*"Skilled Indians in Switzerland: mobility paths and transnational connections"* [1]

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## Introduction

Global transformations and technological advances have helped generate communication and information systems and transport networks that have facilitated connections between people and their mobility. The intensification of international migration, which involves increased movements of skilled persons to countries other than their own has led to concerns about the effects that it has on developing countries (Castles and Miller 2009). Although we are now witnessing a type of human mobility, especially in the case of skilled professionals, that is of a more temporary and flexible nature than that of previous decades, the social capital accumulated by these people and their transnational connections has taken on a particular relevance.

The studies that examine the power of western countries to attract talent mention the demand for skilled professionals in innovative production sectors, the internationalisation of higher education, the prestige of academic and research institutions, the proliferation of postgraduate scholarships and migratory policies. These elements, combined with others of an emotional and personal nature, play a decisive role in mobility-related decisions and about whether migrants remain in the host country or return to their country of origin.

India is a very interesting case to study for several reasons. Until the last decade, the vast majority of skilled Indians saw the United States as their main destination for work or study, but in more recent times, the countries of continental Europe have become alternative destinations, especially within the academic, research and engineering sectors. As India has developed into one of the countries of origin with the largest number of skilled personnel and international students, it has been increasingly considered as a priority country in public higher-education and labour-market strategies. Its growing global importance in terms of science, technology and innovation has also seen it become an essential partner for scientific cooperation and research. In addition, more and more skilled Indians are seen as being capable of generating social transformations in India, with recent studies confirming their role in the development of knowledge-intensive activities there and their active involvement in the country's integration into the global market (Kapur 2004; Saxenian 2006). This has reinforced the image of the Indian diaspora as having an important role to play as an active and creative mediator that is generating change in India (Leclerc and Meyer 2007; Siddiqui and Tejada 2014).

While the mobility of skilled Indians to Europe has attracted plenty of attention, we still know very little

about the Indian skilled professionals and students in these destination countries and their employment or study situation in the local contexts. There is also scant evidence about their transnational contacts and the social capital they have accumulated through their mobility paths and the effects that these have on their mobility decisions and their type of connections with the home country.

This chapter illustrates a case study of skilled Indians in Switzerland, who are mostly temporary stayers, ready to leave the country in the short-term horizon. According to the Swiss Federal Statistics Office, almost half of all Indians with a tertiary education remain in Switzerland for less than five years[2]. They stay in Switzerland in the expectation of continuing their migratory journey elsewhere, in new destinations that arise according to available opportunities and personal interests. The social capital they accumulate during their career itineraries plays a decisive role in their migration preferences and decisions. Even though the value attached to social capital depends on time and place, the new spatial forms created by international migrants reveal the power of transnational contacts as valuable assets for their local and transnational-based practices. Based on evidence collected through in-depth interviews, this chapter focuses on the mobility paths and experiences of Indian students and skilled professionals in the Swiss local context, and it examines the transnational contacts, knowledge, skills and further social capital they accumulate in different spaces and places, which influence their subsequent mobility decisions and shape the type of connection they have with India.

**Mobility, social capital and transnational connections**

In reviewing the literature that examines the mobility paths and experiences of skilled human resources and the conditions for socioeconomic and technological progress, the studies that stand out allow us to assess the manner in which these elements are interrelated, and the effects that are generated for the countries.

For the most part, the literature represents two fields of study. The first of these focusses on the links between science, technology and society, and it looks at the international mobility of skilled human resources from the perspective of the internationalisation of higher education and the globalisation of science. Within the current context of accelerated globalisation, which in its broadest concept involves an increase in world connectivity and the expansion of a global conscience (Robertson 2016), we see how developed countries compete with each other to attract talent from the global offer of human capital, while the mobility of skilled personnel in search of opportunities outside their borders increases. Recognising the value of knowledge in terms of strengthening the systems of innovation and progress, this mobility has considerable potential for the destination countries, which benefit from the contributions of skilled individuals, but it also has potential for the countries of origin, especially the lesser developed ones (Vinck 2013). Recent case studies have set out strategies to absorb human capital by using retention or return mechanisms, the transfer of knowledge and skills through institutional-linkage networks, and the establishment of knowledge diasporas (Kuznetsov 2006; Tejada 2012; Meyer 2015).

The second field focusses on the links between migration and development, where the growing transnational nature of migration - so relevant in contemporary migration - has become more prominent over the past two decades (Vertovec 2004; Bauböck and Faist 2010; Faist et al. 2011). Recent research analyses the capacity of migrants to get involved simultaneously in multiple locations through various kinds of links, and this research incorporates observations of the circulation of ideas, symbols and knowledge into the study of the movement of persons. (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Vertovec 2004; Faist 2010). The interest in the transnational actions carried out by migrants, whether individually or as members of

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[2] Swiss Federal Statistics Office, STAT-LAB, accessed 21 August 2017.

diasporas, translates into an academic discussion that sees them as agents who are capable of generating positive effects for the countries of origin (Kapur 2004; Faist et al. 2011; Kuznetsov 2013).

