

## 2. eRadio: An extended example

Here I have settled  
in the United States  
10 years have passed since  
**I crossed as a wetback**  
papers not in order  
**I still am an illegal**

I have my wife and my children  
who I brought very little  
and they have forgotten now  
my Mexico so dear  
that I never forget  
and I can't go back

**\*what good is my money**  
if I'm like a prisoner  
**inside this great nation**  
when I remember, I even cry  
**'cause though the cage is golden**  
**it still is prison**

Oh!  
**my children don't speak to me**  
another language they have learned  
and forgotten Spanish  
**they think as Americans**  
deny they're Mexicans  
**though my color they have**

from my job to my home  
I don't know what's wrong with me  
'cause though I like to stay home  
out to the street I almost never go  
'cause **I'm afraid they'll find me**  
**and can deport me**  
\* \*

what good is my money  
what good is my money

[Los Tigres del Norte  
Song: *The Golden Cage*]

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Aquí estoy establecido  
en los Estados Unidos  
10 años pasaron ya  
**en que cruce de mojado**  
papeles no arreglados  
**sigo siendo un ilegal**

tengo mi esposa y mis hijos  
que me los traje muy chicos  
y se han olvidado ya  
de mi México querido  
del que yo nunca me olvido  
y no puedo regresar

**\*de que me sirve el dinero**  
si estoy como prisionero  
**dentro de esta gran nación**  
cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro  
**de que aunque la jaula sea de oro**  
**no deja de ser prisión”**

Ay!  
**mis hijos no hablan conmigo**  
otro idioma han aprendido  
y olvidado el español  
**piensan como americanos**  
niegan que son mexicanos  
**aunque tengan mi color**

de mi trabajo a mi casa  
yo no sé lo que me pasa  
que aunque soy hombre de hogar  
casi no salgo a la calle  
**pues tengo miedo que me hallen**  
**y me puedan deportar**  
\*\*

de que me sirve el dinero  
de que me sirve el dinero

[Los Tigres del Norte  
Canción: *La jaula de oro*]

Kids are raised with the idea that one-day—soon—they will depart to New York. It's not a matter of going to the United States, but to 'New York.' Before finishing secondary school, some of them decide to risk their lives and borrow thousands of dollars to be taken over to the United States. [Tulcingo Talks, 2004]

## 2.1 A sketch of Tulcingo and of New York Tulcingans

Tulcingo de Valle, “Town of Emigrants” as the villagers regard their town, is located in central Mexico in the Sierra Mixteca mountain range at the foot of the state of Puebla, almost bordering the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. The Mexican National Institute of Geographic Statistics and Informatics (INEGI) reported in its 2000 Census a population of 11,025 inhabitants, of which 5,875 were women [INEGI, 2000]. At present, it is difficult to estimate the current population because of the high emigration rate as well as the high rate of immigrants from nearby towns who come to Tulcingo attracted by the jobs abandoned by those that left and by the higher standard of living that now exists in Tulcingo.

In spite of the fact that Tulcingo is considerably influenced by the United States through mails, calls, and visits of those that emigrated, life in Tulcingo is easygoing, the pace calm. Like in other small Mexican towns, people know each other, at least enough to greet each other when crossing paths. Information is promptly disseminated through word of mouth, thanks to their efficient oral network. Agriculture and farming have their place in Tulcingo, but most people make a living by tending their own shops, stores, and other kinds of businesses or by working for others or for public institutions.

Tulcingo is a community whose inhabitants have migrated by the thousands to the United States, mostly to New York City [Guzman, 2001]. A reliable estimate is unavailable; according to one source approximately 10 000 inhabitants, half of its total native population, have left [Levine, 2001], while another reports that approximately 7 000 inhabitants, one third, have left [Borden, 2001].

