

Migration and Social Transformation. the Case of Albania and Greece

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Abstract

Migration has become a very sensitive issue for the society not in Albania, but in Europe and beyond it last twenty years. The development through migration seems to be a political issue, therefore it's still regarded a social problem which needs to be controlled. Migration has played a big role within the social order, bounding societies with high cultural differences and beliefs. The case of Albania and Greece, after 1991, helps me to claim that migration has not only influenced the development of both countries, but it has also transformed the social life. This paper aims to take into account two important issues; social transformation and human mobility and its relationship with migration and development, observing the case of Albania and Greece 1991 -2013. The paper will answer the question about the social integration and benefits of both social groups involved; migrants and hosting communities. Globalization (especially after the collapse of the communist regime in Albania), represents an important development in social, economical and political life in both countries, Albania and Greece. The migration of Albanians denied for more than forty years by the communist regime, was reflected with the wave of migration after 1991 initially in Italy and Greece. Within two years, more than 300,000 Albanians emigrated, seeking for a better life, while after 20 years more than 1 million Albanians are living abroad. Albanians are by far the largest groups of foreign workers in Greece, estimated at 650,000 to 800,000. With the economical crises in Greece the situation has changed and many of migrants have decided to return home. What they bring home is not only their money and experience, but they bring most the social transformation. Focusing on the social transformation and human mobility, this research brings into the attention not only benefits of economical developments, but also the social transformation, through exchanging skills and attitude, brain circulation from which benefits both countries.

Keywords: Social transformation, migration, development, brain circulation.

1. Introduction

After 1991, Albania has faced with one of the great emigration of modern times in Western Balkans comparing Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Between 1990 – 2013, roughly 800,000 people have migrated out of Albania, where more than 650,000 of them are settled in Greece, where Albanians make up 60% of immigrants (INSTAT, 2002). After the fall of communism in the early 1990, a large number of economic emigrants arrived in Greece to seek employment. Although our attention is focused on the migration after 1991, we should be aware that migration in Greece is not a new phenomenon for Albanians. The *Arvanites* in Greece, are the historical legacy of such Ottoman migration, and constituted a significant part of the tiny population of Athens at the birth of modern Greek state in 1830. A wave of Albanian migrations started in 1912 after the Balkan Wars and continued until 1945 when the new post-war regime prohibited emigration (Philip & Susan M. and Ferruccio, 2002) Although the initial entry of Albanians in Greece in 1991 until 2000 was through mountains by walk, after this time it seems to have been by visas for those who had relatives in Greece.

This paper, interprets social transformation and human mobility and its relationship with migration and development, focusing not only on economical benefits, but also the social transformation, through exchanging skills and attitude, brain circulation from which benefits both countries. It answers the questions about the benefits of both social groups involve; migrants in one side and hosting communities in the other side.

From the very arrival of Albanian migrants in Greece were stigmatized as “dangerous people” by Greek media. There were repeated claims such as that reported in a leading newspaper, *Kathimerini*, in January 1996 that 60% of all recorded crimes

were committed by foreigners, mostly Albanians (Lazaridis and Wickens, 1999). In fact, as demonstrated in some reports and analyses of immigrants and crime in Greece, the statistics cited that immigrant crime is largely confined to robbery, theft and beggary, whereas serious crimes (murder, rape) are committed overwhelmingly by Greeks (Baldwin-Eduards, 1998). After the first wave of Albanians migration, where most of them were engaged on different sectors of Greek economy, there is evidences that Greeks have increased personal contacts with Albanian immigrants and have changed the negative stereotype.

An important dimension of the relationships between immigrants and Greek families has started to appear after the integration of their children in schools. Both immigrants' children and Greek have studied in same classes, bringing so the culture differences in a setting that young people get over the stereotypes created in the past.

Because of the fact that Greek economy is suffering during last four years, the migration towards Greece is reduced. After 20 years of migration, as it has appeared the Greek crisis in its economy, many of Albanians have been thinking to leave Greece. Some of them are already returned to Albania with their families, while many others have migrated to other developed countries. In the period 1990–2003, an estimated 45% of Albania's academics emigrated to Canada, USA, UK and other EU countries, as did more than 65% of the scholars who received PhDs in the West in the period 1980–1990. 22,395 Albanians live in Canada, while 113,661 is the current Albanian population in United States¹.

