

Social and Cultural Impact of Migration on Albanian Society After 1990s

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Abstract

Internal and international migration is one of the most dynamic and specifying phenomenon of Albanian society after 1990. Albanian society has undergone a series of economic, social and cultural changes caused by the increasing flows of internal and international migration. Referring to these changes we aim to analyze based on a sociological perspective the complexity of migration phenomenon and its impact on social and cultural plan. The focus of this study is Korça city which represents a social and cultural environment characterized by the phenomenon of massive displacement of population from rural areas to the city, as well as of migration to Greece. Data for this paper will be provided by in-depth interviews, which enable us to understand Albanian migration trajectories, as well as the degree of social and cultural integration of migrants. This study provides new insights into line with existing studies and sheds light on integration process between subcultures in local context of Korça city.

Keywords

Rural to Urban Migration, International Migration, Cultural Diversity, Social Integration

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1. Introduction

Political and economic transformations that occurred in Albanian society in 1990s were followed by a series of demographic and cultural consequences. The most significant consequence of these changes was the phenomenon of internal and international migration. Social development is closely linked with the act of displacement and movement of people from one place to another and adapting to the new social environment. Dynamic transformations during transition, the difficult economic and political situation in the country in general and in some regions in particular, alongside the social and demographic characteristics of the population (young aged people, high unemployment rates, etc.) were the main impetus factors for migrants.

Developments in Albania and particularly in Korça city after 1990s are characterized by profound economical, social, demographical and cultural changes. Internal migration in

Albania led to an uncontrolled urbanization and informal development. Internal migration flows are directed mainly from the far north of the country to the main urban centers, such as Tirana, a city which has been the most attractive destination for most internal migrants.

International migration acts as a source of development and hope for the future for internal migrants, but has also created and economic dependence for migrants' families. Social and financial remittances from international migrants are not only a way of life for internal migrants, but also as a protective system for the community. Migration bring people from diverse cultures (with different customs, knowledge, skills, values) into contact with one another, thus it may be regarded as a major mechanism of social and cultural diffusion.

This study aims to analyze and explain a significant sociological phenomenon; the displacement of people in the developed world in search of a better way of life and the consequences of this shift in social and cultural terms

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(relocation includes internal migration, from rural-to- urban areas, as well as international migration). Migration is the major mechanism underlying changes that have taken and are still taking place in the pattern of human settlement.

Confronting the cultural elements diffused from neighboring cultures with subcultures features which characterize Albanian psychological and cultural profile leads to new problems associated first with sub-cultural integration opportunities, cultural coexistence, second tolerance, third integration to the host society and culture, the risk of cultural assimilation as well the attempt to preserve the components of home culture versus globalization trends.

2. Albanian Migration and Its Impacts

Migration is known as a temporary or permanent movement of people from one geographic area of residence to another (Denisoff R. S. & Wahrman R, 1983: 577). Sometimes migrants settle in countries with large cultural differences from the place of origin and feel like strangers in their new destination, trying to preserve their culture, traditions and language by transmitting these to their children.

The transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, unemployment, the legacy of inefficient economic model from the former regime, the destruction of economic structures and political crisis of 1991 and 1997, were the main reasons that migration became the most satisfying solution to all major problems of Albanians. By the end of 1990, about half a million Albanians have left the country in search of work and a better life, making this to be one of the most massive migration of Albanians after the fifteenth century (Biberaj E, 2011: 37). According to INSTAT (1998, 2001, 2002), the unemployment rate in Albania has fallen in recent years compared with the early years of transition, from over 25 % in 1993 to 14.4 % in 2004. In 1995 the number of migrants is likely to have been between 450,000 and 500,000 (3/5 lived in Greece, 1/5 in Italy and 1/5 in Western Europe) (See: Albanian Housing and Population Census 2001).

The main destination of Albanian migrants ones from Korça district was Greece. Geographical distance and the hard economic and social situation in Albania were some indicators that explain this phenomenon. There is a low number of families in Korça city which have no family member who has had migration experience in Greece during 1990-2006. Besides geographical proximity as the most significant factor to explain massive Albanian migration to Greece, there are some other reasons concerning geopolitical and economic sphere of Greece, such as:

- Greece is an EU country

- Economic development which is much higher than Macedonia
- Greater work opportunities
- Historical kinship ties (Vullnetari J, 2012: 109).