Tulcingans leave their town looking for better opportunities; a voyage that for most has resulted in a better lifestyle for them as well as for their families. Nevertheless, back home emigration is causing a significant impact since many children are raised without one or both parents, lands are left without hands to work them, and local assets such as their natural resources, values, and traditions are losing their importance, while social, cultural, economic, political and technological changes are taking place. Surprisingly, fashion trends regarding some music, food, and speaking styles first reach a small and remote place like Tulcingo rather than Mexico's capital city. Bachata, a type of music from the Dominican Republic, was taken to

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Tulcingo via the New York population, and it has largely replaced profoundly rooted salsa, cumbia and merengue.

From another standpoint, among the Tulcingan immigrant population in New York three very strong mother town customs remain; for example, they still love their unique food, give great importance to their mother, and remain close to their extended family. Such is the importance given to these three cultural elements that two types of new businesses emerged from them in New York. One is the *paqueterias* business which is a package delivery service through which thousands of kilos of all kinds of traditional food goods are sent to emigrants every year, ranging from raw seeds and beans to fresh handmade products, such as *tortillas*, *mole* and chocolate, and even commercial candy or canned goods. These *paqueterias* manage to import and export products that usually cannot be sent through other delivery services. Their other peculiarity is that commonly the people living in the United States are the ones who pay, whether they send or receive. The other kind of business is a non-official money exchange market with better services and rates than the official ones. Mother's Day (May 10) and Christmas season are their biggest days.

New York City is approximately 2 200 miles away from Tulcingo [Elliott, 2003] and about 3 500 US dollars away for those Tulcingans who can raise the money to pay for getting there illegally and who are willing to go through terrible hardships and to run the risk of losing all their money, their liberty during detention, and even their lives.

The US 2000 Census reports a population of 8, 008, 278 for the City of New York, of which 15.1% is of Hispanic origin of which 9.09 % is Mexican (260,889) [U.S. Census Bureau]. According to Mario Riestra, Coordinator of the *Oficina de Atención a Poblanos Radicados en el Extranjero*, the number of people from the state of Puebla living in the United States is between 1,000 000 and 1,200 000 of which 75% are from the *Mixteca* region and live in the North East, above all in New York and New Jersey or in Houston [Molina Ramírez, 2002]

New York, to the eyes of a newly arrived Tulcingan, is a 'rush, time is money' place where people are too busy and do not have time for relating with others from their hometown, and where people can become more distant if they do not participate in activities, such as going to certain mass services on Sundays or playing in an all-Mexican soccer or baseball league, and where people get lost in the subway, and where immigrants prefer to speak their mother tongue and struggle when English is needed. Mexicans have their local economy, like Don Felix's *tortillerias* whose target market is the immigrant population. "Through ethnic solidarity, immigrants create an internal economic logic that allows them to pull themselves up by their collective bootstraps"

[Smith, 1992, p. 40]. The famous “Tortilla King” started out by selling *tortillas* door to door and now has a *tortilla* factory in New York.

### 2.1.1 Language

Most Tulcingans in New York are fond of speaking Spanish, when among other Spanish speakers, and, under certain circumstances, are quite capable of fluently inserting words or phrases of one language into the other while speaking. Many children may speak fluent English when among English speaking natives or even when among their siblings or friends, yet switch to Spanish when addressing their parents or certain elders. Most Tulcingans still preserve behaviors and customs of their home town to different degrees, but there are those who have almost completely been absorbed by a more American lifestyle. In fact, some of the new generation Tulcingans do not know how to speak Spanish well or prefer not to do so anyway.

These linguistic phenomena are complex, not completely understood or satisfactorily accounted for. There are many variables at play, such as, the conflicting necessities of preserving one’s ethnic identity while striving for a functional integrative identity at school and at work. One useful explanatory dichotomy that may be applied here is that of strong social network ties *versus* weak social network ties, where strong ties resist changes or act towards maintaining native ethnic, cultural, linguistic features while the weak ties allow for adopting new ways or even bringing them forth [Milroy, 1987a].

### 2.1.2 The status of Tulcingo

The economy in Tulcingo—where the currency is either the *peso* or the dollar—is principally trade. The people that do go back usually set up a business based on what they learned to do in their American jobs. Some emigrants’ reason for not going back is that there is nothing for them to do in their town. It used to be the case that mostly men emigrated, but since a few years back, many young women are doing so too. Moreover, where families are concerned, it used to be just the man of the family who emigrated and sent money back, whereas now complete families are emigrating.

