Mobilising the Moroccans: Policies and Perceptions of Transnational Co-Development Engagement Among Moroccan Migrants in Catalonia

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Like other migrant groups in Catalonia, Moroccans can solicit financial and technical assistance to help better conditions in their localities of origin within the framework of co-development policies. This policy environment reflects international trends of integrating migration and development, including a strengthening of the participatory role of the migrants themselves. Drawing on a qualitative study of Moroccan migrant transnationalism in Catalonia, I analyse the interplay between Catalan actors’ support for migrant civic transnationalism and the perception of and participation in projects of co-development among Moroccan migrants. One of the key aims is to explore to what extent timing, that is, the combination of recent patterns of Moroccan migration and the relatively intense debate on migration and development, influences the balance between top-down implementation of the migration development agenda and bottom-up initiatives from the Moroccan migrants. The paper shows how participation in co-development projects varies among Moroccan associations and outlines the main explanations for both involvement and non-involvement. Thus, the paper engages with the growing literature on the relationship of migrants’ transnational practices with local and transnational power hierarchies, highlighting the role of receiving-country political actors, policy discourses and initiatives.

Keywords: Morocco; Spain; Catalonia; Migration; Co-Development; Transnational
Introduction

The case of Morocco has a high profile in debates and policies on migration in Spain and Catalonia. Moroccans constitute the second largest migrant collective in Spain and the largest in Catalonia. Moreover, Morocco is not only an important country of origin but also one of transit of migration flows into Spain (Carling 2007; Collyer 2007). Issues of migration play a long-standing and important role in Spanish–Moroccan relations, which in turn are embedded in the wider Euro–Mediterranean policy framework of collaboration on security, democratisation and development between states and non-state actors from the northern and southern Mediterranean shores (Aubarrell and Aragall 2004; Collinson 1996).

Within both the bilateral and multilateral Euro–Mediterranean cooperation on migration issues, the emerging policy field of co-development seeks to strengthen the linkage between migration and development (Gallina 2007; Nyberg Sørensen 2006). In Spain, a series of both governmental and non-governmental actors have become more intensely engaged in discussing and formulating a policy framework on co-development. An important dimension herein is the participatory role of migrants and migrant associations in processes of development in their localities of origin. While a comprehensive policy framework on co-development is still in the making, a number of initiatives promoted by regional and local governments and development NGOs have already facilitated the engagement of migrants in projects of co-development. Moroccan migrants are one of the key groups targeted in this respect. Indeed, in the case of Catalonia, both development NGOs and the local government development agency have sought to mobilise the Moroccan migrant collective to engage in co-development activities.

Drawing on a qualitative study of Moroccan migrants’ local and transnational practices in Catalonia, this article analyses the interplay between these Catalan policies and initiatives of co-development and the perception of and participation in co-development among Moroccan migrants. While the main attention in Spain and Catalonia, as elsewhere, is on the role of remittances, this analysis mainly centres on the instances where migrants participate on a collective scale in transnational decentralised projects of development. Such collective participation is a more limited phenomenon, but at the same time migrant collective transnational civic engagement is more visibly in dialogue with the surrounding local and transnational political context than are individual practices (e.g. remittances). However, it is not self-evident for migrants to use their spare time and resources on a local-to-local development project and it is the point of this analysis to scrutinise the extent to which the Catalan context provides a favourable policy environment for this type of transnational engagement. Or, put another way, to what extent are co-development policies and initiatives able to transform migrants from individual to collective actors in the development of their country of origin?

In so doing, the paper engages with the growing literature on the relationship between migrants’ transnational practices and the state. A number of studies have
shown how migrant transnationalism ‘from below’ challenges or concurs with the interest of state actors engaging in transnationalism ‘from above’. From the beginning, any crude application of the below-vs.-above distinction has been criticised for not capturing the complex dynamics of mobilisation and power relations between state and non-state actors (Mahler 1998). Especially the role of sending-state actors in co-opting migrant transnational resources has been noted, as has the scepticism with which many migrants view this type of intervention (Guarnizo 1998; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003a; Smith 2003). However, in contrast to the dominant focus on the role of the political institutions in the sending country, which is certainly also relevant to the case of Moroccan migrants’ transnational engagement, this paper highlights the role of the receiving-country political actors, policy discourses and initiatives. Indeed, an analysis of the interaction between receiving-state policies and migrant responses in Catalonia provides an interesting addition to this field of study. In the case of hometown associations of Mexicans and other Latin Americans in the US, the migrants contribute financially to the project and this funding is then topped up by the homeland local or national government (Delgado Wise and Covarrubias 2007). Yet, as this case-study will illustrate the Catalan policy environment on migrant participation in decentralised projects of co-development is funded by the Catalan or Spanish authorities. This grants the receiving state a strong role in terms of defining the parameters for migrant transnational involvement in publicly funded co-development. Does this lead to a situation where migrant participation in projects of development and democratisation is more a result of top-down implementation of the Catalan agenda on migration and development and less the outcome of bottom-up initiatives from the Moroccan migrants themselves? Or rather, how do Catalan actors go about mobilising Moroccans around the issue of co-development? And how have Moroccan migrants so far responded to these policy initiatives?

