

Incorporation of Skilled Migrants in a Host Country: Insights from the Study of Skilled Indians in Switzerland

Metka Hercog¹, Gabriela Tejada²

Abstract

It is commonly accepted that mobility of people, especially of highly-skilled workers, has acquired a much more temporary character. Such fluid patterns of mobility call to attention the need to observe in what way highly-skilled migrants at present relate to their host societies, in the face of lasting expectations to relocate. This paper presents a case study of Indian migrants in Switzerland, who are characteristic for short-term stays. Nearly half of all Indians with tertiary education stay in Switzerland for less than five years. The selection of Switzerland as the case study of migrants' incorporation in host society matters also in terms of possibilities for integration. With a relatively small Indian population, inter-ethnic contact opportunities are rather limited. This article presents a qualitative analysis aimed at understanding the migratory space of skilled migrants with a particular focus on the effects of migratory plans on creations of their space. The ways in which skilled migrants' mobilities are embodied is examined by the type of networks and solidarity relations they build up with the local community within their transnational space through their professional and social activities as a response to their need to create local anchorage. The article brings together different strands of research on migrants' experiences: the literature on their incorporation and transnational activities and investigates the linkages between migratory planning (and mobility) on both.

Keywords

Highly-skilled mobility, host society, incorporation, transnational spaces, Switzerland

¹ Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland, contact : metka.hercog@gmail.com

² Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland, contact : gabriela.tejada@epfl.ch

Introduction

Migration planning has a bearing on the behavioral patterns of the migrant in the host society as well as on the efforts exerted to engage in a home country (Cassarino, 2004). Whether international mobility is seen only as a short-term stay abroad or as a permanent move, it will have an impact on migrants' relationship with the environment they live in. In other words, if a person expects to stay in a certain country for an indefinite period, he or she will be more likely to invest in him/herself by acquiring location-specific human and social capital, such as learning the local language and interact with local community. Conversely, future plans to return to the country of origin or to move on to a third country might reduce the efforts to integrate socially and politically (Borjas & Bratsberg, 1996). It is commonly accepted that mobility of people has acquired a much more temporary character than it used to be. Globalization and related sectorial shifts in employment require supply of highly-skilled manpower, which is increasingly flexible, responding to the changing needs of economies. Faster and cheaper transportation also made it possible that people can return and travel between countries easily, while technological progress intensifies communication practices and hence, makes transnational networks even more important. Such fluid patterns of mobility call to attention the need to observe in what way highly-skilled migrants at present relate to their host societies, in the face of lasting expectations to relocate in a short-term horizon as well as possibilities to be actively engaged in their home countries. This paper presents a case study of Indian highly-skilled migrants in Switzerland, who are characteristic for short-term stays. Nearly half of all Indians with tertiary education stay in Switzerland for less than five years³. Not only is Switzerland a good case for studying because of the temporary character of highly-skilled migration, the place of residence matters also in terms of possibilities for integration. With a relatively small Indian population, inter-ethnic contact opportunities are rather limited. Research on migrants' incorporation in the host society and transnational activities has mostly focused on low-skilled migration while little is known about the experiences of skilled migrants and their embeddedness in the local environment. Are strategies of migrants to expand and deepen their migratory space limited by the lack of long-term perspectives and thus, a lack of interest to incorporate in the host society? In order to gain an insight in this relationship, a series of semi-structured interviews have been conducted with Indians in Switzerland.

The purpose in this article is to bring together research on migrants' experiences and incorporation in host societies with their transnational activities and investigate the linkages between migratory planning (and mobility) on both. Migrants' material and imaginative experiences and relations are studied under the lens of transnational spaces, which allows us to break the artificial distinction between both processes and to look into simultaneous engagement in life across borders.

Methodology

This article presents a qualitative analysis aimed at understanding the migratory space of highly-skilled migrants with a particular focus on the effects of migratory plans on creations of their space. In order to gain an insight in this relationship, a series of 20 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with Indian professionals in Switzerland. In addition to interviews, this study draws on the insights gained through authors' participation in conferences and workshops concerning Indian international mobility as well as attendance of cultural events organized by the Indian community. We draw on results from a larger research study of highly-skilled Indians in selected European countries which aims to explore possibilities for leveraging their potential in home country development⁴. Interviews were conducted with 20 individuals currently living in