Within the two fields of study, we can see a special analytical focus on aspects related to the circulation of knowledge and other resources that skilled migrants acquire and accumulate through their international academic or professional experiences, and the actions that link them to their country of origin. Empirical evidence has allowed us to analyse the profiles of emigrated students and skilled professionals, their international mobility paths, the elements that influence their mobility decisions, and the types of resources and links that they accumulate during their career itineraries. The reflection includes recommendations on mechanisms and strategies that allow the countries of origin to absorb these resources through physical return, or by capitalising on skills and resources from a distance (CODEV et al. 2013).

Some assumptions and analytical elements from the literature on international migration, whilst not sufficiently addressing the study of skilled migration, are useful in terms of understanding it better. In an analytical framework based on social capital and social remittances, it is interesting to observe the forms of social capital that skilled migrants acquire during their academic paths and professional experiences, and the effect that these have on their mobility decisions and the establishment of transnational links. They usually accumulate contacts, knowledge, skills, ideas and other social capital during their migratory paths. The transfer of this accumulated social capital to the country of origin is known as social remittances (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the cumulative actual and potential resources that are interconnected to the possession of a durable network of established relationships of mutual recognition. For Putnam (2000), social capital denotes the nature and degree of one's social relations and associated norms of reciprocity. According to Portes (1998), social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures. For Bruggeman (2008) social capital represents the benefits of the interpersonal contacts of social networks, where social cohesion as well as structural and contextual elements are crucial for their creation. Such considerations denote social capital as an individual's duties and prospects in the form of resources or capital invested in someone for future use. It is therefore a resource that is capitalised upon and turned into concrete assets by the recipients. Such considerations denote social capital as an individual's duties and prospects in the form of resources or capital invested in someone for future use. It is therefore a resource that is capitalised upon and turned into concrete assets by the recipients.

Social capital is closely related to individual mobility decisions. According to Faist (2000), the decisions that potential migrants make about whether to remain or to leave must be considered within the context of their connections. Van Mol (2017) shows that transnational social capital acquired by international students through their overseas experiences and contacts leads to increased aspirations to repeat migration.

Following Nowicka and Serbedzija (2016), when we study social remittances, we need to look beyond the types of resources that are being sent, and incorporate the result of the transactions that impact social relations, cultural values and rules and the economic conditions of the actors involved into the focus. The interest in the effects of these transfers is evident, and empirical research shows us that the process of social transformation has taken on a relevant role as a conceptual framework that allows us to understand the link between human mobility and global change (De Haas 2008; Glick Schiller and Faist 2009; Castles 2012; Nowicka and Serbedzija 2016). This discussion highlights the fact that the assets linked to social remittances can generate positive or negative effects, for example by contributing to rising or declining income inequality (Glick Schiller and Faist 2009). While Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) point out that migrants can be agents who change their societies of origin and contribute to a restructuring of social inequalities through social remittances, Lacroix et al. (2016) highlight the determining role that available

material resources play in ensuring an effective circulation of ideas and practices, whilst warning of the relationship between the transfer of social remittances and social inequalities.

Another relevant angle for our study is the analysis of space and place with the upsurge of transnational social spaces (Faist 2000, Vertovec 2001; Van Riemsdijk and Wang 2017). Recognising the power of social networks and transnational contacts that extend beyond national borders as a necessary element for understanding international mobility, the literature examines how these contacts and networks facilitate social action and help people to easily reach their objectives, and it shows that contemporary migrants have developed the skill of building new spatial forms. The value attached to a migrant's skills, competences and other social capital depends on time and place, as well as the person and the sociocultural and political context that they find themselves in (Kuvik 2012; Van Riemsdijk 2013). Notwithstanding the wealth of contributions from the perspective of space and place, these have not sufficiently explained the process of the accumulation of social capital by skilled migrants along their mobility trajectories and their local and transnational place-based practices.

**Indian students and skilled professionals in Western Europe**

India has been a significant source country of international labour for many years. Overseas Indians constitute one of the world's largest diasporas, which was estimated to be about 30-million strong in 2016[3]. Indian labour migrants can be found in multiple regions around the world. While the Middle East is a common destination for low-skilled Indians, the highly skilled are mainly found in North America and Europe (especially the United Kingdom) (Khadria 2007). Over the last decade, Indians comprised the fourth largest group of new immigrants in the OECD space (after China, Romania and Poland), with a yearly average of 236,000 Indians migrating to these countries between 2005 and 2015. In 2015, Indians represented 3.9% of all new OECD immigrant inflows. In addition, within the OECD group of countries, India is the top source of skilled migrants from non-industrialised countries (UN-UNDESA and OECD 2013).

Over the past two decades and more, we have been able to observe a systematic increase in the flows of skilled professionals from India to new destinations in continental Europe, which have emerged as a consequence of their transformation into knowledge-based economies and their policy strategies to attract skilled personnel (Buga and Meyer 2012; Mosneaga 2014; OECD 2017). Current Indian skilled migration to Europe comprises mainly persons involved in research and academia, engineers, and professionals in the ICTs, finance and management, and the pharmaceutical sector (CODEV et al. 2013).

