**Migration and return: the experience of Spanish managers and entrepreneurs in innovative industries**

**ABSTRACT**

Although the number of European citizens that changed their country residence has increased from the end of the last century, the percentage of resident Europeans in other countries does not surpass 2% of the total European population (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010). According to data from the project PIONEUR, 64 % of European citizens that started an international mobility strategy returned later to their country of origin (Recchi and Favell, 2009).

Unlike non-skilled migrants, managers and entrepreneurs emigrate not only for economic reasons but because of professional aspirations (Ariss, 2010; Suutari, 2003). Globalization provides greater labour opportunities for those who have high professional skills and are ready to change residence. Nevertheless, the dynamics of international markets, legislation or institutional support for mobility restrict the freedom of movement even in the case of highly skilled professionals (Brown, 2001; Sassen, 2007). In another way, the family may also be a constraint to international mobility. (Shaffer et al., 2001; Suutari, 2003; Tharenou, 2008).

Feminist literature sustains that highly qualified women have more difficulties to carry out mobility strategies or that they are less attracted by international assignments than male workers (Adler, 1984; Ackers, 2008; Selmer and Leung, 2003). Other works highlight that international mobility is also important for women in order to develop professional and personal goals (Ranghuram, 2008).

The objective of this study aims to discover to what extent international experience interferes and influences managers and entrepreneurs in their professional and personal decisions. More specifically, we want to answer the following research questions: Which professional or personal factors influence decisions of women to develop international careers? What is the role of families in making these decisions and how do those decisions change during life-course?

We interviewed Spanish managers and entrepreneurs who have had a significant international experience in terms of length and assignment. During 2011, we collected qualitative information of 22 professionals (9 men and 13 women) working in research institutions or innovative companies from different sectors. We addressed personal and professional issues of these people.

The analysis shows that learning and professional training abroad motivate the first initiative, but personal reasons are more decisive for returning. Both men and women find themselves in a different phase of their life-course, in which housing and family (including partners and children) become more important. In this stage, decisions are less individual; even the most interesting project depends on the family decision. The negotiation of migration decisions depends on the labour opportunities of the partners.

Men and women express the same reasons to go abroad for the first time. These results confirm that there are no differences regarding their professional motivations. However, with regards to returning, women seem more motivated than men to go back for family reasons, mainly because of children and elderly parents. The care of children is not quoted as a problem for female entrepreneurs and managers when they are abroad; the desire to integrate children into the culture of origin is more important.

According to the results, women managers in this study are not examples of couples in subordinate positions in the mobility decision, dependent on the projects of their male partners. On the contrary, some of these women have developed professional trajectories and mobility strategies that affected the whole family.

Finally, professional careers of managers and entrepreneurs working in innovative sectors confirm the capacity of agency of highly skilled professionals developing international careers. It also suggests a mutual dependence between personal lives and professional goals. Therefore, decisions about personal and professional development depend on the global labour market.

**Key words**

International mobility, highly skilled personnel, gender, life-course approach, managers and entrepreneurs.

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