In this paper I argue that we need to think more clearly what social transformation and development has happened due to the migration of Albanian in Greece. The reason why the relationship between migration and socio-economic development has attracted so much the public attention is because of the returning back in their home country and the need to adapt with the new environment. One of the questions that I want to raise, is how could we offer a better environment for repatriated emigrants? What are the social transformations that they bring back in Albania, and if we are ready to make them feel at home? What are the skills and attitude they bring back, and the government could develop policies for this group of people? In this context, I think that it is important to recognize the impact that returned migrants will have not only in the economy but also on social life.

Human mobility, is likely to have both positive and negative consequences for both countries, in the social transformation and development, thus it is quite challenging to analyze those.

Recent studies on relation between migration and development are focused mainly on international migration and its impact on economic growth, poverty as well inequality in sending countries. The debate on migration and development has tended to bring different perspectives from the 1950s as a theory of development-alism, moving later during 1980s towards views influenced by the new economics of labour migration, while after 1990s migration theories are focused on a transnational approach. During last four decades, the impact of migration on development in migrant sending countries has been the subject of heated debates. This debate is reflected on recent studies, targeting Albanian migration and immigration towards Greece and other Western countries.

The debate between migration and development has two different approaches, those who are optimists which are inspired by neo-classical theory and others who are pessimists which are drawn by structuralism social theory. Optimists see the migration as a tool that develops the economy and generate remittances and investments as well knowledge and skills to be invested in the economy and directly stimulate the development (Taylor, 1999), while pessimists tend to address migration as a negative phenomenon contributing to the "development of underdevelopment" instead of the reverse (Lipton, 1980, Rubenstein, 1992). Migration pessimists have also argued that remittances were mainly spent on investments such as houses a rarely in productive enterprise (Lipton 1980).

Remittances are considered a vital source for the development of the economy. However the current debate on migration, remittances and development suffers from a number of shortcomings. Sen (1999) offered a more comprehensive approach to development by conceiving it as the process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy. His understanding of development includes elements such as social well-being, poverty alleviation, income inequality, gender equality and universal access to primary education, health care and meaningful employment.

¹ Migration Policy Institute. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/article/albania-looking-beyond-borders/>

These debates on migration and development seem to be influenced by the paradigm shift in social theory in which social scientists harmonize the debate interaction between migration and development.

2. Methods

The research methodology involves the collection and the analysis of materials relevant to the study. The basic way deals with: data collecting, data analyses and the analyses of the findings from the field work. To answer the main question, the study implies the method of analyzing theories and empirical work. Theoretical work is based on former studies related to immigration and development, and critics towards this perspective, analyzing the experience of migration of Albanians after 1990 in Greece.

The empirical task is focused on the field work, using thirteen interviews with returned and seasonal emigrants. All these data collected are analyzed qualitatively.

3. Migration flow

This paper is mainly focused on the migration after 1991, which is still continuing nowadays. In 2000, the Albanian migration scholar Kostab Bajraba published official of the total number of Albanian emigrants living abroad in 1999. The Albanian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs estimated 800,000 emigrants with 500,000 in Greece and 200,000 in Italy. Other countries hosting significant numbers of Albanians included Germany (12,000), United States (12,000), United Kingdom (5,000), Canada (5,000) Belgium (2,500), France (2,000), Turkey (2,000), Austria (1,000), Switzerland (1,000) and Australia (1,460). Some of these latter figures are likely to be underestimates, given the mobility of Albanian migrants, especially within Europe, and the rapid evolution of new migration channels and routes in recent years. Indeed, recently the new wave of migration of Albanians is towards UKs (Bajraba, 2000).

The publication of the results of the 2001 Albanian Census (INSTAT, 2002) enabled new estimates of the scale of emigration during the 1990s to be made. Moreover, some estimates of its regional incidence could also be inferred. The Census revealed an estimated net loss due to emigration of more than 600,000, calculated by the census residual method. This figure is somewhat less than Bajraba's (2000) slightly earlier estimate of 800,000; but again, as noted earlier, the two figures are not incompatible since the census explicitly excluded short-term migration of less than one year's duration.