Indian international students are also an important component here as they are a significant constituent of skilled migrants and represent the fastest-growing group among all migrant groups (OECD 2017). The role of international students as *knowledge migrants* who have the capacity to become mediators in shaping the structure, power and sustainability of academic knowledge has gained relevance with the increased number of international students over the last few decades (Findlay 2010; Raghuram 2013; King and Raghuram 2013; Riaño and Piguet 2016). Also, the study-to-work transition of international students, as a significant dimension of the transitional character of this category of migrants has gained attention in recent research (Kuptsch 2006; Findlay et al. 2012; Mosneaga 2014).

The increase in Indian international student mobility of recent years is relevant. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database (UNESCO - UIS 2015) shows that international students from India increased almost threefold between 2000 and 2013, rising from 62,342 to 181,872. After China, Indian students make up the second largest number of international students enrolled in OECD countries, with Indians totalling 186,000 in 2014. In contrast to the 7% drop in the number of Chinese student enrolments in OECD countries

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[3] According to data from the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India - http://mea.gov.in

between 2013 and 2014, Indian enrolments increased by 13% (OECD 2017). There are several factors to explain this growth. On the one hand, overseas experience is highly valued in India given the prevalent view that a foreign degree ensures better employment and better career prospects. Besides, more and more Indians are motivated to pursue higher education and further specialization out of their country as part of their career paths. This is related to a recognition of the benefits involved such as having access to study provisions and higher quality research conditions (Martin-Rovet 2003; Findlay et al. 2012), as well as personal self-realisation associated with travel and experiencing another culture (King 2002; Ackers and Gill 2008). The rising Indian middle class that can afford foreign education is another influential factor (Kumar et al. 2009; Mukherjee and Chanda 2012), and this points to the transformation of the geographies of middle-class decision-making in education as a result of the rise of the international education market (Waters 2006).

On the other hand, the internationalisation of higher education and competition for foreign talent among academic institutions stimulates a stronger demand for international students and active promoting strategies (Tremblay 2005; Mosneaga 2014; Hercog and Van de Laar 2017). This is backed by targeted immigration policies in destination countries, which facilitate the recruitment of people who are considered to offer the highest economic payback. This trend of pushing student migration as a forerunner of labour migration (Kuptsch 2006; Ackers and Gill 2008; Findlay et al. 2012), is implemented in the praxis by allowing students who have been awarded degrees in their country to stay on after their studies and by giving them special treatment when they apply for residence permits. Some countries in continental Europe are following this path. For example, the Netherlands and Germany allow foreign students to stay and seek employment for up to twelve and eighteen months respectively after they have completed their studies, while stays of up to six months are allowed in France and Switzerland. The Netherlands has recently moved to allow international students to come to study for more than 90 days by abolishing the requirement to apply for a temporary residence permit. The Netherlands and France have recently introduced targeted entry schemes for international innovative start-up entrepreneurs, which will potentially prompt those Indians who are willing to pursue the entrepreneurial path (including international students) to consider moving to these countries to develop their business ideas. Despite these new policies, these countries are still not attractive enough as prospective work destinations to entice international students after graduation. As Hercog and Van de Laar (2016) have shown, even though continental European countries are attracting more and more Indian students for education purposes, they are still failing to absorb them into the local labour market or offer them interesting long-term career prospects. Failing to provide a smoother transition from studying to the labour market means that these countries remain short-term destinations, and this limits the relevance of the policies they have adopted to target skilled individuals (De Grip et al. 2009; Boeri et al. 2012; Hercog and Van de Laar 2016).

**The Swiss context**

Whereas in previous decades the prevalent strategy in Switzerland focussed on attracting foreign human capital as an economic buffer, this has evolved in recent years towards more a liberal option. Today, together with a favourable labour and academic environment, immigration policies aimed at attracting skilled foreign personnel who can bring a critical mass that is valuable for the economic interests of the country are complementary factors that have influenced the evolution of skilled migration from India to Switzerland, including the reception of international students (Becker et al. 2008; Pecoraro and Fibbi 2010; Mosneaga 2014). As international student recruitment is increasingly becoming a central part of the Swiss bilateral strategy for academic and scientific cooperation with specific countries, higher education and research policies are being restructured across the cantons to secure quality, competitiveness and growth (Becker and Kolster 2012). According to data from the OECD (2017), Switzerland registered a total of 50,000

enrolments of international students in 2014. There was a particularly high share of international students at PhD level, accounting for 53% of all PhD enrolments in the country (against an average of 22% registered in OECD countries).

During the latter part of the last century, migration from India to Switzerland was the result of a modest flow of skilled persons. At that time, the Indian community in Switzerland was made up a small group with diverse ethnic and linguistic characteristics, distributed geographically across the country. During this period associations were established and these allowed students, and people from India in general, to meet and hold cultural and entertainment events with their fellow citizens. This geography has been recently transformed as a result of the rapid increase in the migration of skilled professionals, students and scientists from India, especially in the areas of engineering, finance and management and biotechnology and the pharmaceutical industry. According to data from the Swiss Federal Office for Statistics (SFOS)[4], the total number of Swiss-based individuals with Indian citizenship was estimated to be 2,353 and 3,864 in 1980 and 1990 respectively, whereas by the years 2000 and 2010 these estimated totals had reached 5,864 and 10,391 respectively. In 2015, the total estimated number of people with Indian citizenship in Switzerland was 13,589, which represents an increase of 231% since the turn of the millennium. This population, made up of 9,150 men and 4,439 women, is composed for the most part of recent young immigrants (between the ages of 25 and 45) who have a high level of education (80% of them have third-level education), and they live mainly in the cantons of Zurich, Basel, Geneva and Vaud, which are representative due to the importance of their universities and research centres, as well as their multinational companies and industry.