Moreover, the strong role of the receiving country also raises the question of the extent to which migrant transnational engagement links up with policies and processes of migrant incorporation in the host society. An important point of departure for the analysis presented here is the assumption that the timing—i.e. the combination of patterns of recent Moroccan migration with the relatively intense debate on migration and development—creates a different policy environment for Moroccan migrants in Catalonia than their counterparts in other European countries such as France, Belgium and the Netherlands. In these latter countries, Moroccan immigration and the establishment of Moroccan migrant associations have a longer trajectory. In particular, Moroccan associations in France have been reported to have a long-standing experience with co-development. Meanwhile the Spanish co-development policies have been launched within the first decade of settlement of the bulk of Moroccan migrants. As this paper will illustrate, Catalan co-development actors have heralded migrants as important development agents whose transnational networks and resources may not only contribute to processes of development in their localities of origin, but may also link up with their local incorporation and constitute
an important bridge between their country of origin and that of residence. The local-
to-local dimension of co-development projects necessitates careful consideration of
how these practices are rooted in the particular local and national contexts in both
the country of origin and of residence. The question to be explored here is mainly
how processes of local incorporation in Catalonia influence Moroccan migrants’
transnational engagement in co-development activities.

The paper first sets the context for my analysis by outlining Moroccan migration to
Catalonia, and presenting the main contours of the Spanish and Catalan policy
environment on co-development. It then presents findings on the participation in
and perception of Moroccan migrants and migrant associations. This presentation
includes a discussion not just on the main incentives and experiences of participating
Moroccan associations, but also a review of the key elements of their initial reluctance
towards projects of co-development and the processes of mobilisation by Catalan
actors aimed at changing this. In so doing the paper draws on the Moroccan
component of a study of the local and transnational engagement of migrants in
Barcelona. This study has been conducted over the three years 2004–07 and includes
both in-depth individual interviews with representatives of migrant organisations
and group interviews with associational leaders and migrants who are not members
of any association. Besides migrants, the research also includes documentary analysis
and more formal semi-structured interviews with representatives from government,
local authorities and ‘non-migrant’ civil society associations, especially development
associations, in both Catalonia and Morocco. Finally, a cornerstone of the
methodology has been participant observation in meetings on co-development
with participation of both migrant associations and Catalan or Moroccan
stakeholders.1

Moroccan Migration to Spain and Catalonia

Moroccan migration to Spain and Catalonia goes back at least four decades, but the
bulk of the migrants in Catalonia have arrived more recently than is the case with
countries such as France, the Netherlands and Belgium. Overall migration to Spain
has increased markedly over the last two decades. While half a million migrants were
legally residing in Spain in 1991, the number of both regular and irregular migrants
in 2008 was more than 5.2 million according to the latest figures of municipal
registration [padrón municipal] from the National Institute of Statistics (INE 2008).
At the level of Spain, Moroccan migrants are the second largest group (after
Romanians), numbering 644,688. As part of this trend, Catalonia, the Spanish
autonomous region with the highest number of Moroccan residents, has changed
from being a transit point for Moroccan migrants on their way further north in
Europe to being a destination point in and of itself. The total number of migrants in
Catalonia on 1 January 2008 was estimated at just under 1.1 million, which is nearly
15 per cent of the Catalan population. The number of Moroccan migrants in
Catalonia has jumped from 3,471 in 1986 to 207,194 in 2008—32 per cent of
Moroccans in Spain and approximately 19 per cent of all migrants in Catalonia (INE 2008). Moroccans live dispersed throughout Catalonia, although 60 per cent are resident in Barcelona. The main regions of origin among Catalan-based Moroccans used to be the Yeballa-dominated area of the North and the Rif (not least Nador), although this has diversified in the last decade (Moreras 2004).

