

A theoretical contribution to the contemporary migration: a socio-philosophical reflection

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Abstract

Nowadays we witness an increased use of information & communication technologies (ICT) which contributed to important changes in the world due to the Globalization process. Additionally, Globalization and ICT increased the movement of people or the so called migration. The migratory flows have increased considerably in the last decades. Due to this, there is a need to review the migration theories through the lens of the ICT. The analyses of migration and ICT lay the premises for a knowledge-based society. This paper focuses on the migration theories, starting from the dominant and oldest theory explaining the causes of migration. Hereinafter, it discusses the neoclassical theory and the human capital approach, the new economics of migration, network and institutional theory. Thus, there have been many attempts to explain migration from different perspectives but what becomes clear nowadays is that there is still request for more analyses considering updated perspectives.

Keywords: *Knowledge-based society, ICT, globalization, theories of migration, migration.*

The frequency of using information and communication technologies (ICT), in the knowledge-based society or globalization underlines the need to diversify the national operationalization, due to the openings brought to light by the latter. At the beginning of 21st century, the nature of these openings continues to have many and increasingly unknown variables, but it does not imply the disappearance of controversy. Moreover, the hypothesis that refers to the *rare-ism* openings relates to the benchmarks and their valorization for the creation of intra and inter-relationships in the outside world. It has been proved that the fact of highlighting ICTs during the deepening of changes reflected in transformations in and between

societies and not only during the mainstreaming framework of the information age, reduces the involvement of other components. Simultaneously, it is attested that the reunifications are realized not during the interference with the adjacent ones and not at the borderlines, but independently and on their own. Thus, in order to explain the ascendancy of ICT (information and communication technologies) it has to be underlined the modification of its instrumental character – from a purely technological one to one that offers a new potential to combine the information embedded in ICT systems with the creativity of people in order to develop knowledge.¹ Let us deepen and diversify these remarks, since the development of instrumental approach of knowledge, during the information era contributes to the establishment of interconnections between theories, concepts, and systems and it is formed not by marginalization of the system of values, but rather manifests the presence of values at all levels.

The above-mentioned context is, to a certain extent, developed in studies conducted during the systemic elucidation of the concept of knowledge based society. More specifically, it refers to the need to identify a comprehensive analysis of new components of the concept such as ICT, axiological decentralization or communication between cultures and civilizations, and their relationship with the already recognized components of the scientific community: the unlimited access to scientific information and the media. Thus, the systemic approach supports the arguments according to which every system, even when it reaches a part of many other levels, these ones maintain their components and cannot be modified by inter-changes. In this context, we emphasize that the inter-changes of the system are directly proportional to axiomatic benchmarks. Thus, the participation as a part of many other level opens other opportunities and demands an appropriate approach, including the premises of those systems connecting with other systems, and last but not least, with the system of values.²

In this perspective lies the imperative of the research, which covers the connection of the concept of knowledge-based society theories with the migration theories, and also their characteristics during more than a decade of the 21st century. Why is that? Because the relationships and interconnections within the development of quality components during the establishment of the conceptual

¹ Robin Mansell, W. E. Steinmuller and U.D. Montalvo, “Opportunities for knowledge-based development: capabilities, infrastructure, investments and policy,” *Science and public policy* 26(2) (1998), 91-100.

² Ana Pascaru, “Societatea bazată pe cunoaștere: realități și perspective,” in *Descentralizarea axiologică în societatea bazată pe cunoaștere (Aspecte filosofice)* (Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2015), 9, 15-16.

framework of the knowledge-based society are viewed through the lens of valorization of the existing values, but also of the creation of new ones.

However, the meaning of concepts-theories as a tool for recognizing the reality and its creation, on one hand, is changing due to cognitive experiences, and on the other hand, it constitutes the basis for these ones, through the meanings they entail, more exactly through the “spiritual atmosphere” that they spread, that allows and explains the learning process.³ In our case, the analyses aim to identify the relational referrals of relevant theories with those of migration, inside and between societies.