If we examine the determining factors that facilitate or limit the incorporation and integration of skilled professionals and students from India in Switzerland, we can observe that the particular characteristics of the context and the social environment to which they are exposed play a significant role (Liebig et al. 2012; Hercog and Tejada 2013). 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, security, as well as the favourable employment conditions offered by transnational companies all add up to provide a welcoming context that favours skilled migrants. Liebig et al. (2012) highlight the favourable conditions that the Swiss labour market offers emigrant workers, and they base their findings on the fact that three out of every four persons of the total number of foreign workers are in employment, placing Switzerland as the leading country among the OECD countries. These elements, together with the internationalisation of higher education and the professions, have resulted in the prevalence of a favourable situation for skilled migrants from India in Switzerland. At the same time, they possess valuable social capital as they have a high educational level, work in jobs that are professionally recognised and have international experience. However, on occasions, several elements of a personal nature as well as others related to local structures, may possibly make it difficult for them to integrate into Swiss society outside the academic or professional environment. The temporary nature of their permanence in Switzerland may also be determinant (Hercog and Tejada 2013).

**In-depth interviews with skilled Indians in Switzerland**

The following sections provide a qualitative analysis intended to help understand the mobility paths of skilled Indians in Switzerland and their experiences in the local context, with a particular focus on their transnational contacts and social capital accumulated, which influence their onward mobility decisions and shape their connections with India. A series of 30 semi-structured interviews were held with Indian

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[4] Data from the Swiss Federal Office for Statistics (SFOS) (https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/services/recherche/stat-tab-online-data-search.html) accessed 21 August 2017.

students, researchers and skilled professionals living in Switzerland with a view to advancing our knowledge of these issues. The study also benefits from observations made by the author while participating in conferences and workshops on Indian international mobility as well as her attendance at social and cultural gatherings organised by the Indian community. The chapter draws on results from a broader research project on skilled Indians in selected European countries and returnees in India, which explored opportunities to leverage their potential in home country development, including the return option. The study was completed as part of the international project *"Migration, scientific diasporas and development. Impact of skilled returned migration on development in India"*[5] (CODEV-EPFL et al. 2013; Tejada et al. 2014). The interviews were conducted with 30 individuals living in Switzerland who gave detailed explanations of their mobility trajectories and experiences, the motives that brought them to Switzerland, their study and/or working situation and experiences in the Swiss context, their connections involving India, and the factors influencing further mobility plans. The interviews were conducted in several Swiss cities at two different times: a first round of 20 interviews were held in the period between July 2011 and June 2012, and these were complemented by 10 additional interviews conducted between May and August 2017. Together, the interviews represent a sample of Indian students and researchers from several disciplines in main Swiss universities, and professionals in the sectors of engineering and ICTs, finance, banking, and the pharmaceutical and food industries. 10 of the interviewees were women and there were 20 men, and they represent a variety of trajectories, resident status and lengths of stay. Each interview lasted about one to two hours and they were recorded and transcribed.

The following sections present some observations of the testimonies given by the interviewed persons in relation to these topics.

**Mobility motives and trajectories**

Better possibilities for professional advancement in the more developed countries is one of the most frequently cited aspects among the motivations for moving and remaining abroad. The benefits that result from good working conditions and a competitive income level, career opportunities and academic training opportunities at prestigious institutions, as well as quality public services also have an influence on mobility decisions (Gibson and McKenzie 2009). Despite the existing differences between academic disciplines and professional sectors, the internationalisation of the professions and higher education enables people to be more susceptible to mobility and more flexible when choosing their destinations, and this confirms the current multi-directionality and elasticity of skilled mobility (Meyer 2003; Bruneau 2010).

Prior experience of living abroad, whether it be for education, work or personal reasons, is an indicator of the mobility of a person and their familiarity with the cost of migration (Grundel and Peters 2008). Getting educated abroad increases the probability of an individual working in a foreign country (Parey and Waldinger 2008; De Grip et al. 2009).

The elements of space and place are also determining factors in mobility decisions, as shown in a recent study that examines whether the migratory paths of the skilled Indians are planned and carried out according to those advance plans, or whether on the contrary, their experiences in the host country make them change their plans and stay away for longer, or to move on sooner to another destination (Hercog and Siddiqui 2014). The study shows that perceptions of the quality of the institutions and conditions regarding the context and migratory policies in the host country

affect immediate and future decisions. The time of stay in the destination country is also a factor of influence, as a longer stay in a host country allows a person to adjust better to the local society, rules and culture, and in general to be less inclined to move on to another country or return to the country of origin.

