorian government to channel remittances towards local investment will need to take these factors into account.

Analysis of the findings:

The twenty-one interviews with first-generation Ecuadorian immigrants covered a wide array of topics and although the focus was on remittance sending and its effects on the senders, the additional information was necessary to understand the role of remittance sending within the context of the migration experience. In every case, there were a set of unique circumstances and factors that came together to determine why an immigrant was able to send remittances and how that affected his or her life in New York City.

Paramount among these factors was the situation that propelled them to migrate and whether they were able to do it legally or not.

The few available estimates of the undocumented Ecuadorian population in New York City ranged around 130,000 (NYC Department of City Planning, 2004) and even if this number was overestimated, it would imply that a majority of Ecuadorian immigrants in New York are undocumented, as was the case in this sample (57%). Remittances sent to cover travel costs for undocumented immigrants placed an additional burden on the fragile economies of the newly arrived Ecuadorians, especially during the first five years. This became evident during the interviews, when the participants discussed the economic burden of paying back debts or covering the travel costs for family members. Even those with legal status had family or friends who were undocumented. In one case, a permanent resident brought two of her children legally but her oldest daughter had to come through

Mexico, because by the time her mother could afford to pay, she was over 18 and was no longer eligible for family reunification. These and other stories highlighted the complexity of the migration process and the interconnections between community members in different legal circumstances.

The numerical indicators of remittance sending levels reveal that Ecuadorian immigrants in this sample sent anywhere between 4-50% of their income as remittances, within the past year. The most recent immigrants sent the highest proportion of their income. The proportion sent was closely related to the amount of time spent in the United States, and most importantly, to the relationship with the remittance receiver back in Ecuador. When it was an immediate family member, specifically a spouse or child, the commitment to send was greater. The five participants who were in this situation were living in overcrowded conditions, did not have access to health care, and they were all undocumented. In this subset, remittance sending clearly had a negative impact on the standards of living of the senders.

Overall, when asked what they would spend the money on if they did not have to send remittances, five participants said it would be used for basic expenses, four would save the money, two would invest more in their business, and two would consider donating to a charity. One of the participants said that “remittance sending was such a strong habit that she could not even imagine not sending the money,” (Interview 17, February 2006). The majority also reaffirmed their commitment to continue to send remittances until the family member could migrate as well or until the receiver passed away.

The reasons behind this level of commitment are many, but the most important one was the strength of family ties and feelings of obligation and willingness to help out. In the United States, the immigrant might not have a high standard of living or much disposable income, but in comparison to the situation of family members in Ecuador, he/she was fortunate. Most participants were in constant communication with their relatives and were well aware of the socio-economic situation in Ecuador so they were sensitive to the needs of their family members. Some of the participants felt a strong responsibility and gratefulness to extended family members, grandparents, aunts and uncles who had taken care of them before they could reunite with their parents in New York. In three cases, although the parents no longer sent remittances to their relatives back in Ecuador, their children continued to do so, especially for medical expenses. For immigrants who sent remittances for the holidays, it was a tradition that signaled affection and compensated for not being able to visit, especially for those who were undocumented.

Another important reason to send remittances, especially in the beginning, was to pay off debts incurred for the trip. The high price of the trip by land or by air with falsified documents was a major financial constraint, especially for the participant who was the first in her family to migrate. It took her five years to pay the debt, in contrast with a more recent immigrant who paid the amount back in one year, with the help of her family, already in the United States. Within remittance research on Ecuador, the weight of these payments as part of the total amount sent has not been examined, and they could have a large negative effect on the immigrant and his /her families because there is additional pressure to remit and the amounts have to be higher. Back in Ecuador, the

family may have placed their land and other property as collateral, making all the members more financially vulnerable if the immigrant were unable to meet the payments. For two of the participants, family members already in the United States saved up enough for them to make the trip. Once again, these costs may be recorded as remittances, but the flow goes directly to *chulqueros* (loan sharks) and *coyotes/pasadores* and others involved in the smuggling business (Kyle and Ling, 2001, 18).

