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PREDICTORS

of intercultural capital embodiment in contemporary Mexico

PREDICTORES DE INCORPORACIÓN DE CAPITAL INTERCULTURAL EN EL MÉXICO CONTEMPORÁNEO

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ABSTRACT

Based on a nationally representative survey of 1,200 Mexicans aged 15 and older, the present article sets out to predict whether or not respondents possess intercultural capital in form of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad. The corresponding logistic regression model reveals a panorama of striking differences in the likelihood of intercultural capital embodiment – between receivers and non-receivers of formal education, between the economically affluent and non-affluent, between internet users and non-users, and between men and women. The respective findings offer an empirically grounded critique of voluntarist notions of personal intercultural development. Most importantly perhaps, they raise the question as to how and for how long Mexico and other multicultural countries can afford to exclude important parts of their respective populations from the acquisition of intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, and time spent abroad.

Keywords: Bourdieu, inequalities, intercultural capital, national survey.

RESUMEN

Basado en una encuesta representativa a nivel nacional realizada a 1,200 mexicanos de 15 años de edad en adelante, el presente artículo pretende predecir si los encuestados poseen o no capital intercultural en forma de habilidades para adquirir idiomas extranjeros, amistad con extranjeros, o estancia en el extranjero. El correspondiente modelo de regresión logística revela un panorama de notables diferencias respecto a la posibilidad de incorporación de capital intercultural – entre quienes gozan y quienes no gozan de educación formal, entre quienes son económicamente afluentes y quienes no lo son, entre usuarios y no usuarios de internet, y entre hombres y mujeres. Los respectivos resultados ofrecen una crítica empíricamente fundamentada de las nociones voluntaristas de desarrollo intercultural personal. Quizás lo más importante es que tales hallazgos plantean la pregunta de cómo y por cuánto tiempo más México y otros países multiculturales podrán seguir dejando a partes importantes de sus poblaciones sin la posibilidad de adquirir capital intercultural en términos de habilidades en idiomas extranjeros, amistad con extranjeros, y tiempo vivido en el extranjero

Palabras clave: Bourdieu, desigualdades, capital intercultural, encuesta nacional.

INTRODUCTION

The extent to which people (are able to) realize intercultural capital in today's globally interconnected multicultural societies can have important individual, inter-personal, and social implications (Pöllmann 2009, 2010). The full realization of intercultural capital involves three important dimensions: awareness, acquisition, and application (Pöllmann 2013). In the present article, we take a closer look at different empirical varieties of acquired intercultural capital, to which – inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's notion of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) – we will mostly refer to as people's *embodied intercultural capital*, or simply as their *intercultural capital*.

The embodiment of intercultural capital implies a certain degree of personal intercultural involvement such as in the course of overseas travel, in the context of foreign language learning, or in form of intercultural friendships. In one way or another, they may “interrupt” both long-accustomed practical sense and taken-for-granted ways of being reflexive, possibly stimulating new forms of reflexive intercultural awareness and a renewed feel for the intercultural game (Pöllmann, 2016). Yet, if we acknowledge the fact that not everybody is equally likely to acquire intercultural capital (Pöllmann, 2009, 2013), we need to take a closer look at people's personal characteristics and life circumstances. Such critical scrutiny is of particular importance in national contexts where systematic socio-cultural inequalities constitute the norm rather than the exception – as in the case of contemporary Mexico (Krozer & Moreno-Brid, 2014; Morton 2013; Navarrete 2016) on which we will focus in the course of this article.

It needs to be noted first that, for many years, large-scale empirical evidence on intercultural capital embodiment was unavailable in Mexico. This situation began to change in autumn 2014, when the National Autonomous University of Mexico initiated a major multi-disciplinary research project known as *Los Mexicanos Vistos por Sí Mismos: Los Grandes Temas Nacionales* (Flores & Morales Mena, 2015). The project consisted of 25 nationally representative surveys on topics of high sociocultural pertinence¹, each of which involved a sample of 1,200 Mexicans aged 15 and older who were selected following a process of stepwise cluster sampling.

