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Call for Papers

Return Migration and Social Change

International Workshop held at the Babeș Bolyai University, Cluj (Romania)

November 11-12, 2016

Return migration has been part of the research agenda for several decades. In particular, the political initiatives and academic studies of the 1980s and 1990s treated returnees and their (developmental) impact "back home" with great interest. In the course of these debates return migration has been associated with temporary and circular migration, voluntary (incentivized or assisted) return and increasingly with involuntary and forced return, including deportation. In the past years, the lingering economic crisis experienced by several European countries, and the politicization of migration and growing anti-immigrant sentiments all over the continent, return migration may have actually become an attractive alternative for many migrants living in Europe today. With fewer obstacles to mobility and migration within the EU, and special free travel treaties with some neighboring countries, such as Serbia and Moldova, return migration can be well researched from a perspective that takes issue with the 'mobility turn' in migration research, including transnationalization.

In this workshop we aim to discuss research, compare, and theorize the social, economic and political changes produced by new return migration from Europe in societies of origin. In this vein, the past decade witnessed a proliferation of studies debating the migration-development nexus and investigating the implications of financial and social remittances "back home". This occurs in a general context where migration is acknowledged as world-wide phenomenon that is linking localities of origin and destination in ever more extensive webs of social economic and political ties, transfers and exchanges. Transnational circulation is thus at the core of many political interventions as much as in the academic analysis itself. Many of these studies point towards the fact that migration, once emerging, generates manifold and ever-lasting processes of social change in localities and societies of origin, where returnees play a special role as innovators and transmitters of new ideas, values and practices. At the same time, as many studies

unfolded, the specific characteristics of the areas of return greatly influence on migrants' return experiences and their ability to exercise agency. Such structural perspectives look at the ways in which returnees can attempt to capitalize on their transnational links and economic opportunities between core and peripheral economies. How do such social changes confront the established systems of economic, political, and social power and inequality? How have the lives, practices, and perspectives of returnees changed upon return? And how can such processes of social change be researched and understood in places that are simultaneously affected by many other global dynamics?

Taking a transnational perspective and setting forth Europe as a destination of migration, we acknowledge that the variety of migratory patterns, legal systems, and histories of migration can have different implications for social changes "back home". As migration becomes an increasingly unsettled process, and this includes return migration too, where various forms of im/mobility and transnationality co-exist, the main question is how returnees and their households influence the communities and societies of origin. In posing this larger question we look at three areas that may particularly, though not exclusively, offer valuable insights into the linkages between return migration and social change, namely: transnationalized social capital, changes produced by social and financial remittances, and finally, return migration and social stratification.

Thus, we first aim at unfolding returnees' maintenance of social ties and forms of social capital between societies of origin and destination. Given the diversity of patterns of return and migration in Europe, we aim at looking not only into such processes, but also into all sorts of institutional cooperation enhanced by returnees' social capital, including professional networks, NGO activism and intra-European and extra-European institutional partnerships.

Second, returnees may be investing their financial resources "back home" for household needs, entrepreneurial initiatives, or community development, while many had never planned to settle abroad and over the years sent often larger sums. The issue of social remittances and transfer of values, ideas and norms acquired through migration may be significant in shaping migrants' return expectations and experiences. As guiding questions we may ask: Have returnees acquired new skills and networks for future employment and investment? How does return affect gender and family relations? Have the returnees become agents of political change through democratic experiences? How do local cultural understandings change due to migration and return migration?

Third, many scholars have argued that access to spatial mobility is associated with social inequalities and becomes a powerful factor of social differentiation. In relation to returnees this involves at least two areas: the social upward mobility and potentially higher social positions of returnees "back-home" and the comparative differences between those who had left and now return and those who never migrated. In this respect, we ask: what are the returnees' positions back home and how do they re-adapt to societies of origin? How do returnees experience and position themselves towards growing social differentiation?

With this workshop we aim at bringing together researchers who work on migrations to Europe originating in various countries of origin. It provides the occasion for collaboratively thinking through current dynamics displaying new and old features of how return and social change are interlinked. From the papers and discussion we plan to publish a Special Issue or Edited Volume.

Deadlines

Deadline for the submission of abstracts (max. 400 words) is 15 September 2016.
Selected paper givers will be informed by 1 October 2016.
Draft papers will have to be submitted by 1 November 2016.
Please send abstracts and papers to returnmigration@rub.de.

The workshop will take place at the Faculty for Political, Communication and Administrative Sciences, Babeș Bolyai University. We are able to reimburse travel, accommodation and meals for selected participants.

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