³ Swiss Federal Statistics Office, STAT-LAB, accessed 2 August 2013

⁴ This article is based on the research project: „Migration, scientific diasporas and development: Impact of skilled return migration on development in India“, carried out by the Cooperation and Development Center at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), the International Migration and Diasporas Studies (IMDS) Project of

Switzerland who explained in detail how they assess their experience in the destination country and how they personally act to adapt to the situation of living abroad. The interviews lasted from one to two hours each and were performed in the period between July 2011 and June 2012. The profile of the interviewees ranges from PhD students, academic researchers to professionals working in the fields of IT, banking, finance and food industry. Five of them were women, which is consistent with the general male dominance among Indian skilled migrants. We received their contacts through different channels of informants: Indian community representatives, research institutes and sports clubs. By contacting people of different profiles, we intended to broaden the range of interviewees' experiences and identities. Four interviewees hold Swiss citizenship. One of them was born in Switzerland while the others acquired it with naturalization after years of living in the country. Among our respondents, some plan to stay in the country for a longer period of time while the others see their stay in Switzerland as transitory, either planning to soon leave to another country or return to India. We compare engagement in the host country and the home country between those migrants who have been in Switzerland for a longer period of time with that of short-term stayers.

The questions centered on interviewees' experiences in Switzerland, the situation surrounding their settlement and motivations to participate in social activities. These questions relate to the situation in a particular host society which has limited experiences with non-European immigration and is characterized by short-term stays of skilled migrants. Much research on transnational activities of migrants and their incorporation in the host society has focused on low-skilled migration (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001; Dahinden, 2005; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Pedraza, 2006; Snel, Engbersen, & Leerkes, 2006) while less is known about the skilled migrants and their embeddedness in local environment. We examine the ways in which skilled migrants enact their identities through social and professional activities, by the types of networks they engage in and by their solidarity relations they develop with the local community within their transnational space. The scarce literature on skilled migrants and their social and cultural practices is overly focused on transnational elites which are characterized as aloof from local life, not identified by any particular country but mainly led by the dynamics of global capitalism (Beaverstock, 2005; Sklair, 2001). This article will show that skilled migrants are not only 'accidental tourists' (Mahroum, 2000), following corporate decisions, but are diverse in their migration paths and experiences. By including people with different profiles, we assess what it is that influences their interest (or a lack thereof) in engaging in localized social networks and in what way the host society context might have an influence on the extent of such engagements.

Theoretical discussions

Simultaneous involvement of migrants in different contexts continuously changes fluid social spaces (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Pries, 2005). The study of transnational spaces yields for us a direction to investigate the multiplicity of transnational experiences and relations in which migrants as well as non-migrants are involved. Transnational migration and with it, frequent flows of people, money, goods and "social remittances", transform the lives and contexts also for those people who never moved (Levitt, 2001). As a consequence of migrants' engagement in more than one context, transnational space involves also those people who get in contact with migrants, either in home or host countries. Following Jackson et al. (2005) we observe transnational space as having both material and imaginative significance. Material geographies of migration include the actual movement of people, goods and services, while the imaginary geographies encompass ideas, norms and symbols through which the involved explain the world around them. While looking only at the dynamics in the home or host countries is essentially incomplete when studying

transnational spaces, we focus our attention on the activities based in the host countries as our particular question lies also in the impact of local conditions on the extent and success of migrants' efforts to engage in the new environment as well as in their homelands.

Empirical research in the field of remittances shows that migrants often send money to their homelands as a form of social insurance (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006). Similar behavior can be expected also for non-economic activities. Based on their assessment of what their future needs might be, they strategically invest their time and resources in connections which could turn out to be significant in the future for either social or economic reasons. If migrants plan to return home, higher importance is expected to be placed on maintenance of ties in the home country. Transnational involvement, either through economic ventures or sociocultural activities which spans borders, is by the same token a phenomenon through which people respond to long-distance social obligations and recreate a sense of belonging to their places of origin (Itzigsohn & Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Levitt, 2001). However, not all social practices and relations in connection with the home country express migrants' conscious identification with their country of origin or with their ethnicity. Oftentimes, individuals engage in practices across the borders which are part of their ordinary life but they do not attach a sense of belonging to it. Transnational way of belonging is enacted when migrants recognize their social practices as their source of identity (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004).