After examining the migratory paths of the skilled Indians that we spoke to, we can see that, in general terms, there is no single reason behind their mobility decisions, but rather they have multiple reasons which are often interrelated. The most common reasons are a desire to access opportunities for academic advancement and professional growth, and also, albeit to a lesser extent, to accompany a partner or reunite a family.

Various elements influence Indians' mobility decisions depending on their main activity:, skilled professionals working in the private sector on the one hand; and, students, researchers and professionals working in research and/or academia on the other, although the limits between the two categories are often not very clear. Skilled professionals move to Switzerland to pursue career development opportunities and accumulate experience in multinational or Swiss firms. Their mobility is mainly industry-driven and arranged by recruitment and relocation agencies, and facilitated by their professional networks and organizational channels. In contrast, for students, researchers and professionals in the academic and research sector, migration is mainly driven by individual motivation and facilitated by their personal contacts and networks as they search for opportunities to expand their careers. In their case, scholarship programs and academic exchanges and scientific collaborations are formal vehicles of mobility.

The international professional and scientific setting together with Switzerland's academic and scientific excellence are regarded as valuable assets by skilled Indians as they seek to develop their careers. They mostly move in search of opportunities at the best institutions and companies, and geographic location does not play a crucial part in their choices. They generally stay in Switzerland on a temporary basis. This is especially true in the case of recently-arrived Indians, as they see this move as another step in their on-going movement to other destinations. Their narratives correspond to those usually depicted by non-domiciled transmigrants or globetrotters (Mahroum 2000), who are always ready to move from country to country, guided by the opportunities with their corporations. A male professional in management who works for an international company in Geneva said that he first moved from Mumbai to London to study, and from there to Geneva for work where he has spent six months. He plans to stay a further two years and then move to Asia or the US: *"The opportunity, the potential for growth and salary made me decide to come to Switzerland. I had three other offers, two in India and one in the UK. I had interned here over the summer and I liked it; that is why I joined. Quality of life is high and working conditions are excellent. (However) I am not interested in staying in Switzerland. I am hungry for opportunities and growth, and right now these are not in Europe".* A female PhD student at the University of Lausanne said that a mix of scientific excellence and financial benefits was behind her decision to come to Switzerland rather than go to the UK: *"I applied for PhD opportunities in the UK and Europe. I wanted to be in Europe because the US is far away. I was accepted by a very good lab in Oxford but funding for international students at that time was cut. So I accepted the offer from the University of Lausanne, which is renowned for its biological science research. I liked the place and the lab and the professors are great. At a PhD level, you get employee status and are paid, which is a big advantage".*

The accumulation of transnational contacts of skilled Indians is noteworthy within the context of their migratory paths. Their mobility, which often involves different destinations before they arrive in Switzerland, reveals multi-site paths that enable them to accumulate transnational contacts, experiences and different types of skills (professional, technical and social) that come into play

simultaneously in Switzerland and in India. These connections are favourable in terms of furthering mobility and advancing their professional careers. Accordingly, we can say that the mobility trajectories and plans are influenced by the social relations and the professional and academic contacts that skilled migrants establish during their experiences abroad. We see that, in defining spaces through mobility and interaction, transnational contacts link skilled Indians to specific places of origin and destination, offering them an array of social capital that extends the limits of the spaces where they move and thereby opening up new opportunities (Mahroum 2000; Van Mol 2017). A female PhD student at the University of Zurich explained that a friend in Germany had been a key contact for her move. *"I knew a lot about studying in Switzerland before I came, as a friend I met in Bremen instructed me about visa procedures and students' associations here. I also got to know my supervisor through her. This was of great help."*

We have observed that families often shape mobility decisions. Like in the findings of Hercog and Van de Laar (2017), we observed that a family's social capital not only acts as an enabler of mobility, supported by social networks, but it can also deter mobility when private responsibilities or constraints impede new undertakings. The testimonies of the skilled Indians reveal their confrontation with the strong expectations of international adaptation from their families, colleagues and other people around them, and the consequent mobility, for their academic and professional development. We can say therefore that their decisions are the result of a complex continuum of coercion and free-will' (King 2002). As one male Masters student at the EPFL in Lausanne said: *"I am the first in my family to study abroad. I actually wanted to stay in India but it was actually my mom who pushed me. She said: 'No, it is a good opportunity for you to study abroad'"*. A Basel-based female professional in the pharma industry explained the importance of having her family in India nearby to help her raise her children while she fulfilled her professional obligations; this seemed to influence her plans to return: *"I definitely want to head back to India in the near future. I want my children to be with their grandparents. Also, I could count on them to help me raise them if I have to travel a lot"*. A male Postdoc researcher at the Biotech Campus in Geneva sees the decision about moving as an issue involving his partner. *"I would like to stay longer but this also depends on my wife. If she gets a work permit then we will stay. Otherwise, we will move to the US or India"*.

Contacts with family and friends in the country of origin also usually facilitate mobility and they are constitutive in forming spatial aspirations. A female PhD student at the University of Geneva explained how acquaintances of her parents motivated her to study abroad and provided her with some contacts. *"They put me in touch with a member of their family, a UK-based professor, who told me about scholarships opportunities in Europe and Canada. It seemed like a great idea, so I just looked it up"*.