One of the broader repercussions of remittance sending for this sample and for Ecuadorians as whole, based on the Bendixen & Associates Survey, was the motivation for other Ecuadorians to migrate as well, both family members and others. The visible benefits from remittances, most glaringly evident in the lavish new homes in El Austro, in conjunction with the lack of job opportunities, fuels additional migration and provides an escape valve that relieves pressure on the government and in turn, creates more flows of resources into the country (Solimano 2002, 2). In society in general, other effects of migration and remittance sending are continued family dislocation, emptying out of entire towns and rural areas, an increase in divorces as spouses are absent for long periods of time, and more children raised by a single parent or by other relatives (Jokisch 2001, 78). Four of the participants had children in Ecuador and six had parents who had migrated when they were children.

Another conclusion based on the sample was that the overall trend in remittance sending is for the amount to diminish over time, but there were variations that were also reflective of the conditions of the sender and receiver. When immigrants were unemployed, they were forced to stop sending or sent much less, but when they found work again, they would continue sending remittances. The participants also noted that

they sent additional amounts when there was a family emergency or for special occasions. There were also several participants who were remitting and saving at the same time for their family's trip but once they arrived to New York, the immigrant no longer sent remittances or the amounts were greatly reduced. However, within larger families, this process could be very lengthy. One participant had 11 siblings; she had been the seventh to come to the United States via family reunification and another sister had not yet been able to come because her father, who had been sponsoring her, passed away. The efforts to reunite with family members were mostly in one direction, and only one immigrant said that he planned to return to Ecuador in the near future to be with his family.

Although eight of the participants would prefer to live in Ecuador, and five would like to visit regularly, the situation in Ecuador both propels continued remittance sending to help out family members, and is a major disincentive for immigrants to invest in their country or consider going back. As a result, there is a higher likelihood that remittance receivers will end up migrating rather than the immigrant returning home, as was the case with the participants in this case study, and is evident in Ecuador as more and more people turn to migration as the most promising option for economic progress.

Chapter 5:

Policy Recommendations

It was clear in all the interviews that the participants were very dissatisfied with the Ecuadorian government and they had numerous suggestions for what their government should do to support the immigrant community in New York. The most common and nearly unanimous request was for Ecuadorian authorities to lobby the United States government for immigration reform that would allow for an amnesty or at least, work authorization for Ecuadorian immigrants. Carrying out such a proposal would not be possible for the Ecuadorian government on its own, but there are several important measures that the consulate in New York could undertake. The Ecuadorian civic organizations and other groups could also benefit from the recommendations of members of the Ecuadorian community. Many of the participants' suggestions are included in the following policy recommendations.

Ecuadorian Government:

- Provide clear and accessible information on immigration issues, offer workshops or create a center where immigrants can receive information and be referred to credible immigration lawyers.
- Offer legal protection and advocate for Ecuadorians in deportation proceedings, especially if these arise from unwarranted searches and raids. Also, inform and advocate for appropriate labor conditions and treatment in the workplace, perhaps by receiving complaints and passing them on to the New York State Attorney General.
- Provide information and guidance to Ecuadorian immigrants about the resources available for them, whether they are undocumented or not, in areas such as health, education, and social services. To facilitate this process, the consulate should seek partnerships with community based organizations and non-governmental organizations that provide these services and outreach to immigrant communities.

