Colombian and Dominican Immigrant Transnational Organizations and Development

(Draft)

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Introduction:

In 2011, Colombian organizations put together events to help the estimated two million people affected by the heavy rains that fell in various regions of Colombia the previous year and which caused slides, inundations, etc. In the greater New York area, they organized events such as a gastronomic/humoristic/dance festival in Connecticut, an Ayudaton (“helpathon”) in Queens, and a large banquet to raise funds in New York. With these efforts, the organizations were responding to the call for assistance made by the president of Colombia, who was in the city talking to union leaders in order to promote the signing of a free-trade agreement with Colombia.

This episode is an excellent example of a dominant type of transnational activity in which Colombian organizations in the U.S. are involved. In 1999, after an earthquake struck the coffee-producing region, immigrant organizations were created, others were revived, and all rushed in to assist their compatriots (that time, even without the president’s appeal for help). While this type of assistance might be common, the convergence of projects on single regions or their coordination with state and international relief institutions is not. Aside from these moments of national solidarity, Colombian organizations decide about the projects they want to develop on their own, choose the projects and the places to carry them out according to their own preferences and personal contacts, establish their own connections in Colombia, and resort to their own means in order to monitor the completion of their projects.

Dominican organizations work in a similar way. When hurricane George affected the area of Jimani in the Dominican Republic (2004), a large number of immigrant organizations contributed with donations. While the situation did not merit the creation of new institutions, as in the case of Colombia, it required a change in some existing
organizations, which had to accommodate to the new responsibilities of delivering and monitoring projects in the affected areas. In this specific case of a natural disaster, as well as in other regular projects carried out on the island, Dominican organizations basically operated following the same patterns as Colombian organizations.

Colombian and Dominican organizations exhibit some differences, as well. First, with the exceptions of HTAs, which are a minority in both cases, Dominican organizations carry out far fewer activities and projects in their homeland than their Colombian counterparts. However, compared with the Colombians, there is a significantly greater number of large, well-financed immigrant Dominican organizations in the United States focused on servicing the local immigrant community. A second difference becomes evident by looking at the countries of origin and their relations with immigrant organizations. A new strategy that some Colombian NGOs have been considering in order to finance their activities is to set up a small chapter of the organization in the United States, registered officially as a non-taxable, non-profit organization (501-c3) in order to collect donations within the Colombian community. This strategy had previously been used by two very large Colombian NGOs establishing a presence in the United States to capture corporate donations but now even small organizations are considering this strategy, in spite of the complexity of the process involved. There are no such forms of NGO extension by Dominicans in the U.S. There are, instead, very active political parties and a large think-tank with links to the Dominican president taking out a transnational initiative from the island.

How can we explain these similarities and differences in the involvement of Colombian and Dominican immigrant organizations in their home-countries? We argue that these differences can be understood to a large extent by looking at the state/civic society dynamic of both context of exit and context of destination within which these organizations are embedded. This constitutes the first aim of this paper.

The study of Colombia and the Dominican Republic can also add a different perspective to the literature on collective remittances, migrant associations and development which has been focus mainly on hometown associations. While these are very common forms of immigrant organization, other types of associations involved in development, which function differently, exist, as well and merit attention. The
Dominican and Colombian immigrants, predominantly from urban origin, form these other types of organizations. The second aim of this paper is to understand how the different character of these organizations influences the type of development activities they carry out in their places of origin. For this purpose, we examine the main characteristics of Colombian and Dominican organizations in the U.S., the type of involvement they maintain in their places of origin, and the partnerships they have established with the state and/or various institutions and organizations of civil society.

The space of immigrant organizations and their development projects

The surge of international migration has increased the relevance of immigrants in the development policies of their countries of origin. In neither the initial market oriented paradigm (1950s and 1960s), where the state played the central role as developmental actor, nor in the dependency paradigm (1970 and 1980s), where grassroots and self-help were the movers of development, did migrant associations receive much attention. It was not until the 1990s, within the transnational paradigm, when the diaspora is introduced as a civil society actor, that associations are recognized as agents of development (Faist, Fauser, 2011; Kivisto, 2011). Migrants contribute to their countries of origin as individual senders of remittances, as part of professional or business networks, or as part of hometown associations or senders of collective remittances (Kivisto, 2011).

Individual remittances have attracted the attention of scholars and policymakers but it was not until more recently that immigrant organizations and their contributions became central to the discussion on migration and development. The emphasis, however, has been primarily on hometown associations, sometimes obscuring the presence of other forms of migrant associations.

The first point we want to argue in this paper is that the oversimplification and equation of migrant organizations with hometown associations has practical and theoretical implications. It has practical implications because the particularities of migrants as agents of development can be quite different according to whether the organization, for example, has activities and projects in a single locality or in various regions in the home country. In other words, a project or a campaign taken over by a group of middle class professionals from various urban centers does not work in similar
ways to a project carried out by a hometown association. The contact in the country of origin, the locality or localities where the project is implemented, the type of project involved, are all dimensions of development that vary significantly with the type of association. Theoretically, the implications of equating immigrant organizations with hometown associations run the risk of overemphasizing locality at the expense of regional or national dimensions.