Regarding future mobility plans, we can see differences between the perspectives of students and those of established professionals. Whether a student plans an academic career or to look for work in private industry depends on the career that they assume they will undertake in the near future (Ackers and Gill 2008; Hercog and Siddiqui 2014; Hercog and Van de Laar 2017). We can observe that students are more uncertain about their short-term future plans than academics and professionals in remunerated employment are. This is probably the case because they are younger, without any family responsibilities and their situation is less stable, which causes them to be more open to opportunities. The discussion of our observations indicates that Indian students in Switzerland do not limit their mobility plans to time limits or specific places, but rather they follow strategies in which their options are kept deliberately open. The intentional uncertainty of the migrants is significant when they are not sure about the possibilities that the future is going to offer them. As mentioned by Mosneaga (2014), the status transition of international students, as a transitional and transnational stage, is framed by diverse sets of challenges and opportunities and

includes various geographical locations as the factors that shape their transition experiences often range beyond their host or home contexts. Consequently, we could conclude that the mobility decisions of international students depend on the opportunities available and their perceptions of environments in the possible locations. Moreover, as Van Mol (2017) indicates in his study of Erasmus students, we can see that students are more likely to move in their future careers, which is in line with other studies which suggest that once migrants have moved, they are more inclined to move again. One male Masters student at ETH Zurich stated, *"Once I finish my Masters I will start looking for jobs and PhD positions in different places. Regarding jobs, I do not have any location preference; any country will be OK. For the PhD, it should be in an equally reputable university. If I get that in ETHZ or Imperial London or someplace like that, then yes. The UK would be fine and the rest of Europe is fine, but not the US as I actually feel that it's a bit far away and it doesn't really appeal to me"*.

Regarding future mobility plans, a possible return to the country of origin comes to the fore in the testimonies of the Indians that we spoke to. The common aspiration to return and accomplish their migration project back in India arose as a response to a positive assessment of the economic and professional opportunities that India has to offer, as well as a reply to questions about family ties. Some Indians are motivated by the idea of deploying their foreign earned experience and knowledge in the Indian context. As in the findings of Carling et al. (2016), we see that skilled Indians rely on relatives and acquaintances, social media and networks for information about the situation back in the home country, and this impacts their intention to return. As shown by Biswas (2014), migrants' intentions are largely based on the career and business prospects they believe that India has to offer, and their families and professional networks facilitate their possible move. A male management professional working for an international company in Geneva said *"I have an aspiration to go back home. India is growing fast; I see good opportunities there"*. A female PhD student at the University of Zurich mentioned her intentions to use the knowledge and expertise she had accumulated overseas within the Indian academic field, and she also wanted to be close to her family. Her collaboration with a scholar there may help her move: *"I definitely would like to return to India in the near future. I do not see myself staying away for long. (…) I plan to apply for an academic position in Delhi, where my family lives. I am working with a professor there in my current research and this will help me re-establish contacts"*. She mentioned policies that India is implementing to attract its talented people based abroad. *"I heard about a programme supporting young researchers to return and pursue an academic career back there and I plan to apply"*. The Indian case shows that doctoral graduates are highly mobile and looking for the best opportunities worldwide. As they represent a valuable human resource for research and innovation, their mobility is gaining importance in an increasingly competitive global market. As pointed by Auriol (2010), the mobility of doctorate holders is seen as a significant vehicle of knowledge flow by the governments and backed by policy measures aiming at gaining them as part of their labour force.

**Experiences in Switzerland and transnational connections**

Skilled Indians spoke positively of the international atmosphere at the place where they study or work, which they are happy with because it creates an environment in which they can establish connections and feel welcome. We can see that the perception of their experiences in the Swiss context varies according to whether they are referring to the highly international and open environments of the institutions in which they study and the companies in which they work, or whether they are referring to their exchanges with the local community in the places where they live. Culturally speaking, Indians are openly disposed and inclined to engage with local people although this is not always easy for them. We see a contrast between

the perceptions of those who live in the more cosmopolitan cities such as Geneva, Zürich or Basel and the few who live in the Swiss countryside where the internationality in the setting is less palpable and connecting with the local community is more difficult. While they do have a positive perception of the local environment, especially with regard to employment and career opportunities, income level, level of scientific research and academic institutions and the living environment, they cite language barriers, Swiss people (who they see as "*reserved*" and "*difficult to access*")*,* and problems renewing or obtaining working permits, as some of the obstacles that they face in the Swiss setting. Accordingly, as Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) have indicated, we can see how the idea of place, where skilled Indians are located in the same relational space or shared belonging, is detached from the space in which one lives, indicating a disassociation between their professional or academic activity and their ties with the peculiarities of the host-country setting.