Compared to other migrant groups such as the Latin Americans, the Moroccan migrant collective is dominated by single male migrants (CEO 2006). Yet, there is a process of feminisation of Moroccan migration with migrant women now constituting more than a third of Moroccans in Catalonia. A growing number of women have migrated independently, thus challenging the stereotype of Moroccan women as merely following their husbands abroad (Zontini 2004). The socio-demographic profile of Moroccans living in Catalonia is also characterised by a growing number of children under the age of 15 as a result of family reunification and births in Catalonia. Indeed in 2003 the number of 15-year-olds among Moroccans was higher than the Catalan average and in the same year Moroccans were the migrant group with the highest number of births in Catalonia (Moreras 2004). The number of Moroccan children in Catalan schools has almost tripled from 12,414 in 2001/2 to 34,725 in 2007/8 (Nadal 2008). Thus there are clear signs of Moroccan migration entering into a phase of more or less permanent settlement in Catalonia. Importantly, compared to the other migrant groups, Moroccans in Catalonia have a very high rate of regularisation, even prior to the latest round of regularisation of irregular migrants in Spain during 2005.

As non-EU citizens, Moroccans have no electoral rights until they naturalise after 10 years of legal residence. However, Moroccans in Catalonia are increasingly more visible in the realm of civil society. Many associations have been formed to represent and defend the interests and rights of Moroccans in Spain and in Catalonia (Danese 1998; Moren-Alegret 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen and Moreras 2006). These associations differ in terms of their size, purpose, degree of institutionalisation and resources. A few associations, such as Ibn Batuta or ATIME (a state-wide network of associations with a branch also in Barcelona), have a high profile in issues of migrant incorporation and, increasingly, co-development, while the majority of associations are smaller and more local in their membership base. Importantly, in terms of dynamics of internal and external representation of migrants, the number of religious associations is growing. Of the approximately 160 prayer areas in Catalonia, four out of five are managed by Moroccans and are described as attracting many Moroccan migrants (Østergaard Neilson and Moreras 2006). A large proportion of Catalan-based Moroccans are of Amazigh (Berber) background, a feature that influences the associational life and outlook of this group (Roque 2002). Especially during recent years, a growing number of associations present themselves as representing the Tamazigh-speaking Moroccans and working towards recognition of Amazigh cultural distinctiveness and rights.

In terms of the country of origin, the role of Moroccan migrants in the local and national economy has been increasingly recognised and acted upon by both state and
non-state actors in Morocco. The Moroccan government has embarked on a celebratory rhetoric about the role of Moroccans resident abroad (Belguendouz 2006; Brand 2002; Sadiqi 2005), including a more relaxed (less controlling) policy towards Moroccan migrant associations abroad (de Haas 2007; Dumont 2008). Among various initiatives, it has launched a series of measures which make it easier for Moroccans abroad to remit money (de Haas 2007; Nyberg Sørensen 2004). In 2006, official remittances reached 47.8 billion dirham (5.6 billion US dollars), which is about six times the value of direct foreign investment and the total development aid that Morocco receives (de Haas 2007). In that respect it is worth noting that Moroccan migrants in Spain account for an increasingly important part of the remittances sent back to Morocco. As indicated in Table 1, official remittances from Spain have increased from 924 million dirham in 2000 to 8.4 billion in 2007, making Spain the second-largest remittance-sending country to Morocco after France. It is therefore not surprising that there has been an intensification of both private and public actors from Spain involved in the transfer and investment of these funds.

Remittances aside, Moroccan migrants may help their villages of origin with financial and logistical support for development projects. However, this type of support seems to mainly come from the more established migrant collectives in France, Holland or Belgium. It is the aim of Spanish and Catalan co-development policies to facilitate this type of engagement among Moroccan migrants residing there.

### Policies and Perceptions of Co-Development

It is early days in terms of Spanish and Catalan policies on co-development. Consequently, the term is still somewhat ambiguous and continues to be defined in a variety of ways, with different actors and documents emphasising different aspects and priorities. Policy plans at both the state and regional levels on migration or development cooperation have mentioned co-development during the last decade. The concentration of earlier policy programmes on co-development had a dominant focus on linking development with migration flows. This focus persists, but in more recent policy plans on both development cooperation and issues of migration, the strategies for co-development also emphasise how migrants, as collective actors, can contribute to development in their countries of origin from afar. By implication such policy documents also link co-development with issues of migrant incorporation (Østergaard Nielsen 2009). This local and transnational dimension of migrant agency has been explicit in Catalanian policy documents for a longer time than in the rest of Spain. However, at the level of the Catalan government [Generalitat] and development agency, the process of clarifying the scope and meaning of Catalan co-development policies has been awaiting the presentation and debate of a Green Paper on co-development in 2008.²

While co-development is still a policy area in the making, local councils and development NGOs have been active in the field of co-development. An important
actor in that context is the Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament which is the development agency of the Catalan municipalities. The Fons Català has pioneered the implementation of co-development understood as migrant-led decentralised development cooperation. Moreover, there has been a number of initiatives by non-governmental development organisations in terms of promoting migrants’ engagement in development of their countries of origin. Indeed, at the local level, the very visible policy environment surrounding this topic cannot be underestimated. During the course of this research, a long list of conferences and day-long seminars on migration and development gathered local and national academics, local authorities, NGOs and migrant associations to discuss proposals, projects and experiences with supporting the role of migrants in the development of their country of origin.