- Provide more information on the voting process through an effective media campaign and make use of Ecuadorian organizations and businesses. This would probably require a larger allocation of funds from the central government.
- Improve the quality of customer service it provides to Ecuadorian immigrants by establishing an additional office in Queens. Clearly the demand for services exceeds the capacity of the current consular staff. In addition, staff training on customer service delivery would improve the relations between immigrants and the authorities. The president speaks highly of immigrants and their contributions to the country, but this language of respect and recognition needs to be put into practice in the daily interactions between the community and the authorities.
- Put in place existing projects such as the “*Casa Ecuatoriana*” which has a budget allocation from the central government and lobby for the implementation of other initiatives, such as the “*Fondo de Solidaridad, Ahorro e Inversión.*” A project such as “*Casa Ecuatoriana*” could greatly increase the credibility of the Ecuadorian government among its immigrant community and create incentives for immigrants to organize and provide a setting for Ecuadorian culture to be celebrated and shared with the host community.
- Collect accurate demographic information and document the history of Ecuadorian immigration in New York City. This project is part of the “*Casa Ecuatoriana*” initiative and would probably require more funds than are currently allocated, but having precise data on the Ecuadorian community would be a powerful tool for obtaining additional resources, both from the central government and the private sector. This process could be carried out in conjunction with research centers focusing on migration as well as the New York City Office of City Planning.
- Advocate for the recognition of the Ecuadorian national ID card, the *cédula* as a valid document for use in banking transactions, access to public schools and other daily activities. Similar to the initiative of the Mexican *matrícula consular*, under this proposal, the Consulate could work with banks and with local authorities to provide a venue for undocumented immigrants to have easier access to basic services. Some financial institutions have already taken the initiative, such as CitiBank.
- Lobby in favor of immigrant rights at the local level and in conjunction with other consulates in the area, forming part of a national policy organized by the central government, building on the strength and experience of other immigrant communities in New York City and the Metropolitan Area.
- Improve the coordination and registration process for Ecuadorian civic organizations. Set up minimum standards that these organizations need to abide by in order to receive consular recognition, such as having a clear mission, official bylaws and procedures, transparent use of funds, and democratic election

of leaders. If organizations fail to meet these standards, they should not be recognized by the consulate or included in their official list.

Ecuadorian civic organizations:

- Democratize the leadership structures and make a concerted effort to recruit and diversify the current membership. This is especially important for the *Comité Cívico Ecuatoriano/Centro Cívico Ecuatoriano*, which needs to regain credibility by becoming more transparent and responding more effectively to the needs of the Ecuadorian immigrant community.
- Formalize the structure of the organization, by registering as an official NGO or CBO, which would increase the level of accountability and credibility of the organization, both amongst Ecuadorian immigrants but also in the larger community. Some of the larger organizations have done this and others have been around long enough that this would be a logical step. For some of the smaller organizations this is not yet a realistic option, but adhering to similar standards will ensure similar benefits in the long run.
- Provide more information on the mission of each organization and the different activities they engage in. Currently, most immigrants have the perception that Ecuadorian civic groups focus on partying and drinking, and even though there is a large diversity within the organizations, in terms of activities, regional focus and mission, the community at large is unaware of this.
- Create and publicize opportunities for sending collective remittances. This would be most effective within regional or city specific organizations that can clearly identify projects and beneficiaries. The process would have to be transparent and as new immigrants join, a participatory approach must be in place to include their voices in the process.

The objective of these recommendations is to solidify and provide a supportive network of organizations that can address the concerns of Ecuadorian immigrants. Over 90% of first generation Ecuadorians send remittances in some form or another and there is also great potential for sending collective remittances. Individual immigrants are receptive to the idea of contributing to their home communities but they are also extremely disappointed in their government and the local leadership of civic organizations so any initial efforts will be met with skepticism. Therefore, these efforts

need to be truly transparent and have to take into account the level of regional division between the immigrants as well as the tensions that have been created by the changes in social and economic structures amongst Ecuadorians in New York as well as back in Ecuador. León Roldos Aguilera, the presidential candidate with highest level of support according to recent polls, chose New York City as the first stop on his campaign, (Ecuador News, available at: <http://ecuadornews.net/periodico/edicionactual.html>) demonstrating the increasing recognition of the economic and political power of the immigrant community in Ecuadorian society. The timing is ripe for a new government to recognize the value of remittances and try to put into place initiatives that will encourage collective remittances by creating a more stable and economically viable environment for immigrant investment.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

This project focused on collecting data on remittance sending, but the information also helped create a better picture of the immigrant experience for Ecuadorians in New York. Remittance sending was one aspect of their experience and the patterns and effects of sending remittances reflected their migration situation and the current conditions the immigrants faced. As mentioned previously, the data was not meant to be representative of the entire Ecuadorian immigrant community in New York. Most importantly, the results highlight areas in need of additional research in order to have a more accurate picture of the Ecuadorian immigrant community. With regards to remittance sending the key questions that were proposed by the project can be addressed with the following summary.

