

RETURN FOR DEVELOPMENT AND EUROPEANIZATION AMONG MOLDAVIAN IMMIGRANTS

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Abstract

This chapter links migration, cross-mobility and return for development, in terms of approach to Europeanization. Taking into account the global changes in Moldova, the paper examines the perceptions of migration/mobility, return and identity of the Moldovans engaged in emigration in the countries of the European Union (EU). Using a multi-discipline approach and an in-depth qualitative interview technique, this chapter analyzes from a transnational perspective how migration/mobility and return can support social change and development in Moldova, and argues that people who cross EU borders, and who live through the experience of emigration, acquire a pro-European mentality.

Key Words: *Mobility, border, identity, Moldova, Immigrants, European Union*

Introduction

This chapter discusses the influence of migration, cross-border mobility and return for development on the reconfiguration of the identity of those who emigrate, while taking into account the already complex Moldovan identity. Using a multi-discipline approach and an in-depth qualitative interview technique, the paper aims to contribute to the literature by studying

immigrants' perceptions about their cross-border mobility and their return from a transnational perspective. The paper argues that since cross-border mobility and transnationalism are fundamental concepts (Faist 2010), this necessarily also entails examining the whole cross-border mobility/identity/transnationalism/return nexus; how being in possession of the citizenship of an EU country favours the practice of mobility and return for development, which in turn influences transnational practices. The chapter also argues that people who cross EU borders, and who live through the experience of emigration, acquire a pro-European mentality understood as Europeanization.

First I examine how the position of Moldova on the EU border and the possibility of Moldovan citizens obtaining Romanian citizenship influence the increase in mobility towards the EU. The second and closely connected aim is to determine how Moldovan migrants use their European citizenship in transnational practices, and what impact this may have on return for development. Can having Romanian citizenship help Moldovans build successful cross-border mobility strategies combining labour abroad and at home? The third and final aim is to examine how mobility, return, and the reconstruction of identity that is closer to Europe can underscore social change in Moldova.

The paper is organised as follows. First there is a brief description of Moldovan migration in the context of the identity dilemma in the country. The next section details the theoretical and methodological background of the study. The following empirical section presents an analysis of the narratives of returned Moldovan immigrants, taking into account cross-border experiences, return and development strategies, and the perceptions of identity. The paper ends with some reflections on how mobility, return, and the creation of a new and more European identity can support social change and development in the country.

Cross-border mobility and return for development from a transnational perspective

Research concerning mobility and return for development among immigrants in the EU refers to the development of geo-cultural aspects of migration, embedded in the combination of concepts such as border and transnational mobility, citizenship and identity (Vertovec, 2004).

As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, 1002-1003) rightly noted, ‘some migrants remain strongly influenced by their continuing ties to their home country or by social networks that stretch across national borders’. This calls for a transnational perspective on migration (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992). And in adopting the transnational approach our analytical focus must necessarily be broader and deeper as migrants are often embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields encompassing both those who move and those who do not.

In Moldova, migration/mobility has had a strong demonstrative and symbolic influence. It has had an impact on the country in three ways: first, by providing assistance to support the country in overcoming some poverty-related problems; secondly, by influencing policy agenda in the area of human development; and thirdly, by ‘Europeanizing’ Moldovans themselves. Thus, Europeanization is discussed in terms of globalisation (Beckfield 2006). As Fligstein and Mérand argue, ‘much of what people call ‘globalisation’ in Europe is in fact Europeanization’ (Fligstein and Mérand 2002, 8).

The patterns of mobility and particular negotiations around identity and citizenship that link Moldovan migrants could be seen as what Rouse has called a tightly ‘woven together’ community defined by a ‘transnational circuit’ (2002). These social practices challenge discreet boundaries around what it means to be a citizen of a single state, instead suggesting that we need to think in more nuanced ways about the complexity of multiple and shifting citizenships.

Linked to the complex issue of identity and citizenship in a wider Europe, research on migration and development is undergoing a ‘transnational turn’ (Skeldon 2010).

Following the transnational perspective, this paper conceptualizes ‘return’ as a dynamic and open-ended process rather than a once-and-for-all move from the host to the home country. Such an approach recognizes that ‘return’ may not necessarily be permanent and often involves mobility between the host and home country. Return, in other words, should not be interpreted as a ‘closure of the migration cycle’, but rather as ‘one of the multiple steps of a continued movement’ (Ammasari and Black 2001, 12), so that the notion is able to incorporate a whole range of people with differing mobility patterns.