Another reason for not going back to their hometown is that getting a satisfactory migratory status in the U. S. A. can be a difficult matter for these illegal migrants. It takes at least a couple of years for some, while others apparently never manage it. Therefore, many of the people who leave do not go back in the short-term, not even to visit. Most of those that leave do not go back to stay; however, most of them do intend to go back to live in their hometown someday; at least they were determined to do so when they first left. Few go back to stay, but there are those that save money to go back home to visit their families in December, to take part in festivities, to

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carry out wedding or baptism ceremonies, or to celebrate their own birthdays. Afterwards, they return to the United States. Some do it the way they left for the first time, illegally. However, in a town with such high levels of emigration, taking the risk of illegally crossing the border is commonplace.

The Internet is available in this community, but it is a novel phenomenon, used mainly by the youth. The telephone is the main medium that keeps emigrants in touch with their families and relatives living in their hometown. Emigrants are the ones who place the calls since it is cheaper from the United States than from Mexico. Tulcingans in Mexico usually call only when money is needed or to give important family news. Emigrants call their families relatively often to tell them about their life in New York, but they always try not to worry the family. When the emigrant is going through a rough moment, he or she will say so but in a way that will not sound too bad.

In Mexico, people are somewhat aware that life as emigrants in New York, at least during the first years while they get adapted and learn the language, is hard, but they do not have a clear picture of what that ‘hard’ means. In contrast, the new generations born in the United States do not know the culture, the traditions, and, sometimes, not even their parents’ town.

A young person, especially a man, feels more uncomfortable saying that he has never been in the United States than admitting that he did not finish junior high school. [Tulcingo Talks, 2004]

## 2.2 Two places, one community

A considerable number of inhabitants of the town of Tulcingo emigrated voluntarily, little by little, over several decades, to the United States, especially to New York City where most of them are now living, mainly in The Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. The exodus continues.

In spite of the size of New York City and of its intangible complex forces that pull relatives, friends, and acquaintances away from each other, there persists substantial contact among a number of Tulcingans; that is, they get to see, visit, and help each other from time to time if not frequently. Also, there are periodic larger-scale social, religious, cultural, and athletic activities. These as well as other activities are not exclusively made by or meant for Tulcingans because they naturally tend to intermingle with other Mexicans and Latinos. Tulcingans mix mainly with people from the state of Puebla, their own home state. A Mexican patriotic festivity reaches massive proportions: *5 de Mayo*, yearly celebration commemorating the Battle of Puebla fills the streets of New York with thousands of Mexicans, Latinos, and people with all kinds of backgrounds. This year’s celebration reached 800 000, as estimated by Carmelo Maceda, the organizer. [Maceda, 2004]

Most New York Tulcingans belong to a low socio-economic stratum. However, some are doing well, with good jobs or businesses of their own, and a few are doing extremely well, because of great jobs or great businesses of their own.

In general, Tulcingans in New York feel extremely fond of their hometown. Typically they have close blood relatives still living in Tulcingo. Some do not, but still feel for Tulcingo. There was, however, one who said “What do we want to do radio with Tulcingo for if we do not have family there anymore?” [Tulcingo Talks, 2004]. In spite of the differences and difficulties pointed out, Tulcingan residents of New York City constitute a social entity.

### **2.2.1 The Tulcingo community profile**

The Tulcingo Community can be considered a diaspora community because:

The community is now divided into two main populations.

- Both groups of people were born in Tulcingo but are now geographically separated, see Figure 2-1.
- Both groups of people are native speakers of Spanish and use it.
- The Mexico group lives in its small hometown, Tulcingo, and is a closely-knit society.
- Those residing in New York City emigrated from Tulcingo and maintain considerable intra-group relationships, but constitute a loosely-knit network.
- At a small scale, individuals and families have kept in contact and helped each other across the international border.
- At a large scale, the town of Tulcingo population, as a whole, and the Tulcingan New York residents, as a whole, have kept in contact, cooperated, and helped each other across international borders.