The second point we want to argue in this paper is the importance of seeing migrant organizations within the context of the state and civil society of the countries of origin and destination because migrant organizations move in this transnational space. In Madrid or Barcelona, for example, policies of these municipalities combined programs of incorporation of immigrants with programs of co-development for those immigrants' places of origin (Fauser 2011). In other cases, such as Mexico, it has been the state of origin that defines the programs of development (i.e. the federal 3 x 1 and the state 2 x 1 programs) (Goldring 2002, Smith 2003, Smith 2008). The idea, then, is to look at places of origin and destination (at the supra-national, national, regional and local levels) because it is in this overlapping space that migrant organizations and their dynamics are defined.

**Research Design and Characteristics of the Organizations:**

For the present paper, we use the data from a large study of first generation Colombian, Dominican and Mexican immigrant organizations, the Comparative Immigrant Organization Project (CIOP), of the Center for Migration and Development at Princeton University. This study included: 1) inventories of organizations from the two nationalities; 2) face-to-face interviews with leaders of transnational organizations; 3) visits to the countries of origin; and 4) interviews with government officials in the U.S. and in the countries of origin. Leaders interviewed were members of organizations that have some form of transnational connection, that were active (not in a state of dormancy), well-established and recognized as an organization by the community, other organizations, or the consulates (not just one person acting as an organization).
The immigrant groups

The two immigrant groups included in the study have various characteristics that make them comparable. They are some of the largest groups of Latino immigrants in the United States, they both belong to the post-1965 wave of migration, they are predominantly urban (even though they have some rural migration), they include middle class migrants, and they share the same status of non-refugee immigrants, so therefore, are not entitled to particular U.S. state programs.

The number of Colombians in the United States is estimated at 1.18 million (35.4% of the total of 3.3 million Colombians abroad) (DANE, 2006). Colombians are of a predominantly urban origin and have higher levels of education than other Latino groups (Guarnizo, Sanchez & Rocha, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006, p. 69). They concentrate in the metropolitan areas of Florida, New York and New Jersey, but there are also sizeable Colombian communities in Chicago and Houston, as well as the growing metropolitan areas of Atlanta and the state of California, in general (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; Aysa-Lastra, 2008, p. 32). Dominican community in the U.S., estimated at over one million and concentrated mainly in New York, New England and Florida (Rodríguez & Hernandez, 2004), began arriving in the first significant migration wave as political refugees in the 1960s and 1970s, but these first immigrants were followed by a more economically-based migration wave in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, the majority of Dominican migration is working-class; however, there is a significant component of middle-class professionals and entrepreneurs (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Portes & Guarnizo, 1991).

Colombian organizations

The characteristics of immigrant organizations themselves is the first aspect to be consider in order to understand the extent and form of their involvement in their home-country. Colombian organizations in the United States have two main characteristics: first, Colombians organize in forms typical to the urban middle class, and second (related to the first), organizations tend to be cross-regional and therefore, those oriented to their places of origin tend to constitute themselves into traditional philanthropic and charitable organizations rather than into hometown associations.
Hometown associations (HTAs) do exist in the U.S. Colombian immigrant community; however, they are not the most common form of organization. In a list of more than 300 organizations, we found reference to only 6 HTAs, all from the western coffee region, an area with high levels of out-migration in Colombia. The urban origin and the patterns of settlement of Colombian migration have contributed to the mixed character of most organizations generally formed by people from different parts of the country (with few exceptions, including the HTAs) and not linked to any specific region. The implication of this pattern of organization for development is that these work with a different dynamic because, in contrast to HTAs, they have to start by deciding where to work, what project to support and whom to work with in their home-countries.

Among the civic and cultural organizations which constitute the largest proportions (47.30%) of Colombian first generation immigrant organizations (see Table 1), those created with the specific purpose of assisting people in Colombia include a wide range of groups. Some reproduce the voluntary associations of elite women in Colombia (groups of Damas Voluntarias in Miami organize fundraising events and support various NGOs in Colombia); others are networks of friends and acquaintances who decide to contribute to specific projects in Colombia (Corazón a Corazón, 1981, helps children with heart problems get operations in the U.S.); still other groups emerged as a result of community efforts to aid the victims of natural disasters. Three of these organizations in the New York metropolitan area [Long Island for Colombia (1999), Siempre Colombia (1999) and Comité Divino Niño (1999)] began after the earthquake in the Colombia coffee-growing region in 1999. There are also other traditional civic cultural organizations that had been mainly oriented towards the migrant community in the United States [e.g. Centro Cívico Colombiano de New York (founded in 1978), the Club Colombia USA, Hackensack, N.J. (1969), the Club Colombia de Dover (N.J., 1979), as well as Colombianos en Acción, Paterson, N.J. (1989)], but which have in recent years developed projects or activities in Colombia.