From a development perspective, Black and Gent (2006) argue that return is far from unproblematic, raising questions about the conditions and the voluntariness of return and the ability of returnees to reintegrate, what Van Houte and Davids (2008, 1414) define as ‘re-embeddedness’. Both studies distinguish between the individual sustainability of return and whether return contributes to development.

A number of recent studies have looked at the economic behaviour of return migrants and its implications for the country of origin. Rather than focusing solely on earnings, these papers address the occupational choices of returnees, their entrepreneurial decisions, their savings and remittance behaviour, the acquisition of skills and qualifications while abroad, and the transfer of knowledge upon return (Martín and Radu 2012; Williams and Balaz 2005). For the case of Moldova, in particular, Pinger (2010) shows that return migration is beneficial for economic development in the home country not only due to the repatriation of skills but also because of higher financial transfers from temporary migrants compared to permanent migrants. Prospective returnees remit higher amounts and transfer more savings than permanent migrants, even if they

earn lower wages in the host country. For Moldovan migrants, return has been dealt with by referring to the ways in which returnees are successful in adapting to their home environment, at all levels. They learn how to take advantage of the European identity attributes they acquired abroad, with a view to distinguishing themselves from the locals. As Chapman and Prothero (1983, 849) rightly point out, thanks to the transnationalist approach to international migrations and to return migration, in particular, it is possible to question the binary structuralist vision of cross-border movements, taking into account the circularity of migration movements which facilitates migrants' mobility and consequently their approach to European values.

Methodology

Our framework was developed from qualitative fieldwork with emigrant returnees to Moldova. I held 54 in-depth semi-structured interviews of duration of between one and two hours. Besides Chisinau, the interviews were conducted in the cities of Anenii Noi and the town of Varnita, located on the border with Bender, Transnistria (the town was selected because the inhabitants are close enough to Transnistria for it to be a feature in their daily lives), Hincesti (on the Romanian border) and Straseni, from where the greatest number of Moldovans emigrated to the EU and returned. These populated areas are part of the Central Moldovan Development Region and share similar development characteristics.

I interviewed 24 men and 20 women of working age who had returned from EU countries. The interviewees had emigrated over the last 10 years to Italy (12), Spain (10), the United Kingdom (9), Ireland (3), Portugal (5), and Greece (5), having returned over the last year, although some continue to engage in cross-border mobility. All of them had secondary or higher education. In terms of sector work abroad, the men were employed in the construction and repair sectors,

transportation, industry and agriculture, and the women were employed in the service sector, trade, housekeeping, care of the aged and children. Thus, a significant proportion of highly skilled Moldovans undergo occupational ‘de-qualification’ when they migrate, often employed as unskilled or low-skilled workers.

In 27 cases, their migrant experience helped them in setting up a business in Moldova by using the social, human and financial capital they had gained in the EU. In the other 17 cases, the interviewees’ experience was difficult due to the precarious legal and juridical situation in the destination country.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and were conducted in Romanian (the native language of Moldovans) and later translated into English. I conducted interviews in both the homes of the respondents, and in the businesses of returning migrants, at the offices of the mayors, and in cafés and restaurants of the chosen cities and towns. To select people, I received help from the mayors of the three municipalities (Hincesti, Straseni and Anenii Noi) and professors at the University of Chisinau.

I also interviewed 10 officials who specialize in the migration management in Moldova: the IOM coordinator in Chisinau, researchers and professors at the Academy of Science and Chisinau State University, local councillors in Hincesti and Anenii Noi and the town Mayor of Varnita. I completed the field work in Bucharest and the headquarters of the National Authority for Romanian Citizenship (April 2011), where I interviewed the director of communications in order to better understand the process of granting Romanian citizenship to Moldovans. I also spoke with Moldovans seeking Romanian citizenship.

Using a focus taken from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I analyzed interview transcriptions and coded them (with the Atlas Ti, 6.2 Program) according to the issues that emerged. From the beginning, I followed Barth's theory (1989), and on the presumption of disorder, later tried to organize and explain data according to ground theory method. By using open coding, both axial and selective, the issues that emerged from the interviews were organized and analyzed as follows. Four issues emerged, which allowed us to build and homogenize the research: migration and cross-border experiences, return linked to development, working in Transnistria, and finally, the issue of identity linked to the sense of Europe. However, it is clear that identity runs throughout the entire discourse of the interviewees.