Immigrants inevitably made tradeoffs when they decided to send part of their income back to their families. The costs of sending remittances meant that many of the interviewees were allocating fewer funds to housing, health care and other basic needs. It also meant setting aside pleasurable activities such as eating out and traveling. The fees that migrants paid to send remittances and to send packages to Ecuador were very high until fairly recently, placing an additional burden on the immigrant and reducing the amount available to their families. As a result of increasing competition within courier services and transfer agencies, and the official dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy, the transfer costs have been reduced, but so has the acquisitive value of the dollar in Ecuador (Suro 2005, 47). In broader terms, when remittances were essential to the family

income back in Ecuador, the immigrants were giving up the option of returning home. The senders with the highest incomes did not face similar tradeoffs, but they were only a small segment of the sample (10%) although the rationale for sending remittances was similar for all the participants.

Within this sample, the main reasons for sending remittances were family responsibilities and ties of affection between the immigrants and their relatives. With more frequent communication and better information and transnational links with Ecuador, remittance senders were also more aware of the situation back home and of their families' specific needs. The participants were well informed about the economic situation in Ecuador and could make more informed decisions about how much to send and what it would be used for. Sending remittances as gifts or for emergency purposes helped compensate for the absence of the immigrant from his/her family. Another important rationale for remittance sending was to pay off debts for travel costs, which created an additional financial constraint. The pressure from this obligation was an economic burden for almost half of the participants, and it signals an area for further research in order to fully understand the implications of the situation.

The value of social remittances was harder to quantify, but there is much more communication and interaction between Ecuadorian immigrants and their families as a result of improvements in technology and the viability of a market for this type of exchange, so information and knowledge acquired by immigrants, as well as new patterns of behavior, can be more easily transferred. For critics of migration in Ecuador, the results have been mostly negative, with an increase in consumerism and materialistic attitudes, higher divorce rates, increased student drop out rates and a loss of pride in

Ecuadorian traditional values (Jokisch 2001, 78). On the other hand, as more women migrate and become economically independent, they have challenged traditional patriarchal roles, especially as a result of the latest wave of immigration. Women have become the majority of immigrants since 1999, so the broader impact of their migration is yet to be seen. The women left behind have also taken up new leadership roles as head of the household. In rural areas in Cañar, as remittance receivers buy more land, women are in charge of hiring workers during the planting and harvesting season, as well as managing the expansion of the family home (Jokisch 2002, 536).

The migrants from rural lower class backgrounds who migrated first, and sent money for their families to build modern homes and buy more land, are challenging the existing social structure by reallocating wealth to a previously more disadvantaged group. From El Austro alone, an estimated 100,000 people migrated, about 25% of the total population, and they were mostly from lower income backgrounds (Ibid, 528). In New York, they have formed their own civic groups and since they have a significant numerical presence and more economic resources relative to other Ecuadorians, they are also reshaping the traditional class and racial structures.

What does this mean for the future of remittance sending and collective remittances? The explosion of Ecuadorian immigration occurred relatively recently and shows no signs of stopping so the flow of remittances will also continue to increase. Based on the interviews and anecdotal evidence of collective remittances, there is potential for an increase in these flows as well, despite the lack of government incentives and reliable organizations to channel them through. However, the level of disenchantment and lack of faith in the Ecuadorian government and its representatives

will be very difficult to overcome. Besides remittance sending, these feelings of disenchantment were the other common link between all the participants. Regarding the Ecuadorian civic groups, the participants in this sample expressed a similar disappointment and frustration with the leadership and the goals of these organizations. However, the key motivations for sending remittances remain and many of the participants indicated their willingness to contribute in other ways.