At the same time, transnational activities in some instances support successful adaptation to their new countries. According to Pedraza (2006, p. 15) 'transnationalism has consequences for the extent to which immigrants can assimilate – both culturally and structurally'. Portes, Haller and Guarnizo (2001) empirically show that successful transnational entrepreneurship can work as a distinct path of immigrant incorporation to the host country. Likewise, another study based on the same data shows that transnational political actions may have a constructive effect of providing immigrants with a "renewed sense of efficacy and self-worth" which in turn facilitates political integration (Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003, p. 1239). These examples correspond to the view which emphasizes transnational participation and incorporation in the host society as "concurrent and intertwined social processes" (Itzigsohn & Giorguli Saucedo, 2002, p. 915). Increased socioeconomic status of migrants is proven to promote transnational participation and at the same time incorporation in the host country. Portes (2003) highlights in his findings that transnationalism is not in the realm of the poor and the marginalized. Quite to the contrary, it is more educated, well-established and high-income migrants who economically and socially engage in their home countries or lead associations linking diaspora of the respective countries.

The alternative view points to the negative effects of transnational activities, involvement in which supposedly hinders incorporation in the host country. Congruent with the classical assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964), which claims that with time, when migrants are more exposed and get more acquainted with the norms of the host society, they will have less contacts with the home country and with people with the same ethnic background. This view is not prevalent in the recent academic literature, but some studies still point to the impeding effects at least in certain spheres of integration. The study by Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes (2006) on different categories of immigrants in the Netherlands, for instance, finds out the relationship between the level of socio-cultural transnational activities affects the identification with the native Dutch people in a negative way.

We should stress that the local conditions in the host country influence the extent and success of efforts to engage in the new environment and hence, also the intensity of interaction with co-ethnics and social network in the home country. For example, Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992) claim that non-acceptance in the established society favors identification among

immigrants with transnational and home country communities. Likewise, Portes (2003, p. 880) argues that 'immigrants who become dispersed and whose inconspicuous presence protects them from discrimination are less prone to engage in transnational ventures.'

In examining how the conditions in the new environment of the host countries affect migrants' social space, the diversity in the forms of geographical mobility and its specific determinants should be recognized. We focus our interest in what is particular for the migratory space of skilled migrants to portray the increasing temporary character of the mobility of people as a consequence of the restructuration of capital and space in which the rise in the competition of human capital is apparent. As argued by Bruneau (2010), today a much higher proportion of migrants arrive to the country of destination with advanced education and professional talent facilitating their transnational linkages and flexibilising their mobility patterns. Also, employment opportunities in the host country play a significant role on migrant's mobility choices as well as on their capacities of intervention in the host society. For example, as shown by Eliasson et al. (2003), individual labor market status and spatial variations in employment opportunities influence interregional job search behavior and mobility decisions.

We explore if skilled professional migrants, as 'transnational mobiles' (Dahinden, 2010) tend to have a low level of local attachment to the host country given that they are in continuous mobility. As argued by Dahinden, in this type of transnational formation mobility becomes an essential part of migrants' life strategies and their impetus to stay mobile and move frequently can be viewed 'as a professional asset' (p. 56). The ways in which skilled migrants' mobilities are embodied and grounded is examined by the type of networks and solidarity relations they build up with the local community within their transnational space through their social and professional activities as a response to their need, to a certain extent, to create local anchorage. Furthermore, the study of the experiences of skilled migrants' representations and practices, as well as their class position in the host countries will provide insights on the symbolic and material settings - their *ways of being* and *ways of belonging* of the transnational space (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004).

The Swiss context

In recent years we have been able to observe a systematic increase in the flows of skilled professionals from India towards the countries of Western Europe, specifically to those countries that have adapted their migratory policies as part of their strategy to attract skilled personnel, Switzerland being one such case in point. The strategy to exert a pull on foreign human capital as an economic buffer have changed to more liberal and open options which following market requirements offer employment opportunities and means of entry to skilled personnel. Immigration policies as well as the favourable labour and academic environment that Switzerland offers are complementary components that have influenced the evolution of skilled immigration from India. In the second half of the last century, migration from India to Switzerland was characterized by modest flows of skilled persons who came in pursuit of work opportunities as engineers with multinational companies or workers with international organizations in Geneva. At that time, the Indian community in Switzerland was made up of a small group with diverse ethnic and linguistic characteristics, scattered geographically around the country. This period saw the establishment of associations that brought students, or more generally persons from India, together to celebrate cultural events and social encounters with fellow nationals based in the major Swiss cities. Recently this geography has been transformed with rapid increase in the migration of skilled professionals and students and scientists from India, specifically within the areas of ICT, finance and management, biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry. While the

population with Indian citizenship in Switzerland was estimated to number 2,229 in 1980, it was assessed to be 13,635 in 2012.⁵