1 The resulting collection of research monographs addresses issues of poverty; economy and employment; indigenous Mexicans; health; children and youth; family; gender; aging; migration; globalization; identity and values; religion, secularization, and secularism; housing conditions; mobility and transport; public security; federalism; political culture; corruption and culture of legality; justice; the environment; science and technology; education; human rights; and culture, reading, and sport.

The present contribution draws on data from the *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte*, whose descriptive results appeared in book form on August 25th 2015 under the title *Cultura, Lectura y Deporte: Percepciones, Prácticas, Aprendizaje y Capital Intercultural* (Pöllmann & Sánchez Graillet, 2015) and were subsequently made available on the project's website. The respective online resources include open access to a digital version of the book, information on the research methodology, as well as the possibility to download the respective questionnaire and data files for critical inspection and independent secondary analyses.

At the descriptive level, the *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* reveals that the large majority of respondents have never lived abroad, do not have any friends who are foreigners, and are unable to converse or read in any foreign language – albeit at a basic level (Pöllmann & Sánchez Graillet, 2015). However, if we take a closer look at the respective empirical indicators of intercultural capital embodiment, we find important variations by people's gender, age, level of formal education, internet use, perceived economic situation, and the size of their place of residence. This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the explanatory impact of these variables and, by extension, to a critical engagement with ontological levels about the potentials and capacities of rational, reflexive, interactive, critical, innovative and entrepreneurial individuals.

As noble and desirable as such voluntarist notions of personal intercultural development might sound, they ultimately fail to recognize the existence of extra-individual forces that mediate or influence the actual operative possibilities of people's creativity, initiative, self-determination and will power (Pöllmann, 2016). Even if this lack of recognition tends to occur as the by-product of a certain naïve benevolent intercultural enthusiasm – rather than in the shape of an explicitly elitist global corporate identity – taking the global spread of *homo interculturalis* for granted ultimately contributes to the perpetuation of unequal and unjust processes of intercultural development (Pöllmann, 2017).

DEVELOPMENT

The *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* contains a number of operational measures for the possession of embodied intercultural capital – three of which are of particular interest in the context of the present article. The first documents whether or not respondents consider themselves capable of engaging in a basic conversation in any foreign language. The second accounts for the existence

or absence of any personal friendships with foreigners. The third provides ordinal-scaled information about the time spent abroad (i.e., “none”, “less than one year”, “between one and three years”, or “four years or more”).

The relative low levels of intercultural capital embodiment observed in each of these three operational measures led to the necessity of computing a more basic indicator of embodied intercultural capital that would subsequently allow for a meaningful multivariate statistical analysis. Therefore, all those respondents who reported no time spent abroad, no foreign language skills whatsoever, and no friendships with foreigners at all classify as not having acquired intercultural capital. All other respondents who answered affirmatively in relation to at least one of the three original operational measures count as possessors of intercultural capital.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentages of respondents with and without intercultural capital – in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad – as well as the proportionate share of missing cases (which will be excluded from the later multivariate analysis).

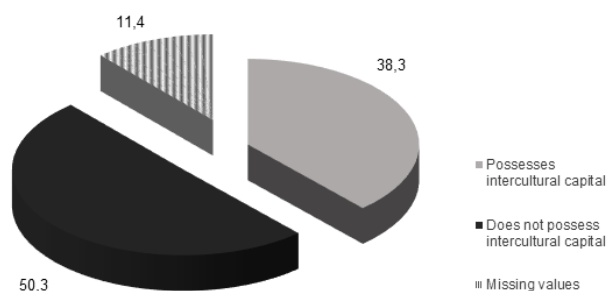


Figure 1. Distribution of intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad; in percent of 1,200 unweighted cases

This new indicator for the possession of embodied intercultural capital will serve as the outcome variable in our binary logistic regression model with six predictor variables.