Whilst most authorities concur that Albanians in Italy number around 200,000, possibly 250,000 (Pittau & Forti, 2004), quantifying the much more fluid movement and presence of Albanians in Greece is more difficult since its cross-border, to-and-fro nature challenges the very meanings of migration and residency. However, the 2001 Greek census figure of 443,550 Albanians tends to confirm previous estimates which were generally in the range 450,000 to 500,000, since the census will probably have missed some Albanians present in Greece (King, 2003).

4. Challenges and barriers of migrants

Migrants from Albania, with a diverse language and cultural background, from the very beginning have faced obstacles to gaining host community acceptance, which limited their ability to participate, contribute and settle in Greece. Some of the barriers faced are related with language, negative stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, negative and stereotypical reporting by media, which have led directly to the access to employment, education, health and housing.

Living in these new realities, to adapt to these cultures developed or consolidated civilization, as the case of Greece, adaptation it has been undoubtedly necessary; to know the culture, language, habits, to become part of the fast development, competitive and dynamic modern life there. In this respect, Albanians have demonstrated extraordinary vitality, power and energy as a result of long suppression during 45 years of dictatorship, but also as a reflection of the fact that it is a young population with 60% of population under 30 years (Pango, 2013).

With the exception of immigrants from Greek minority of Southern Albania, all other immigrants did not have knowledge of Greek language. This used to be a serious disadvantage in terms of matching the professional skills and experience of them with the available jobs openings. Lack of language courses for immigrants have created the missed opportunities to benefit from high professional qualifications.

The socio-cultural adaptation of emigrants is a matter of cultural differences and their daily contacts.

"New migrants sufficiently motivated to move forward appear aggressive for success at work and in school. They preserve ethnic identity, but also develop strong ties of solidarity and of social groups. In the other side, we must not forget that during the process of adaptation, there is assimilation, but also marginalization. Although many of Albanian migrants with university education, they have worked in common with hosting communities and other migrants without proper education¹.

This is the impression of new comers, as for the rest of the new generation – the children of these families – the life become more interesting. The adaptation of migrants is highly depended on their age. Adaptation of migrants in a very small age is easier, comparing adults, which have their roots on memories, habits, relationships, emotions and everything else is more vivid at present. A typical case for the aforementioned claims is of the family *Sinani* from Kukes, which emigrated to Greece at early 1993.

We have emigrated to Greece on March 1993, following the path of other Albanians and our relatives. By that time, we had two children, our daughter 11 years old and the little son 4 years old. The adoption of our daughter to Greece life was really difficult, while for the boy was easier. After we decided to come back in Albania, we have faced more difficulties than when we went in Greece. Children are feeling foreign and have no affections, or connection. For us as parents, we it is easier, since we have relative and memoires here, and we were employed and stabilized. Children are looking forward to go back while we never think about this².

For the majority of migrants who arrived in the early 1990, these experiences were unexpected, while for the others arriving later these became normal norms. Many migrants believed these barriers had arisen as a result of a lack of understanding within host communities about the intended outcomes of immigration policies and the mutual benefits for all Greek population. Observation of real social practices shows that Albanian migrants are adapted and integrated in the hosting communities, and have played a key role in the social economical life.

Additionally, migrants are put in difficult situations when faced with the border experience, which include stories of maltreatment, death, rape and destruction of identification documents. Below is a case faced by a migrant crossing the Greek border;

"...crossing the border was the worst experience, full of fear not only from the Greek military, but also from Albanian gangs, that waited to rape or rob migrant people. I was going back for the third time to Greece illegally to work with a friend of mine, and just we crossed the border we faced a band that took us everything we had.³"

Another important issue not mentioned yet is related to the migrants without documents. The majority of migrants were illegal and without proper documents, to work, thus for this reason, most of them have find employment in the informal economy. Despite the missing data regarding undocumented migration, labouris founded in the sectors of construction, agriculture, hotels, restaurants and domestic work. Reports regarding undocumented migrants, assess the undocumented migrant workforce as complementary to the formal economy, but others have notes that settled migrants could be competing with undocumented, as the later are willing to accept more precarious working conditions due to language difficulties, nationality, non recognition of their qualification and general experience of discrimination.