Professional organizations (8.89%) are, in general, interested in creating networks of Colombian professionals in the U.S. but one of them, PECX (1991), was actually born as the support network for a Colombian governmental program (to be discussed later) interested in creating an international electronic network of professionals abroad (Red de
Today, however, PECX is independent from the Colombian institution and has as its main objective to support Colombian professionals and students in the U.S. in their efforts to develop their professional careers there. Colombians have a significant number of international philanthropic organizations (6.98%) -- such as Lions, Kiwanis or Rotary Clubs -- compared to the other non-Asian nationalities. These are oriented both to the U.S. and to the country of origin of their members. In the U.S., these clubs not only carry out the traditional activities of helping children or the blind, as Kiwanis or Lions generally do, but they also organize health campaigns and health fairs – in cooperation with local hospitals and institutions – for the purpose of assisting immigrants without access to health care facilities in obtaining free exams, information and referrals. In their country of origin, these clubs also carry out projects to provide help for people in need. The large number of these international philanthropic organizations among Colombians can be explained as the result of the higher socioeconomic status of this community compared to others. Members of these organizations are generally older and of higher socioeconomic status than the rest of the U.S. population (Kiwanis International, 2006 and Ly, 2005, cited by Ramakrishnan & Viramontes, 2006). Neither professional nor international philanthropic organizations are new to immigrants. On the contrary, these are organizations of the middle and elite classes in Colombia with which Colombians are familiar. In fact, for some middle class migrants, their membership could be a symbol of status that they would not be able to achieve at home.

There are various advantages to these philanthropic organizations. First, they provide the solid formal structure and the stability that many immigrant organizations lack. When the organizations face a crisis because of strong disagreements among the members, they do not collapse like more informal organizations typically do; they subdivide. This process explains in part the existence of 4 Lions and 2 Kiwanis Colombian clubs in the area of Miami alone. The formal structure also provides contacts and facilitates the relations of these clubs with authorities and other formal organizations. Second, given their international character, these organizations establish easy contact with similar clubs in Colombia, which aids club members in the U.S. with the difficult task of selecting, delivering and monitoring projects in Colombia, a challenge faced by
many other U.S. Colombian immigrant organizations with transnational orientation. Specifically, the clubs arrange *hermanamientos* (brotherhoods), a sort of formal commitment between a club in the U.S. and specific clubs in the country of origin that allows an enduring relation between the two associations to develop.

While this form of charitable philanthropy of the civic-cultural organizations and the international philanthropic associations continues to be the most common, a new form of corporate-style philanthropic organization has also emerged. These foundations, including *Give to Colombia* (2003) and *Genesis* (2001), were created with the purpose of channelling large donations from the corporate sector in the United States to Colombia, although *Genesis* also works with educational programs in the United States. While *Genesis* was created in the United States, *Give to Colombia* (2003) was actually promoted by the Colombian corporate sector with the main purpose of channelling large tax-deductible donations from U.S. and multinational corporations towards education, health, and social development projects in Colombia. This foundation, modelled after the Asian counterpart *Give to Asia* (2001), was created under the direction of *Compartamos*, a social branch of the corporate sector in Colombia which assists and monitors small non-profit institutions in carrying out projects financed from abroad or from within the country. This is an example of the non-governmental, voluntary Colombian organizations that have extended into U.S. territory (3.17% of the organizations). For the majority of them, the purpose is to directly collect money or to organize fundraising events in order to finance their projects in Colombia. Among these organizations are *El Minuto de Dios*, a large, well-known Catholic institution in Colombia which first opened an office in Miami (2003) and now organizes their famous fundraising *banquetes del millón* (‘million peso banquets’) in various cities of the United States.

Colombian immigrants have created an array of organizations which one way or another are invested in development projects in Colombia. They include 1) civic charitable organizations, some of which started as disaster relief organizations to help individuals or communities; 2) chapters of international philanthropic organizations; 3) professional and economic organizations; 4) foundations; and 5) home town associations.
Dominican Organizations

Similar to Colombians, the organizations of Dominicans are more typical of the middle-class and, in this case, the working-class, rather than rural migrants. However, in comparison with Colombia, Dominican organizations are in large proportion oriented towards the United States and less towards the country of origin.

Among the Dominican organizations, as among Colombians, the civic/cultural organizations predominate. However, there is a larger proportion of specifically cultural organizations. This preponderance of cultural organizations could be the result of the legacy left by the cultural office that was created in New York by the secretary of culture of the Dominican Republic in the early 1980s and directed by an appointee from this country (Ventura, 2004).

There are two other common forms of associations: clubs (places for social gathering and recreation) and service providers (characterized by having headquarters, no membership, hired staff, and significant resources from local and state-level institutions and corporations or foundations; e.g. Alianza Dominicana, 1987), which are mostly oriented towards the immigrant community in the United States, even though a few of these organizations have occasional contact with the places of origin.