In what follows, we take a closer look at our predictive model. We then present the results of our multivariate statistical analysis, with the aim to illustrate who is more likely to count as having foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad. The article concludes by highlighting important implications and limitations, as well as suggestions for further research on intercultural capital embodiment in Mexico and elsewhere.

Predictors of intercultural capital embodiment

As previously noted, the *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* reveals important variations in intercultural capital embodiment in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad, depending on respondents' gender, age, level of formal education, internet use, perceived economic situation, and the size of their place of residence. Our binary logistic regression model will include the respective variables as predictors of individual-level intercultural capital embodiment – on the one hand, to acknowledge their impact in the corresponding bivariate exploratory analyses (Pöllmann & Sánchez Graillet, 2015) and, on the other hand, due to their theoretical and empirical relevance more generally.

A great number of research projects demonstrate the explanatory impact of people's economic, cultural, and social capital on their lives in various local, regional, national, and transnational fields. In contrast to our explanatory variables gender, age, and size of place of residence, the range of potential operationalisations for the respective capital variables can be complex and confusing. The following paragraphs shall therefore serve to make explicit our particular operational approach for the purposes of the present article.

Earlier work on socioeconomic contingencies in the acquisition of embodied intercultural capital has identified ‘the danger of excluding those students who would benefit most from intercultural training and intercultural experiences – those whose families can not afford to travel the world or to pay for private language teachers’ (Pöllmann, 2009). Given the importance of economic capital, the *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* contains ratio-scaled empirical indicators of respondents' individual income as well as the income of the household of which they form a part. However, due to a large number of missing values on these potential operational measures for economic capital, preference was given to a third variable that provides information on respondents' ordinal-scaled *perceptions* of their personal economic situation.

As is the case with all forms of cultural capital, the full realization of intercultural capital depends to an important extent on (processes of) recognition, valuation, and certification in and through institutions of formal education. In fact, acts of educational institutionalization and accreditation can substantially enhance or diminish the relative “exchange value” and symbolic power of different empirical varieties of individually embodied intercultural capital. To account for the particular symbolic power of scholarly degrees and certificates, our multivariate statistical analysis will include an ordinal-scaled indicator of respondents'

level of formal education (i.e., “none”, “primary”, “secondary”, “preparatory or baccalaureate”, or “university”).

Empirical varieties of social capital include a diverse range of interpersonal and social relationships, networks, and connections that increasingly operate via digital communication services and resources (Ellison, et al., 2011; Hess, 2013; Loader, et al., 2015; Spitz, 2013). The *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* includes a binary variable on respondents’ internet use, which, for the purposes of the present article, shall be regarded as a proxy for their access to mediated social capital. The *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* includes a binary variable on respondents’ internet use, which, for the purposes of the present article, shall be regarded as a proxy for their access to mediated social capital. Table 1 provides an overview of the latter and all other variables in the model, together with the associated numerical codes and the empirically obtained proportional share of each of the respective answer categories (i.e., in percent of valid observations rounded to the first decimal place).

Age	18.8 % “from 15 to 24 years” (1) 22.9 % “from 25 to 34 years” (2) 24.9 % “from 35 to 44 years” (3) 14.7 % “from 45 to 54 years” (4) 18.7 % “55 years and more” (5)
Size of place of residence	52.0 % “from 1 to 2,499 inhabitants” (1) 18.0 % “from 2,500 to 14,999 inhabitants” (2) 18.0 % “from 15,000 to 99,999 inhabitants” (3) 12.0 % “100,000 and more inhabitants” (4)

If we take our proxy for people’s access to mediated social capital as an example, we find that the 52.3 percent of respondents who use the internet received a numerical code of “1”, whilst the 47.7 percent of respondents who do not use it received a numerical code of “0”. A similar revision of the other variables listed in table 1 can help us prepare for the subsequent multivariate statistical analysis, where we will attempt to answer the question as to who is more likely to count as having intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad.

Table 1. Specification of binary logistic regression model.

