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The Characteristics of the Romanian Emigration Phenomenon

Maria PESCARU

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The Characteristics of the Romanian Emigration Phenomenon

Maria PESCARU¹*

Abstract

The sociological structure of Romanians emigrating abroad has changed over time. At first, the graduated, the highly qualified or specialists from urban areas emigrated. Currently, most of the emigrants are young, poor or insufficiently qualified, coming from rural areas. Even if there have been periods of increasing the domestic demand for labor, lately, many Romanians want to go abroad to work. After 1989, the political reflection was unanimous in recognizing the issue of emigration and asylum in Europe from a new perspective, stemming from the process of political developments in the Central and Eastern Europe. The vertiginous emigration from the East to the West has engendered a complex of representations, political mentalities and pragmatic reactions. The first representations on emigration were the significance of the victory of the humanist precepts and the liberal philosophy of human rights. As the phenomenon of emigration evolved in the East-West direction and there were dysfunctions of the exercise of the right to free movement - illegal migration, involuntary migration, foreign citizens in illegal situation, unjustified asylum requests - this phenomenon constituted a source of analysis. Emigration can also be analyzed as a crucial and necessary social act, absolutely mandatory for certain social categories, thus acquiring major community significance. In Romania, we are witnessing a situation of this kind, due to the persistence of youth emigration, the mood of young people to emigrate. The perception of the profile of the Romanian emigrant, together with the study and understanding of the multiple implications of emigration, should be a reference point in the elaboration of Romania's national policies on migration.

Keywords:
Migration, Romanian emigrant, brain drain, cultural model, migration culture.

¹ University of Pitesti, Pitesti, Romania, mariapescaru@yahoo.com

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Corresponding Author: Maria PESCARU
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1. Introduction

Romania became one of the major source countries in the Eastern European migration system in the second half of 1980. The important factors that led to this situation were: the external economic crisis associated with the lack of resources, the isolation of the country and the lack of credibility due to the communist regime [2]. In 1980, the number of Romanian citizens who have applied for refugee status in Western countries was of 2864, and in 1989 their number reached 14864 [23].

After the fall of the communist regime between 1990 and 1993, 190687 Romanian citizens emigrated legally, [21] and 338132 have applied for political asylum in Western countries [23]. Gradually, Western countries have become reluctant to recognize the status of the political persecution of the Romanian migrants, and the political asylum applications have begun to be denied, with many Romanian citizens becoming illegal migrants. Due to the collapse of the Romanian economy, the Romanian illegal migrants, after 1990, settled in another country to work. [15] Thus, many Romanians left to work abroad. In 2000, their number was estimated at 2.5 million [15].

Thus, in 2006, 9% of the Romanian population who was able to work in the country, intended to go abroad to work in 2007 among 18-24-year-olds, with the potential emigrants rising to 23% [22]. This increased availability of young people in Romania to engage abroad can provide more explanations regarding the more general economic and socio-cultural institutional context in Romania. From a theoretical point of view, emigration needs to be analyzed as a structuring process, [8] valorizing the set of ideas associated with the concept of “migration culture” and analytically specifying how the “culture of migration” is present in societal structures. Starting from this theory, important issues can be distinguished: young people’s orientations to migrate can not be exclusively analyzed as preferences that are culturally determined, can not be analyzed as being determined by the context of the structure of opportunities offered by the dynamics of economic life. Emigration orientations for young people are the result of individual structural and cultural opportunities and collective preferences.

The concept of “migration culture” should be analyzed from the perspective of the various senses and analytical dimensions of the notion, but also from the perspective of the structural-particular context of the social organization of labor. It is important to analyze how young people relate to emigration from their communities, to the role emigration plays in various biographical projects of young people. This role becomes an option.
that turns into preference in the specific context of the social organization of work in which it has to choose a way in life.

In view of the scientific approach to migration issues and types of emigration in Romania, we considered it necessary to analyze emigration as a cultural model in terms of major meanings: imports resulting from emigration, deep changes in the value systems, changes in economic and behavioral mentalities and ignoring traditional values.

Of a particular importance is the issue of the deindustrialisation and social organization of labor as a socio-economic process encountered in Romania after 1989, which has intensified international migration as a resource-generating opportunity.