Most of Albanian migrants are located in Athens, Thessaloniki and other urbanized centers. These cities attract most of the migrants because they offer more employment opportunities. Their size and social heterogeneity facilitates social integration of migrants. Seasonal migration connected to labor in agriculture is another characteristic of Albanian migration to Greece. Recently realized data from the Greek Ministry of Interior show that more than 40,000 permits for seasonal and temporary employment were granted to Albanians during 2007-2009, namely 13,416 in 2007, 13,732 in 2008 and 13,679 in 2009 (Vullnetari J, 2012:85). The main squares of the cities serve to migrants as meeting and socialization spaces, where they share together information on access to employment. For residents of Korça city and its suburbs Thessaloniki remains the most attractive destination to migrate, because of the historical ties between these two cities (cultural and commercial ties between cities before World War II).

On the other hand internal migration is expressed in massive urbanization of some areas and depopulation of the others. Internal migration in Albanian context characterizes the displacement of individuals between districts, between the districts of the same prefecture, between rural areas and cities; the latter is the focus of our study.

For the first time, the population living in urban areas has exceeded the population living in rural areas. The resident population in urban areas is 53.5 per cent while 46.5 per cent of the population lives in rural areas (See: Albania Population and Housing Census 2011). Such a phenomenon is closely linked to modernization. This population shift has had a huge cost for Albanian society and was associated with different problems and conflicts never happened before, such as the occupation of lands that belonged to the rightful owners, building entire neighborhoods on the suburbs of cities without the necessary infrastructure and without applying the laws of urbanization, which brought a real chaos in city life.

Rural exodus of the population is explained by the push and pull factors theory, of socio-economic inequality between areas. Studies show that migration of people from rural to urban areas brings important consequences in their lives in terms of education, employment, family relations, lifestyle in general. Internal migration mainly affects young active population. INSTAT data show that 72% of migrants belonged to the age group 20 to 65 years old (Albanian Census 2001).

Migration (both internal and international) is associated with important demographic, economic, social and cultural implications within Albanian society. Thus internal migration has contributed to the concentration of the new work force, which has led to the promotion of an important demographic and economic pressure in a very limited number of areas of the country as well as the phenomenon of brain drain. (Albania Housing and Population Census 2001, page 28).

Rural exodus has helped in this way, in a functional division of the territory. There is a clear distinction between those areas which are characterized by a traditional pattern of life, with numerous women who leave the labor market and in those areas that are characterized by a concentration of economic activity, becoming in this way fed up areas that fail to integrate the labor force recently settled. Large flows of population coming from rural areas have led to rapid urbanization and large concentration of population in urban areas. Internal migration, combined with massive emigration of Albanians has led to significant changes in gender relationship of population, impacts in labor market development. Summing up it is important to note that among the most visible consequences of internal and international migration in Albanian society are:

- Changes in population structure
- Changes in the geographical distribution of the population
- Changes in the internal structure of the population
- Destruction of elements of urban service sanitation systems, drinking water supply, energy, housing, health service, etc.
- Shift in economic structure (mainly the impact of financial remittances from emigrants which create a security system for Albanian families in terms of economic and social maintenance
- Changes in cultural plan, related to the melting and co-existence of different sub-cultural elements in a diversified social environment.

3. Migration as a Factor of Cultural Diversity

Migration studies indicate social and cultural transformations of urban environment resulting from the efforts of migrants to build a new life in the country of destination. (Dina Vaiou & Mary Stratigaki, 2008: 120).

In sociological studies special attention is paid to the mechanisms of social change and cultural diversity and the main factors that determine such dynamics. Sociologist Zyhdi Dervishi (2011) considers the cultural diffusion as one of the most influential factors in the development of culture.

Migration is an important mechanism of social and cultural diffusion that requires special attention in sociological studies. Thanks to migration process individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds come into contact by creating diverse and complex social environments in terms of the cultural formation and patterns of social interaction.