The contemporary era makes us communicate and share each other’s cultures through travels, trade and migration. We are in a huge global village where if something happens in one local area can affect the whole world. This process was called globalization. Globalization is the process by which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and ICT play a huge role in it. ICT contributes daily to the increase of trade and cultural exchange. Additionally, the biggest companies following their desire to reduce the costs and maximize their profit are no longer national firms but multinational corporations with branches and offices in many countries. Media companies together with the development of the new ICT, from the other side, make the dissemination of information easier and faster. In one second, one can learn what is going on in the other part of the globe and can follow life the global happenings. As Appadurai said “Globalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labor and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments”.⁴ Appadurai emphasized the human role in the globalization process and we can only agree with his affirmations that without human beings the whole process could not be possible.

Globalization, altogether with its implications, intensified the mobility of people worldwide. Most of them move hoping for a better life, a bigger income, a better future for their siblings, others are forced to do it because of conflicts, natural disasters or political reasons. Regardless the reason that stays behind the migration path, migrants play a central role in cultural, social and economic transformations of both countries of origin and destination. Thus, migrants are the main global transnational agents of change. As Clair H. Rirth and Aitor Ibarrola-

³ Ioan Biriş, *Conceptele științei* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Romane, 2010), 539.

⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1996), 10-11.

Amendariz said “...undeniable the [migrants] decision will affect not only their own life trajectories and identities, but also the sending and receiving societies as a whole. Thus, these transnational agents affect the demographic, economic, and social structures of the countries at both ends are inevitably reshaped by this global phenomenon.”⁵

In order to understand the complexity of the migration phenomenon and their role in a knowledge-based society, several contextual theories will be considered to offer a comprehensive analysis of migration from economic, social, cultural and know-how points of view.

Some theoretical models try to explain the causes for international migration, trying to answer the question why people migrate and which are the factors that influence such a decision, based mainly on *economic* reasons. The neoclassical theory is one of the dominant and oldest theories explaining the causes of migration from this point of view. But this model limits the migration complexity to the micro and macro level and both are based on the economic causality of the migrant. Besides this, the neoclassical model stresses upon “the utility-maximizing behavior of individuals and the profit-maximizing actions”⁶ and in the neoclassical explanation individuals act rationally, have all accessible information and a perfect knowledge about the future.

Although it might explain some parts of migration, this theory has been criticized due to the fact that in real life, most migrants, when they decide to migrate, only have a vague knowledge about their future life in the new land of their dreams.

The human capital approach is different from the neoclassical theory. The human capital approach to migration was in its fundamental elements presented by Sjaastad,⁷ who gave up the assumption of homogeneous labor. Individual labor market characteristics and the different wages in different regions result in migration being worthwhile for some individuals in a country and not for others. Migration is interpreted as an investment since the present costs have to pay off in the future. The human capital approach also gives a theoretical argument for the

⁵ Claire H. Firth and Aitor Ibarrola-Amendariz, *Migration in a Global Context, Transitions and Transformations Emerging from International Human Mobility* (Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2007), 9.

⁶ James M. Cypher and James L. Dietz, *The process of economic development* (London: Routledge, 2004), 127.

⁷ Larry A. Sjaastad, “The costs and returns of human migration,” *Journal of Political Economy* 70 (1962), 80-93.

observation of most empirical studies that identified decreasing migration incentives with ageing.⁸

Similarly to Sjaastad, Harris and Todaro⁹ gave up the neoclassical assumption of full employment and were looking at the migration from rural areas to the cities in the less developed countries, which took place despite the high unemployment in urban areas. Then, the expected income is relevant which relates to the probability of getting a job. The importance of job probabilities and urban unemployment rates were proved true by many empirical studies.¹⁰ However, the basic theoretical considerations can be transferred to international migration as well. This means that even in cases of a reduced probability of getting a job in a developed country, it may be worthwhile even for an individual employed in a less developed country to migrate, if the wage difference is higher.