In these meetings, as well in documentary material from the various governmental and non-governmental actors, the evaluation and perception of migrant engagement in co-development projects is largely positive: migrant engagement in development complements the work of other actors engaged in development because migrants are insiders, have the specific knowledge and understanding of local conditions, and have contacts and access. This type of engagement, moreover, signifies a cosmopolitan agenda, reinforces international solidarity, and thus creates better citizens. Migrants become bridges between their places of settlement and origin. In the words of a senior representative of Fons Català, migrants are the ‘umbilical cord between the community of expatriates and villages of origin’ (Diao 2004).

The main critical issue raised is that conflicts of interest may arise between Catalan actors, migrants, the local population and interested actors in the country of origin in terms of what types of projects of development are needed.³ It may also be argued that projects of co-development disproportionately burden migrants and make them responsible for functions that the state (of origin) should rightfully assume. Finally, there is a line of criticism related to the sometimes problematic processes of implementation of co-development projects. It is not, however, the aim of this paper to evaluate the problems of execution that sometimes arise in the process of implementing co-development projects. Instead the following analysis concentrates on the processes of mobilisation of Moroccan migrant associations within the context of co-development and how Moroccans perceive and respond to the initiatives of Catalan local governments and NGOs.

Table 1. Remittances from Spain to Morocco, 2000–07

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<th>2000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Remittances from Spain in million DH</td>
<td>9,242</td>
<td>1,895</td>
<td>1,957</td>
<td>3,189</td>
<td>4,563</td>
<td>5,290</td>
<td>6,699</td>
<td>8,422</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total remittances to Morocco in million DH</td>
<td>22,962</td>
<td>36,858</td>
<td>31,707</td>
<td>34,582</td>
<td>37,423</td>
<td>40,738</td>
<td>47,834</td>
<td>55,127</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remittances from Spain as % of total</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
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Mobilising the Moroccans Around Co-Development

The engagement of Moroccan migrants in the development of Morocco is by no means a new phenomenon. Notably, associations of Moroccan migrants in Belgium, the Netherlands and especially France have undertaken projects with or without public funding. For instance, the projects of the French-based association *Migrations et Développement* include bringing electricity to 90 villages, constructing hydraulic water pipes in 32 villages, building 13 schools and financing five ambulances and three tons of medicine (Lacomba 2004: 216). Moreover, Moroccan migrants in France have gained a significant voice in the definition of co-development programmes through nation-wide representative platforms like the FORIM (Lacroix 2007). In Spain, the nation-wide network of REMCODE, a sister organisation to the Association of Moroccan Workers and Migrants in Spain (ATIME), is active in migration and development projects and was included in the national register of development NGOs in 2007. REMCODE has executed a wide range of projects targeted at improving infrastructure and supporting educational facilities and associational activities, and has supported cultural exchange programmes with Moroccan counterparts.  

On that background, the projects identified in Catalonia, which are receiving public funding, are much more small-scale. They usually consist of collaboration between a migrant association in Catalonia, a Catalan local government and/or a Catalan NGO, and the Moroccan counterparts which may include the beneficiaries, and a local municipality and/or NGO. The development activities vary in scope, ambition and funding as well as level of institutionalisation. One of the larger projects is in the field of ‘rural’ development and aims to (re)generate employment by irrigating a segment of land belonging to 80 families in Tamasinth outside of Al-Hoceima. This project was initiated by a migrant association and a Catalan neighbourhood association in Mataró, and formulated and implemented together with the *Fons Català*. Other project objectives include activities aimed at the employment and civic organisation of women, support for educational centres and the construction of sanitary facilities in marginalised rural zones. Projects that are primarily aimed at improving infrastructure or generating employment usually also have a civil society component of forming associations of beneficiaries that can formulate further projects.  

The majority of projects are local-to-local in the sense that they are targeted at particular rural areas or urban neighbourhoods. Some projects have a wider scope such as those regarding the education of urban Moroccans. For instance, Al Wafae, an association largely consisting of Moroccan students, has set up a series of EU-funded projects of education for youth, women and children in Tangiers. Ibn Batuta also participates in several projects, including support of an education facility (again, for youth, women and children) in Tangiers. Alongside these projects a series of small-scale exchange activities have been undertaken by Moroccan associations in order to raise awareness in both Catalonia and Morocco. There have been exchanges of...
schoolchildren, students and even groups of elderly pensioners, organised and implemented by migrant associations with public funding. Again, these projects have a dimension of emancipating the local population by contributing to a greater will and capacity to formulate projects to better their livelihood.

These projects all represent important contributions by Moroccans in Catalonia to local social and economic processes of change in Morocco. However, compared to the sub-Saharan migrant collectives, such as the Senegalese and Ghanaians, Moroccan involvement in co-development is less common. This was especially the case at the beginning of my research, but during the course of the research the number of Moroccan migrant-led co-development projects has grown remarkably. To some extent this is the result of a process of mobilisation on the part of Catalan actors. Interviews with Catalan development NGOs and agencies in 2004 revealed a concern with the lack of involvement by Moroccans which translated into concerted efforts among especially the Fons Català, the Pagesos Solidaris and various development NGOs. The main axes of mobilisation have been to spread information about co-development and increase the contacts and networking with and among Moroccan associations in Catalonia and with actors in their localities of origin. One of the earliest initiatives was the Xarxa Cornisa, a network of Catalan and Moroccan development NGOs already involved in development projects in Morocco. The overall objective of the network is to strengthen the connections among associations and local governments in Catalonia and Morocco, thus creating a platform for participatory development initiatives. This includes activities to foment the participation of Moroccans in Catalonia in development projects in Morocco because, as stated by Xarxa Cornisa, the Moroccan migrant collective ‘wants to participate but has all kinds of limitations to do so.’ To that end the network organised a series of seminars during 2004 where invited speakers from Morocco talked about issues of democracy, local development, environmental problems and gender in Morocco. They have also organised seminars on co-development specifically targeted at migrant associations in Catalonia.

Also, from around 2004, the Fons Català started to dedicate resources to the mobilisation of the Moroccan migrants in Catalonia. Generally, Fons Català aims to strengthen the relationship between migrant associations, municipalities and Catalan organisations, and co-development is seen as a highly relevant tool in that respect (Østergaard-Nielsen 2007). There has been a series of Jornadas de Sensibilización on co-development where migrant associations already involved in co-development projects recount their experience to the wider migrant groups in the municipality. Furthermore, the Fons Català has helped organise co-development courses in order to strengthen the capacity of migrants and migrant associations in formulating and running development projects.

The Moroccan migrant collective has received particular attention by the Fons Català. One of the key efforts has been to contract a Moroccan-origin co-development expert who has undertaken an impressive round of consultations with Moroccan migrants and associations all over Catalonia and supervised already
existing co-development projects. In his own account he has met with associations and more informal groups of people in order to listen to their ideas and identify matches with the profile of the development work of the Fons Català. Subsequently he has helped them formulate projects and facilitated contacts with the local administration or other local Catalan actors. The number of projects involving Moroccan migrants in the Fons Català database has tripled from 5 in 2004 to 15 in 2006. Indeed, again with the involvement of Fons Català, 12 of the Catalan-based Moroccan migrant associations which are the most visible in the co-development context met in spring 2007 in order to establish a network (XAMAC) that can help coordinate their development activities.

Between Enthusiasm and Scepticism: Perceptions of Co-Development Among Moroccan Migrants

As already indicated, there is a fair amount of interest and willingness to participate in decentralised development cooperation among Moroccan migrant associations in Catalonia. Criticism of the policy environment on co-development and the practices of local governments and development NGOs came up in interviews with Moroccan migrant associations, but not as an actual obstacle to participation. Instead co-development, understood as the idea of migrants doing decentralised, publicly funded development projects, is welcomed as a way of giving something back to the community of origin beyond remittances. Moreover, the growing public attention to and funding of projects patronised by migrants is felt as a recognition of their local and transnational resources and potential to contribute to local social change. No migrant interviewed subscribed outright to a notion of co-development being aimed at halting out-migration from the localities in which they are working. Instead it is formulated more carefully as being about giving people ‘back home’ the choice not to migrate by providing more opportunities and bettering the conditions where they are.

It is, however, important not to take for granted that migrants are by default interested in participating in co-development, although this is often implied in the Spanish and Catalan policy environment. Migration, as stated time and time again in interviews with Moroccan migrants, is an individual project that the migrant undertakes to safeguard the livelihood of his or her family. Thus, at this fairly early stage of understanding migrant transnational participation in projects of development, it is relevant to analyse further the reasons for not only the participation, but also the lack of participation of migrants and their associations. Some migrants’ reluctance and various types of obstacle mentioned in several interviews provide the negative side of the blueprint for the long-distance participation of Moroccan migrants, and may thus serve as a complementary to the growing research on instances of where Moroccan migrants do engage in processes of development in Morocco (de Haas 2005; Lacomba 2004; Lacroix 2005).
There are many reasons why Moroccans and other migrant groups do or do not participate in co-development projects involving Catalan actors. I will focus on three main issues pertaining to both the local and the transnational contexts of the migrants. First, the fairly concrete dimension of how co-development engagement among individual migrants and their associations is tied in with their process of integration, resources and know-how. Second, at the level of migrant associations, the question of the priorities in terms of the local and transnational agenda. Third, the question of political trust, i.e. the extent to which Moroccan migrant associations are mobilised or deterred by their perceptions of Moroccan public institutions and current processes of development and democratisation in Morocco.

**Lack of Time and Resources**

The most frequently mentioned (and least surprising) explanation among Moroccan interviewees is that, because Moroccan migration to Catalonia is relatively new, Moroccans lack the time, resources and know-how with which to engage in co-development projects. Tellingly, the projects identified in my research have been set up by migrants with a longer-term residence in Catalonia. This echoes findings from the growing number of studies showing that transnational civic and political engagement is largely an elite phenomena comprising educated, well-settled, integrated migrants who feel part of both their country of settlement and of origin (Guarnizo et al. 2003).

In one illustrative example from Santa Eulàlia, a neighbourhood in the municipality of Hospitalet, west of Barcelona, with a relatively long-standing and high immigration of Moroccans, a group of younger Moroccans, raised in Barcelona, wanted to mobilise the local Moroccan community in order to improve the roads in Beni Ahmed, close to Chefchaouen, from where a majority of the migrants originate. Their idea was to collect funding and ideas within the community, set up an association/working committee and approach the local authorities with a project. They started out well, in part because they linked up and collaborated with a Catalan development NGO that had already begun a project constructing local infirmaries for women and children in the zone. The activists went to the local associations and to the mosques to gain publicity and managed to collect some donations. The donations were, however, short of their expectations and moreover those who did contribute financially were not interested in participating in the organisation and implementation of the project. After the initial mobilisation phase, the organisation lost its energy and wider support. One representative of the association, when interviewed a year later, had still not given up hope to present the project. But she was no longer confident in mobilising a wider group of migrants. In her experience, the older and more established generation who had more time not interested in active participation, and the more-recently arrived younger migrants were interested but did not have the time. As she put it:
The problem is—the main problem is that the people who come here, who migrate, they come to work and to live. That is to say, they cannot take out hours from work in order to dedicate themselves to the association. They would very much like to, they are very, well they are very involved, but I cannot ask them that they give me two hours a day, for instance, if they go to work at 6 in the morning and return at 7 in the evening. They just have the time to prepare the dinner, sleep and then get up the next day and go to work (Interview, Barcelona, 2005).

Main Interest in Working on Immigrant Political Issues

Intertwined with the issue of resources is the extent to which the associations prioritise co-development with respect to local work on issues of migrant incorporation. There are plenty of problems to work on in that area, including helping recently arrived migrants with no papers and permits, confronting discrimination and labour market conditions, and debating the increasingly politicised issue of the role and place of Islam in Catalan public space (Østergaard-Nielsen and Moreras 2006). Moreover, there are other, more specialised, associations, such as those representing the Tamazigh-speaking Moroccans, working towards recognition of Amazigh cultural distinctiveness and rights. According to a recent survey of the Catalan Generalitat, Moroccans have a higher level of unemployment than other major migrant nationalities such as Ecuadorians and Romanians. Importantly, Moroccans feel more discriminated against than these other major groups and also complain about racism on the part of the Catalans (CEO 2006).

The way in which migrant associations prioritise their local and transnational engagement is the subject of a large and growing body of literature (Ehrkamp 2005; Faist 2000; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003b). These studies break with the idea of migrant associations being attached to the homeland only for as long as the migrants see themselves as abroad on a temporary basis. With settlement follows a growing concern with the situation in the country of residence, but the local immigrant political and transnational engagement is not mutually exclusive; they can coexist, even reinforce each other and are at times inseparable. That is to say, most recent studies concur that there is no dichotomy between either the local or the transnational or the immigrant political and the homeland political: the local work of associations is often embedded in the transnational context of networks, activities and orientation—and vice versa (Danese 1998; Levitt 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003c).

Only time (and further research) will tell to what extent there is a constructive dynamic between participation in co-development and local political incorporation of migrant associations. The Moroccan associations included in this research fall into three groups in terms of the nexus between co-development and local incorporation. First, there are the larger, more resourceful migrant associations, such as Ibn Batuta or ATIME-REMCODE, which have well-established links with the local administration and an infrastructure facilitating engagement in co-development projects. For instance, Ibn Batuta, the largest Moroccan migrant association in Catalonia, has a full-time employee engaged in soliciting and managing projects. Second, there are
some interesting examples of how smaller migrant associations, through their work on co-development, have strengthened their contacts with the local administration. For instance, Taroof Bi Salam, a Moroccan association in the municipality of Montcada i Reixac, outside Barcelona, has undertaken a co-development project on teaching basic literacy in northern Morocco. In the view of the association this has not only served to strengthen their ties with the local administration, but has also been an incentive to orientate themselves in the landscape of wider regional collaborators and sources of funding for new projects. The third group of migrant associations interviewed for this research has not entered into co-development activities with public funding. The combination of a finite amount of resources among the migrant associations and a large number of unresolved issues pertaining to the more recently arrived Moroccan migrants’ role and place in Catalan society has translated into a prioritisation of activities related to their process of settlement. In the view of these associational leaders, co-development projects can only be realised once the migrant political activities are up and running and the association has the surplus energy to engage in transnational activities of co-development.

Lack of Confidence in Moroccan Public Institutions (and Processes of Democratisation)

The final set of explanations, stated by Moroccans themselves (but also the majority of the Catalan NGOs interviewed), pertain to Moroccan migrants’ lack of trust in public institutions in Morocco and their perception of the scope for development and democratisation in Morocco. Moroccan migrants, apart from a small elite, lack a ‘culture of political participation’ and are often described as having a lack of experience with local and national democracy. Moreover, their mistrust in the political regime in Morocco and in the likelihood of political change leaves them with a feeling that they cannot make any real difference (see also Lacomba 2004). This latter set of explanations, however, raises more questions than it answers. Other studies of migrant civic and/or political transnationalism have linked the scope and extent of such activity to the migrants’ perception of the efficiency and representativity of the national regime in the country of origin. For instance, Guarnizo et al. (2003) conclude that migrants are more likely to engage in political transnational activities (including those aimed at local development) during processes of democratisation in the country of origin. However, in the case of Moroccans in Catalonia it is evident that any generalised statement on the relationship between Moroccan migrants’ perception and interpretation of the pace and scope of political change in Morocco at the national level and their level of engagement in local development would not do justice to the complex reality on the ground. Ambivalence between defensive patriotism and disappointment with economic and political development pervades the interviews. Moreover, the political situation in Morocco, in particular the extent to which a substantial and genuine process of democratisation and effort to promote development is taking place in recent years, is interpreted very differently by different members of the Moroccan
collective in Catalonia. Both negative interpretations (‘the changes are only on the surface and the real issues are not dealt with’) and positive interpretations (‘now is an historic moment, substantial reforms are already underway’) serve to mobilise or discourage transnational engagement. Democratisation and development are to some extent in the eye of the beholder and are not objective variables for use in the analysis of transnational civic mobilisation of Moroccan migrants.

Thus, it is difficult to establish any causal relationship between how Moroccan migrants perceive the political and economic state of affairs in Morocco and the extent to which they engage. Moreover, contrary to the findings of Guarnizo et al., mistrust in the political regime and (banking system) in Morocco can also serve to mobilise rather than deter engagement in local development projects. Leaders of Moroccan migrants’ associations engaged in co-development have emphasised that local-to-local development co-operation with Catalan funding is a welcome opportunity to bypass the Moroccan national regime which for long ignored the plight of the northern regions of Morocco such as the Rif and the Rif Oriental. As one migrant who is actually engaged in a project explained, they are sure that their efforts and money actually reach those who need it:

You know, in Catalonia 80 per cent are not Arabs . . . . they are from the Rif, from the Rif that I am from, but where are the remittances from the Rifan migrants? They are in Casablanca. Nothing is invested in the Rif. They are using our money as they see fit. So this [the project] is to denounce this. We are Rifans, we are from the Rif and we work for the Rif, right? (Interview, Mataró, 2005).

It is not known if the number of Moroccans from the northern region of the Rif actually amounts to 80 per cent of the migrant collective. Moreover, the often strained relationship between Rifans and Rabat and Casablanca is not necessarily representative for all Moroccan migrants in Catalonia. The fact that at least a majority of the Moroccans in Catalonia do originate in the rural areas of north Morocco is also used by associational leaders to explain the relative lack of more visible civil society links with their localities of origin. The Rif is a region with a much less active civil society than in, say, the south of Morocco, where civil society is described as vibrant and increasingly linked up with the outside world through transnational networks with migrant or other types of civil society association (Roque 2004).

Conclusions

This paper set out to analyse the interplay between the Catalan policy environment on co-development and how Moroccan migrants perceive and participate in such initiatives. The point of departure for my analysis was the assumption that, in the case of Moroccan migrants in Catalonia, there is a particular constellation of a relatively recent Moroccan migration and a fairly intense co-development environment in Catalonia—an environment wherein Moroccan migration has a high profile because of its intensity and scale, and the important role of this country in Spanish
(and increasingly Catalan) bilateral and multilateral relations across the Mediterranean. The fact that this is an emerging phenomenon limits the available empirical material and hence the scope of the conclusions. More studies comparing different political institutions across Spain and considering the processes of mobilisation of different migrant collectives are needed in order to advance our understanding of these processes. Yet at the same time it also provides an interesting venue for probing into several issues central to understanding the migrant–state relationship in a transnational optic.