Access to services for illegal migrants, such as health and education has been very difficult from the beginning. The situation has changed over the years, and nowadays children have the right for education and health services. In 1998, an amnesty bill was passed by Greek parliament which intended to regulate illegal migrants in Greece and migration policy in general. This bill intended to regulate illegal migrants that were already living in Greece by application of 'white card' and 'green card'. During 2001, a new migration policy named as Law 2910, "Entry and residence of aliens on Greek territory" was the most important law passed in the Greek parliament regarding regularization of migrants, because for the first time migrants could get citizenship (Castles, 2006).

¹ Interview with Sh. Gashi, 7 February 2014. He has worked and lived with his family in Larissa, Greece for 13 years.

² Interview with S.H. 13 February 2014.

³ Interview with Lulzim, on 12 February 2014, returned migrant from Greece.

5. Economic impact and social transformation of immigrants in Greece

Contemporary trends to global economic and political integration lead to processes of social transformation in all types of society. Social transformation drives emigration from poorer countries, but it is also a process that affects richer countries, shaping the conditions for immigration and incorporation (Castles, 2007). There is a reciprocal effect in economy and social life, based on the intercommunion of migrants and hosting population. Understanding migration as an integral part of social transformation is not possible to be covered in this paper; however, there are evidences and interviews that claim the importance of these relationships.

According the report on Immigration to Greece the immigration flow to Greece after 1990 has been really huge. According this report, 57% of all immigrants come from Albania. Most of the immigrants were male while their average age was approximately 34 years. It is largely accepted that immigrants have had a great contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of Greece, with a net contribution up to 1.5% of GDP (Lianos, 2004).

An important issue with regard to the presence of immigrants in Greece, is the extent to which they causes unemployment of native workers, although it is difficult to prove that immigration has affected in a positive or negative way the level of unemployment of native workers. However there is a common belief that immigration has caused unemployment in disqualified and semi-qualified section of the labour market.

A substantial proportion of incomes earned by immigrants are remitted to their families. In the case of Albania, the development of this country has been highly depended on remittances from Albanians working abroad, playing a great role in its economy. Remittances sent from Albanian emigrants to their origin households have reached record levels: the Bank of Albania reports that Albanian emigrants' remittances have reached \$1,028 million in 2004, which is twice the size of the foreign exchange revenues from export and about 13.7 per cent of official GDP (Castaldo and Reilly, 2007). Recent studies assert that most of the remittances are mainly spent on basic consumption, such as food and consumption or on building and improving housing (Cerruti, 2000).

Regarding Social impacts, one of most evident difficulties remains their integration in the Greek society. The majority of studies analyze the conditions of social exclusion, arguing that the source of this phenomenon is the nationalistic. Immigrants are seen in many cases as the cheap manpower, as well as people whose "inferior" cultural origin necessitates the assistance of more privileged societies (Lianos, 2004). Immigrants' activities and behavior haven't corresponded to the norms of the mainstream society, since Greeks perceive themselves as a cultural homogeneous group, identifying "others" with no potential for creative action and changes. An important issue related the economic impact of immigration is related with the welfare services and other social benefits that immigrants consume. Based on the observation and findings during this study, it is true that seasonal migrants have not benefited from social welfare, while residential emigrants have benefited after three or four years of their settlement. However, concerning the amount of social support received, it is concluded by that immigrants have used less social benefits than natives

Stephen Castles has argued for a social transformation approach to migration. It is simply not plausible to take migration in isolation as though it were not impacted by globalization and development, social and political struggles. For Castles, social transformation would be conscious of the complexity of social relation, interdisciplinary and comparative, always set in the broader context and historically grounded (Castles, 2000). In this perspective, I would rather bring in the attention the social transformation approach to trade unions, allowing us to view them as social movements. Although immigrants unions are not very well organized, they promote social movements, as a part of community, household, gender and cultural relations. Being able to organize different event, they can be seen as potential citizens and bearers of individual rights that can articulate collective grievances.