Nevertheless, there is little socio-cultural interaction between these two groups that live in different countries, yet, in many ways, they constitute a single community.

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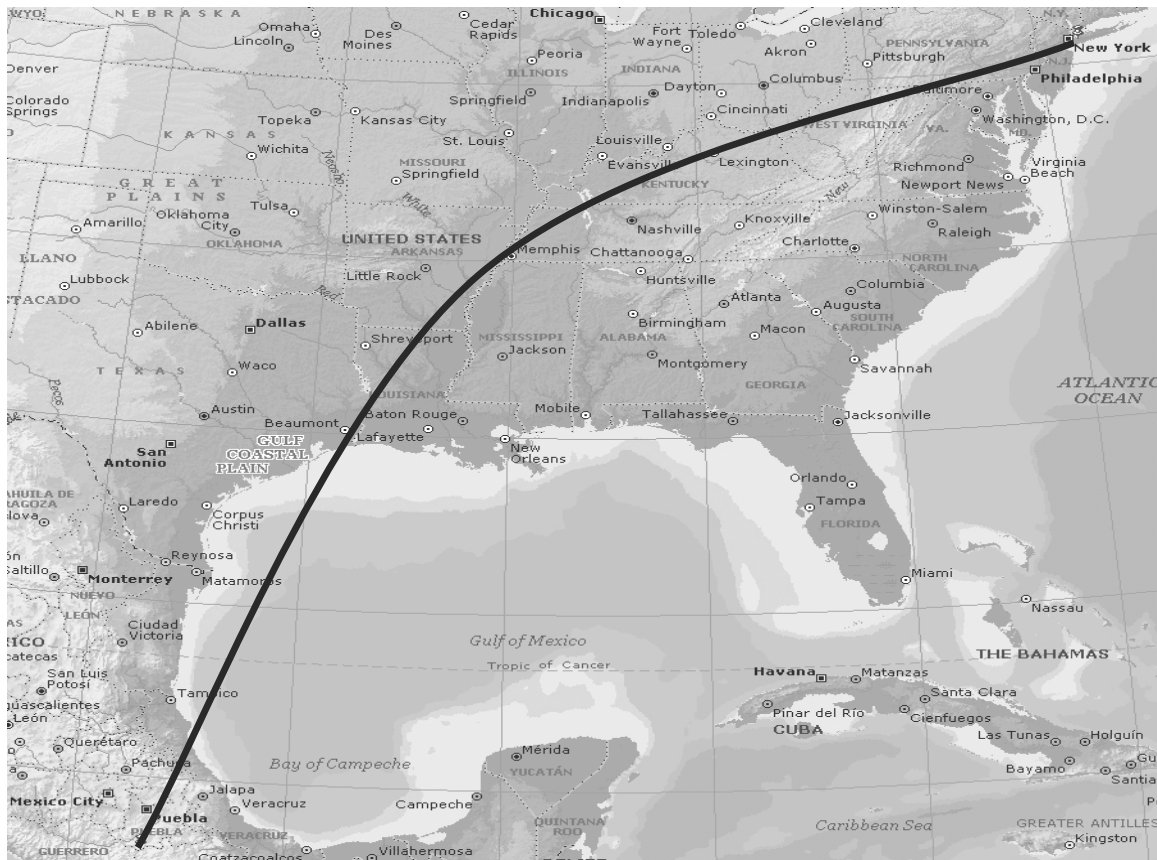


Figure 2-1. Distance between Tulcingo, Puebla, Mexico and New York City, USA  
[source: Encarta]

### 2.2.2 The need and the means for interaction

The eRadio project is a two-way, web-radio production model, where both groups record relevant content, edit it, and transmit it to each other in an attempt to bridge the socio-cultural interaction gap. When they were told of the possibility, both groups were interested in the project, even if only as a pilot implementation.

Each group would need a set of electronic tools meant for web-radio production. Two components make up the set: one is a special computer, the VoxPopBox that facilitates the production and transmission of radio programs. Users who have had no experience in computing or audio production are able to do so by using an interface with a small set of simple visual symbols. The other tool is a portable, digital audio-recorder (the iRiver H120).