The Harris & Todaro model was a first step to account for the uncertainty associated with migration. In this model, however, one assumes that the probability of getting a job is known. Therefore, in a further step the costs of gaining information were incorporated. No potential migrant will spend unlimited resources in order to get information about various target countries. There are models which try to formulate explicitly the search behavior such as for example Maier¹¹ and Berninghaus and Seifert-Vogt.¹² The fundamental result is that the search pays off only as long as its expenditures are smaller than the expected gain from further search. In the era of available ICT a migrant is considered to be aware of salaries in the destination country. Given this prerequisites, the potential migrant may decide for the “second best” solution. In case of migration from a totally different world region, the search costs will be extremely high and in this way explain why so many people prefer not to migrate to the North. Uncertainty and false expectations about a target country are also connected to the aspect of temporary migration, return migration or transit, although these cases are also possible without uncertainty and may be planned in advance based on some

⁸ T. Bauer and K. F. Zimmermann, “Modelling international migration: economic and econometric issues. Causes of International Migration,” *Proceedings of a Workshop* (Luxembourg, 14.- 16. December 1994. Eurostat, Luxembourg, 1995), 95-115.

⁹ John R. Harris and Michael P. Todaro “Migration, unemployment and development: a two-sector analysis,” *American Economic Review* 60 (1970): 126-142.

¹⁰ Michael P. Todaro, “Internal migration in developing countries: a survey,” in *Population and Economic Change in Developing Countries* (NBER, Chicago, 1980).

¹¹ Gunther Maier, “Cumulative causation and selectivity in labour market oriented migration caused by imperfect information,” *Regional Studies* 19 (1985): 231-241.

¹² Siegfried Berninghaus and Hans G. Seifert-Vogt, *International Migration under Incomplete Information* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1991).

foreseeable development of wages and sufficiently low migration costs. Dustmann¹³ emphasizes the role of potentially lower living costs in the country of origin for the decision to return home, which may be also planned before initial emigration. Other models assume that there is some option value of provisional non-migration or waiting,¹⁴ since the investment in migration is generally irreversible or at least only at very high costs. It could be disadvantageous to migrate now if the development is unexpectedly positive in the home country or unexpectedly negative in the target country. If this is not the case, one may still migrate in the next period when one has acquired more information on the further development. Concerning international migration from less developed countries, these models possibly provide some very important factors in actual migration from developing countries. While some basic information about the countries of destination like approximate income level and unemployment should be relatively easy to find, this is certainly not the case for individual employment opportunities. This uncertainty is even more important if one assumes that the majority of individuals is risk-averse or hopes for an unexpectedly better development in the home country. On the other hand, there is a decreasing uncertainty caused by modern ICT, like TV and internet, which might be an explanation for persistently rising migration.¹⁵

Contrary to the neoclassical view, the “new economics of migration”¹⁶ looks at the household as core decision maker and takes a different view of the microeconomic determinants of migration. In this approach, migration is a strategy of risk diversification for the households. Moreover, the importance of the relative income situation for the migration decision is emphasized. Although it is also possible to analyze migration as a family decision within the neoclassical framework,¹⁷ the perspective of the new economics is a fundamentally different one. Individual family members migrate because the dependence on the situation in single labor markets is reduced. Closely related to this aspect are remittances from the emigrants, which can be seen as the outcome of an implicit contract with their families, left behind. This form of risk diversification is a particularly

¹³ Christian Dustmann, “Return intentions of migrants: theory and evidence,” *CEPR Discussion Paper*, 906 (1994).

¹⁴ Michael C. Burda, *Migration and the option value of waiting*, CEPR Discussion Paper No. 1229 (1995).