In examining the determinants that facilitate or limit the incorporation and integration of skilled professionals and scientists from India in Switzerland, the particularities of the context and the social environment to which they are exposed play an important role. Several elements such as the scientific and educational excellence of Swiss academic and research institutions which are at the vanguard of technological progress and innovation, the high quality of life, as well as the favourable employment conditions of transnational companies, are part of a framework of reception in the host country, which is seen as being favourable for skilled migrants. A recent study highlights the favourable conditions of the Swiss labour market for emigrant workers based on the fact that three out of every four persons of the total foreign labour force is employed, a fact that positions Switzerland at the head of the OECD countries (Liebig, Kohls, & Krause, 2012).

Another influence in the incorporation of migrants into the social space of Switzerland is how the subject of immigration is handled in the political discourse and the way that this influences the structures of inclusion and exclusion (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006), and the consequent impact on both the social integration of foreigners and the position that they are assigned in Swiss society. Migration policy, which has been highly controversial in Swiss society up to now, has been conceived as a means of meeting the challenge of finding a pertinent balance between the economic need for foreign labour and the demographic stabilization of the foreign population in Switzerland, causing fear of the threat of foreign overpopulation for the Swiss national identity (the issue of *Überfremdung*) (Becker & al., 2008; D'Amato, 2008; Kaya, 2005; Liebig, 2004). Based on current legislation⁶, which gives priority to immigration from the European Economic Area (EEA) and which limits the admission of persons from third countries to skilled professionals, foreigners have been classified in the current Swiss political discourse as holders of differential qualities according to their country of origin and their level of skills. Immigrants are distinguished according to their 'class', with skilled migrants being portrayed as 'those required by the economy and by science' and the 'most capable of being integrated' into the host society (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006). The consequence of this is the double vision of Swiss society towards foreigners: the vision of the foreigner as culturally close and the foreigner as culturally distant from Switzerland, either on the ground of its origin or the skills level. Beside the cultural difference discourse, which creates a structure of inequality in terms of opportunities for social and economic participation, the application of restrictive citizenship policies show that immigration policies have focused on controlling the admission of foreigners rather than promoting their integration into the host society (Gross, 2006). Indeed, the application of restrictive citizenship policies has given rise to a lack of identification with the nation state on the part of immigrants and a 'segregated relationship between nationals and foreigners' (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006).

Swiss immigration policy as 'a policy of national identity' (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006, p. 16), the political discourse of double vision towards foreigners, together with the international competition for human capital sets the context for the mobility of skilled Indians, their social and professional incorporation and interventions in the host country as well as their transnational social practices. The following section presents the main observations regarding the situation of skilled Indians in the professional environment and their integration through their work and professional activities in the host society in Switzerland. We examine the influence of the professional setting on the type of belonging that they build with the local community as a result of their temporary imaginary geographies. The specific experiences of skilled Indians in Switzerland, both material and imaginary, which take place in this context, are observed.

⁵ Based on data from the Swiss Federal Office for Statistics (SFOS), accessed 2 February 2014.

⁶ The New Foreign National Act - NFNA and the Agreement with the European Union for the Free Movement of Persons

Professional environment for Indians in Switzerland: mobility, incorporation and belonging

Skilled migrants are a heterogeneous group. According to their different professional backgrounds, we tried to differentiate in our analysis between skilled professionals working in industry, scientists and researchers and postgraduate students.

