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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

Building transnational lives:
Using ICT to connect mobility and home

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Abstract
The first part of the paper presents the evolution of Romanian educated migration during the last years with a special emphasis on the case of Romanian educated migrants in France. We analyze the reasons that lie behind this migration and the strategies employed in order to leave Romania. Furthermore, we proceed at a description of the problems encountered in France and of the changes that occur in the lives of migrants once at destination. We identify three overlapping dimensions that undergo important transformations due to mobility: the spatial dimension, the temporal dimension and the relational dimension. Mobility transforms the way people conceive space, time and relations to others. These transformations are further deepened by the new ICT developments.
The second part of the paper puts forward the relations maintained with family and kin in the origin country. The low cost of transportation and its high speed enable migrants to make trips home more often and their family and kin to come and visit them at destination. However, in recent years immaterial flows have gained ground over material ones. Networks built between migrants and their kin and family in the home country are analysed in terms of recent developments in ICTs which affect both the nature and the frequency of the contacts. They enable migrants to act as agents of change in the origin society allowing them to be virtually present while physically absent. These relations of co-presence engender an important two – way flow of information, values and ideas. This flow enables migrants to keep informed of the events occurring in their home country and at the same time brings changes in the lives of those who remained behind.

Keywords: educated migrants, brain circulation, multiple allegiances, information and communication technologies, co-presence
JEL classification: F22, D86, O15, O38

A Picture of Romanian Educated Migrants with a Special Highlight on the French case

Over 15,000 youths have been leaving Romania every year for the last six years once they finished their studies and a quarter of high-school students intend to leave during their undergraduate studies or after (Open Society Foundation). Fears that the country would end up being deserted by the best and brightest have spread among society and political leaders. The main destinations of this massive youth migration are the US, but also Western European countries. For instance, about 3% of young urban residents according to the Public Opinion Barometer developed by the Open Society Foundation would like to leave the country either during their studies or afterwards. The preferred destinations for those who would like to continue their studies abroad are: the US (for 14%), France (for 13%), Germany (for 11%) and Great Britain (for 10%). The rate of return for those who leave to study abroad is according to the Romanian Passport Department and the Frontier Police of a mere 10%.

The mobility of low-skilled Romanians which unfortunately often occurred under illegal conditions has often caught the public eye and made the headlines of European journals. Meanwhile, the mobility of educated Romanians has been cast into shadow. These two types of mobility have developed at the same time though for different purposes. Whereas the mobility of the low-skilled has been mostly motivated by the need to survive in a collapsing economy, the mobility of young educated Romanians is above all a quest for social status: one leaves because one needs to make his own way, to succeed in his career and to be acknowledged for this success.

Among EU countries, France is one of the preferred destinations of these youths who leave the country in order to complete their studies, first of all because of the historical ties between Romania and France. Many Romanians were brought up with the image of France being the model for Romania. As one of the interviewees underlines *"We are talking about France, a country that has given so many personalities"*. Throughout Romanian history France represented a model for Romania and the ties established with this country were particularly strong. Furthermore, France is one of the traditional destinations of Romanian emigrants. To a certain extent, Romanian mobility to France has its roots long ago. The mobility of Romanian students to France started to develop from the end of the 18th century and even became a tradition during the following century when aristocratic families used to send their children to be educated in France. At the end of the 19th century, Romania and Russia were the first source countries in Europe for international students in France. This tradition was thoroughly kept by Romania until the outbreak of World War II and the instauration of communism. Consequently, in what concerns the history of French-Romanian relations we feel the need to emphasize the existence of a circulation not only of people, but also of ideas, practices and symbols, which was interrupted only by the communist period. French soft power has played a major role in attracting Romanian students in order to complete their studies. During the 1990s with the dismantling of political frontiers, a lot of intellectuals fled abroad, some of them choosing France. After the episode of the invasion of Bucharest by miners in the summer of 1990, a sign of a possible political instability to follow, it is estimated that 5000 Romanian students left the country. The departures continued du ring the ninth decade with many Romanians leaving during their undergraduate studies. In the majority of cases, the geography of mobility seems to be shaped by the exchange programmes concluded by the universities in the countries of origin and destination. With the emergence of a network of student exchange programmes, France became rapidly one of the main destinations for this type of migration for study (Lagrave 1998). However, this proved to be a mere strategy in order to leave the country, with many of these students never coming back to

their country. As the statute of political refugee became more and more difficult to acquire and the labour contracts favoured only some very precise domains as the high tech, this strategy was adopted by a wider range of highly-skilled persons. This confirms Faist's remark (1999) that formal networks are the main channel to enable the mobility of the highly-skilled.