¹⁵ Ralph Rotte and Michael Vogler, *Determinants of International Migration: Empirical Evidence for Migration from Developing Countries to Germany*, IZA DP No. 12 (1998).

¹⁶ Oded Stark, *The Migration of Labor* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

¹⁷ Jacob Mincer, “Family migration decisions,” *Journal of Political Economy* 86 (1978): 749-773.

important aspect in countries where public social security is inadequate, and working private capital markets are rare. Remittances are often the biggest part of household budgets. Another contribution of the new economics of migration is the concept of “relative deprivation”. Here, it is not one’s absolute income which is decisive for migration issues but the individual’s relative income position within a society. This provides a theoretical foundation for the empirical observation that migration rates in the poorest regions are not necessarily the highest, and that migration rates often are higher if the higher income inequality is high. Thus, there is a higher incentive to migrate if one is poor among rich than if one is poor among poor. Migration is the optimal allocation of the factor labor into regions of highest productivity, leading to an equalization of wages if there are no costs of migration.¹⁸

Despite the great variation in the migration patterns and the extremely complex combination of microeconomic and social motivations for migration, similar motivations seem to underpin the decisions to migrate. There is evidence that migration between two countries with unequal average real wages can remain low when there is an expectation that aggregate “quality of life” is improving in the country with the lower income. A significant proportion of any country’s working force may prefer to remain at home rather than take on the risks of moving abroad and leave family and friends behind. Yet, many households agree to leave their familiar surroundings when their home countries do not provide the premises for their physical protection from attack or abuse, or have poor public-service delivery and governance, an uncertain business investment environment, or high unemployment.¹⁹

Network and institutional theory attempt to explain the course of international migration flows over time. Additionally, these theories try to clarify, for instance, why international migration flows may increase if the initial incentive to migrate has diminished.²⁰

Thus, the network theory explains the influence of: chain migration, obligations inherent in network ties, risks attenuation; conceptualized as a self-sustaining diffusion process: a family/household decision, but once someone migrates the potential exists for a chain of migrations to occur. Several writers in the study of international migration have recognized the role of social networks, or

¹⁸ Rotte and Vogler, *Determinants of International Migration*.

¹⁹ World Bank, *Migration and Remittances, Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Ali Mansoor and Bryce Quillin (Europe and Central Asia Region, 2006), 10.

²⁰ R. P. W. Jennissen, *Macro-economic determinants of international migration in Europe* (Groningen: s.n., 2004), 32.

“migrant networks”, as an important force in explaining the perpetuity of international migration.²¹ Migrant networks are defined in the extant literature as recurrent sets of interpersonal ties that bind migrants and non-migrants together within a web of reciprocal obligations that can be drawn upon to facilitate entry, adjustment, and employment at points of destination.

A social connection to someone with migrant experience at a particular destination represents an important resource that can be utilized to facilitate movement. The movement of one person within a network transforms the relationship into a valuable connection that can be used by anybody within the network to facilitate migration. The recognition of social relationships and its role in international migration adds an important theoretical emphasis, refocusing the act of migration away from either the ‘over socialized’ deterministic view of social structure or the ‘under socialized’ perspective of atomized rational actors. This middle perspective, which highlights the social forces involved in the migration, refocuses on the analysis of international movement: “Thus, studying networks, particularly those linked to family and households, permits understanding migration as a social product—not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction.”²² One implication of this thesis is that the process of being socially connected to someone who has migrated necessarily creates a migratory information feedback mechanism, where contacts act as conduits of information to potential migrants. As argued by Spittel, “Migration is defined as a network-creating process because it develops an increasingly dense web of contacts between places of origin and destination. Once established, such networks allow the migration process to become self-sustaining and impervious to short-term changes in economic incentives.”²³ This assumption is supported by the intense use of internet among the migrants. It helped them not only to stay in contact with their family members, but also to keep a close eye to the happenings in the social and political field of home land institutions as well as help migrants to form virtual communities, groups and sometimes institutions.