Empirical evidence of returned Moldovan immigrants

Return for development

As seen above, the essential key factor that determines the success of return for development is the possibility of practicing cross-border mobility by having dual citizenship. In addition, respondents noted that their decision to return depended on the economic crisis that affected their employment status in the destination countries, but also their family situation and the prospects of working in Moldova. When making the decision, they relied on the information regarding the possibilities of development in their country. They stressed that the best option was to set up their own business, using the experience gained during the migration process.

I gained experience during my 7 years in Italy... I would build a small hotel or a guesthouse here in my region. (Man returning from Italy, age 48, Anenii Noi)

The interviewees point out that they often encounter difficulties when re-integrating into Moldovan society, lacking the infrastructure, opportunities and support available to them

previously in the countries of migration. Despite these conditions, we note that those who return who possess some capital for investment, have an entrepreneurial spirit and are willing to undertake some risks choosing to invest, and are capable of generating decent livelihoods in Moldova. Of the 44 people interviewed, 27 had begun to set up their own business. They are, precisely, the dual citizens, who can practice mobility. This is the case of Irina who told us:

My husband and I, we have dual citizenship... Thanks to this, we can move freely. We have an optical business, which is the first in the city. However, I also have a translation company, because I prefer to work in the translation of Russian, English, Romanian and Portuguese. I need to keep these languages alive because I don't know when I will need them, because we can practice mobility. (Woman returning from Portugal, age 45, Hincesti)

Respondents prefer to set up small sized family businesses and investments are made for the most part with income that has been accumulated during the time spent outside of Moldova, and are not officially registered. For example, migrants who work in the construction industry and the repair and renovation of apartments and houses have invested in equipment, instruments and vehicles for such activities.

Many of them (12) who have free access to the countries of the EU as dual Romanian citizens said they were trying to build a cross-border strategy combining labour abroad with small entrepreneurship at home. Vasile told us:

Since I have Romanian citizenship and I can practice cross-border mobility, I opened a food store in my village, but I also work in Italy, in the construction sector. I have a very good relationship with my Italian employer, and when he needs me, I travel to Rome and work 2-3 months every year. For me it is important, because in this way, I can earn more. (Man returning from Italy, age 45, Anenii Noi)

In just a few (3) cases, investments were made with income from programmes coordinated by the the Agency of Migration and Development [13] and PARE 1+1. Regarding this, Oleg said:

I have applied for and obtained significant financial aid to open my own business. It is an agricultural cooperative, where we have fruit trees, bees and vines. The beginning was difficult, but now the results are good and I see that with the aid, things are getting better, because I can also employ people. (Man returning from Spain, age 47, Hincesti)

However, according to most interviewees, businesses are set up with very little resources, which do not surpass more than a few hundred euros. The largest sum invested was €50,000. There were also 4 cases of couples where one partner (generally, the woman) worked outside of the country while the male partner managed the business. Vasile, who received us in his market, said:

My wife works in Italy and sends money every month, so I can stock the market and make things work. It's like a chain. (Man returning from Italy, age 48, Straseni)

The greatest number of interviewees mentioned that although migration provided them with a lot of potential in terms of financial, human and social capital, unfortunately, it could only be used to a very limited extent in Moldova because of the “*system existing in our country*”.

Another issue identified by our interviewees is an unfavourable legal framework for opening and operating a business, which leads to a lack of transparency in operations. Avoiding legal frameworks is done by corrupting authorities. The problems of legal frameworks have motivated those returning to open their businesses over the border in Romania, where legal frameworks are more favourable. Even if few such cases exist at the moment, there is a potential for these numbers to increase in the future, especially since obtaining Romanian citizenship by Moldovans has become easier. Valeriu notes that:

I tried to start up a business here in Hincesti but, in the end, we took it to Galati across the border. There are lots of hair stylists, pharmacies and food stores that are in Romania because there is less bureaucracy there. In our country, corruption is overwhelming. (Man returning from Italy, age 51, Hincesti)

Interviewees point out the importance of the human, social, and even psychological and cultural capital they acquired during the process of migration. Most of them agree that the opportunity to migrate and live abroad transforms migrants' general attitudes, mentalities and vision in several ways and has taught them to be more flexible, to adapt more easily and to find the strength to survive: *"One learns many things there, although higher value is still placed on money"*.