Nowadays, France is the main destination for Romanian students, over 4500 students leaving for France in order to complete their studies during each of the last five years (EduFrance). For example, in 2004 the number of Romanian students attending courses in French universities stood for 4839 persons. The number of Romanian and Bulgarian students in French universities has been increasing constantly since the mid 1990's. These countries have known the most spectacular evolution in terms of countries of origin of international students during the period 1980- 2001. This is also due to the fact that during communism (with the exception of children of former nomenclature) this kind of migration was very limited.

Case study: The Romanian Educated Migrants in France departure strategies and challenges at destination

Our research is based on twenty exploratory interviews conducted in France during March and April 2006. We have then drawn a questionnaire that was filled in by 125 persons. We shall further on proceed at a brief description of this sample. The average age of our sample ranges in the interval 26-30 years (48%). All these persons have a tertiary degree education acquired either in Romania or in France. The average time already spent in France by these people varies between two and five years. Two thirds of our sample population are women, which is in accordance with the statistics issued by EduFrance that acknowledges women dominance of the student flows for the last years and also with the data provided by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics which show from 1990 onwards a steady increase in the percentage of women in the Romanian migratory flows. These persons come from all over Romania however most of them have done their studies in Bucharest. Bucharest is followed by the universities of Cluj and Iasi. We can thus identify a capital effect, with Bucharest attracting an important number of Romanian students due to the quality and the diversity of the studies offered and also to better job opportunities after graduation.

As regards the distribution by fields of specialization, in the ranks of men we identify most high tech specialists (32.6%) and economists (30.4%), followed by mathematicians, while with women we identify most economists (34.2%) and philologists (15.2%). The diversity of fields is greater in the case of women. On the whole, six persons have a double degree and nine have completed their whole college education in France.

The main advantage of this population obviously resides in the skills acquired, although most of them had a previous migratory experience generally linked to their studies. Should we consider the case of a former internal mobility experience (which is the case of sixty-two persons in our sample) or that of an international one (eight persons), or even of both (four persons) we can identify from the start the existence of a mobility experience which has an important role in the departure decision and in the way these people fared afterwards. There are even cases in which the whole family stands for an example of development of a culture of mobility with several members living in other countries or having spent significant time abroad. The main reason for departure seems to be the wish to attend internationally recognized study programmes leading to the acquisition of an internationally recognized diploma followed by the search for better job

opportunities and the desire to acquire a better social status. These two reasons however are not as they may seem at first sight divergent, as the diploma recognized all over the world seems to be the element which facilitates mobility. Once the diploma acquired, these educated migrants can leave wherever they find the best job opportunities. Another element that triggers the departure resides in their discontent with the Romanian society as many consider that even though the communist regime is gone, the change in mentalities has lagged behind. Some of them confess to have left in search of freedom perceived as still difficult to find in Romanian society, whereas the wish for an experience of another culture also plays a significant part. Man's exploratory nature has never faded away even in modern times.

An important element which seems to influence the destination choice along with the formal networks and French soft power resides in the existence of informal networks, this is kin or friends established networks. About a third of our sample members admit the importance of informal networks in their destination choice. Network expansion usually precedes territorial expansion. Within the network material and immaterial flows circulate ensuring the transmission of goods and services, as well as of social and economic information. The information received about better career opportunities often determines the departure of migrants to another country. Social networks usually guide migrants into or through specific places and occupations. As acknowledged by Steven Vertovec (2002), they are often crucial for finding jobs and accommodation.

Sometimes, the strategies designed before the departure provide for the change of statute, e.g., from international students to highly-skilled workers or from tourists to international students as many of these persons do not intend to go back to Romania but to stay on and enter the French labour market. The differences in categories no longer seem to matter, as one can very easily pass from one category to another. Some of the persons admit to have stayed on once their initial study contract was over in order to complete their qualification, whereas the majority seems to think that they have better career opportunities in France. In the case of researchers, the lack of possibilities to conduct research at the international level in Romania and the low rate of investment in the R&D activities both from the public and the private sector seem to encourage them to stay on. A possible return to the home country is perceived as leading to brain waste. For others their stay is mainly due to the changes which took place in their lives. Some of them have built a family in France, others simply consider that they have made their own lives there and that coming back would mean starting all over again.