In this regard, it is important to debate the Institutional theory. It discusses the role of private institutions and voluntary organizations that step in to assist the

²¹ Michael Spittel, *Testing Network Theory through an Analysis of Migration from Mexico to the United States*, CDE Working Paper no. 99-01 (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998), accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/cde/cdewp/99-01.pdf>.

²² Monica Boyd, “Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas,” *International Migration Review* 23(3) (1989), 642.

²³ Spittel, *Testing Network Theory*.

migration process; they become known by migrants and constitute another form of social capital as they become institutionalized.²⁴ According to the institutional theory, a large inflow of international migrants determines profit and non-profit organizations, which can be legal or illegal, to provide, for instance, (clandestine) transport, labor contracts, (counterfeit) documents, dwellings or legal advice for migrants.²⁵

Migration is also a *social* transformation that takes place in a complex *communication* process. The initial migration decision, the migration plan as well as process and integration are accompanied by an active communication. Communication links single individuals and groups, according to their anthropological characteristics, similarities and differences as well as emigres with the potential emigrants from the home country. This social activity pushes to migrate offering them the needed information and through communication, the decision to migrate is taken. The decision taking might be hard for a migrant when they face internal and external communication fears and when he moves out alone. Communication upon arrival is most of the time difficult due to the lack of language knowledge and because of cultural differences. The communication with the origin country usually is maintained. The ICT play an important role in cost reduction of the communication as well as raising the IT skills of migrants. People who migrate can also keep in contact by mobile phone and the Internet while they are away.²⁶ Due to internet telephony the cost of communications falls practically to zero. The two important areas of overlap between migration and communication research are the models of *cultural* adaptation, and the negotiation of identity in places with relatively easy contact with the home country via new communication technologies.²⁷ Although there are many challenges to a person culture and background, the migrants try to keep their cultural heritage from home. This is mainly visible in the culinary customs, the presence of home country shops as well as cultural festivities organized abroad by migrants. All this represents the cultural heritage that the migrants offer to the hosting society. As Clair H. Rirth and Aitor Ibarrola-Amendariz advocate, the “cultural capital” represents the information related to job opportunities, social environment, legal policies, etc. that migrants bring from their country of origin to the host country and the “social capital” with

²⁴ Douglas S. Massey et al, “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal,” *Population and Development Review* 19, 3 (1993): 431-466.

²⁵ Jennissen, *Macro-economic determinants*, 34.

²⁶ United Nations, *Men in Family and Family Policy in A Changing World* (2011), 127.

²⁷ Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, “Migration and Immigration,” in *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. W. Donsbach (Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

which they count upon arrival help in employment and social matters, friendships and community ties or family relations.²⁸

Both social and cultural capital play an important role in the migrant's adaptation to the new environment and it can serve as an important input to the hosting society.

Thus, the migratory journey is always an on-going process of transition between two contexts and transformation into a new self-hood. It is a journey not only of geographical displacement, but it also involves social and psychological dislocation as well.²⁹ According to Sowell, "Among the heaviest costs of all is the severing of personal ties in familiar surroundings in order to face new economic and social uncertainties in a stranger land."³⁰

In conclusion, we can say that so far there has not been identified one theory that could explain the complexity of the migratory path in a global world. Although there have been many attempts to explain it from different perspectives and which were appropriate at the time of their elaboration, it still needs new analyses and in the context of the transition to the knowledge-based society this need is emphasized even more. Nowadays, the migrant and migrations continues to be a hot topic for many countries, thus it is necessary to analyze it from the perspective of the ICT and the transition of the migrant and hosting society to the new era of a respect, knowledge and development, the so-called move towards the knowledge-based society.

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²⁸ Rirth and Ibarrola-Amendariz, *Migration in a Global Context*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 12.

³⁰ Thomas Sowell, *Migration and Cultures: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 2.

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