A distinctive feature of the Dominican professional associations (14.12% of organizations) is the close ties they maintain with the professional organizations of the Dominican Republic, which are powerful, stable associations. This is, for example, the case of the Association of Dominican Journalists in New York, linked to the School of Dominican Journalists in the Dominican Republic, Colegio Dominicano de Periodistas, as well as the three chapters of the association of Dominican doctors, linked to the School of Dominican Doctors, Colegio Medico Dominicano. While the professional associations keep close ties with the countries of origin, the guild associations, such as the Grocer’s Associations of Philadelphia (1998) and Camden, New Jersey (1994), are oriented towards the United States.

Both the service-provider organizations and the professional/guild organizations have their main projects directed towards the host country. This predominance among Dominican organizations of social service providers and professional associations, more than the Colombians, explains to a large extent the lower percentage of transnationality I
found in our samples among the Dominican organizations (see Table 2). However, in spite of the heavy weight of the U.S. oriented organizations, some still maintain links with the country of origin, particularly after natural disasters, such as Hurricane George in 2004, which created a movement among immigrant organizations of all kinds toward Jimani, the most affected region. There also are HTAs, most of them in Massachusetts, which maintain permanent relations with their communities of origin.

As mentioned in the introduction, we did not find the same extension of country-of-origin NGOs into the United States as among the Colombian community. However, there is a much more active engagement of political parties and politically-oriented institutions. Fundación Global is a transnational NGO, created by President Leonel Fernandez after leaving office in 2000, and today remains a private organization which studies, proposes and promotes policies for sustainable development and democracy.

To summarize, aside from the 1) hometown associations, which are by definition linked to their localities of origin; there are 2) professional associations linked to the island and 3) other organizations more oriented towards the United States, such as service providers or sport clubs, which maintain relatively low levels of contacts and activities in the Dominican Republic.

Colombian Migrant organizations, state and civil society

Colombia is characterized by a state that had difficulties consolidating and has been, therefore, historically weak, as well as by a dynamic and extensive civil society (Villar 2001). Aside from this weakness of the state vis-à-vis Colombian society, the intense period of violence between Liberals and Conservatives (1940s an 1950s) and the bipartisan regime that followed also contributed to give a particular shape to a vibrant civil society in the years to come. The traditional parties, comfortable in their shared power, lost their role as mediators between the state and civil society. These political parties left large sectors of society suspicious of and disappointed with the political institutions. After the 1970s, when the state expanded and developed institutionally, there
was a parallel explosion of non-governmental institutions critical of the political institutions and promoters of self-development (Villar 2001).

By the 1980s, but more specifically by the 1990s and 2000s, when immigrant organizations were looking for counterparts to channel their contributions, there was an array of institutions of all sorts, at the regional and local levels, that could attract the resources of the migrant associations. Given the already-established tradition of circumventing politicians and the state whenever possible, NGOs, churches and other institutions appear, in many cases, more appealing to migrants than regional or local governments or state institutions.

The Colombian state's policies towards its expatriates also played a part in maintaining distant relations with their organizations. In the new Constitution of 1991, the state granted Colombians abroad the right to retain their nationality when nationalizing in another country and the right to participate in national elections from abroad. These rights were granted relatively early compared to other Latin American countries, in response to the pressure exercised by the expatriate community with the help of sectors of the political class interested in establishing a constituency abroad. In spite of these early concessions, the state did not approach this community of emigrants with any comprehensive program until a decade later and even then, as explained below, the state maintained a very low profile in its dealings with organizations and their development programs. In the early 1990s the state was preoccupied with the highly skilled and the brain drain. Colombian state was a pioneer among developing countries in establishing an Internet network of Colombian scientists in the Diaspora in the early 1990s (Red Colombiana de Investigadores en el Exterior –Red de Caldas). This network, developed in parallel to a program favoring the return of highly educated Colombians, had the purpose of facilitating scientific contributions to national development by those who remained abroad. While a few projects did in fact emerge out of this effort, the network did not last long and fell short of fulfilling the high expectations that had arisen around such an innovative enterprise. In the early 1990s, the state also developed particular policies for Colombians abroad, to protect them from abuses (in view of their large numbers in foreign jails).
In 2003, as Colombians abroad became more important as senders of remittances, the state developed a more comprehensive program, *Colombia Nos Une*, designed not just for the highly skilled but for the numerous lower to middle class migrants which had become the bulk of the mostly economic migration since the 1980s. The policies associated with the program *Colombia Nos Une* have been designed to facilitate economic transfers, training, credit and investment from abroad; it has also designed programs to help improve the situation of Colombians abroad in terms of their access to social security, education, job training etc., and has coordinated with the various state institutions to draft and approve a national migratory policy (MRE 2006:19-20; MRE 2008, COMPES 2009).