Our sample shows that people tend to go abroad only for some periods of time and at a certain point they decide to return and reintegrate as agents of development in their communities. As Ciprian told us,

If it were possible to accomplish things in our country, about 90% of the people would return. We want to live as in Europe, but we have to learn how to behave as they do in Europe, because in a country it is necessary that businesses function, that taxes are paid, and that people are well. In fact, it is we the returning emigrants who have to change things; to unite and put change into effect. (Man returning from Ireland, age 48, Straseni)

The situation for the remaining 17 interviewees continued to be difficult because they had exhausted the resources saved during the period of their emigration and were unemployed at the time of the interview. They are migrants who still do not hold dual citizenship and so their mobility and therefore their ability to find strategies to thrive in their country is hampered. As Irina told us:

Without European citizenship, without an identity card... it is very difficult. They exploit you and pay you very little... (Woman returning from Portugal, age 47, Straseni)

In fact, the 17 respondents confessed that they earned little during the years of emigration to other countries, although they made serious efforts to save money. For them, “homecomings” tends to generate rising expectations. Given their location in scattered rural settlements returnees were effectively isolated from towns and from potential job markets. As Maria points out:

I cannot find a job after my return. My husband earns just over 3,000 Moldovan lei. And natural gas costs us 2,700 lei per month. Imagine how we live. We survive because we have a vegetable garden. We buy food only in winter. But we have to save forever. (Woman returning from Spain, age 53, Straseni)

We can say that these were cases of marginal return in vulnerable situations. The failure to integrate into the Moldovan labour market upon returning home, as well as poor infrastructures, especially in rural areas, thus became motivating factors (push factors) to continue migration. But to emigrate again under the current conditions is difficult. As Corina noted:

Once I returned without papers. I left again, paid €3,000, and the route was very dangerous; my life was in the balance. There are thousands of people in Moldova who have been unable to return, who suffer. It is because Moldova is throwing us out that we have to leave. (Woman returning from Portugal, age 45, Straseni)

We can see that Moldova still demonstrates a deficiency in the area of a comprehensive policy framework for return migration, which requires an explicit national policy, an organized institutional structure, and an effective coordination mechanism of migration policies.

“It is important for there to be cross-border mobility towards the EU”, said the IOM coordinator of Moldova, because in comparison to emigration to Canada or the United States, it is a process that produces benefits for Moldova in terms of remittances, economic growth, return, the human factor and the change in the mentality of the people who emigrate and their families.

Europeanization of Moldovan returnees

Moldovan mentality is partly formed by their recent history as part of the Soviet Union. However, the migration process in recent years has been changing, and the people returning from abroad have lost their former spirit. The returning emigrants interviewed crafted narratives of identity that dealt in one way or another with a historical or socio-economic framework. This provides a clear trans-European overlap in the sample, and it seems that the overall theme of the border that I suggest in this work was everywhere understood to be about these spheres of identity. This is important, as weak European self-identity is one of the main challenges for the European integration policy of Moldova.

In the fieldwork, respondents argued that Moldova must maintain and strengthen the hallmarks of its identity, but at the same time, the experience of migration/mobility and return for development has instilled the ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong 1999), the idea of belonging to Europe and that their country should and must orient itself towards Europe.

Ioana told me:

Migration and above all mobility have taught me that we belong to Europe. We can move like Europeans, we can go to our country and travel freely, set up a business and go back. We can thrive in any European country. And I think that Moldovans have to change their mindset. For

development, we need two things: to move freely and to belong to Europe. (Woman returning from Spain, age 45, Hincesti)

Therefore, freedom of movement is essential. For them, having a European identity implies coming into the EU and taking on Europeanization. In a broader sense, as Kohli (2000) rightly noted, the term ‘Europeanization’ suggests the emergence of a sentiment of belonging, of a European identity that complements national, regional and local identities.

Despite favouring Moldova’s entry into Europe, respondents discard any possibility of uniting with Romania. They want to have Romanian citizenship by right, but none of those interviewed self-identified as Romanian. Most of them declared that they are Moldovans who speak Romanian.