Skilled Indian professionals move to Switzerland to follow opportunities for professional growth and to gain international experience in multinational or Swiss companies. For them mobility is mostly industry-driven as they benefit from organizational channels, recruitment and relocation agencies. In contrast, for scientists in the academic sector and students, migration is driven by individual motivation and shaped by their personal contacts and networks. We can see how the internationalization of both higher education and professions enables skilled persons to have a higher propensity of mobility and flexibility in terms of choosing their destinations (Iredale, 2001). Our case study confirms the multi-directionality and elasticity of skilled mobility (Meyer, 2003). The decision to migrate is seen as an exercise of choice and it responds to job and academic opportunities. It allows them to gain experience and ensure their prospects for professional growth in a diverse range of geographical locations. In general, their stay in Switzerland is of a temporary nature, especially in the case of recently arrived Indians, and they consider it as one step on their on-going movement to other destinations. We observe that Indian scientists and researchers are exposed to strong expectations of international exposure and consequent mobility. The temporary imaginary geographies of skilled Indians regarding their career prospects and their scientific and professional advancement deriving from their movements also include plans in their home country. As an example of this, their testimonies show their wish to accomplish a professional, personal or familial project in the home country in the future. Their plans to return will be based on several determinants that shape their decisions, and for the most part these mix professional and familiar factors and in some cases they can cause them to feel obliged to go back to support their extended families. As pointed out by King (2002), migration decisions of skilled Indians could be a result of 'a complex continuum of coercion and free-will' (p. 92). In this regard, and referring precisely to the strong expectations of mobility for career progress of skilled persons and scientists (Ackers, no date), it is 'difficult to speak of migration as voluntary but neither is it forced in the traditional sense of the term' (p. 6). In this context, skilled Indians mostly move to follow opportunities with the best companies or institutions, and the geographic location is less important in their decisions. Accordingly, the highly international professional and scientific context together with the scientific and academic excellence offered by Switzerland are seen as being valuable assets by skilled Indians in their quest to gain new knowledge and enhance their career progression.

More foreign talent has been admitted with the increase of multinational companies on the Swiss territory, leading to a change in the ethnic landscape. The international environment is valued by our respondents for a number of reasons. While it makes it a better working place as it creates greater opportunities, it also makes it easier for immigrants to create social networks, especially in the initial stage of their stay abroad. Professional part of life is a very important path for skilled migrants to situate themselves in a new setting. As for most skilled Indians the main reason for arriving and staying abroad is job-related, their social space tends to be centered around their work. Colleagues at work are often the first and most obvious choice for starting social interaction. Because of intensive working hours, such concentration around the working place is not necessarily by choice but is mostly circumstantial. At first glance, scientists and students as well as skilled professionals in multinational companies only have a small opportunity to interact with local people through their professional and scientific activity given the fact that only a few Swiss people form part of the teams in such international environments. They find it easy to socialize with their work colleagues and fellow students from many diverse countries who are generally in Switzerland

only temporarily, and these contacts facilitate their first experiences in the host country. As one respondent who has worked for the past two years at an international research institute in Geneva put it:

I started to make friends very soon, I don't know why. Probably because in this office no one is from Geneva. They come and they have to make friends with each other. They don't have a circle already.

Besides his good experiences of making social contacts at work, the only other people he got to know outside of work are a few Indians who took part at Indian social events. We can see that the professional space can offer skilled Indians the chance to interact with people notwithstanding linguistic, cultural or personality differences. While for many, the formal belonging to their professional space is the key that gives them access to future opportunities within the professional or academic labor market, for others this also implies the possibility of a long-term stay in the country of destination. We can also see how the idea of place, where the shared presence of the skilled Indians is located in the same relational space or common belonging, is elastic and mobile, and in numerous cases it is dissociated from the space in which one lives. In other words, there is a disembedding (Giddens, 1991) or detachment between their professional activity and the connections with/or the anchorage in the particularities of the context of the host country (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Skilled Indian professionals mentioned language barriers, Swiss people who are reserved and conservative and what they perceive to be a limited cultural offer as some of the difficulties that they have faced in adapting to the Swiss environment. Particularities in terms of adaptation to the host country arose when we observe specific obstacles in terms of professional endeavors. Among other obstacles facing entrepreneurs, there are some which relate mainly to respondents' foreignness. One entrepreneur based in Bern with business both in India and Switzerland mentioned:

Swiss people are very nice people, I had never any problems. The only difficulty I faced, because I am a foreigner, was to market my products. If you bring something new into the market the acceptance is higher for Swiss people who can easier market their products because of the dialect. Swiss people are mostly conservative. Now I have a Swiss business partner and the acceptance is higher because he is Swiss.

