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## RETURNING TO ROMANIA AFTER A LONG STAY ABROAD- CONSIDERATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

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**Abstract:** *ROMANIAN MIGRANTS HAVE ENGAGED SINCE 2007 ON MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES WITH A VERY CLEAR ROAD MAP, AS A RESULT OF BETTER REGULATION, NETWORKS AND ALSO BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE WEST. IN THE PAST YEARS THE NUMBER OF ROMANIANS RETURNING HAS INCREASED, HIGHLIGHTING A NEW EVOLUTION THAT OF REEVALUATING THE OPPORTUNITIES ROMANIA HAS TO OFFER IN TERMS OF PROFESSION AND SOCIAL LIFE. IN DECIDING WHETHER RETURNING IS THE GOOD OPTION, MIGRANTS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WIDE RANGE OF MOTIVES. OUR RESEARCH FOCUSES ON THE PERCEPTION MIGRANTS HAVE ON THEIR PROSPECTIVE PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE BUSINESS SECTOR SHOULD THEY DECIDE TO BECOME RETURNEES. THE QUESTIONS WE SEEK TO ANSWER ARE THE FOLLOWING: DO ROMANIAN MIGRANTS THINK THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCES THEY HAVE ACQUIRED DURING THEIR STAY ABROAD COULD INCREASE THEIR CHANCES OF BEING SUCCESSFUL IN THE ROMANIAN BUSINESS SECTOR? WHAT WOULD BE A FINAL MOTIVATION TO RETURN AND START AN ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIENCE? MY RESEARCH IS BASED ON QUALITATIVE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH 10 ROMANIANS WHO EITHER HAVE DECIDED TO RETURN TO ROMANIA OR ARE IN THE PROCESS OF TAKING A DECISION. THE INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED FACE TO FACE OR THROUGH ONLINE MEETINGS.*

**Keywords:** *MIGRANTS, RETURNEES, IDENTITY, PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES*

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### INTRODUCTION

Romania is the EU country with the largest diaspora living in other countries of the European bloc (almost 4 million people). Over the years, migration has triggered profound changes in the Romanian society, both in terms of relations between individuals and the overall functioning of societal mechanisms.



The explosion of migratory movements from Romania over the last 20 years is a unique phenomenon that deserves the attention of researchers, politicians and society as a whole. Dumitru Sandu, one of the lead migration Romanian sociologists, explains in comprehensible dichotomies the way in which the migration of Romanians took place and still takes place: internal - external; temporary - permanent; over short or long distances; departure - arrival / return (Sandu, 2010 pp.60-85).

For a long time, until 1990, but also in the 90s, internal migration was the most frequent migration typology in Romania, on the trajectory village-city during the communist regime and on the reverse migration path in the 90s, when many of those who had migrated to cities during the communist period no longer found their place in the urban space, or they were confronted with financial or identity challenges. Once the process of democratization started to generate effects, external migration flourished among Romanians who were seeking for improved life conditions abroad. Before 1990, external migration was possible only as illegal border crossings or through agreements made by the Romanian state with foreign states that had ethnic communities represented in Romania, such as Israel or Germany, the migration taking up different trajectories and different characteristics, relevant for our research and for understanding the phenomenon of return migration.

#### **THE PROFILE OF THE ROMANIAN MIGRANT AFTER 2007**

The Romanian migrants who were interviewed in this study are migrants from the last wave, namely the fourth wave, of highly qualified migrants. They are migrants who have benefited from free movement rights within the European Union (acquired after the accession of Romania to the European bloc ) and who had a thorough plan that could be followed step by step (migration became more predictable through the existence of several sources of information, by strengthening networks which worked better and better, through the institutional involvement of recruitment companies which were better regulated, etc.) (Cvajner M. & Sciortino G, 392). We can therefore speak of a type of migration that has reached a higher degree of maturity, a type of migration oriented towards skilled labor, towards accumulation, based on a clear migration project - even if this project is not always implemented as planned.

Although the migrants' approach to the migration project is a safer and more relaxed one, we can still talk, as Dumitru Sandu explains, about the social world of migrants, a special world built between here and there. Even if the migrant is professionally integrated in the host society, he preserves certain behaviors that put together cultural models and stereotypes, a certain sense of identity that makes the migrant feel at ease in Romanian communities without being dependent on this type of interplay. If these migrants keep in touch with those at home - either by their indirect inclusion in the migration project, by remittances, or by intense communication, even this migration can have a transnational character (Sandu & Alexandru, 2009, pp.35-45).

The migrant of the fourth wave has other characteristics that differentiate him from the migrants from the previous waves. We are talking about a migrant with a stronger financial education than his predecessors, a person who has an account and a bank card and who, although he continues to be involved in the remittance system, approaches them differently, having a much better articulated investment plan. The data that currently exist show that this type of migrant has a migration project that also includes the family (circulatory migration being less present).

For the migrant of the new wave, migration is not only an attempt to maximize financial benefits, but also a project through which benefits, such as increased skills and social prestige become important. This type of migration also includes small entrepreneurs or skilled workers, with employment contracts, who benefit from social protection. These migrants learn the language of the destination country, interact with the citizens of the respective state, create integration opportunities



for their families as well, being part of the destination society. Even so, they do not rule out returning to Romania, but without developing a plan to pursue this goal.