Among a variety of public portrayals, news representations play a significant role in the way people, culture and social life are represented in the public eye. News coverage is a means for all social groups to make their voice heard and communicate their agendas. Van Dijk, (1991) argued that immigrants were mainly represented in the print media in association with crime, violence, social welfare and problematic immigration, claiming that it is through newspapers that elites may affect what ordinary people think, therefore giving racist views popular currency.

6. Albanians returning from Greek migration

Recently there is a big attention regarding migrants returning from Greece, because of economic crisis they are facing. Their re-integration and broader sustainability has become an important issue last few years. As was previously seen, many of Albanian migrants in Greece have traditionally been temporary in nature of seasonal migration (Azzarru & Carletto, 2009). According recent studies, the returning of immigrants from Greece, particularly of those settled with families and for a long time, has started after the social-economical crises and political situation in Greece.

Many of these returned emigrants, after a long period of working and living in Greece with their family had decided to continue their life in Greece, because their children have started their education there and their language is better than Albanian, while there are also a category of migrants that had planned from the beginning their return to Albania, thus their integration in the Greek society has been very difficult. Some of the reasons found during the interviews with returned migrants are described as below:

Because of unemployment; problems of integration; poverty and others to start a business; or a few of them who are return after having satisfied their initial ambitions such as saving enough money to buy a home.

Living for a long time abroad, and especially for the new generation, young people who are educated in Greek, the Albanian society and sometimes even the Albanian language is unfamiliar to those young people. Being not prepared to return and having high problems to reintegrate in a country without experience, it has become a social problem for their families and for the community as well. A teacher from the primary school in Kukes, explains the difficulties of integrating a pupil returned from Greece.

"...In my class I have a girl who is eight years old returned from Greece and she speaks not very well Albanian. For me it is very hard to work with this category of pupils, as we are not used to work in the past. They need separated time, and the environment also seems to be very different with what this child is used to have in Greece. There is a lot of difficulty for her and for us both in the integration"¹.

There are other cases of returned migrants, such as of young people, who have studied in Greece. This category, believes that it is easier to penetrate to Albanian labour market than abroad, thinking that the labour market have more opportunities, especially in undeveloped areas. In this regard, many questions could be raised. What happens to a return migrant when they face the new reality? According to media in Albania, there are cases where returned people have become depressed, stressed or frustrated, because of big changes faced either by their children or by adults too. Professor Ylli Pango, explains this phenomenon as the case of their reasons for motivation; relationship between that is earned abroad and what is lost regarding cultural identity, individual personality and the ability to accept the reality (Pango, 2013). Regarding the fact what the migrant gained or lost is related with well-being in general in one side and social relations and contacts in the other side.

"...Economically I was very well, but something else was missing in my life. My relatives, friends and all my life are strongly connected with Albania. Although I was well adapted in Greek society, my mind was to come back in Albania"².

The fact of getting the attention within their friendship circle is likely the main reason for Albanians, particularly for those who migrated in an adult age, to return back. Nostalgia for oriental customs, such as chin or gossip, are typical for most of the people and migrants seems to miss them a lot. In most of the cases, returning back home from the emigration is as difficult as the time when they migrate abroad. Many of returned migrants are still living with their savings, which can produce a real social problem, while there are other cases that they have started new businesses. Their contribution to Albanian economy has been very significant, thus they deserve to be well treated in order to be re-integrated very well in the society.

¹A.D. Teacher of primary school, interviewed on 13 February 2014, Kukes.

²Interview with Gezim, 15 February 2014. He is 45 years old, and he is a musician.

7. Benefits from exchanging skills and attitude, brain circulation

Migrants coming from poorer countries are likely the source of their country development, because money remittances ensure a potential source of the investment. Another important discussion identified by different scholars recently is related with the idea of replacing 'brain drain' with brain circulation. Many migrants from countries in development, like Albania, are enhancing their skills through migration and after some years they are coming back home with more skills.

During the transition period 1991 – 2013, the tendency of migration to Greece has involved in the most cased migration of low level of education, while the migration of education people has been oriented mostly towards Canada or USA. The trend of migration by low educated people to Greece is because of the short distance, traveling without documents and the job market, where most of Albanian migrants are employed in construction, industry, agriculture and farming.