Regarding the duration of the departure and the events in the life of each emigrant, emigration involves the existence of rules and plans. As young people face difficulties in obtaining a job on the domestic market, it is necessary to outline the perspectives of emigration as a transition state for adulthood. In particular, young people in rural areas have a limited spectrum to gain a position in the domestic labor market.

An important topic of debate related to international migration is also the brain drain from Romania, a subject that can be analyzed from the perspective of job search strategies, transnational relations, recognition of qualifications within the international framework and the labor market with career prospects migrants.

The transnationalism is an important aspect of the contemporary migration, as it is determined by the ease of people’s movement as a result of the development of transport and publishing and communication technologies. Transnationalism is encountered in immigrant communities in the diaspora that can be aware of everything that is happening in the country.

Migration offers aspects of positive and negative experience of life, structure of migrants by level of studies between 1995-2017 and other data, argues the measures that could be taken at the economic, social and cultural level in order not to confront massive flows of migrants.

2. Theoretical Background

In general, emigration is determined by the individual’s inner impulse consisting of necessity, desire, passion, feeling, emotion, etc. and which inspires him/her to move to a potentially safer place. In this respect, legally, the emigration act has its content, alongside the objective side and the subjective side, the evolutionary factor. Purpose-as an element of the
subjective side-defines the subject pursued by the emigrant, as a rule, the change in the objective reality-by transposing emigration into practice.

From a sociological point of view, emigration is a phenomenon that involves the movement of crowds of people from one territorial area to another one, a change of residence and a form of activity in the area of arrival.

The reporting of the phenomenon in a given population implies the existence of two forms of migration: immigration (the ensemble of inputs) and emigration (the set of outcomes). In fact, any migrant act is at the same time an immigration and an emigration.

From the perspective of the national territory, from the sociological point of view, there is internal migration, when the migration is made on the territory of the respective country and external or international migration.

The characterization of a migratory act as temporary or definitive is difficult at the moment of its occurrence, which is why it is necessary to reconstruct the emigration after a period of time beyond which it can be considered definitive.

The types of emigration characteristic to the Romanian society and that have met in the evolution of this social-historical phenomenon are:

- "economic emigration", from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, predominantly in North America;
- "political emigration", after World War II, in Western Europe, but also in North and Latin America;
- "contemporary economic emigration", massive in Western Europe, but also with a much wider area of distribution worldwide due to increased mobility” [11].

The process of the Romanian diaspora formation has crystallized in three periods of time, but the types of emigration in Romania, depending on the reasons for leaving abroad and the professional status of emigrants, are economic, political and cultural.

a. Economic emigration. In Romania, the indifference of the governors to the living conditions determined those who decided to emigrate, leave their homes, break up families and relatives to seek better living conditions or higher sources of earnings in other countries. At the individual level, the decision to leave to work abroad was part of a life strategy, it had certain purposes, such as personal well-being and material comfort of the family.

b. Political emigration. The establishment of the communist regime in power after 1945 led to the abolition of private property and the restriction of the right to free movement, the persecution of the Romanian political and intellectual elite, the rich and those with high political responsibilities opposing the restrictive measures imposed by the Communists. Historical
political parties have been abolished, and their representatives have been investigated, harassed, and convicted. Political figures and wealthy owners who have been seized by wealth, state officials, and citizens who have not accepted abuses of the new power, have fled the country to save themselves from Communist terror. They have sought asylum in different Western European countries, but also in other continents, North America and Latin America.

The political emigration also expanded during Ceauşescu government, with thousands of Romanians illegally crossing the borders of Romania and the Danube to reach Serbia, where, after a temporary stay, they went to an inviting capitalist country. During that period of Communist oppression, Romanian citizens who went to official delegations abroad or to tourists renounced their return to Romania.

c. Cultural emigration. This has involved, in particular, some writers, artists, scientists and scientific researchers, performance athletes, university professors, journalists, branded spirits in philosophy and dramaturgy, who left Romania in several stages of the communist period to benefit in more developed societies, freedom of creation and expression, professional achievements and a social climate conducive to value recognition. They have chosen to live, work and affirm in different countries of the world, where they have found favorable living and creative conditions, demonstrating creative virtues of reference in the sphere of spiritual life, making the entire creative spirit of the Romanian world known and suffering for being away from home.

After the Revolution of December 1989, a large number of intellectuals who left, returned to Romania, others left their lives away from their country, remaining in the memory of the Romanians with their valuable contributions to the development of science and culture.