Professional character of Indians in Switzerland influences their settling in the host country to a large extent since the responsiveness of the local community hinges on the image that has been created around migrants from certain origin countries. These elements enable the welcome and recognition provided by the host society and facilitate their incorporation into the new local setting. Swiss immigration policy has a strong focus on attracting skilled migrants and restricting the legal channels for low-skilled migrants. There was a wave of asylum seekers from South Asia, in particular from Sri Lanka, which created a stereotype of South Asians as asylum seekers. The difficulties which they encountered are known to Indian migrants because of their physical resemblance to Sri Lankans. They notice the different approach towards them once it is clear they are Indian and work in a highly-skilled job. Such remarks display sensitivity to how they are being perceived by mainstream society. The view of Indians in Switzerland is considered to be one of highly-educated immigrant group which is necessary for the Swiss economy. Such positive evaluation directs the general positive experiences Indians have in Switzerland. One Ph.D. student at the University in Lausanne elaborated on this issue mentioning that Swiss people see skilled Indians as a necessity from an economic point of view:

Swiss people do not see Indians as a threat, unlike other immigrant groups, (a threat) which is there in the public discourse. The Swiss are not indifferent, but they do have a rational

position regarding India along the lines of: OK, they are third-country immigrants, they have their own cultural thing for which there is a kind of fascination, but they also include the argument of the economic need much more clearly than regarding any other highly-skilled immigrant group.

All these factors not only shape skilled Indian migrants' identities and temporary belonging and incorporation but they also shape their mobility and flexibility in terms of choosing their next destination or considering the possibility of staying.

Social strategies for creation of transnational social space

Even when assessing the social and cultural angle of international migration of professional workers, the institutional positioning related to their employment is inevitable. Our sample of respondents encompasses people who have been in Switzerland for very different periods of time, from one who has been in the country for only half a year to the other extreme example who arrived already in 1986; therefore, it is in line with expectations that their reach-out towards the local community has been pursued to different extents. Exactly the person with the shortest duration of stay in Switzerland corresponds with the typically portrayed undomiciled transmigrant who is willing to move from country to country, following the opportunities with the company. Culturally open disposition, willingness and capability to engage with the cultural "other" may be seen in part as a result of their cosmopolitan orientation (Kofman 2005). Regardless of how long they have been in the country, our respondents spoke favourably of the international environment in their place of residence. The international environment allures to our respondents because it creates the surroundings where one is able to immerse easily without the overwhelming feeling of standing out.

That migration experience is structured also through the racial identity is implicated by the use of terms like 'someone with my skin color' or 'a foreigner like me is more detectable'. For a respondent who lived in France before moving to Switzerland, the feeling of being 'outside' of the main society was one of the important reasons why he did not want to stay in France and it is in particular the international environment in Switzerland which made him feel that he wants to try living there. Nevertheless, the possibility to have a less conspicuous presence in the more cosmopolitan cities like Geneva and Zürich is juxtaposed to perceptions of the Swiss countryside where one could expect difficulties with respect to racism. One interviewee who works at a large bank in Zürich area interprets the rejection of foreigners in small villages by the felling that 'they are coming and getting our jobs', which according to him would happen in any place with large labor migration. For those who have been in the country for some time, there is a general perception that the Swiss are becoming more open towards foreigners. High regard for the international environment is based also on appreciation to communicate in English. English is the common language in the international environment in which they work, and therefore for most of them learning the local language is not necessary at a professional level, and so they do not consider language a barrier from a professional point of view and they make little effort to learn any of the local languages. Only those skilled Indians who have converted their temporary stay into a longer period of residence in Switzerland have made the effort to learn either French or German. They recognize that without learning the language they might feel somehow 'handicapped'. Proficiency and the use of the majority language are one of the most important elements of social-cultural integration, and form the basis for social contacts and lessening of the distance between immigrant communities and the rest of society (Vancluysen & Van Craen, 2010). Language skills are repeatedly mentioned in the interviews as the single most important tool for integration. One post-doctoral scholar at EPFL who is married to a Swiss woman said: 'I realized that if you really want to know about Swiss culture and society you have to learn and speak French, that's when I decided I should take some courses'. He also found this step necessary to communicate with his

Swiss in-laws. Those who speak any of the local languages notice a change of acknowledgment from the local people after they have learned the language.

While for those who learned either French or German, a change was noticeable in their incorporation in Swiss society, for the others language barriers outside of work place represent a major obstacle which is especially present in times of major family decisions. One interviewee, an IT specialist living in Olten with his family, mentioned that they were considering moving to an English-speaking country before the children would enter the kindergarten and school. Eventually, they decided to stay as they 'had a fortune of having many others who started early'. So, through experiences of other Indians whose children started going to school a few years earlier, this important step for their children and for the whole family was perceived to be more manageable. Those that overcome the initial concerns about their children's education in an education system unfamiliar to them, feel that later on the whole family benefits from their inclusion in the social activities through school. Parents get the possibility to interact with other parents and at the same time learn about the local society through their children. While he admitted that integration is difficult in Switzerland, it helped him and his wife a lot that their children are going to a German school and took this as an opportunity to also learn German themselves. Now their children speak English and German and understand Malayalam but reply back in English.