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

The methodology we decided to apply in this study is grounded theory. This choice is the result of a carefully reviewed specialized literature in the field of qualitative methods. The difference between grounded theory and content analysis is not always obvious, which is why we want to justify why we ultimately chose grounded theory as the analysis methodology and not content analysis as a qualitative research method. Grounded theory and qualitative content analysis have many features in common, as evidenced by some researchers misapplying them. Both methodologies are based on the identification of themes and categories, which automatically involve a coding process (Harwood & Garry 2013). Grounded theory is an inductive methodology, but unexpectedly, it is not a qualitative method (according to the Grounded Theory Institute). Grounded theory can use both qualitative and quantitative methods, as long as they are part of a set of procedures that lead to the creation of conceptual categories (Grounded Theory Institute, 2013). Grounded theory has two unique features: constant comparative analysis and theoretical sounding. The researcher using grounded theory will not wait to collect all the data before starting the research, but the data collection is done simultaneously with the analysis of this data.

Given the fact that migration is a huge topic in the literature, but remigration plays a marginal role, we considered the development of an appropriate theory for the context of this research would be a natural approach. Remigration is generally studied in connection with the migration theories, without theoretical particularizations of the phenomenon of remigration, especially in the case of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, members of the European Union.

We developed a set of questions that were addressed to the subjects, but we mostly encouraged them to tell us a story of the migrational experience and also their plans related to the return. The focus of our interviews was on the reasons that trigger the decision to return. We have identified several dichotomies that apply to the experiences of the migrants we interviewed.

### **HERE AND THERE**

Life for migrants is a pendulum that moves from one living place to another in the attempt to find home and to find an identity related to one specific place. “I feel less and less at home in Romania each time I go there, but when I stay longer, the departure is almost heartbreaking” (Raluca, 25, Belgium), and “I believe home is where your family is and my family lives with me in Germany” (Marcela, 45, Germania). The profile of the migrant is anchored in the concept of transnationality, as the identity shifts between different types of social lives that revolve around different places (either Romania or a foreign country). Given the fact that until recently, Romania has not been a desirable place to go back to for successful migrants, the experience of transnationality and shifting identity is still very pregnant and very few Romanians have given up the dichotomy “here and there”.

### **THEM AND US**

“I do not want to say that I felt discriminated against in any of my professional or social interactions, but locals always seem to have a condescending approach towards us and other Romanians working in the community” (Werner, 51, Germany). “You are always the stranger, the one from abroad that will not be given the same opportunities (Florin, 43, Great Britain). This profound interior fracture is a general characteristic for migrants, who live a life in which they are always those from abroad in the country of destination and always those living abroad in their home countries. When the migrants refer to “us” they refer not to all Romanians but to the Romanian migrants (the distinction



revealing particularities of these categories), a small group to which they adhere in totality. “Them” are the locals of the destination countries, the people of the place, who are born and who have lived their entire life in that country. Another category of “them” are those who stay in Romania, the other Romanians, who have remained in the country and have not engaged in a migratory project.

### **BETTER SOCIAL LIFE VS. BETTER PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

We asked our interviewees questions about how social life and professional life would be for them should they decide to return to Romania. The responses converged to the conclusion that family life and social life are considered to have an enhanced quality should the migrant decide to return to Romania. Not that any of them would openly acknowledge that social life abroad is fragile, but the answers revealed that the degree of satisfaction regarding this aspect is not even close to what social life would offer in Romania: “I did not use to go out that often, I had things to do at home after work” (Diana, 24, France, “my group of friends was mostly made up by Romanian, I felt I could better communicate with them” (Valeriu, 34, Great Britain), “my jokes were not funny for my coworkers so there was no reason in seeing them after work, Romanian friends on the other hand seemed to understand me well” (Ileana, 28, Austria).

Professional opportunities and salaries have been the major concern of Romanians and the main trigger for migration (a push factor). Romania was a country with comparable lower salaries than those in the West and with a fragile business sector (the general perception being that business is for those with political connections and with money). However, Romania has become in the past years economically dynamic with big cities in which businesses flourish and job opportunities multiply. So, migrants who have never considered returning, are contemplating the possibility of becoming entrepreneurs in Romania.

### **SOCIAL STATUTE VS. ANONYMITY**

One of the recurrent considerations that were made by my interviewees was concerning social statute. “In Romania if you are a good professional you have the chance to perform and become one of the best in the job” (Maria, 29, Bucharest, returnee from Spain) or “I feel I get the deserved respect in my profession since my return” (Adrian, 41, returnee from Italy). Returning to Romania in the past several years has been for many migrants a success story, as they managed either to become successful business people or to prove they are great professionals in their field of activity. Gaining a statute in Romania is put in antithesis with the anonymity of the profession in any of the western countries.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the past years, Romanian migrants have partially engaged on a return trajectory. It is a novelty that has been triggered by the economic evolution of our country and also by the perceptions of the migrants, who have started to think about Romania as the land of opportunity, of social statute and recognizable identity.



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