OUTCOME VARIABLE	
Intercultural capital	56.8 % “no intercultural capital possession” (0) 43.2 % “intercultural capital possession” (1)
PREDICTOR VARIABLES	
Perceived economic situation	9.0 % “very bad” (1) 26.5 % “bad” (2) 47.0 % “regular” (3) 14.0 % “good” (4) 3.5 % “very good” (5)
Level of formal education	11.8 % “none” (0) 14.3 % “primary” (1) 32.0 % “secondary” (2) 28.9 % “preparatory or baccalaureate” (3) 13.1 % “university” (4)
Internet use	47.7 % “no” (0) 52.3 % “yes” (1)
Gender	49.7 % “female” (1) 50.3 % “male” (2)

Multivariate analysis: who is more likely to count as having intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad?

Prior to presenting the results of our binary logistic regression analysis, it is important to note that the specified model did not violate any of the relevant mathematical assumptions (i.e., sufficiently large sample size; independence of error terms; linear relationship between the logits of the respective predictor variables and the outcome variable; no multicollinearity). A clearly non-statistically significant Hosmer and Lemeshow test provided some additional reassurance as to a good overall model fit. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that our model increased the percentage of correctly classified outcomes from 56.8 percent (i.e., when the constant only is taken into account) to 69.9 percent when the six predictor variables: perceived economic situation, level of formal education, internet use, gender, age, and size of place of residence are entered simultaneously.

Looking at table 2, beginning on the left-hand-side, the first column of results contains the B coefficients for all predictor variables and the associated constant (i.e., the expected value of log-odds of intercultural capital possession when all predictor variables equal zero). In the next column, we find information on the standard errors of our respective B coefficients, which allow for the computation of confidence intervals for our parameter estimates. The following column details the associated Wald Chi-Square tests, which examine the statistical significance of the respective B coefficients and the unique contribution of each

individual predictor variable within the context of all other predictor variables. Finally, and most interestingly from an interpretive point of view, the right-hand-side column provides information on the exponentiations of the respective B coefficients – better known as odds ratios.

Table 2. Results of binary logistic regression analysis of intercultural capital possession.

	B	Standard Error	Wald Test	Exp(B)
Perceived economic situation	.292	.083	12.405***	1.339
Level of formal education	.486	.080	36.574***	1.626
Internet use	.700	.169	17.105***	2.014
Gender	.527	.140	14.171***	1.694
Age	.019	.059	.100	1.019
Size of place of residence	-.164	.069	5.759*	.848
Constant	-3.145	.432	53.039***	.043

Note (1): Analysis based on 1,057 valid (unweighted) cases

Note (2): All variables entered simultaneously

*** Statistically significant at the .001 level

* Statistically significant at the .05 level

As the respective Wald Chi-Square test statistics (all with one degree of freedom) indicate, the B coefficients for respondents' economic situation, their level of formal education, and their internet use are all statistically significant at the .001 level. Regarding the other three variables, we find the B coefficient for respondents' gender to be statistically significant at the .001 level and the B coefficient for the size of their place of residence statistically significant at the .05 level. The B coefficient for respondents' age (i.e., in five categories), on the other hand, is not statistically significant.

The respective odds ratios provide intuitively comprehensible measures of the relative explanatory impact of our predictor variables. In the context of our model, they

represent the factor by which the likelihood of possessing intercultural capital increases for every one unit change on a given predictor variable. Thus, we observe that the odds of intercultural capital possession are twice as high amongst respondents who use the internet as opposed to those who do not use it. In a similar vein, we can state that for every higher level of formal education, the odds of intercultural capital possession increase by a factor of approximately 1.6. The way in which respondents perceive their economic situation appears to have a comparatively less powerful explanatory impact on the odds of intercultural capital possession. Regarding respondents' gender, it is worth noting that being male, as opposed to female, increases the odds of intercultural capital possession by a factor of approximately 1.7.

Table 3 offers another illustration as to how female and male respondents' economic situation, level of formal education, and internet use influence the likelihood of whether or not they possess intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad. Instead of odds ratios, we are now looking at predicted probabilities, which can range from "0" (i.e., intercultural capital possession is not likely at all) to "1" (i.e., intercultural capital possession is perfectly likely), considering the examples of five real respondents aged 55 years or older and with residence in a locality with up to 2499 inhabitants.