Knowledge of the local language represents more than only a tool for communication. In the context of learning the language of your host country as a migrant, it also signifies that one is willing to take the effort to expand their social space beyond the necessary interaction at work and beyond the comfort zone of interaction with the co-ethnics and other foreigners. Another interviewee, chemical engineer working in Lausanne, was critical of other Indians who have lived in Switzerland for a number of years and are not making the effort to speak the local language:

You'll be floating here, if you don't learn the language. I don't feel outside, because I understand. Otherwise, you lead a blind life. You don't know what's going on, what are the daily problems. It's the way to get into the society.

He continues by saying that at least basic French or German courses should be compulsory; 'otherwise you get alienated here. You can't really hook everything for your professional life. You're living here'.

Indian community in Switzerland is considered to be relatively slow in picking up the local languages. In two interviews, Indians were compared to Pakistanis and Sri Lankans who by contrast learn the language very fast. The given explanation for such a difference is in their working situation with respect whether they interact with the locals at work. As most Indians in Switzerland are highly educated and work in English-speaking companies or research institutions, they do not feel the need to learn the local language. Another relevant remark was made with respect to a common situation in Indian couples that women stay at home as housewives which limits their opportunities of interaction with local people. Although there is a clear distance between migrant communities and the local society, Indians do not feel separated in a negative sense. The distance does not mean they are removed from local life. As people in Switzerland 'tend to give each other their space', there is a lack of intrusion also in migrants' private affairs. One respondent described Swiss culture in this way: 'It's not a high-impact culture that you feel outside. If I go back to India today, I would feel more outside than here. Because there is a mainstream culture (in India), which doesn't exist so much visibly here'. When asked if he experienced any problems in adapting, he responded, 'people in Switzerland leave you in peace'. 'You don't live *mit einander* but *bei einander*'. Instead of *living with each other*, the Swiss have an expression that they live *next to each other*. Except for one interviewee who had no interest in staying in Switzerland and saw local

people as 'conservative and reserved', this perception of Swiss culture has been accepted and even seen as positive in certain ways.

By pointing out the efforts they have made to incorporate in Swiss society, more established migrants set up a dichotomy between themselves (as integrated) and other Indians, which do not show much interest to learn the language or otherwise incorporate in the host society. Such clear differences in migrants' approaches in pursuing their transnational livelihoods are related to their construction of a sense of belonging. The individual agency in producing their sense of belonging to either their home country or with the local community rests mainly on the imaginary geography of their future. Respondents who married Swiss partners are very much aware of this situation putting them in a different context compared to other Indians who have Indian partners. Likewise, children's incorporation in the education system signifies one such threshold in engagement in localized social networks and with it, an expansion of imaginary geography. Such events are not necessarily occurring as a matter of family or other personal circumstances. As several of our respondents mentioned, it was a perfectly planned and cognizant measure, pursued to expand their chances of interaction with the locals. One interviewee mentioned some of the measures he conscientiously pursued to reduce the barriers with the local people:

When we were looking for an apartment, we said it should not be too close to Indians. If you're a few miles away, you can still meet with them a few times a week. But then you interact with local people. Also, when we first came, we took lunch from home to here (work). Then we stopped. Now I also go out for lunch with my colleagues and that's when we talk about other things. During lunch time, we speak in German. I don't see that among people who come here for a short time. If you stay in a country for a long time, you should try to make an effort. I know people who have lived here for 5 years, and still don't try to learn.

Being simultaneously involved in the destination country as well as transnationally can lead to conflicting identities. This is obvious from all respondents regardless of their approach to integration. As clear from the above quote, some purposely stay away from Indian associations and claim that involvement in such organizations prevents one from experiencing the culture of the host country. A postdoctoral researcher from Geneva who has lived in Switzerland for seven years gave his view on people actively involved in Indian associations:

I'm not saying it's bad. It's the ones that want to preserve their culture. But for me personally, I was never interested in association because my idea was to experience new culture, learn new things, and integrate into society where you are. My idea was to learn stuff here. The biggest problem with Indian associations is that once you go in, you're trapped in a bad way. You just live among them. You hardly go out of this bubble, meet new people, and learn their culture.