3. Argument of the paper

Emigration is one of the social processes that deeply influence the present Romanian society, becoming a subject of reflection alongside other central themes today in social sciences: globalization, transnationalism, changes imposed by the development of communications and transport, etc. Recontextualizing discussions on emigration and focusing on issues of sociological importance provides a wider perspective, useful for an adequate understanding of contemporary migration. The phenomenon of Romanians’ migration abroad is generally known only by the magnitude and the socio-economic causes that determine it. It must also be analyzed from the
perspective of models of thought, action and identity assertion, but also of the effects on those left behind or returned home. From this perspective it would be necessary to implement migration policies in Romania.

The concept of “migration culture” refers to “changes in cultural values and perceptions. [6] This concept can be analyzed from the perspective of four major meanings.

The first meaning of “migration culture” refers to imports resulting from migration. Emigration can become a cultural fact in the communities of origin, resulting in new habits, perspectives, ideas and values that can become part of the culture of the home society and can mark the decisional context of that society [7]. Thus, there are changes in consumption-related behaviors, and the analysis of the Romanian migration phenomenon has made changes in this respect [10]. Imports resulted from migration can contribute to profound changes in the value systems of home companies. The literature describes changes in economic mentality to former migrants who return to their home societies in the context of migration, gaining the experience of individualism and competitive behavior. These behavioral patterns are in contrast to the collective values that are promoted in some pre-industrial societies. Returned to communities of origin, individuals act competitively, guided by the goal of maximizing profits, and ignore the logic of community control, which is oriented towards maintaining the traditional status structure [4]. Such behaviors can determine value orientations for different segments of society that offer more individualized life strategies. Some specialists [20] Some specialists have analyzed cases of emigrants where, due to sustained migration, the dominant alternative to generating the necessary resources for households has become migration, and the opportunities to connect to the local labor market have been ignored. If emigration becomes more efficient for generating resources, emigrants become less motivated to deal with some traditional economic activities. These changes may lead to the decline of production practices and the future subsistence of home companies, depending on migration. [19] In Romania, there are such tendencies in rural areas where land ownerships and productivity in the cultivation of the land were considered as the constitutive dimensions of individual and family identities and were an important source of social prestige at local level. Due to the absence of an important segment of the labor force for long periods of time and the reevaluation of local economic efficiency, the cultivation of land has become less attractive in Romania. [17]

The concept of “migration culture” can have meanings that refer to how to assess emigration. From this perspective, the culture of migration can be analyzed as a system of norms and ideologies that function as a
framework for interpreting and assessing stability or mobility in society. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, Hungarian intellectuals in Romania saw a position in their emigration towards Hungary, against the resistance to economic hardship. This was followed by anti-Magyar political manifestations. [5]

The Communist authorities condemned emigration on ideological grounds, considering it a form of protest against the regime, saying that “the emigration of a larger number of citizens symbolically disregards the regime and challenges its legitimacy (in front of the remaining ones and the international audience) as a functioning political system.” [5]

The concept of “migration culture” must also be understood in terms of the changes that have occurred, due to the fact that part of the community is emigrating the patterns of accommodation, the prolonged absence of part of the community. Some specialists explain that in Romania there are situations where, due to absenteeism as a result of emigration, the norms of inclusion and community belonging are redefined or situations where certain functions (especially economic and family) are redeployed in different ways due to the prolonged absence of some family members.

The challenge of researching the phenomenon of migration is determined by the extreme diversity of life situations in the field of emigration, as well as by the great diversity in the field of knowledge. Migration concepts, perspectives and theories seem to be overcome by the dynamics of the phenomenon. We can thus explore the life experiences of Romanian immigrants by focusing on life projects, remittances or the communication they have with their home people. This exploration can be in comparative and historical perspective, by reference to different levels of life (from individual and family, community and region, transnational spaces).

“Moving from a closed society, as Romania was before 1990, to a society with more than two and a half million people going to work abroad, is obviously the result of a large-scale process. Less of the public debate is the internal facet of the phenomenon, related to the large number of remanders, those who have returned to the country over the years (especially before the global financial crisis started in 2008); almost a third of people adults who are in the country have gone to work abroad at least once.” [15]

Emigration can also be analyzed as a crucial and necessary social act, absolutely mandatory for certain social categories, thus acquiring major community significance. In Romania, we are witnessing a situation of this kind, due to the persistence of youth emigration, the mood of young people to emigrate.
Some authors also use the concept of the social world of migrants with “meaningful living space structured by patterns of thought, identity and action associated with migration” [15] to this world the quality of socio-cultural spaces in which groups resemble the way of thought, action and identity assertion.