Although the level of education, it appears that both countries, Albanian and Greece have benefited from exchanging skills and attitude. Regarding the hosting country, migration provides a large pool of skilled labour, benefiting especially from the availability of skilled workers without the associated cost of worker training and education. Greek businesses, farming and agricultural families or cooperatives have benefited cheap labour force, getting a very positive impact on their outcomes, while Albania has benefited not only the remittances to its economy, but also brain circulation will be an asset for the development.

Another important element that needs to be mention is the new generation. As aforementioned in this study, many of migrants have already established their families in Greece and it is likely that their children born in Greece will not move back to Albania, since their homeland, unlike from their parants, is not Albania but Greece. In this case Greece is benefiting from the new population.

Arben, a householder migrant in Greece states that his children born in Greece don't like the idea of coming back in Albania. They are born in Greece and educated in these schools, speaking mostly Greek, while Albanian is spoken only at home. Their childhood and memoires will remain of Greek environment.

This case illustrates far better the benefits of the new age, which has derived from the immigration.

The phenomenon of migration has produced also some costs for hosting communities as well for the sending ones. Sending communities have lost their human capital; deterioration of local economy as a result of migration of skilled labour; break up of many families, where many of them are divorced, or in some other cases elder people are living alone. The last concern is often faced on the southern part of Albania, where many villages are with empty housed and only some elder people live there. Another concern for sending countries is related with economic costs. The sending country loses the income tax revenue that they would have received if the workers had stayed in their country. However, this could be justified with the remittances.

Regarding the brain circulation, the discussion has changed in recent years, seeing the migration not only as a brain drain, but more as a brain circulation. Analysts such as Solimano (Solimano, 2006) note that "the emigration of talent can also have a positive effect for the source countries as well in terms of remittance flows, mobilization of fresh capital, accumulated by emigrants when they return home, exposure to new technologies and managerial techniques and contacts abroad...". In the case of Albania, the success of emigrants is not only the remittances, but also the brain circulation, through the results of economic learning and bringing back to Albania. There are many cases and examples of returned migrants from Greece that have started different businesses, based on their previous experience and background they have practiced in Greece. Being in these conditions, the sending country, in this case Albania government has to prepare the social and legal infrastructure for the integration of the returned emigrants with a proper attention to those educated people that aim to invest in the country.

8. Conclusion

Based on our observation and findings, and other studies regarding migration and development, it is obvious that migration has played a big role within the social order, bounding societies with high cultural differences and beliefs. Despite the problems of integration, or other difficulties that migrants face either in hosting communities or sending ones, it is clearly accepted to state that migration still affects very much social changes, bringing social transformation and development for both societies, hosting and sending ones. It is clear that different immigrant groups - depending on their number in a

country – perform very differently in the social life, but in this case where Albanian migrants are the largest number in Greece, it is obvious their impact on the social cohesion. This refers to how migration has affected the hosting communities, their neighbourhoods where they are settled and local policies.

The social transformation is achieved through exchanging skills and attitude, brain circulation from which benefits both countries. The benefits from returned migrants have been underestimated and largely neglected by Albanian authorities and institutions, since the national and local authorities are moving very slowly in seeking ways to use the potential benefits from returned migrants. Most of the studies and reports have been focused on remittances rather than the human capital of returned migrants. Their impact in the economy is also through the transfer of knowledge, market information and sharing best experiences. Returned emigrants should not be seen as a problem for the economy, as it is mostly argued regarding the lost of remittances or if they can affect the rate of unemployment. What they bring back is not only their money and experience, but they bring most the social transformation.

What is it very important about migration and especially for the returned emigrants, it is related with the promotion of programs dealing with brain circulation and preventing the remittance dependence. In order to bring desired social changes, Albanian government should not only prepare appropriated policies and reforms, but it is important to foster the community about the social impact of returned migrants and their re-integration on the society. Social integration of migrants requires active participation and commitment in the communities where they live. Our observation explores that highly skilled migrants are returning in Albania with more human, social and financial capital and will play an important role on establishing businesses. Others who are not able to establish a business will bring a high impact on work environment of smaller companies, as they are experienced in a developed country.

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