This summer, the Ecuadorian soccer team will be at its second World Cup, taking place in Germany. Ecuadorians in all parts of the world will rally in support of their team and this support will unify the entire community, at least for the duration of the tournament. This energy and pride is a heightened version of the feelings of solidarity and commitment that fuel remittance sending and could be channeled into sending collective remittances and other forms of investment in Ecuador, but there remains a lot to be done in order to regain the confidence of the immigrants and demonstrate potential outcomes that will benefit their families and produce positive results for Ecuadorian society. However, the answer is not in the remittances themselves, but in creating a receptive and more equitable society that can make the best use of these resources.

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Interview No. 18, February 19, 2006. Queens, New York.

Interview No. 19, March 12, 2006. Manhattan, New York.

Interview with Joseph Gavilanez, Presidente de la Asociación Mundial de Ecuatorianos Residentes en el Exterior (Worldwide Association of Ecuadorians Abroad), April 21, 2006, via telephone.

Appendix A

**Initial Survey for Ecuadorian Immigrants and Remittance
Senders in New York City**

Location: _____

Date: _____

Identifying Number: _____

Basic Information:

Name: (optional) _____

Age: _____

Sex: __ Male __ Female

Place of Birth: _____ (city/town) _____ (province)

Please mark the chosen response with an X:

1) Educational Level:

None/N/A: _____ Primary: _____

Secondary: _____ University: _____

Graduate level or above: _____

2) Current Occupation:

Administrative/Secretarial: _____ Store clerk/Salesperson: _____

Restaurant employee: _____ Child Care: _____

Beautician/Hairdresser: _____ Client Services: _____

Taxi/limo driver or parking employee: _____

Janitorial or Housecleaning services: _____

Businessperson: _____ Manager: _____

Factory worker: _____ Construction worker: _____

Housewife: _____

Other: _____ Not Available: _____

3) Average individual yearly income (estimate): 4) Family Income (estimate):

Less than \$10,000 _____

Less than \$25,000: _____

Between \$10,000- 19,999 _____

Between \$25,000 – 49,999 _____

Between \$20,000- 39,999 _____

Between \$50,000 – 74,999 _____

Between \$40,000- 59,999 _____

Between \$75,000 – 99,999 _____

Between \$60,000- 79,999 _____

Over \$100,000: _____

Between \$80,000- 99,999 _____

Over \$100,000: _____

5) When did you first come to the United States? _____ month _____ year

6) How many family members are in the US with you at this time?

7) What is your position in your home?

Head of household _____

Spouse _____

Son/Daughter _____

Brother/Parent/Grandchild _____

Other Relative _____

Housemate/Roommate _____

Other _____

Not Applicable _____

8) How many people, including yourself, live in your home? _____

9) How long have you been living here? _____ months _____ years

10) What were your major reasons for coming?

11) Do you visit Ecuador regularly? _____ When was your last visit? _____

12) Do you plan to return to Ecuador permanently?

13) Do you know other Ecuadorians in the city?

14) Do you send remittances or have you sent them in the past?

For those who currently send remittances:

15) On average, how often do you send remittances?

Every week _____ Every two weeks _____

Every month _____ Every two months _____

Every 3 months _____ Every 4 months _____

Every 6 months _____ Once a year _____

16) What is the average amount?

Less than \$50 _____ \$51 up to \$100 _____

\$101 - \$250 _____ \$251 - \$500 _____

\$501 - \$750 _____ \$751 - \$1000 _____

\$1001 - \$3000 _____ More than \$3000 _____

17) What means do you use to send your remittances?

Local Agency _____
 Transfer Agency _____
 Bank _____
 Friends/Relatives _____
 Mail/Money order _____
 Other _____

18) Who do you send them to?