Analyzing the phenomenon of emigration in our country some specialists pointed out that “Over one third of the country’s households, about two and a half million, had at least one of their members left abroad after 1989. About one fifth of Romanian households had a member who has worked abroad. The share of people aged 18-19 who have worked abroad since 1989 is at least 12% of the population ... increased especially after 2002, with the liberalization of the Schengen area for Romanians. Currently, the phenomenon of temporary departure to work abroad is about three times more intense than in 2002.” [15]

4. Arguments to support the thesis

*The brain drain* has been and remains an important subject of debate due to its consequences on social and economic development and is associated with international migration from less developed countries to more developed countries. Brain outpouring goes beyond the area of the economy, having effects on the social and political development of the countries of origin.

The term “brain drain” means the international transfer of human capital, the emigration of relatively high educated individuals from developing countries to developed countries. In the opinion of some authors, “the irony of the current international migration is that ... many of those who legally migrate from the poor to the richest are those that countries ... least allow them to lose: the highly educated and qualify. Since most of these migrants are leaving definitively, this perverse brain drain not only represents a loss of valuable human resources but could also be a major constraint on the future economic progress of nations....” [18]

In Romania, the emigration of the highly skilled labor force is influenced and affected by globalization and the needs of the knowledge economy. In the opinion of some authors, “though much is known about migrating highly skilled workers and their consequences on destination countries, there are still many issues that need to be explored dynamically”. [16]

The brain drain phenomenon in general is characterized by common trajectories and patterns of emigration: job search strategies, reasons for
emigration, transnational relations, recognition of qualifications, the international character of some professions, the presence of a labor market international potential with the intent to pursue and develop career prospects.

Reasons for emigration are combinations of issues that make people assess their current environment and outlook. Those who went abroad to study abroad as the main reason say that “the factor of studying abroad” was only an apparent cause, but the real cause was the search for better conditions and means to achieve a higher standard of living and satisfactory jobs. Other reasons for this are the possibility of discovering new countries, cultures and places and a more satisfying working environment. It is remarkable for emigrants that the feeling of frustration with Romania, combined with expectations and illusions, despise the Western countries in which they are immigrants.

Some specialists claim that “despite the attraction of higher economic opportunities, migration is generally” expensive “in both monetary and psychological terms ... Young skilled immigrants are at a stage in their lives can move without the burden of many family responsibilities .... In this era of globalization and economic opportunism, many of the youngest are willing or even anxious to move to another country. [3]

The presence of relatives abroad has a limited influence on the emigration of skilled workers, with labor opportunities being the cause of potential emigrants to decide. The initial migration chain seems not to be always continued by others in the same family, community, or locality. The family network seems to have no such significant influence, and migratory trends are all metropolitan. [1]

Some specialists work in Romania for foreign companies. Working in a foreign company can help create conditions for emigration, but can also be a mechanism for human resource retention, when working conditions in Romania exceed the local standards in this area. Outsourcing refers to the relocation of some of the production segments to take advantage of the cheaper and more skilled labor force in Romania. Such work is actually called brainless bodies, because the products of these brains work at a distance end up on the Internet directly to the foreign business center, which is a form of virtual mobility of the workforce.

Strategies that are used to find a job abroad can be grouped in two ways: personal or professional networks or internet searches to gather information and enroll in competitions. Few of the highly qualified Romanians resort to job placement agencies. The Internet is an important means of spreading information about companies, positions and procedures
globally. The job search process is quite easy, compared to the problems associated with obtaining a work permit.

The choice of a particular country of destination is influenced by the quality of life and work preoccupations. Some employment policies can keep Romanian immigrants in a state of instability and disadvantage compared to their competitors in the host countries. They affect the workforce of immigrants, restricting it to a certain extent, employers being able to take advantage.

This emigration type occurs when the highly qualified labor force is employed in Romania in less paid or lower levels of qualification, not ensuring professional development and personal fulfillment. The decision to emigrate is not a choice, but a possibility of fruitful development of the educational path and of the cultural potential. The Romanian environment fails to always encourage the stimulation of the best performances of individuals, it is lacking good and well paid jobs, typical of a post-communist country. Generally, the brain drain is treated as a natural and spontaneous factor as a result of globalization.