In 2005 and 2006, *Colombia Nos Une* undertook a more direct and concrete effort to address the organized community promoting and coordinating local organizations with seminars in some locations in the United States, the Americas, and Europe (COMPES, 2009). This effort was very important and unprecedented and contributed to the revival of organizations and the creation of networks in the U.S. and Spain; however, it did not have a significant organizational impact on the migrant community or change the way they have carried out their projects in Colombia. First, because Colombians in general are not familiar with and, to the contrary, dislike the idea of having the state play the role of civil society organizer; second, because the program’s officers had to overcome the frustration and distrust that arose among many organization members from previous failed unifying experiences in the early 2000s; third, because even though *Colombia Nos Une* made important advances, e.g. gaining approval of the national migrant policy, Colombians abroad and their programs have not been a state priority and the program was discontinued. 5 Officials of *Colombia Nos Une* have redesigned the strategy and are carrying out “working tables” in different topics (labour, business, health, etc.) according to the needs and requests of the communities of the various consulate areas. Organizations can participate, take the lead or result from these working tables, but the emphasis is on concrete projects. Through *Colombia Nos Une*, the state has made migratory agreements with seven departamentos and two cities with high migration rates so they would include nationals abroad in their development plans (COMPES 2009). *Colombia Nos Une* plans to open, with the help of the International Migration Office,
IMO, offices to serve migrants in several frontier and sending cities (including both those who plan to migrate as well as those who plan to return).  

From the beginning, Colombia Nos Une has also worked on the technological infrastructure necessary to create virtual networks of Colombians abroad. While the infrastructure, a virtual platform (initiated in 2007), has finally been established and is in operation, the networks it was expected to promote crystallized only to a lesser degree, due to the competition from other social networks and the lack of distinctive benefits for possible users. The transformation of this portal in a network platform that serves at the same time as the main center of information on state programs and services is expected to attract more users. In an effort that continues the tradition of the Red de Caldas, the government is now involved in the online enrolment of highly qualified people – estimated to represent 6.4% of Colombians abroad – a French pilot program, the creation of diaspora incubators for Latin American knowledge (Création d’incubateurs de diasporas des savoirs pour l’Amérique Latine, CIDESAL, Incubadora de conocimiento, “Knowledge incubator”), which seeks to facilitate the contribution of these Colombians to their home-country. Even though the number of people enrolled has grown, the possibility of creating a “virtual community” able to bring concrete benefits to Colombian society is still a very difficult goal to achieve.

To summarize, Colombia has been characterized by a weak state and a dynamic civil society which has often taken the lead where the state has been absent. The state policy towards emigrants, focused more on facilitating remittances and attracting individual investments, is working to provide services to the community and is interested in the knowledge of the highly skilled, but has not yet offered substantial, concrete programs to shape or attract immigrant organizations’ contributions.

**Dominican Organizations and a Politicized Civic Society**

The particularities of the Dominican immigrant organizations in the United States stem to some degree from the characteristics of civil society and the state in the Dominican Republic. The history of patrimonial regimes in the Dominican Republic has limited the development of civic institutions and organizations of the civil society. In the U.S., the political structures of the opposition to the dictatorship of Trujillo (1930-1961)
and the authoritarian regime of Balaguer (1966-1978) dominated the Dominican community, given the political character of the first significant wave of migration.

During the period of struggle for democracy (1978-1996), significant forms of social organization and mobilization emerged in the Dominican Republic. However, at the same time, the political parties developed as strong, well-disciplined organizations and acquired predominance in Dominican society. This preponderance of the parties created a form of *partyarchical* regime (government of the parties), where the parties penetrated and politicized all forms of organizations and civil society, in general, forcing these to align under party lines (Hartlyn, 1998, pp. 151-152).

When Trujillo left power, however, these political structures did not disappear; they continued to influence the growing Dominican community. The politicized character of civil society was transferred to the Dominican community in the United States and has influenced its organizations. Even though the Dominican political organizations, both U.S.-oriented or home-country oriented (see Table 1), are not proportionally much more numerous than the Colombian ones, there are vibrant political networks linking organization leaders with parties and politicians and influencing the organizations’ character and transnationality (Itzigsohn, 2004; Graham, 2001). The politicization of the Dominican population, as well as its experience in structured, well-disciplined parties, has favoured the political organization of Dominicans in the U.S. and their political success.

The recent history of professional and guild associations in the Dominican Republic has influenced this type of association among the migrant Dominican community in the United States. A process of mobilization without precedent took place in the late 1970s and 1980s, as the new social democratic government took power in the Dominican Republic after almost a century of authoritarian rule. Aside from the resurgence of the labor unions and the more independent consolidation of the large entrepreneurs’ sector, the economic crisis of the early 1980s and the program of economic adjustment demanded by the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s prompted the organization and mobilization of other sectors of society, as well (Espinal, 2001, p. 103). Among these were the poor urban population with no representation in the labor unions, the middle-sector professional unions and organizations, and small entrepreneurs, all of
which emerged as important new political actors (Hartlyn, 1998, pp. 198-199; Espinal, 2001, pp. 112-118). The middle and lower class migrants who started to move to the United States as the economic situation worsened in the 1980s brought with them these recent experiences of organization and mobilization, kept links with the newly created organizations in the country of origin and, in some cases, directly imported their structures.