Table 3. Predicted probabilities of intercultural capital possession for five respondents aged 55 years or older and with residence in a locality with up to 2499 inhabitants.

	Economic situation	Formal education	Internet use	Gender	Predicted probability
Respondent A	Very good	University	Yes	Male	.87
Respondent B	Good	University	Yes	Female	.70
Respondent C	Very bad	Secondary	Yes	Male	.45
Respondent D	Regular	Secondary	No	Female	.30
Respondent E	Very bad	None	No	Female	.08

Note (1): Based on real data from five selected respondents

Note (2): Predicted probabilities can range from “0” (i.e., not likely at all) to “1” (i.e., perfectly likely)

For instance, comparing the two “extreme examples” – that is respondents A and E – gives us a particularly striking idea of how drastic the respective predicted probabilities may vary. Concretely, our binary logistic regression model estimates the predicted probability of intercultural capital possession for respondent A, who classified his economic situation as “very good”, studied up to university level, and uses the internet, at .87. In stark contrast, the predicted probability of intercultural capital possession for respondent E, who classified her economic situation as “very bad”, has not obtained any formal education, and does not use the internet, corresponds to .08 only.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on a recent nationally representative survey of 1,200 Mexicans aged 15 and older, the present article set out to predict whether respondents count as having intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad. The focus lied on examining the influence of their perceived economic situation, level of formal education, and internet use, as well as their gender, age, and the size of their place of residence. As we have seen, the corresponding binary logistic regression model revealed a strongly statistically significant impact of respondents’ economic situation, their level of formal education, their internet use, as well as important variations by gender.

It is, of course, necessary to consider some of the most important limitations and implications of the present contribution. To begin with, our binary outcome variable was limited to intercultural capital acquisition in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, and time spent abroad. In future research, it would be interesting to explore potential predictors of embodied intercultural capital in terms of people’s experiences with one or more of Mexico’s indigenous cultures, which – according to the *Encuesta Nacional de Cultura, Lectura y Deporte* – are strikingly rare. As a case in point, the corresponding empirical data indicate that more than nine out of ten respondents consider themselves as unable to have a basic conversation, or to read a basic text, in any of the country’s pre-Columbian languages (Pöllmann & Sánchez Graillet, 2015).

Moreover, as much as future research could benefit substantially from an in-depth exploration of intercultural capital embodiment in Mexico’s diverse sociocultural groups and communities, it could be usefully expanded beyond the national territory. In other words, whilst the present

article draws on data provided by Mexicans who were physically available at their Mexican residence at the time of the survey’s implementation, it would also be interesting to learn about different types and processes of intercultural capital embodiment from the perspective of Mexicans abroad – particularly in the USA and Canada.

In addition, it is worth noting that the set of predictor variables employed in the course of our multivariate data analysis has its limitations in terms of both analytic depth and breadth. The binary variable *internet use*, for example, which featured as a proxy for people’s access to mediated social capital, might alternatively be combined with (or replaced by) more elaborated operationalisations. That said, each of the selected operational measures were the best possible available choice – as was especially the case when preferring an ordinal-scaled measure of how respondents perceived their economic situation to their (ratio-scaled) individual or family income due to its substantially lower proportion of missing values.

Notwithstanding the particularities and limitations of our binary logistic regression model, the respective findings are arguably far from trivial or irrelevant. In relation to contemporary Mexico, they provide a panorama of striking differences in the likelihood of intercultural capital embodiment – between receivers and non-receivers of formal education, between the economically affluent and non-affluent, between internet users and non-users, and between men and women – that cast doubt on naïve voluntarist notions of personal intercultural development. Future research will have to show how and for how long Mexico and other multicultural countries can afford to exclude important parts of their respective populations from the acquisition of intercultural capital in terms of foreign language skills, friendships with foreigners, or time spent abroad.

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