As Dorin explained:

I am a Moldovan of Romanian origin. There has been talk about union, but we are not a country. We are Moldovan. (Man returning from Belgium, age 43, Anenii Noi)

They note that the border separating and opening may promote the free movement and integration of Moldova into the EU. Andrei noted that:

I felt the border in my skin, and when, at last, I could move freely, I felt at the same time to be a Moldovan and European citizen. (Man returning from Spain, age 48, Anenii Noi)

However, it is important to note that since gaining independence in 1991, Moldova has experienced complex relationships with its neighbours, including Russia. Thus, Moldova, forming part of the contested neighbourhood of the EU and Russia, has been trying to balance between the two powers, playing on their contradictions and availability. According to the

Barometer published by the Public Policy Institute in May 2011, 65% of people are in agreement with Moldova's integration into the EU, while 15% are undecided.

In comparison to these national statistical data, we note the outspokenness of returning emigrants who oppose Russian influence over their country's future, associating Russia with the past and backwardness. The majority of respondents report feeling closer to the EU. As Mariana told us:

For me, I have been living in Spain for five years, I have a Romanian passport, and I was able to travel freely; Russia is a nightmare. We are Europeans. I don't want to think about Russia; it would be like going backwards. I have always thought that Europe is the solution. I say that the people who left could see how life is abroad and can apply what they have seen and heard.

(Woman returning from Portugal, age 45, Hincesti)

Thus, people who practice crossing EU borders, and who live through the experience of migration, acquire a 'transborder citizenship' (Glick-Shiller and Caglar 2008), a pro-European mentality. Moldovan discourse is transformed into a European discourse through a mobility that at the same time is the means by which Moldova will become closer to Europe.

Conclusion. Waiting for Europe

In this paper, I examined from a transnational perspective the perceptions of migration/mobility, return and identity of the Moldovans engaged in emigration in the countries of the EU. Regarding the research questions posed at the beginning, the following conclusions can be made. First, the position of Moldova on the EU border influences the perceptions of emigrants that return to their country. Migrants point out the isolation that they suffer because of a border that separates them from the rest of Europe (Marcu 2009; Marcu 2011). As such, the border both unites and separates them and integrates and fragments them.

Secondly, I have studied how Moldovan migrants use their European citizenship in transnational practices and what impact this may have on return for development. While remittances are for now an important advantage, it has been demonstrated that emigrants' return and their setting up of businesses may help to strengthen the ties between cross-border mobility and development. Although for now, as with Romanians, Moldovans still seem relegated to secondary roles in the European labour market, some of them take advantage of the right to move freely and try to build a successful cross-border strategy combining labour abroad with small entrepreneurship at home. For returnees to contribute to development, the existence of well-functioning social, legal, political and economic institutions is of paramount importance.

In relation to their Europeanization, we note how mobility, return and the potential reconstruction of identity that is closer to Europe can underscore social change in Moldova. Returned Moldovan migrants have a clear pro-European orientation. They agree that Europe is part of their Moldovan identity, and therefore feel they are a part of Europe. Migration instilled in them a sense of being closer to Europe, and they adopt elements of European sense that they use to influence the thinking of their fellow citizens. As Lavenex (2004:213) noted, 'the EU has the ability to export norms, values and models to its "outsiders".'

Given that return for development requires the adequate reintegration of migrants who choose to return to their homeland, a number of specific policy recommendations drawn from this study could help. First of all, there is a need to ensure effective management of cross-border mobility by developing partnerships between Moldova and the EU, providing access to information on legal migration to EU member states. Secondly, we consider that Moldova should also develop effective mechanisms for returning migrant workers by introducing incentives, such as developing monitored programmes for promoting investments in Moldova by Moldovan citizens

working or living abroad; initiating policies and programmes encouraging cross-border mobility among Moldovan migrants in EU member states; and establishing a comprehensive and sustainable system for reintegrating returning migrants. As Arowolo (2000:67) notes, ‘programmes of economic reintegration of returnees must be based on a careful analysis of their background and characteristics, such as age, gender, education/skills acquired, reasons for leaving, type of work done while away, family details, amount of money repatriated, and access to property at home’.

As our fieldwork demonstrated, the international community (IOM) shows openness to Moldova by providing its assistance both to the Government and to migrants. In this line, from the scientific field, I suggest that the contemporary scholarly debates on citizenship, migration and transnationalism thus need to pay closer attention to the experiences of migrants. The situation of returning Moldovans calls for further qualitative research and for researchers from the EU and Moldova to join forces and approach this multifarious phenomenon from many angles and perspectives.

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