It is found that migratory movements affect social and cultural development; major changes occur in family relationships, lifestyle, tendency for acquiring new cultural values. This is more evident to migration of the rural population towards developed urban centers. New economic resources, new working tools, dynamic social interaction in the country of destination, constitute an important source in transforming individuals lifestyles (Tirta M, 2006: 147-148).

While the debate about the costs and benefits that society has of cultural diversity is still intense, there is a consensus among researchers about the impact of migration in cultural and sub-cultural diversity. Many studies focused on identifying the social and cultural impacts of migration (Levitt 1998, De Haas & Van Rooij 2010, Vullnetari J, 2012).

Due to internal movements and emigration to Greece social environment of Korça city is characterized by a significant sub-cultural diversity. There is a coexistence of rural subculture, urban subculture and the one of people with emigration experience. People coming from rural areas appear to be integrated in different levels in urban life. This depends on factors such as age, time of migration, education level, etc. The level of cultural integration affects patterns of social interaction. On the other hand emigration to Greece and especially financial and social remittances from emigrants have brought significant changes to urban lifestyle as well as to the way of living of people from rural areas.

4. Data from Survey

Cultural integration patterns are usually not directly observable dimensions. Through in-depth interviews this paper aims to highlight the degree of social and cultural integration people came from rural areas and the ones with migratory experience to Greece in urban culture as well as to shed light on different patterns of sub-cultural coexistence. The study is based on 25 in-depth interviews; 10 interviews with individuals who have moved to Korça city from the village, 10 interviews with residents who have emigrated to Greece (6 of them have returned after a long period of living in Greece, 4 of them are seasonal emigrants who go and come several times during the year) and 5 interviews with people from urban subculture. The interviewees have been selected intentionally and through "snowball method". They belong to the age group 20 to 55 years and represent different

educational and professional status.

Data from the interviews show that Albanian's migratory trajectories are very complex. Estimates from the respondents lead to the conclusion that internal and international migration in Korça region has affected the dynamics of relationship between subcultures.

Both internal and international migration has played a central role in social, political, economic changes of rural and urban community. Migration has offered new opportunities to earn an external income independent of the constraints set by traditional peasant society. However it is important to say that people moved from rural to urban areas take with them traditions, customs, mentality, lifestyle, which they continue to practice in the host society, but somewhat moderated (Tirta M, 2006: 187).

Migration and the close confrontation with other cultural models this involves, seems to have a profound influence on local culture and perceptions of people living in sending communities. Cultural features of emigrants face those of cultural environment where they settle (of Greece concerning our case), bringing changes in attitudes, behavior, way of speaking, thinking, life-style in general.

The integration of migrants in urban areas is mainly based on their economic interests while, at the same time, maintaining their unique identity in terms of social and cultural life. In Albanian context, family and family ties remain very important factors that determine the decision to migrate and the choice of destination. Moreover, these links create what is known in the literature as chain migration and social networks in the choice of destination.

Motives for cultural integration are directly related to the expected benefits of individuals or groups from interaction. Cultural integration facilitates exchanges between individuals. Cultural integration model suggests that individuals from two different cultural groups have joined to social and economic interaction.

Based on the survey data those concluding remarks could be mentioned as follows:

- Migrants who return to their country of origin bring new skills and new ideas.
- Migration can provide a vital source of income for migrant's women and their families, and offer them greater autonomy and improved family and social status.
- Migration change expectations of women and men to one another and leads to more tolerant relationships between men and women
- Emigration affects the phenomenon of displacement of population from the village to the city. Financial

remittances of migrant facilitate not only the living conditions of the rest of the family, but also the process of transferring to urban areas.

- Migration brings new perspectives and enriches cultural diversity. Cultural background of migrants affects migration (migration behavior, decision to migrate, who will migrate, where, how), while the migration process itself affects cultural patterns of migrants.
- Migration of men abroad, besides numerous consequences that bring family relations, especially to family members left behind, serves as a factor that promotes the transition to small nuclear families (De Haas & Van Rooij, 2010). Migration-related tensions on remittance use have played an accelerating role in the breakdown of extended families and have stimulated the lifting out of nuclear families and nucleation of family life.

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