However, once at destination, difficulties arise both on the professional and on the social side. At the professional level, the difficulties emerge with the passage from one status to another, for instance from international student to highly-skilled worker. Many of them admit to have had difficulties in finding a job corresponding to their qualification. The success also varies with their professions and therefore with the labour market demand. If the economists and the high tech specialists seem to face fewer difficulties in finding a job, this is not the case for the persons holding a degree in the field of humanities. Most of the migrants blame this state of affairs in discrimination against foreigners on the French labour market. Indeed, the unemployment rate in 2002 stood for 5% for the natives, 7.2% for EU-15 nationals on the French labour market, 11% of foreigners having acquired the French nationality and at 18% of foreigners coming from countries other than EU- 15, which accounts for a rate almost three and a half times greater than in the case of the natives (Economic and Social Council 2002).

If the professional integration seems difficult, what about social integration? Among the factors that could eventually facilitate social integration are the acquisition of the French citizenship which ensures equal judicial rights as the natives, the knowledge of the French language, mixed marriages and kin and friends networks which could ease the contact with communities of which they are already members. The most important part is played by the ties developed with colleagues at the university or at work as they introduce the migrants to the common practices acting as their best teachers.

New technologies and multiple allegiances

Upon analyzing the interviews conducted, we realize that the traditional discourse in terms of social integration, assimilation and identity does no longer correspond to these migrants' experience as they live in a world of multiple allegiances. These allegiances concern the home society, the destination society and above all a multitude of communities (Kastoryano 1998).

In the era of new technologies and with the rapid spread of globalization, many have argued that geographic distance tends to fade away, to lose its power as migrants are easily connected to other realities. Being connected means being aware of events that happen in different places at the same time, but it equally translates a need to actively and emotionally involve in these events. The connexion allows people to actively take part in the lives of those left behind. In this sense, even if away, these educated migrants are still a part of their home communities, out of which the family is the most powerful type of community as it relies on the closest ties among its members. We indeed notice that these migrants develop competing but not exclusive attachments to more than one community at the same time. We can identify a wide range of communities to which these migrants belong: family communities, professional communities, student communities, ethnic communities, religious communities, political communities. These migrants are thus part of a range of overlapping communities both in real and in symbolic terms. They can actually belong to more than one type of community, and even to more than one community of the same type. In these communities migrants very often develop ties which go beyond borders, creating a network culture, as most of them admit to having friends or relatives in other EU countries. Multiple allegiances to different communities are at the origin of the shift from a "*territorial identity to a network identity*" (Badie 1995). In this context, "*identity is also, inescapably, about displacement and relocation, the experience of sustaining and mediating complex affiliations, multiple attachments*" (Clifford 1998). Identities, in consequence, tend to be more situational. They are overlapping and flexible in order to allow individuals to adapt to their new condition of circulatory migrants and to take advantage of the best opportunities they can come across.

But if geographic distance is losing its power, the social distance is also diminishing. N. Van Hear (1998) identifies three types of factors that have acted in favour of social ties, reducing both physical and social distance: communication facilities, transportation means and socio-cultural skills. Due to the unprecedented development of these three factors, social ties are nowadays easier to build and to maintain.

Social ties may have a double nature. On one hand, migrants maintain "real" ties determined by the fact that they can visit their families back home several times a year and in turn family and friends may come to visit them in their countries of destination. The real contact has recently seen an important development due to the decrease in the price of transportation and to its accrued velocity. As a consequence, educated migrants left often come back during holidays for short

visits home while 'sedentary' family members also pay visits from time to time now that they can afford it.