Another respondent living in Lausanne made a similar argument with pointing out the context of originating from India. As culture in India is so different from the Swiss culture, it is crucial to make a decision at some point whether you are staying abroad or you will return to India. 'Sitting on the fence all your life and feeling that you don't belong here and that you want to go back is not benefiting anyone.' In his view, if one decides to stay abroad, he should accept life there and make the best of the situation there; at the same time he should then 'let one thing go. You can have one as the main thing and the other one as a hobby.'

On the opposite side, those active in associations look at those Indians who take distance from the diaspora association as being aloof from their culture. The president of one Indian student

association spoke of the 'preconceived notion' that some people when they go abroad 'don't have to spend any time with people from our own country. That's how they fit into the new place. They don't speak the language we speak at home. They keep themselves away from the activities we organize.' Even for those who stay on the periphery of Indian associations, transnational ties at the individual level remain relevant but in this case their individual engagement in practices across borders do not construct their identity and belonging to a community but is in most cases a part of their ordinary life.

Conclusions

Through the examination of the experiences of skilled Indians in Switzerland we can see that the professional component is a major element of their identity and belonging to a community which has a common set of knowledge, way of thinking and norms, which depends in many cases on their professional sector, academic area or scientific field, or even on the institutions they are professionally engaged in. In defining spaces through mobility and interaction, specifically for scientists and researchers, science functions as a 'global space' offering them a set of contacts and academic disciplinary networks and opening opportunities of recognition and credibility (Mahroum, 2000). We can see how skilled Indians have permissibilities to succeed professionally, and these include the possibility to move freely, as a result of their advantageous social position and the fact that they belong to a category of global elites which transcends the local aspect and the borders of time and space without limitations. At a macro level, the internationalization of higher education and professions facilitates the prevalence of an advantaged situation for skilled Indians in Switzerland. At a meso level, the commitment of current Swiss policies to open immigration of skilled professionals is accompanied by a congruent construction of the policy discourse and the social context insofar as it is believed that immigration of qualified personnel benefits the society in terms of long-term economic growth and scientific advancement. Our observations of the Swiss setting confirm the argument of Iredale (2001) that policies and cultures of inclusion are arising as demand drives the need for professional workers. Therefore, skilled Indians benefit from an advantaged situation regarding their mode of incorporation in the host country (Portes & Borocz, 1989), given their high level of education and their valuable skills and their engagement in positions of professional recognition, which in turn, facilitate their interaction with the local community.

The identification or identity of the skilled Indians is situated in a context of multiple belongings influenced by the difficulty that they have to establish long-lasting and embedded places of belonging. Their places of belonging become mobile and deterritorialized and they take on an importance in accordance with their particular needs or situations. Accordingly, we can see that the construction of a sense of belonging by the skilled Indians is not only linked to the territory in which they live, but rather they are also influenced by imagined spaces in other geographic and temporary contexts, which the scientists and skilled professionals think and perceive themselves as being members of.

Alternative points of view on the relationship between transnational activities and incorporation in the host society exist not only in the theoretical discourse, but also in perceptions of migrants themselves. The transnational family and community links with the country of origin and with Indians abroad are either seen as both a curse and a boon for the creation of links with the host society. Recent migrants do not generally meet in networks or associations and they are immersed in their own particular process, which involves constant negotiation of their cultural belonging to both Switzerland and India and the oscillation of their subjectivities between assimilation and exoticism (Jain, 2011). Despite they may not learn the local languages, skilled Indians show a culturally open disposition to the host culture and society as a result of their cosmopolitan orientation to which speaking English language is seen as part of. If this *privileged national* moving

freely with capacity to engage in multiple cultures and presenting new forms of identity and belonging corresponds to the *cosmopolitan figure*, as understood by Kofman (2005), is something that needs further examination. As far as the temporary imaginary geography is concerned, we can see how the skilled Indians decide to establish ties in a certain territory based on the idea how they imagine the future and the strategies they believe as being necessary to make these come true. The transnational engagement of skilled Indians should be seen as a dynamic process, embodying individual life plans, social expectations and professional opportunities, as well as variance in public discourse. In these imagined geographies, the skilled Indians build for themselves a situation in which their freedom of movement is not restricted, and where their desire to create a professional, personal or familiar life project in the present and in the future is a reflection of their temporary nature.

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