Given the Dominican Republic’s particular historical relations among the political parties, the state, and civil society, it has not been the state or civil society but rather the political society that is in a position to extend itself beyond the territory and into the Dominican community in the U.S.

In his second administration (beginning 2004), Leonel Fernández has had as a governmental priority the consolidation of the ‘strategic alliance’ between the Dominican Republic and Dominicans abroad as a state formal institution. In addition to a housing initiative, his government also launched in 2005 a program to create an Advisory Board of Dominicans abroad, following the model and the direct advice of Mexico. This board comprises representatives from the Dominican community in the five regions of the United States where the Dominican population is concentrated (New York, New Jersey, Miami, Chicago, and New England) and from ten other countries with significant numbers of Dominicans. Its first general annual meeting was in 2006. This council, under the newly created Secretary for Dominicans Abroad, has its members suggested by the community in regional meetings and officially nominated by the Dominican President. Besides limited resources, the major challenges faced by this program have been: 1) the top-down selective approach of the council members, which limits representation and participation; and 2) the difficulties in making this a state program and not a project of the party-in-government interested in consolidating a constituency abroad. The Presidential Consulting Council of Dominicans Abroad became law in January 2008.

In short, the politicized Dominican civil society has influenced immigrant organizations in the United States, first, because of the immigrants’ familiarity with organizational participation; second, because of the political activism and contacts that
encouraged some of these organizations to become service providers with external funds; and third, because political parties continued to be critical transnational actors.

**Immigrant organizations and development**

There are some basic commonalities in the projects that Colombian and Dominican organizations carry out in their countries of origin. Notwithstanding these similarities, there are significant variations as well which depend, to some extent, on the type of organizations that predominate in each immigrant community and of the state/civil society dynamics.

A first crucial – and not always evident – commonality between Colombian and Dominican organizations and their development programs stems from the fact that they are located in the United States, where there are no state policies shaping immigrant organizations or promoting specific development programs for immigrants' countries of origin. Canada and some European countries not only have specific policies directed towards helping the organization of the immigrant communities but also, in the case of European countries, include co-development programs as part of their general policies for their immigrant populations, in addition to programs of incorporation (Broemraad 2005, 2006; Fauser, 2011; Kivisto, 2011). As a result, the projects or development activities carried out back home by immigrant organizations in the United States are influenced more by policies and programs and, in general, by the dynamic of the country of origin.

What kind of projects and activities do transnational migrant organizations carry out in Colombia and in the Dominican Republic? As mentioned previously, members of these associations have to negotiate what they need to do, where they are going to do it, and how they are going to do it.

**What to do?**

Several examples can serve to start the discussion of the type of projects Colombian and Dominican immigrant associations carry out in their homelands.

A dynamic member of a women’s organization from Miami describes how her group decides which project to support:
We receive many requests from different Colombian foundations that had different objectives, either with children, with the elderly, or with people who really need a hand. We receive all those requests and we try to determine a specific project we are going to work for. We don’t just send them the money for them to figure out what to do with it. We pick a specific project of the foundation and focus on it. There are many, many foundations and all of them need a lot. We try to quantify the project and determine if we can help only one foundation or more than one with each event we organize. We try to organize between four to five different events each year.

A member of a nearly 30-year-old Lions Club in Miami, which, like other Lions Clubs, has organized twinning with Lions Clubs in Colombia to carry out their projects in Colombia, summarizes their work there as follows:

We helped in the construction of a health center in Bogotá, in the barrio La Gloria, with the Lions Club of Bogotá-San Agustin; we also worked in Cartagena, with the Lions of Cartagena-Crespo, and Cartagena de Indias. With the Club Medellín-Laurels, we helped an association named Drop of Milk, which is like a day-care for children from newborn to 7 or 8 years old. With the Club Santa Marta-Rodadero, we collected funds to build a school. With the clubs of three cities in the coffee region, Pereira, Armenia and Manizales, we helped get ophthalmologic equipment.

The leader of one Dominican service provider organization from New York described their projects as follows:

We have what we consider a charitable interchange. We collect here all we can use in the Dominican Republic, mainly in the area of health. We ask for medical equipment, and we send it to clinics and hospitals. There is a program called Nutrition for Life in which we are involved, along with two other institutions in
the city of New York. Once a year, a commission of doctors and experts travels to bring medicine to clinics and rural neighborhoods of the Dominican Republic.

A member of another organization from New York described their contribution to the Dominican Republic:

We donate medicine to the hospital ... Our organization has a peculiar or special policy. When we make a donation to the Dominican Republic, a commission goes to give it directly and personally. And, when we receive requests, there is a commission that resides there that goes and verifies if the person really needs it. Only after they give us their report do we go and give the donation...We have also given equipment, instruments. We gave to maternity in the hospital Nuestra Señora de Altagracia, in the capital, beds, some instruments, canes, wheelchairs, sheets, and all that a hospital needs.