Figure 1 **Membership in overlapping communities**
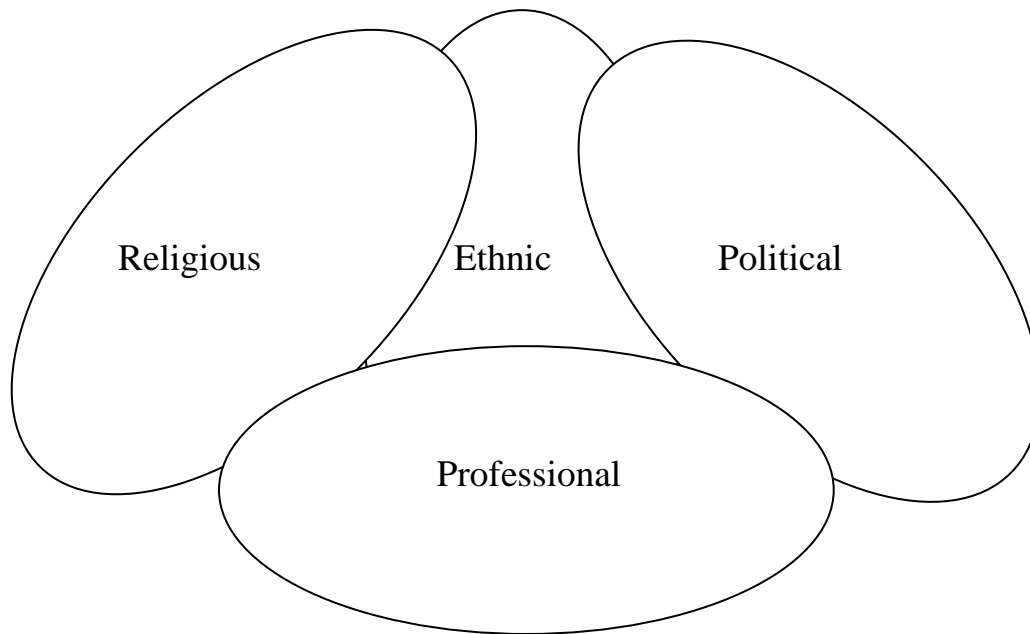
On the other hand, we witness the emergence of 'virtual' ties, as migrants can communicate with their families back home by phone or on the Internet. The ties maintained with the family in the home country are often quite strong as most of them keep in touch by virtual means. The telephone and the Internet are the main communication channels employed to this end. The telephone is slightly more preferred than the Internet as it seems to be more accessible for the family members still in Romania, though the Internet is gaining ground.

The long-distance networks in this way can provide very important channels for flows of capital, skill and information. In our study, we try to assess the existence of a permanent contact with family and friends back in the home country. For almost 40% of the migrants these contacts take place weekly, whereas for almost 50% these contacts are even more frequent occurring daily or several times a week. The preferred communication means is the telephone in about 45% of the cases and the Internet in 32%. The rest of the migrants use both means at the same frequency. The telephone remains still the means of communication which is most often used in spite of the accrued competition of the Internet. This competition has resulted in the transformation of these 'objects of connection', so that they have come to include each other's functions. The mobile phone allows one to connect to the Internet, whereas on the Internet we see the emergence of a line of services, like Skype and Messenger with voice performing functions similar to the phone. There is no longer a clear distinction between these objects and by using either, the customer can actually be using the other at the same time.

The decrease in the price of communications allows migrants to maintain the contact and to actively take part in the real life of those left behind. It is a way of living together and apart at the same time. Moreover, the webcam attached to the computer makes possible the visual contact even in the case of the virtual communication, reinforcing the impression of the reality of the presence. The migrant is no longer absent from his space of origin and his presence is ensured by the constant contact facilitated by the development of these means of communication. The eye is the "*most direct and purest interaction that exists*" (Simmel 1997). It generates "the most complete reciprocity; of person to person, face to face". In this way the eye affects the connection and interaction of individuals. It creates the impression of togetherness in spite of the physical distance between the sender and the receiver.

As family and friends go to visit they become an active part of this mobility and they can actually choose at a later stage to become migrants themselves. The virtual contact plays a major role during the first stage of this process, because potential migrants may get familiar with their future destination due to the information they receive from the already established members at destination. The development of new ICTs in the last years facilitated the contact inside the networks allowing for a virtual projection of the future space of mobility. The migrants can in this way get accustomed to their future destination even before having a physical contact with this space. In the second stage 'real' contact is made possible by the visits paid at destination. Following the significant decrease in transportation costs, many migrants have already been to their destination country to visit relatives and friends. The visits paid as tourists are just a first step in becoming a migrant and are often part of a learning process which is very important for the future mobility of these migrants.

As a consequence, it has become nowadays more and more difficult to draw a line between migrants and sedentary and to establish who is involved in the mobility process and who is not.

Dimensions of change in the life of the educated migrants

These people have made mobility a way of living. However, the context in which mobility develops affects their lives and those of the families back home bringing about important transformations. We identify three different dimensions that bear important changes due to mobility as mobility affects the way one perceives time, the perspective on space, but equally the relationship with close persons. These three dimensions are closely intertwined as changes on one of these dimensions may actually reflect in others. The way one conceives time changes due to the fact that one lives in several spaces at the same time whereas this co-presence is made possible by the relations developed across spaces.