### 2.2.3 The project: aim and framework

The pilot implementation took place on March 20 – 28 in Tulcingo, Puebla, Mexico and on April 17 – 25 *Casa Puebla* in New York City. My original plan was the following.



Both groups would first learn how to handle the electronic tools and to carry out production, creation, and elocution tasks as well as some journalistic skills to elicit from members of the community relevant content, such as anecdotes, opinions, music, news, and fun talk. Members of the community had to cooperatively participate in the production of radio programs that they recorded, edited, mixed and transmitted. In March, the Tulcingo audio pieces were going to be transmitted through the Internet for the people in New York and on FM radio for those in Tulcingo. In April, the New York audio pieces would be transmitted via Internet to Tulcingo where they would be retransmitted on FM radio for the larger population to listen to them.

Both groups would listen to each other's programs, initiating an interactive process expected to bring forth integration and oneness—in spite of geographic and cultural separation. This experience could lead the community to want to implement the project or a variant of it on a longer term basis with periodic transmissions, seeking greater community involvement and, in the long run, community empowerment that could be seen in decisive community participation in establishing, pursuing, and achieving goals beneficial to each of the two groups and to the community as a whole.

## **2.3 The radio production workshop**

In Tulcingo, a group of people organized where the training was going to take place, where the Internet connection was going to be made, when there would be group meetings, and when the final transmission was going to be made so as to notify people in New York and in town.

### **2.3.1 Doing radio**

As it turned out, the Tulcingo group had little time for group sessions and absolute reluctance to touch the editing tool. Notwithstanding, I introduced them to the basics of radio production. They were given explanations of relevant concepts and shown how to use the recorders to make an audio piece. They did learn how to handle the recorder and gained skill in its use throughout the week. And they also learned and did the editing, with me as the operator of the editing tool.

### **2.3.2 The first stages of producing an audio piece**

They had to plan and design their audio piece, decide on the topic, characters, background sounds, format, questions or scripts, and other elements proper to creating an audio piece. Three of them worked individually and the other two as a duo. Together, they established a schedule for using the tools, depending on the peculiarities of each audio piece. On their own, they started gathering audio-content using the recorder, the microphone and the headphones. The duo decided to do a piece titled “What kermesses [fairs] were like in the 50s,” so they interviewed an elderly

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man who told them all the details about kermesses in those days. The duo had planned their questions in advance, which made for a structured interview, and the way they posed the questions helped make the responses sound like vivid recollections. All of which contributed to turning it all into a storytelling audio piece, rather than an interview.

### 2.3.3 Transferring the audio onto the tool

When communicators were done with their content gathering, we logged into the VoxPopBox and, with a USB cable, plugged the recorder into it. We waited a few minutes until the red light of the recorder stopped blinking and the icons of the recordings appeared on the left side of the ‘Gather’ task-area. The system automatically transferred all the recordings from the recorder to the VoxPopBox’s environment, leaving the recorder empty for the next user.

The VoxPopBox computer was custom made and the iRiver H120 recorder was customized to provide the maximum simplicity in audio production for the users and purposes here described. Within the VoxPopBox, on the left side of the ‘Gather’ task-area (the Clips Manager), users can select ‘listening’, ‘renaming’, ‘deleting’, and ‘importing’ their recordings (clips) into a project. Once they have listened to their recordings and decided which ones they are going to use for their final piece, they can create, on the right side of the ‘Gather’ task-area (the Projects Manager), a ‘New\_Project.’ After naming their new project, users select and then drag-and-drop their clips into the project. (In the Projects Manager, they can also delete projects.) Once they finish the drag-and-drop of all the clips they intend to use, they click on the new project and the system imports the project into an AUP sound waveform and places each clip on a different track. In the meantime, it switches from the ‘Gather’ task-area to the ‘Produce’ task-area.