Even when the brain drain is understood as a loss for Romania, the benefit of the good reputation enjoyed by scientists and skilled workers in Romania in most of the developed countries and, implicitly, in Belgium, is also recognized by the fact that offers Romanian families additional regular return income, with added value given by the additional human capital acquired abroad.

Because the causes of brain drain are very profound and problematic, economic development means are needed, such as: providing ameliorative opportunities to motivate skilled workers to stay in the country by applying retention policies; attracting foreign investment and capital to the country; attracting those who left the country by offering them incentives, higher wages and a free market economy. Other measures to be taken include: changing governance, in particular, in the fight against corruption and the completion of the political and economic reforms recommended by the European Union.

Beyond the fact that the substantial investment that the Romanian state does with the education and training of these people is no longer recovering, it cannot count on their contribution to the general development of Romania. The phenomenon is all the more worrying, as the employment of young people in the country with high performances remains a delicate issue, as long as the national economy does not offer attractive solutions.

A solution that should be permanently considered for diminishing the intensity of this phenomenon is the re-absorption of Romanian students who have studied at universities abroad on the labor market in Romania.
Such an approach should be conditioned by the development of a viable strategy to convince the young people to return to the country within a timeframe in which they can be useful to Romanian society. Other solutions could include: providing tax incentives for those employing young Romanians returning to the country, applying favorable credit schemes for purchasing a home, etc.

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

Romania re-entered, after almost 45 years of restrictions, in 1990, the international migration circuit. During the communist era, there were only a few types of migration: state-controlled ethnic migration (accessible to Jews, Germans, Hungarians), family-based migration and poor migration for work in “friendly” states.

The Romanians’ freedom to move freely implied a movement allowed by the state of origin, but which quickly struck the restrictions imposed by the states of destination. Thus, the Romanians began to learn the rule of the international game in which a departure from the country of origin did not mean an unconditional entry into the destination country.

Emigration is strictly linked to the labor market due to the fact that the reasons for the decision to migrate are usually grounds related to the economic status of the person in Romania. From this perspective, we stressed that even though the emigration approach in our country remains focused on the exclusive aspect of European migration measures and policies, the new social, economic and geostrategic conditions require the resizing of measures necessary to ensure a competitive institutional framework, coupled with concrete immigration measures and policies.

The migration process may involve multiple transformations over time as it is not static. Labor migration can in time be a complex social construction involving several actors: home nations, receiving societies and immigrants.

Brain mobility does not yet mean brain drain because a movement of people, skills and contributions is a connection with Romania. Some professions are highly mobile by nature. Globalization provides the necessary conditions for international mobility and transnational identities.

6. Dismantling the arguments against

One of the important causes of emigration is the pay gap, in the opinion of specialists, only by adopting a macro perspective can long-term
solutions be found to solve this problem. [9] The necessary conditions would be: rapid economic and social development, substantially increased aid, increased foreign direct investment. Communication and online communities are very relevant but should not be treated separately from the physical adoption and integration required in the destination countries.

As the economic situation improves in Romania, and the wage differences between our country and the developed countries in the European Union will be reduced, a smaller number of Romanians will take into account the migration variant, and those who emigrated, a large part will return to the country.

In the specialists opinion, “the current economic and demographic contrasts in the world, as well as the devastating effects of natural disasters, will continue to impinge on the territorial mobility of the population in various parts of the world. Those belonging to younger generations will not only be the most willing to radically change their own condition of life, but also those most apt to assume entry into the international migration trend.” [12]

7. Conclusions

Migration is a response to the discrepancies in the political, security, demographic situation, but also to a response to economic conditions. International migration has its roots in the structural realities of the international economic system. Well-managed, migration can become a tool for development, and development can influence the dynamics and migration structure.

Migration management requires coordinated interventions at global and regional level. The existence of different types of migration requires flexible policy approaches. For Romania, it is important to look at how migration can reduce poverty and contribute to development, how the effects of skilled labor emigration can be offset or mitigated, how the diaspora can be better harnessed.

Romania’s national space opening for the flow of people, goods, capital, technology and information is not without concerns social adjustments, especially if unqualified persons. The impact of technological developments on the need for unskilled labor will lead to a society in which there will be a higher income gap between those with higher and unskilled qualifications.
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