For instance, time seems to be flowing faster than ever. If, for people in the home country messages still seem at times not to be received as often as they would desire for those who are away, being connected at several realities at the same time makes their day seem shorter and the time allowed to each of this 'reality' to become more and more precious. The impression is that of accrued velocity, because events happen so fast one cannot keep track of them anymore. The synchronicity of events taking place in several spaces at the same time affects thus the way one conceives time. The development of ICTs leads to a change in the temporal dimension as the past becomes part of the present and may also affect the future. The borderline between the past, the present and the future fades away as people and events from the past affect the choices one makes today and are also likely to influence the future unlike during the communist period when the past, the present and the future were clearly defined. It is true however, that once an event has

passed it can be revived anymore and the conscious of not being able to turn back time, of irreversibility increases further more the impression of velocity.

But still one cannot turn back time, one cannot become again the person he once was and this changes the relationship with close persons as the flow of time and the experience of a new space brings about important changes to migrants' personalities. These changes are acknowledged by the family in the home country and this and transforms there relationship with the migrants.

At the level of the spatial dimension, space seems to lose its power and to be compressed as the physical distance is no longer important. One can live nowadays in more than one space at the same time and this is due to existence of social ties. Migrants can live in several real spaces, but they equally live in a virtual space as space is not limited anymore to its pure physical and geographic borders. Our vision is that of virtual social space that is in fact an extension of the real space. In this sense, the real space and the virtual space are not two competing concepts. This virtual space is of a social nature to the extent it relies on a web of social ties maintained due to the increasing availability of ICTs. The existence of social virtual spaces does not erode the power of the space on the individual. Instead its effect is that of a diversification of the sources that feed this power.

Figure 2 **Intertwined dimensions of change**

Temporal dimension

Spatial dimension

Relational dimension
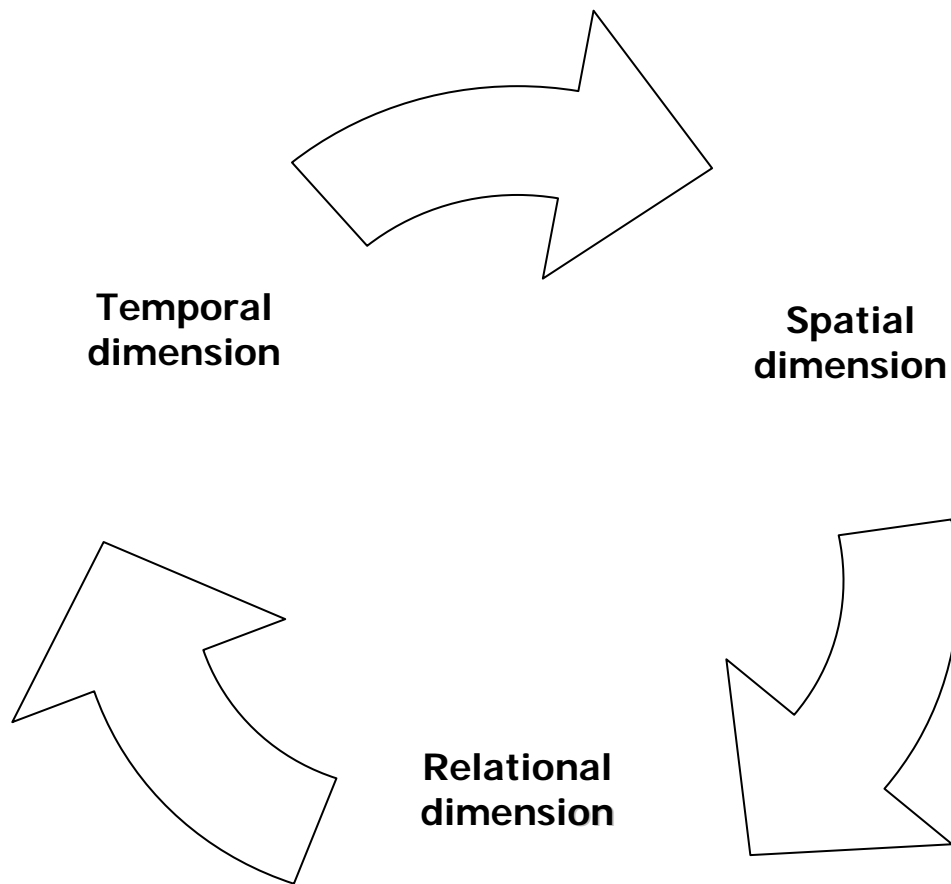
Another type of change is the one induced in the relational dimension, the way people relate to each other. Even though the ties seem to be as close as ever due to the virtual contact, distance does play a certain influence on how people relate to each other. Nowadays, we live in several spaces at the same time. As already argued social distance also fades away due to the real and virtual contact, yet to a certain extent some believe that those left behind have trouble understanding their new way of living, their choices… Even if they turn for advice from time to time to their family members, there is still some doubt on their part that this advice is the best one they could get as it is given by people who do not actually live in the same 'reality'. Due to the developments of ICTs relationships are in a sense built faster and easier, but they are not so solid anymore. Furthermore, at times the refuse to follow the spouse who left, has resulted in divorce. According to F. Ascher (2006), "*these new social ties are probably weaker, less polyvalent, but a lot more numerous and changing: they grant mobility a new social status and allow individuals to lead a life of n dimensions.*" However, these cross-border ties ensure the presence of the migrants in more than one place.