According to the statistical analysis of the transnational set of interviews, Colombian organizations invest their collective remittances in three main areas: 71.8% of organizations carry out projects helping the sick, the elderly, the disabled and children; 65.6% of organizations develop projects on education, 56% on health, 31.2% on economic activities (including activities of the chambers of commerce, donations for institutions that have economic projects, and individual cases) and housing, 25% (for victims of the earthquake of 1999) (see figure 1). In general, Colombian organizations distribute their donations among various small projects in these main areas. The predominance of the first area makes explicit that many organizations operate mostly within traditional charitable philanthropy. This is, in part, the result of the middle class origins of many Colombians, who reproduce this pattern of philanthropy, learned in Colombia. However, the large number of projects for orphanages, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, etc., is also, in part, a result of the fact that these projects are reached by consensus among organization members and projects intended to solve the immediate needs of the most vulnerable are a good compromise. There is a second pattern of philanthropy used by the more recently formed and larger foundations, the
aforementioned *Genesis* and *Gift to Colombia*, which work with a different approach, that we call entrepreneurial philanthropy, that tries to maximize the “social impact” of their “investment”. These foundations, which channel larger amounts of resources (*Genesis* reported $1.3 million invested in Colombia in 2011), have implemented their own training programs for the non-governmental organizations that receive their support in order to promote sustainable development.

The pattern is different among Dominican organizations, almost half of which (48.3%) invest in health projects; 35.4% in education; and 32.2% on natural disaster relief. Because the data was collected when Hurricane George hit the area of Jimani, on the border with Haiti, there were a significant number of organizations making donations for the victims of the disaster. The projects are of smaller frequency and dimension than the Colombian ones (see figure 1).

Where to carry out a project/program/activity?

With the exception of HTAs, most Colombian organizations include people from different areas – cities, since most of this migration is urban. As a result, immigrant organizations carry out projects in various parts of the country using informal members' networks (relatives, acquaintances, etc.). But in these cases, members have to select the areas and make the contacts and figure out the project they want to develop. These are decisions that members of HTAs do not usually have to make because they locate their projects in their hometown, they use the social networks that extend from this hometown to the migrant communities and they do not have to select from an infinite number of possible projects but between a couple that are most needed in their hometown. The same is the case for Dominican organizations, although these have a slightly higher proportion of HTAs and home state organizations than Colombians (4.71% versus 2.22% of our general inventory, see Table 1).

Another element that the first Colombian quote makes evident is the active role of Colombian NGOs in contacting the migrant organizations and directly petitioning for the funding of small projects. These petitions are generally done through the informal
channels by which the organizations make their initial contacts (relatives and acquaintances), once the organization and their funding projects become known. On the Dominican side, contacts are also informal, but as the quotes show, more than representatives of NGOs that are part vibrant civil society, we see active professional networks – in this case the health professionals – serving as links and conduits of requests between their organizations and programs with hospitals, health centers and neighborhoods on the island.

*Who to work with?*

There are all sorts of individuals and entities serving as counterparts of immigrant organizations in their countries of origin. Given the time and effort it takes to raise the funds for specific projects, members of these organizations look for the best options to guarantee the successful development of their projects. As one of the interviewees quoted above told us, some prefer to do things themselves directly. But this is not an option for many, depending on the type of organization, the legal status of the organization’s members and on the type of project. Some organizations find the right intermediary after experiencing serious difficulties with others.

The study shows a similar pattern between the strategies used by Colombian and the Dominican organizations to reach their objectives in their homeland. They use all sort of intermediaries but NGOs and chapters of he organizations (here are basically the HTAs) are the most common. There is however more reliance of Colombian organizations on church related institutions whereas the Dominican organizations approach more directly institutions such as hospitals, libraries, universities and schools or monitor the projects directly. There is also more interaction with the Dominican parties. In both cases, state institutions play a minor role (see figure 2).

*Figure 2 about here*

As mentioned above, there are two issues that make the state a difficult partner in development programs for organizations of Colombian immigrants. First, the Colombian state has not traditionally been an organizer of civil society and has not had a successful
tradition of partnership with it. Second, aside from the virtual network of the highly skilled now being promoted, the program *Colombia Nos Une* has not designed other specific mechanisms of collaboration for organizations of migrants abroad.