### 2.3.4 Editing

Once in the ‘Produce’ task-area, users can listen to their project. While listening, they should keep an eye on the seconds counter and take note of (Log) the relevant parts of their recordings. After having mapped their recordings on a piece of paper, the users have to decide on: (1) the structure of the piece; (2) how to grasp and keep the interest of their audience; (3) where to begin and where to end; and, (4) where to add effects, if needed. Then the users go through the unpredictable doing, listening, and redoing process called editing, which involves cutting, pasting, deleting, adding more clips and effects onto the audio piece, and saving. The editing process takes time, because users have to listen carefully—critically—to every single part they edit, paying attention to the waveforms, doing, redoing, touching, and retouching. Little by little they get used to it, and little by little it becomes a more intuitive process. At first, the idea of turning an hour-long interview into a less-than-ten minute piece sounds like an easy undertaking,

but after hours of structuring, extracting, and putting things together, they realize that it can be time consuming. If the users wanted to add more clips, they could always click on the Gather button in the Task menu-bar to go back to the first Task area, where the drag-and-drop clips into Projects was simpler. The menu bar is a switch for the four Task areas: Gather; Produce; Publish; and Listen.

### 2.3.5 Publishing

The network functionality of the ‘Publish’ task-area has not been fully implemented; I will however describe it as envisioned.

When users think that their project is finished, first they save it and then click on the Publish button of the menu bar. The system then converts the sound wave form into an MP3 file to make it a shareable audio piece. In the ‘Publish’ task-area, users choose whether or not they want their piece to be published, that is, to make it available to certain other users and eligible to be made accessible to everybody on the Internet. They can always ‘un-publish’, edit and re-publish their pieces. When the pieces are published, the system places them in a database belonging to Public Radio Exchange (PRX), making the pieces available for the other VoxPopBoxes connected to the Internet. PRX is a non-profit organization through which member radio stations in the United States have access to these audio pieces that were web-cast in New York. The ‘Publish’ task-area records which radio station downloads it and when it is going to be played. The system can upload the pieces onto the server overnight and keep a status of the process for the dial-up connections. In the ‘Listen’ task-area, once they have been published, users can see and listen to the audio pieces made by the other users; that is, by both the local communicators (e.g. Tulcingo) and the remote ones (e.g. New York).

Creators help each other when one is faced with any kind of difficulty, whether it be the content or an artistic aspect of their piece or the handling of the recorders, by providing feedback as to content or style and by explaining or showing how to do something. Once all the pieces of the group are done they decide how the transmission is going to be structured, who is going to open and who close.

In Tulcingo, they test the air transmission by connecting the sound output of the VoxPopBox to the FM transmitter that is connected to the antenna. Later they get in touch with the people in New York to agree on the last details. Meanwhile, people in New York have been going through the same process on their side. Since broadcasting the entire program on the air in New York is expensive, the transmission was going to be over the Internet. The New York group got together at *Casa Puebla* in Manhattan Island for the participative transmission, where they would all listen

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together over loud speakers. They had previously promoted the event among people of the Tulcingo-New York community.

### **2.3.6 On air**

The day of the transmission, everybody was excited about together transmitting a program that was going to be heard in their town, in the Manhattan locality, and everywhere in the world over the Internet. Once the transmission started, it was very moving for people at both sites to hear the voices of people they knew transmitted over public media, to learn about traditions that do not exist any more, to listen to a Tulcingan recalling the challenges he faced when he crossed the border as a 14-year old and in charge of his 11-year old sister.

Downtown Tulcingo, stores, shops, and taxis were tuned into our radio frequency, playing it so loud that passersby could listen to the program. The transmission was on the air. Phone calls started ringing in the house across the street from where we were broadcasting (since we were using our phone line for the dial-up Internet connection). Callers wanted to send greetings to people, and they congratulated the communicators and all those who had made the project possible. Some of the storeowners who had their radios playing loud wanted to advertise through our transmission big savings at their stores. From New York, all the messages were arriving by email.

The communicators and the audience were satisfied with the first transmission and started throwing out ideas about making improvements, adding more audio pieces, getting more people to participate, establishing topics for each program, and having a regular schedule.