Exposure to a highly international context as in the cities of Geneva or Basel, which host international organisations and multinational companies, provides an opportunity to adapt as well as personal experiences which are accumulated in the form of greater social capital. Moreover, the experience of working abroad and of multiple mobility helps people to form a global perspective, which is a valuable and even essential asset in terms of being competitive in highly international academic and professional environments. A female professional in the pharma industry based in Basel said *"Living and working here has given me massive exposure; it is good for my career and for learning"*. The high consideration for the international environment is also based on their appreciation of the possibility to communicate in English. As English is the common language in the international environment in which they work or study, most of them do not need to learn the local language to a professional level, and therefore they do not see the language as a barrier from a professional point or view, and hence they do not make much of an effort to learn any of the local languages, which becomes a real obstacle to a long-term stay. A male professional in management working for an international company in Geneva said: *"Although English is the language in my company, I see my opportunities for career advancement in Switzerland restricted because I do not know the local languages"*.

The life and professional experiences of skilled Indians in the Swiss context will be influenced by their perspectives and mobility plans in the short-term horizon (Raghuram 2013; Van Riemsdijk and Wang 2017). Since their stay is essentially a temporary one, their efforts to integrate into Swiss society depend on their construction of a sense of belonging to the local community or to the community in the country of origin, following the imaginary geography of their future in a short-term horizon (Hercog and Tejada 2013). Moreover, we can see how skilled Indians decide to establish links in a particular territory according to the notion of how they imagine the future, and the strategies that they believe to be necessary to make it become a reality.

The organization and collective action of migrant groups are significant as they offer access to significant social capital through their operations that result from contacts, social and professional links and any institutional relations that are established (Tejada 2012). We are interested in knowing about the experiences of skilled Indians regarding their participation in formal associations, including those that bring their co-nationals together. Since this involves a relatively small and scattered population, meaning that opportunities to contact with other Indian co-nationals in Switzerland are limited, community association activities are of particular importance. We can see that their active participation in the cultural associations that unite the Indian community in Switzerland is not obvious, and this partly explains their interest to interact more with the local community or with colleagues from their academic or professional environment. As the findings of Jain (2011) show, recent Indian migrants do not generally meet in networks or associations, and they are immersed in their own particular process, which involves a constant negotiation of their cultural belonging to both Switzerland and India. As Putnam (2000) points out, when they choose to participate in different activities with others as they pursue their professional, academic,

leisure, family interests or those of another kind, the social capital shows its relational nature insofar as it is the property of the individuals, but only by virtue of the fact that they belong to a group. For the Indians, their sense of belonging to a group is established by the perception that they have of their identity linked to their educational or professional activity at a specific institution. This is what motivates them to participate in association activities that operate on the basis of reciprocal commitments on the part of their members, and which represent a significant asset in the accumulation of social capital.

For students, we can see how associations such as the "Indian Students Association Zurich" (InSAZ) and "Indian Students Associations Lausanne" (YUVA) organise a wide range of activities and offer possibilities for contacts, and facilitate their arrival and integration in Switzerland. A male Masters student at the ETHZ said: *"I am in touch with people from the association because they have excellent groups and provide advice on what you need to do when you come here"*. They also function as a platform where Indians can get together and meet other communities and celebrate cultural, social and sports events, such as cricket and badminton tournaments, yoga courses, and Diwali or Holi festivities and movie nights. He continues with an explanation of the main objective of InSAZ: *"It is basically for Indian students who are living here not to feel unwelcome in the city because when they come here they do not really have a lot of friends, so they can get together with other fellow Indians and have fun"*. A female student at the University of Lausanne talked about her active participation in YUVA: *"I initiated this with a friend of mine. We are planning a career day that companies will attend, with some workshops for job interviews, CV writing and visits to companies. We have a Facebook page where we post our activities"*. As Putnam (2000) mentions, we can see how social capital allows individuals to access resources, ideas, information, and to have precise expectations about the behaviour of others thanks to their participation in relations that are the result of networks and associations. The testimonies show the significant role played by the organisations that support associative activities by providing contacts with actors linked to academia or industry, which may result in opportunities with a long-term impact.

We are interested in seeing how the transnational contacts, skills and further social capital that skilled Indians accumulate in different spaces and places shape the type of connections they have with India. The literature on transnationalism in migration shows that the greater the number of transnational connections, the greater the effect on migrants, on the persons closest to them, and on their community in the country of origin. We can see that the transnational contacts of skilled Indians often create a transnational social space that is made up of a series of relations formed by more or less structured interactions and exchanges of practices and information. Even though the transnational connections of migrants are generally considered to be the equivalent of positive social capital, various empirical research studies have shown that these connections can also have a negative effect (Tabar and Maalouf 2016) in the form of the exclusion of other communities, excessive claims on group members or restrictions on individual liberties (Portes 1998). On this point, some studies show how the transnational connections of the diaspora can replicate attitudes of social exclusion that exacerbate the structural inequalities or racial tensions that have operated in certain societies (Kwankam 2010). Other cases highlight elements that characterise the lack of a strong and cohesive national identity, which limits the collective actions of the diasporas, their transnational actions and possible benefits for the country of origin (Tejada 2012).