In the meantime, Colombian civil society, with its numerous NGOs, Lions Clubs, Churches, Chambers of Commerce, public and private orphanages and nursing homes, and numerous philanthropic institutions, continues to be directly involved in the programs financed by the organized Colombian Diaspora. The only organized program to attract collective remittances has been *Conexión Colombia*, a private initiative of the corporate sector, business and media sector, which started in 2003 with an Internet initiative to attract individual donations. Today, *Conexión Colombia* channels donations from individuals or groups abroad towards a selected number (40) of NGOs (located in Colombia) directly monitored by the private institutions associated with *Conexión Colombia*. While its main aim is to serve as a channel for donations, and guarantor of the good use of those donations, it has also directly helped create groups of donors among Colombian business entrepreneurs in several cities abroad. *Conexión Colombia* has established agreements with some state institutions to facilitate the bureaucratic procedures to bring and distribute donations in kind from abroad.\(^{11}\) The only case that resembles some form of state partnership between the Colombian and migrant organizations is the pledge of *Acción Colombia*, the social agency of the Colombian presidency, to match half the funds collected in an event coordinated by *Genesis*, in Miami, for educational programs in Colombia.\(^{12}\)

In the case of the Dominican Republic, the state has been interested in capturing and channeling individual remittances for investment and has, for example, promoted specific housing projects. However, it has not created concrete mechanisms to promote or channel collective remittances. The private sector has not been interested in taking the lead, either. Given the overpowering role of the political parties and the fact that civil society is not external to them (Espinal, Morgan, Hartlyn 2010) they continue to exert an important influence in the transnational relations of Dominicans, but developing projects is not on their agenda. Thus, Dominican immigrant organizations in the United States, many of whom are interested in helping the community in this country, where leaders
have carved out a political niche, do not find external incentives from the home country to focus their activities there.

**Preliminary Conclusions**

There are some similarities and differences between Colombian and Dominican organizations. Both have high numbers of urban migration and, therefore, other forms of organization – not just HTAs – involved in development projects. The organizations, which include people from different areas or cities and do not inherit the social networks from the homeland, as HTAs do, nor the concrete relation with a specific place and its needs, have to address additional questions concerning what, where and how to carry out programs or projects. There is more activity on the part of Colombian organizations towards Colombia than among Dominican organizations in their homeland because Dominican organizations concentrate many of their activities in the United States.

Even though both Colombia and the Dominican Republic have opened programs for expatriates starting in the early 2000s, in neither case have these programs helped shape or organize the collective remittances of the expatriate community. They are organized and carried out using informal contacts. In the Colombian case, given the vitality of civil society, there is the private alternative of Conexión Colombia, which helps a specific number of organizations. But there are now a few private foundations channeling large amounts of resources into large, well-planned, sustainable projects, some with state partnership. These types of programs, which we have called entrepreneurial philanthropy, contrast with the more traditional charitable philanthropy that has characterized the urban, middle-class immigrant organizations of both Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

A look at the dynamics of state/civil society of Colombia and the Dominican Republic has helped us understand these different patterns because immigrant organizations in the United States and their activities are shaped, conditioned and enhanced more by the homeland characteristics and policies than by those of the United States which has no particular policy for these immigrant organizations or for the places these immigrants come from. A next step in the analysis of immigrant organizations and development would be a comparison of cases where the state (local, regional, national,
supranational) in the place of residence is active and influences immigrant organizations and their development programs in their homeland.
### Table 1

**Type of Immigrant Organizations by Country**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dominican Rep.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic/cultural</td>
<td>47.30</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>30.00</td>
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<td>Cultural</td>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.29</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homefederation</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestate</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<td>1.18</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Home-country NGOs</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philanthropic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
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<td>5.88</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
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<td>14.12</td>
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<td>Religious</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service providers</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>17.06</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
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<td>1.76</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>170</td>
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Table 2.

*Orientation of Immigrants Organization by Country*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Dominican Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusively US</td>
<td>31.06</td>
<td>37.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainly US</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>29.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainly country of origin</td>
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<td>17.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both</td>
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<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N\] 161 75
Figure 1. Types of Projects of Colombian and Dominican Immigrant Organizations in their Home Countries

Figure 2. Entities in Home Country serving as counterpart of immigrant organizations in the US by Nationality
References


Estudios Institute and Latin American and Caribbean Center, LACC), pp. 185-213.


U.S. Census Bureau (2000). Hispanic or Latino By Type. Census 2000 Summary File 1(SF 1) 100–Percent Data.


1 Ramakrishnan & Viramontes found these forms of Kiwanis Clubs, which they call ‘hybrid,’ among Philippino-Americans in Los Angeles (2006, p. 41).
2 Lions Clubs have existed in Colombia since the 1930s, although they became more common in the 1940s. Today there are 228 Lions Clubs in Colombia. http://www.leonescolombia.gq.nu/somos.html.
5 Personal interviews, Colombian consuls in Miami (January 2006), Los Angeles (September 2005), New York (March 2006), and a representative of Colombia Nos Une in the U.S. (June 2006).
6 Risaralda and Bogotá have been some of the initial programs:
   http://www.bogota.gov.co/portel/libreria/php/01.3010.html, access on April 5 2012.
7 See http://www.redescolombia.org/content/listado-de-colombianos-en-el-exterior-con-alta-calificaci%C3%B3n-ya-supera-los-9000-registros
9 Ley Orgánica del Consejo para las Comunidades Dominicanas en el Exterior No. 1-08, 4 de enero de 2008.
11 Personal interview, Conexión Colombia, Bogotá 11/05/08
12 See Genesis Foundation Newsletter Spring 2009: