Personal values and entrepreneurial career location: The case of high-skilled immigrants from a developing country

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The purpose of this research is to analyze the influence of personal values on the reasons why high-skilled immigrants from developing countries are returning to their home countries for career development by creating a business instead of starting up in their host country. A case study methodology was used to understand the role of personal values. The cases studied had a migration experience from Colombia to Spain and decided to return to Colombia to create a business instead of remaining in Spain. This study reveals the role played by personal values of high-skilled immigrants in key decisions about their professional careers. The instrumental values security, independence, stability and wealth help immigrants to shape their idea of the adequate place to develop a career and to decide what kind of career they want to develop. The terminal values: community, family and true friendship were important components of the decision to return home. The findings help policy makers to understand more deeply the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in high-skilled immigrants group. This paper examines a new approach –personal values- to understand the entrepreneur’s decision of where to locate their entrepreneurial activity.

Key words: Personal values, high-skilled immigrants, entrepreneurship, career location, case studies.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, geographical mobility is one of the social phenomenons with a higher impact in European society. The total number of international migrants has increased over the last 10 years from an estimated 150 million in 2000 to 214 million persons (International Organization of Migration, 2011). At the same time, governments and multilateral institutions are aware that entrepreneurship has become more and more important as a vital tool to support and generate economic development and welfare in regions around the world (CEEDR, 2000). The high rate of new firms created by immigrants in many countries (Masurel et al., 2004) has encouraged policymakers and social theorists to study deeply the phenomenon of immigrant and ethnic minorities entrepreneurship (Levie, 2007; Fairchild, 2008). However, to understand immigrant entrepreneurship, we should recognize the diversity of the migrant group in areas such as culture and/or skills (Kloosterman, 2010).

In Europe, more high-skilled migrants from non-OECD countries are arriving (Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2010). Increasingly, institutions and policymakers are realizing the importance of attracting and retaining individuals with skills that improve the competitiveness of regions. This is reflected in the increasingly research that has gone deeper in this phenomenon in the last years (Syed, 2008; Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss and Syed, 2011). However, the literature has a tendency to ignore skilled immigrants from developing countries, reason why this topic is still unexplored (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010).

This new global and mobile society requires higher
levels of education and vocational training to meet the demands of tasks in an increasingly complex production system (Rifkin, 1996; Rahmati et al., 2011). Factors like personal and cultural values of immigrants will be taken into account by the entrepreneur to evaluate positive or negative aspects of different options and, in this case, choosing between staying in the host country to develop a career or going back home to do so (Dolan et al., 2006).

**Entrepreneurship as a career for high-skilled migrants**

Career behavior involves continuities of individual action based on occupations and organization, which provide both an opportunity for migration (Carr et al., 2005). Nevertheless, to understand immigrant entrepreneurship, we first should note the marked polarization with regard to their level of skill (Klooosterman, 2010). Despite the continuing presence of large numbers of low-skilled immigrants from developing countries in recent years, the number of high-skilled immigrants in developed countries has also risen sharply. In Europe, immigration policies such as the EU Blue Card aim to favor high-skilled migrants by facilitating entry, for residence and work, of high-skilled non-EU citizens into EU labor markets (Docquiera and Marfouk, 2004; Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2010). In this manner, Klooosterman (2010) argues that the opportunity structure model in Europe aims to address two significant changes, one in the supply side (that is, more high-skilled migrants from non-OECD countries) and the other in the demand side (that is, new opportunities arising due to the post-industrial transformation of urban economies). A new generation of ethnic entrepreneurs is emerging and this transformation is influencing the type of firms being created.

However, the context in the host country must be favorable, and it should allow immigrants to continue their career development in the host country. This requires that all agents are aware of the importance that new citizens have for their development, from leaders of public institutions to private organizations. For example, Zyl et al. (2011) highlight how determinant can be that managers from “first world” had cultural intelligence because it provides them with practical techniques for functioning effectively in any culture. Cultural intelligence is a person’s capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context (Early and Ang, 2003).

**Personal values**

In academic business research, the topic of personal values has usually been related to work. Rokeach (1973) defines values as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence”. We can find different levels of analysis, such as: country, group, and individual (Roe and Ester, 1999). In our research we will focus on the individual level, specifically in the values of the potential entrepreneur.

There are many theories that have tried to relate personal values and the motivational process in making certain decisions, for example, theories focused on expectancy for success, theories focused on task value or theories that integrate expectancies and values (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). In the latter group of theories, we found a modern expectancy value theory in which both the components of expectancy and value are more related to social/cultural determinants and are positively related to each other (Feather, 1988, 1995). Feather (1995) argued that values are one class of motives that lead individuals to perform acts they think should be done and assumed that values function like needs to influence goal-directed behaviour. This can influence the choices that are made between alternative activities and the way situations are constructed.

Rokeach (1973) divided individual values into two sets: terminal and instrumental. Terminal values are existential objectives, which are end states of existence or ultimate modes of living what has been idealized as “the good life”. Instrumental values are those values that represent the necessary way of acting to get existential values. There are some personal values that clearly point to what kinds of behaviors or situations they are relevant to (e.g. money or good friends), but there are other values that are a little more diffuse, such as a meaningful life or work (Elizur and Sagie, 1999). Most researchers seem to assume that work values are somehow derived from general values, even though they are not very explicit about the causal nature of this process. In some cultures, work values could be a source from which general values arise, for example in multinational corporations (Schwartz, 1999).

Some studies have tried to prove the relationship between the personal values and the satisfaction feeling or the motivation in the workplace; for example, Yilmaz (2011) found a relationship between personal values and the feeling of teacher’s loneliness. This author found a relationship between the social companionship dimension and the tendency of feeling loneliness. This work reveals how values can influence the worker positive or negative feeling about the environment.

Despite this, little research has been done in terms of the influence of entrepreneurs’ personal values when choosing the place to set-up a business as a career development option. This research is focus on those values that can influence an entrepreneur’s choice of a place to develop their career (Table 1). Firstly, referring to terminal values, the importance and significance of the values, such as, true friendship, family and community in
Individual values that influence the choice of a place to develop a career

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<th>Terminal values</th>
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Source: Adapted from Rockeach (1973).

Spain as a host country for highly skilled entrepreneurs

Non-EU nationals must obtain a work permit in order to work in Spain. Colombians who are direct employees of a Spanish company may be granted work permits. In Spain and, in general, in Europe, specific provisions apply to entrepreneurs, researchers, academics, and very high-skilled workers (Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2010). Although Spanish legal system has some faster channels to recruit high-skill immigrants, it is not a favorable environment to attract talent at all. Therefore, the company cannot be small and the new employee has to be hired in a management position. Moreover, the permit is only for a short time. This legal system is not as flexible as in other European countries like The United Kingdom. Despite this, Spain has received an increasing number of highly skilled immigrants in the last years. In 2005, the 20.58% of natives had a high education and 21.33% of immigrants had it (Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2010).

In Spain, Colombians represent one of the largest immigrant groups. Nowadays, it is the third largest developing country nationality, after Morocco and Ecuador. Regarding permits for students, in 2009, Spain issues close to 5,000 licenses for Colombians, and Catalonia was the region in Spain that authorized more permits, a total of 1,763 (Spanish Secretary of Immigration and Emigration, 2011).

In particular, Barcelona Metropolitan Region is considered a dynamic European economic area and is setting in motion a wide range of policies aimed at promoting innovation and creativity. Moreover, the image of Barcelona as a welcoming and tolerant place and the weight of its cultural assets would seem to attract knowledge workers to develop their careers in this region (Pareja-Eastaway et al., 2008).

The purpose of this study is to understand how personal values can influence the decision process of high-skilled immigrants from a developing country (specifically, Colombia) to return to their home country to develop their entrepreneurial career instead of starting up in a European country such as Spain.

METHODOLOGY

Keeping in mind the main goal of this study, we applied a qualitative research model to examine the influence of personal values on the decision-making of Colombian graduates when associating the chance to develop a career as an entrepreneur (understood as one who creates a business) with the opportunities presented by migration. The migratory relationship between Spain and Colombia is not new. Spain is the first non-American destination for emigration of Colombians and the second OECD country after the USA (International Organization of Migration, 2011).

The case study model is recommended in qualitative research when the social and personal context is relevant to understanding and interpreting phenomena (Newman, 1994; Yin, 1989). Using case studies to analyze and explain career experiences has become increasingly accepted in the literature (Syed and Pio, 2010; Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010). In particular, we find studies analyzing the return of immigrants to their home country (Cerase, 1974). In this research, Cerase classifies the reasons for returning from the United States to Southern Italy and one of them is need of innovation which assumes that individuals could have acted as a carrier of social change. In this manner, Iredale and Guo (2001) studied the desire of an individual to fully explore their professional knowledge and skills in their community of origin (Iredale and Guo, 2001) using case studies.

Of significance, the case study model selects not a representative sample of the population but a theoretical one. As “the appropriate number of cases depends on existing knowledge, topics and information that may be obtained through the incorporation of additional case studies” (Eisenhardt, 1991), the selection process began with the contact of Colombian Master students in Entrepreneurship at Catalan Public Universities and with students from Entrepreneurship programs in Colombia that had emigrated to Spain. In the second stage of the process, 10 individuals were contacted and informally interviewed with the intention of obtaining additional information about their entrepreneurial intentions. The three cases selected were those individuals that were already involved in their entrepreneurial activities (legal formalities, contacts with customers, etc). The other seven individuals not included in the analysis were no firmly committed to setting up businesses. In the group of individuals not included in the analysis, two of them were women but both of them...
were already studying and working for a company at part time.

The three case studies shared the following characteristics: (a) all were migrants from Colombia (Bogotá) to Spain (Catalonia); (b) all were university graduates (in business administration or engineering) when they left their country of origin; (c) all had university education (undergraduate or postgraduate) in entrepreneurship; (d) all were involved in an enterprise creation process; and (e) all finally decided to refuse to set up their business in Spain and decided to do so in Colombia. The three of them received their undergraduate education in Colombia (Bogotá). Case A and B received postgraduate entrepreneurship education in Spanish universities and Case C received undergraduate entrepreneurship education in a Colombian university.

The data was obtained using semi-structured interviews with open, in-depth questions. The questions centered on four main areas: (1) their main reasons for emigrating, (2) their expectations related to their professional and social lives in the host country before emigrating, (3) their current expectations related to their professional career in their home country, and (4) the main reason for leaving Spain and returning to Colombia to create their business. All of these questions were open-ended and no answer categories were induced.

**ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDIES**

In the analysis of these three cases, we focus on how the entrepreneurs’ personal values influenced: first, their expectations of a good place to create a business and develop a career; and second, the decision of leaving their host country and making their way back home.

**Values that originated migration**

We conduct this analysis with the assumption that values are “strategic learning relatively stable about a way of acting that is better than the opposite to obtain goals or to make things go well” (Dolan et al., 2006).

**Case A**

Participant A is 28 years old and was born in Bogotá, Colombia. He is an electronics engineer who lived in Barcelona, Spain for one year. He migrated to Spain in order to study a Master of the Creation and Management of Innovative and Technology-based Enterprises at a public university, and then he intends to create his own enterprise.

Participant A’s main motivation for immigrating was to expand his formal and informal learning. Although his initial reason for immigrating was to pursue a university master’s degree, he also desired to get to know other cultures and lifestyles. He considered both types of experience equally important.

In the same way, the terminal value, community, played an important role in his decision to migrate. In 1985, Bachrach and Zautra used a scale to measure the sense of community that individuals had, including items like satisfaction with the community and agreement with the values and beliefs of the community. Participant A mentioned among his reasons to move from Colombia was a sense of disappointment with some aspects in his home community.

“I did not agree with the behavior of citizens in my country. I thought that many things could be made better, especially from a professional point of view”.

However, the same terminal value was a trigger to decide to move back home after one year. As we mentioned before, integration into the host community is a key factor for immigrants’ choice to stay or return home. When the socio-political context in the host country does not make things easier, the option of going back home, where immigrants have a strong sense of belonging to a community becomes stronger. Legislation and the knowledge of how things work are fundamental aspects of the process of integration into a new community; integration that Participant A never fully achieved. Once he completed his master’s and after encountering little success after several months of trying to develop his entrepreneurial project in Barcelona, he decided to return to Colombia to develop his idea there.

“To create an enterprise in Spain, you have to have a work permit, a requirement that we postgraduate students cannot meet”.

“Banks request collateral (property or family backup) but do not accept them if they do not belong to the European Union.”

“I tried but I could not succeed; I could not continue in Spain, missing the opportunity to start”.

The terminal values: family and true friendship, also influenced Participant A’s decision to go back and develop a career as an entrepreneur in their home country. When asked about what he missed the most and what was the most difficult for him to leave back when he decided to migrate, the answer was immediate: “…family, relationships, friends, food and the kindness of people”.

Instrumental values also influenced both processes (migration away from and returning to his home country). On the one hand, the value, exploitation, helped to make the decision to migrate. Participant A hoped to acquire technological and business-related knowledge in Spain that would be useful for his professional career. He also looked forward to meeting with people from different countries and with different lifestyles, something that he saw as a personally enriching experience.

The instrumental value, independence, made clear for him the idea of starting his own business, and he never thought about entering the labor market in Spain.

“…to complete my graduate studies and start my own business in Spain”.

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Table 2. Personal values that influenced case A to return to his home country.

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"...independence is one of the main advantages I have here in Spain".

Wrapping up Case A, we found that personal values (terminal and instrumental) strongly influenced the decision of choosing the home country to develop a career as an entrepreneur over the host country (Table 2).

Case B

Participant B is 34 years old and was born in Bogotá, Colombia. He is a chemical engineer who lived in Barcelona, Spain for 16 months. He is an entrepreneur with a firm in the Technology and Communications sector in Colombia.

We find in the instrumental value, stability, his main motivation for migrating to Spain. He decided to move to Spain when his wife enrolled herself in a Ph. D. program.

"I came for many reasons, the first being to be with my wife during her doctorate studies. It was important for me to be with her."

He also considered the possibility of expanding his Colombian business in Spain or even creating a new one. For this reason he decided to study a Master of Enterprise Creation and Management at a public university.

In regards to the instrumental value, independence, he expected to get to know the new culture and to discover new ways of doing things and conducting business. From a professional point of view, Participant B expected to see his company grow in Spain or to create a new business but never to become an employee.

"It was never my intention to enter the labor market as an employee, but I hoped to create an enterprise abroad, either as an expansion of the one I had in Colombia or as a new business opportunity".

As for Case B, although he initially intended to create a new business in Spain, his enterprise is restricted to Colombia. He is still unable to overcome the legal barrier of the work permit and he emphasizes the strong cultural differences. In this case as well, adaptation to the community was an obstacle to remain in Spain and to develop a career in this country.

"It is not easy to create an enterprise in Spain. Spain does not have an entrepreneurial culture. There is no risk culture; in Colombia we take more risks and that helps us to create in all senses. Culturally, we have been taught to "push ahead" and that is essential to create an enterprise."

After one and a half years, he thinks that the circumstances in Spain are unsuitable for expanding his market and developing a career.

"The entrepreneurial ecosystem is much more favorable in Colombia than in Spain; it is a much easier process".

Despite all of this, he has not given up on the idea of creating his enterprise, and he is presently working on a new project to establish business ties between Spain and Colombia through an e-commerce platform for the service sector.

When Participant B was questioned about what he missed the most and what was difficult for him to leave back in Colombia when he migrated, he answered:

"...definitely my group of friends and my family... I miss the place I used to hang out with them... here you have to start over again and it takes a long time". Table 3 shows the instrumental and terminal values analyzed for case B.

Case C

Participant C is 37 years old and was born in Bogotá, Colombia. He studied Business Administration in Colombia and lived in Lerida, Spain for ten years. During this period, he gained plenty of work experience in the construction-related services sector and worked in various companies in the industry.

His mains reasons for migrating were related to instrumental values like security and wealth; he went to Spain with his family in search of better professional and personal development opportunities.

Participant C had high expectations related to the opportunities to learn from people with different lifestyles and experiences. He was the only participant who had not intended to create a company before migrating. He expected to develop professionally inside a firm and to
Table 3. Personal values that influenced case B to return to his home country.

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<th>Case B</th>
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<td>Terminal values</td>
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Table 4. Personal values that influenced case C to return to his home country.

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<td>Terminal values</td>
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obtain promotion to positions of responsibility where he could pursue learning.

"Sincerely, I was excited by the possibility of meeting people with life experiences different from mine".