19) Do you know what the recipients use the remittances for?

20) Do you send more or less money now than you did a year ago?

If you sent remittances in the past but no longer do so now:

21) How long did you send remittances? _____ months _____ years

22) Who did you send them to?

23) What was the average amount?

Less than \$50	_____	\$51 up to \$100	_____
\$101 - \$250	_____	\$251 - \$500	_____
\$501 - \$750	_____	\$751 - \$1000	_____
\$1001 - \$3000	_____	More than \$3000	_____

24) What were the main reasons for not sending remittances any more?

**Cuestionario Inicial para Inmigrantes Ecuatorianos que Envían
Remesas en la Ciudad de Nueva York**

Ubicación: _____

Fecha: _____

Número de identificación: _____

Información Básica:

Nombre: (opcional) _____

Edad: _____ Masculino Femenino

Lugar de Nacimiento dentro del Ecuador: _____ (ciudad/pueblo)
_____ (provincia)

Por favor marque con una X la respuesta más apropiada.

1) Nivel de Educación:

Ninguna: _____ Primaria: _____

Secundaria: _____ Universidad: _____

Maestría o Doctorado: _____

2) Ocupación Actual:

Administrativo/Secretarial: _____ Vendedor/a, Cajera: _____

Restaurante (mesero,etc): _____ Cuidado de niños: _____

Estética/ Estilista/Peluquero _____ Servicio al Cliente: _____

Chofer de Taxi/Limo o empleado en un parqueadero: _____

Servicios de limpieza, en edificios o residencias particulares: _____

Hombre de negocios: _____ Gerente: _____

Trabajador de fábrica: _____ Albañil/Plomero/Carpintero: _____

Ama de casa: _____

Otro: _____ No Disponible: _____

3) Ingresos anuales promedio (estimado):

Menos de \$10,000 _____

Entre \$10,000- 19,999 _____

Entre \$20,000- 39,999 _____

Entre \$40,000- 59,999 _____

Entre \$60,000- 79,999 _____

Entre \$80,000- 99,999 _____

4) Ingreso Familiar Anual (estimado):

Menos de \$25,000: _____

Entre \$25,000 – 49,999 _____

Entre \$50,000 – 74,999 _____

Entre \$75,000 – 99,999 _____

Más de \$100,000: _____

Más de \$100,000: _____

5) ¿Cuándo vino por primera vez a los Estados Unidos? ____ día ____ mes ____ año

6) ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva viviendo aquí? _____ años _____ meses

7) ¿En este momento, cuantos miembros de su familia (incluyendo hermanos, primos, tíos, etc.) están en los EEUU además de usted? _____

8) ¿Cuál es su posición dentro de su hogar?

Cabeza de familia _____

Esposo/a _____

Hijo/Hija _____

Hermano/a/Padre/madre/Nieto/a _____

Otro Pariente _____

Compañero/a de cuarto _____

Otro _____

No Aplicable _____

9) ¿Cuántas personas, usted incluida, viven en su hogar? _____

10) ¿Por qué razón/razones decidió venir a los EEUU? _____

11) ¿Usted visita el Ecuador con frecuencia? _____

12) ¿Cuándo fue su última visita? _____

13) ¿Usted piensa regresar al Ecuador permanentemente? _____

14) ¿Conoce a otros ecuatorianos que viven aquí (además de sus familiares)? _____

15) ¿Usted envía remesas (dinero, ayuda financiera) o las enviaba en el pasado? _____

Para los que envían remesas:

16) En promedio, ¿cada cuanto tiempo envía remesas?

Cada semana _____ Cada 3 meses _____

Cada dos semanas _____ Cada 4 meses _____

Cada mes _____ Cada 6 meses _____

Cada dos meses _____ Una vez al año _____

17) ¿Cuál es la cantidad promedio?