We observed how Indians imagine themselves generating change in India through their own subjective opinions of the contributions they make from abroad. Skilled Indians think that Indian society can benefit from their accumulated resources, their contact networks and their scientific and professional knowledge, both through their transnational connections that promote the transfer of knowledge through various forms of cooperation and interaction from a distance, and through a physical return to their country. As one male researcher based at the CERN said, *"I have exchanges with researchers and entrepreneurs in India; we want to develop a new technology for efficient waste management"*. Their transnational ties with India in the form of social remittances follow several patterns and comprise diverse type of knowledge

circulation practices (Tejada 2016). Their aspirations to make a social contribution to their community, and contribute intellectually or professionally through their work, are linked to the plans that many have to return to India at some time in the future, which would allow these aspirations to materialise if the return actually occurred. One male PostDoc researcher at EPFL mentioned: *"Once I get back to India, I will educate and train younger generations through my research work. That will be my contribution. I am preparing my return by using my networks and the help of my colleagues back home"*.

However, the evidence shows that several barriers must be overcome if the accumulated social capital is to be transferred effectively to the local context. As the findings of Siddiqui and Tejada (2014) have shown, resistance to a change in the work culture, the lack of an adequate infrastructure, long bureaucratic processes and resistance from the society are some of the elements that affect the appropriation of new practices and knowledge that are transferred transnationally.

**Conclusions**

This study allows us to observe the knowledge, skills, contacts and other forms of social capital that skilled Indians accumulate during their academic paths and professional experiences abroad, and the influence these have on mobility decisions and the establishment of transnational links. The most common reasons behind mobility decisions of skilled Indians are an aspiration to access opportunities for academic advancement and professional growth. This confirms that professional advancement is the main stimulus behind decisions related to international skilled mobility.

The international professional setting together with the academic and scientific excellence offered by Switzerland are valuable assets that skilled Indians consider as they seek to develop their careers. They mostly arrive in Switzerland to pursue opportunities in specific academic institutions and companies, and geographical place is not an essential element in their decisions. In general, Indian students and young researchers do not specifically seek to come to Switzerland, but rather they are attracted by educational and doctoral programmes at institutions with a reputation for academic and scientific quality. The same happens in the case of professionals whose mobility is mainly industry-driven and arranged by recruitment and relocation agencies.

Their mobility, which often involves different destinations before they arrive in Switzerland, reveals multi-site paths that enable them to accumulate transnational contacts, experiences and different types of skills that come into play simultaneously in Switzerland and in India. The experiences of skilled Indians show that their mobility trajectories and plans are influenced by the social relations and the professional and academic contacts that they create during their experiences abroad. This social capital helps to further their mobility and exposure, and advance their professional careers. Moreover, the family often shapes mobility decisions and it can be involved in forming spatial aspirations. Through multi-site mobility and interaction, skilled Indians define the spaces that they remained linked to through the transnational contacts they establish in various locations, and this offers them a set of social capital elements that open up new opportunities and broaden the limits of the spaces that they move in. Furthermore, international experience facilitates their adaptation to the new contexts. They usually come to the countries of destinations with an advanced education and professional skills, which ease their transnational linkages and make their mobility patterns more flexible.

Skilled Indians generally stay in Switzerland on a temporary basis. This is especially true in the case of recently-arrived Indians who see this move as another step in their on-going journey to other destinations. Indians have a positive perception of the local setting in Switzerland, particularly with regard to employment and career opportunities, income level, level of scientific research and academic institutions and the living environment; while they mention language barriers, the reserved character of Swiss people, and problems when renewing or obtaining working permits as some of the obstacles they

face. Their lives and professional experiences in the Swiss context are influenced by their perspectives and their mobility plans in the short-term horizon. This shows that the decisions of migrants to establish links in a certain territory have to do with the notion of how they imagine the future, and the strategies that they believe to be necessary to make this become a reality. Their decisions regarding further mobility depend on the available opportunities and their perceptions of contexts in possible locations, whether in Switzerland, India or elsewhere. Here, the element of space and place is a determining factor in the subsequent mobility decisions since the migrants' perceptions regarding the quality of the institutions, the conditions of context and migratory policies in the host country affect their immediate and future decisions about whether to move on again or not.

A return to the country of origin is a possible option in the future mobility plans of skilled Indians. The common aspiration to return and accomplish their migration project back in India arises as a response to a positive assessment of the economic and professional opportunities that they see India offering, as well as a reaction related to family ties. As they think that Indian society can benefit from the contact networks, skills and knowledge they have accumulated, their future plans include the idea of deploying them in the Indian context and making social contributions to the community, either by their physical return or through transnational connections using various forms of cooperation and interaction from a distance.

This study shows that by increasing their social capital during the course of their career itineraries, skilled Indians develop local and transnational contacts based on specific places, which are maintained when they move to a new destination. Even though the value attached to social capital as a result of the impact of the social relations depends on time and place, this study shows that the new spatial forms created by international migrants reveal the power that transnational contacts have as valuable assets for their local and transnational-based practices, and these are determining factors in their further mobility decisions and the connections they maintain with the home country. Establishing transnational connections has to be seen as a dynamic process that embodies individual life plans, social expectations and professional opportunities, as well as contextual issues from the countries concerned. It is an individual process which people experience in different ways, and it is linked to the construction of a sense of belonging to a specific place and the individual agency to produce this depends mainly on their future plans.

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