"What I was really expecting was a good professional involvement in a company in Spain".

Case C obtained both a work permit and nationality after living in the host country for ten years, and so his legal status was not a problem. The obstacles he noted to creating a company were the high cost of the infrastructure required, which made it more attractive to invest in Colombia, the higher level of competition in Spain, and market saturation. Because of this, the Colombian market offers greater growth opportunities.

After living in Spain for almost ten years and gaining plenty of work experience in the construction-related services sector, he decided to return to Colombia to develop a career creating a firm that trades European construction products (floors, faucets, and hydraulic systems).

"In the current situation, it is much easier to start a business in Colombia than abroad, mainly due to infrastructure costs".

When Participant C was questioned about what he missed the most and what was difficult for him to leave back in Colombia when he migrated, he simply answered: "...human warmth".

Finally, it is important to highlight a difference of this case compared with the other two. Lerida is a much smaller city compared to Barcelona, with 1,300,000 inhabitants less. Moreover, Barcelona has a more favorable ecosystem for the generation and development of new technology companies (technology parks, institutions for financial and legal support, etc). This factor could influence the fact that after 10 years of living in Catalonia, he did not find the supportive environment to create his company. Table 4 shows the personal values that influence case C to return to his home country.

DISCUSSION

This paper has studied the cases of three high-skilled immigrants who decided to go back to their home country to develop an entrepreneurial career instead of remaining in the country they had migrated to. The research seeks to understand the influence of personal values on the reason why they decided to move back home to continue their professional career.

The personal values of entrepreneurs play a fundamental role both at the moment of expectancy creation for migrating and the moment of deciding on a place to develop a career. On the one hand, the instrumental values, that is, security, independence, stability and wealth help immigrants to shape their idea of the adequate place to develop a career and to decide what kind of career they want to develop – entrepreneurship in these cases. On the other hand, the terminal values such as community, family and true friendship were important components of the decision to return home. In some cultures like in Colombia, the sense of belonging to a community and the sense of proximity with friends and family are important issues to take into account as a negative point when exploring the option of leaving your home country and a positive point that reinforces the decision to go back there.

Moreover, the participants in the study found important institutional barriers in order to develop their professional careers as entrepreneurs, especially legal. They had awareness of their knowledge and believe they were able to develop their entrepreneurial career despite of the contextual difficulties. The importance that the participants gave to certain personal values like community or friendship will finish determines that the best option was
continuing their professional development in their home country.

These results are consistent with those found by other authors in the field. In this line, Al Ariss and Özbilgin (2010) reveals in their interviews with policymakers in France, that institutional mechanisms such as policy interventions do not currently offer appropriate support for non-EU skilled immigrants. In this sense, Carr et al. (2005) assume the presence of career frustration and talent waste between immigrants with high skills. In many occasions, organizations and institutions are not able to fairly value the education and professional experience of immigrants.

Certain practical and social implications can be derived from this research. Many host countries in Europe (Spain included) are wasting the chance to benefit from this knowledge and talent through entrepreneurial activity. One of the findings in this study reveals that immigrants decide to develop a career in their host country instead of remaining in their host country due to the lack of sense of belonging to a community. It would be impossible for governments of the host countries to replicate the home communities of immigrants, but it could be possible to improve the legislation to facilitate the access of immigrants to benefits and opportunities that only native citizens have financing, residence status, permits, etc; in this way avoiding the feeling of rejection and the lack of opportunities that high-skilled immigrants experience.

At the same time, home countries like Colombia have identified entrepreneurship as a new alternative for encouraging high-skilled emigrants to return. Colombia has launched specific programs aimed at these emigrants, offering technical and financial support to help them create their companies.

Although the findings of this study are relevant, some limitations should be noted. Despite the difficulty of finding cases, the number of cases should be increased as well in order to ensure that the presence of certain personal values is not particular and unique to cultural components of Colombian society. This study has provided the groundwork for further research on the important role that personal values play in the process of creating a new venture, particularly on entrepreneur’s decisions. In addition, the fit between immigrants’ knowledge and the knowledge required in the host country would be a future topic of research as well. It would be also interesting to replicate this study in different countries to compare the differences in entrepreneur’s personal values.

REFERENCES