Two issues are relevant to the understanding of the interaction between the Catalan policy environment and the reactions and perceptions on the part of Moroccan migrants. First, Moroccan migrants’ transnational engagements take place in a policy environment where the host-country actors engage in ‘top-down transnationalism’, seeking to mobilise the transnational resources of migrant associations. As described above, Catalan actors are interested in encouraging and supporting, even financing, migrant transnational civic engagement. Regional and local governments, NGOs and development agencies have reached out to the Moroccan migrant population in order to assess their potential for co-development collaboration and to strengthen their capacity to do so through courses and seminars. Indeed, during the course of the research, the extent of Moroccan migrant associations’ participation in publicly funded decentralised development cooperation has grown significantly, as associations become more aware of the opportunities and scope of co-development.

This scenario differs from that of France, for example, where other scholars have described how Moroccan migrant associations with a much longer trajectory have played a role as initiators of co-development activities and also tried to influence political and practical definitions of co-development (Lacroix 2007). Yet, I do not want to categorise the Catalan case as one whereby migrants, including those from Morocco, are simply implementing national, regional or local policies on migration and development. Publicly funded co-development projects do take place within the overall framework of Catalan or Spanish development assistance. The landscape of Moroccan migrant associations is heterogeneous and engagement varies, but Moroccan migrant leaders are largely positive about the idea of co-development as an opportunity to ‘give something back’. The majority of the associations interviewed expressed recognition of the complementarities and common goals among migrants, development NGOs and local governments. That said, the uniqueness of migrant participation and input is rendered as part of the core definition of co-development projects in a migration and development setting. It is therefore relevant to further scrutinise processes of agenda-setting and the pursuit of interests in order to discern to what extent the migrant ‘voice’ continues to be heard.

The second important issue is to further reflect on how Moroccan migrants’ participation in projects of co-development is related in their process of settlement in Catalonia. Arguably, the Catalan migration and development agenda is not just about development in the country of origin but also about encouraging and facilitating a
transnational civic-ness among migrant groups in Catalonia as part of local processes of settlement. Migrants are heralded not only as potential agents for change in their country of origin but also as important bridges promoting mutual understanding between the local populations in Catalonia and Morocco. Indeed, in some of the seminars I attended for this research project, migrants have been heralded as cosmopolitans whose outlook goes beyond their local or national environment. Yet, although Moroccan migrant associations in Catalonia are occasionally also linked up with wider Moroccan networks and civil society in either Europe or Morocco, most activities in the realm of co-development are translocal, bridging specific localities in Catalonia and Morocco.

In the case of Moroccans in Catalonia, their process of local incorporation and their prioritisation of migrant political issues bear an influence on their transnational participation in projects of co-development. A growing number of Moroccan migrants and migrant associations were participating in Catalan-funded co-development projects at the time of this research. Those not participating cite lack of time, resources and contacts and the fact that they prioritise using their often very limited resources on issues of migrant settlement rather than development of their locality of origin as important reasons for not ‘doing co-development’ at the moment. Following this, the most effective co-development policy might be a comprehensive policy of migrant incorporation. Thus, while the encouragement of a transnational collective engagement among migrants adds an important dimension to the Catalan notion of migrant incorporation, it is pertinent that policies of co-development go hand-in-hand with policies of integration securing the rights and well-being of Moroccans in Catalonia.

Notes

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[2] For a more detailed analysis of the various shifts and priorities in the formulation and implementation of Spanish and Catalan policy documents on both development cooperation (including the Plan Greco, the Plan Director de la Cooperación Española, 2005–08, and the Plan Africa 2006–08) and migration policies (including the Plan Estrategico de Ciudadania y Integración 2007–10 and the Plan de Ciudadania i Immigració 2005–08), see Østergaard-Nielsen (2009).


[5] Also, both Al Wafae and Ibn Batuta participate in the Solidarity Caravan, a project of shipping aid such as medicine, school material, clothes etc. to Morocco, Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania. This is a collaboration of between 15 and 20 NGOs that has run for a number of years now.

In 2007, the Fons Català was working with Moroccan associations, informal groups and local governments in 10 municipalities in Catalonia.

Indeed, Lacomba (2004) argues that, while the dynamic local associations in the southern province of Souss are born out of the interest of the local population, then the formation of Rifan associations are born out of their stimulation by international NGOs; that is, they are formed in order to be counterparts in projects of development (Lacomba 2004: 187).

References