Menos de \$50 _____ \$501 - \$750 _____

de \$51 hasta \$100 _____ \$751 - \$1000 _____

\$101 - \$250 _____ \$1001 - \$3000 _____

\$251 - \$500 _____ Más de \$3000 _____

18) ¿Qué medios usa con mayor frecuencia para enviar sus remesas?

Agencia local _____

Agencia de Transferencia (Delgado por ej.) _____

Banco/Cooperativa _____

Amigos/Parientes _____

Por correo/giro postal _____

Otro _____

19) ¿A quién/es envía las remesas? _____

20) ¿Sabe para que se usan las remesas que usted envía?

21) ¿Envía más o menos dinero ahora de lo que mandaba hace un año?

Si usted mandaba remesas pero ya no lo hace:

22) ¿Por cuánto tiempo envió remesas? _____ meses _____ años

23) ¿A quién se las enviaba?

24) ¿Cuál era la cantidad promedio que mandaba?

Menos de \$50 _____ De \$51 hasta \$100 _____

\$101 - \$250 _____ \$251 - \$500 _____

\$501 - \$750 _____ \$751 - \$1000 _____

\$1001 - \$3000 _____ más de \$3000 _____

25) ¿Por que razón/es dejó de mandar remesas?

Appendix B

Individual Interview Questions:

1. What was your occupation in Ecuador? Did that job and those skills help in the United States?
2. How did you find work in New York (what is your work history)?
3. How did you make the trip to the United States? Did you plan on staying when you first came?
4. Would you prefer to live in the US or in Ecuador?
5. Do you feel it is important to be in contact with other Ecuadorians here in NYC?
6. Are you a member of an Ecuadorian civic organization or take part in activities planned by these groups? Why or why not?
7. Do you have access to news from Ecuador? What are your main sources of information?
8. Have you taken English classes or plan on doing so in the near future?
9. Do you have health insurance?
10. What is your housing situation? Are you satisfied with it?
11. Overall, do you feel you can cover your expenses and those of your family comfortably in your current economic situation?
12. If you didn't send remittances, what would you spend the money on?
13. If you still send remittances, do you think you will continue sending them for some time?
14. In your opinion, what has the Ecuadorian government done or what should it do in favor of its immigrant population?
15. Do you know that Ecuadorians can vote for president from NYC?
16. Would you consider going to vote?
17. What is the community you identify with in NYC?

Preguntas Individuales para la Entrevista:

1. ¿A que se dedicaba en el Ecuador? ¿Esa ocupación le ayudó en los EEUU?
2. ¿Cómo consiguió su trabajo aquí? (cual es su historia laboral)
3. ¿Cómo fue su viaje hacia los Estados Unidos? ¿Usted pensaba quedarse aquí cuando viajó?
4. ¿Usted preferiría vivir en los Estados Unidos o en el Ecuador? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Le parece importante estar en contacto con otros ecuatorianos en Nueva York?
6. ¿Es usted miembro de una organización cívica ecuatoriana o toma parte en las actividades que estos grupos planifican? ¿Porqué si o no?
7. ¿Tiene acceso a noticias del Ecuador? ¿Cuáles son sus fuentes de información?
8. ¿Ha tomado clases de ingles o planea hacerlo en un futuro cercano?
9. ¿Tiene seguro médico? Si no, ¿donde consigue servicios médicos?
10. ¿Cuál es su situación de vivienda? ¿Le parece satisfactoria?
11. En general, ¿siente que puede cubrir cómodamente sus gastos y los de su familia bajo su situación económica actual?
12. Si no mandara remesas, ¿en que gastaría ese dinero?
13. Si las envía todavía, ¿piensa que seguirá mandándolas por algún tiempo?
14. ¿Qué es lo que el gobierno ecuatoriano ha hecho o debería hacer a favor de los inmigrantes?
15. ¿Sabía que ahora los ecuatorianos pueden votar para presidente desde el exterior, incluyendo Nueva York?
16. ¿Usted consideraría votar desde Nueva York?
17. ¿Siente que usted es parte de una comunidad aquí en NYC?