Mobility and change in the lives of the families in the home country

Mobility and distance do not affect only people involved in transnational movements but also their environment in the home country. This mobile life brings changes in both the lives of those directly involved in this mobility and in those of family members who are at least in appearance 'sedentary'. For these days can one really trace a line between sedentary and mobile people? One can choose to go mobile whenever one likes. Family and friends back home equally become part of this world of movement and of the transnational social spaces that are being built between the home country and the countries of destination. The way in which the lives of migrants change due to mobility has been at the core of many studies, whereas the effects on the family and friends back home have been less examined. Even when studies have tried to shed light on these effects, they have done so by focusing separately on the migrants and on the family back home. The relationship was never conceived as a continuum, as something that takes place in several spaces at the same time, but on two separate and clearly cut dimensions. On one hand the migrants with their lives at destination, on the other hand the families back home, sedentary people left behind who have to suffer the consequences of migration without being an active part of the process.

The following analysis is based on twenty exploratory interviews done with family members in Romania that were matched with the initial interviews with educated migrants done in France.

For a long time Romanians could not freely circulate. People who lived during communism did not have the opportunities that are available for the new generations. The lust for freedom and a certain thirst for mobility, for meeting other people and other cultures has grown and grown and has passed on from one generation to another. Very often the support given to the migrants by the family members takes the form of financial backing during the studies or until the off-springs are ready to take their lives into their own hands. These financial transfers are usually one-way flows. Family members not only do not receive financial support from their off-springs, but it is usually them who support their off-springs. Why this matter of state? It is quite simple. Children have often been fed on the dreams nourished by their parents who during the communist times have been deprived of the possibility to travel and see the world, of knowing other cultures and other ways of living. In the parents' view, their off-springs also fulfil partly their dreams by going

abroad, flying out of their nests and they support them actively by investing in their careers, ensuring so the success of this flight until the children would finally grow their own wings. Many people still disapprove of the current state of affairs in Romania and do not feel that the change occurred has necessarily led to an improvement in the living conditions that could guarantee better opportunities for their children and in the end a better life. And this is the stake for those who stay and support the ones who go: a better life for the next generation. Things have begun to change in Romania above all after 2000 and opportunities may present also there as some families do admit, but this change is still slow. And if at the economic level changes can be felt faster and the highly-educated people might have better opportunities in present-day Romania than they had in the past, the change in mentalities and ways of behaviour still lags behind. This is what most of the family members as well as of those left behind feel. European integration is often seen as an important channel that could offer better opportunities in Romania and that in the long run might equally lead to the change of a corrupt and evil system that has been reproducing itself in post-communist Romania.

Another issue is that for each visit home, there seems to be quite a ritual of gift-bringing. As members left behind would not accept to be reimbursed for their financial support, children often feel that these gifts could be a little contribution on their part in order to compensate for these efforts. They bring back along with gifts the fulfilment of dreams of another generation. At the same time the young migrants seem to be aware of the transfer of dreams and of hopes which is more important than that of money.

As young migrants aware of these dreams that their parents have built around them and of the financial sacrifices made, one of the concerns is not to disappoint the family members left behind. This is a supplementary motivation for them to succeed in making their own way so when they talk to their family or when they visit them they can reassure that the hopes have not been wasted. They know that for younger brothers or sisters or even friends and neighbours they have become models and that upon each return these persons will listen to their story and they would be a sort of heroes and this is sometimes putting pressure on them. As if they were compelled to succeed, to fulfil the dreams of another generation and to tell stories which others might repeat at bedtime. For their parents the fulfilment of their dreams is above all financial reimbursement. The fact that they see their dreams being fulfilled by their children is their main source of repayment.

At the same time the family members left in Romania have become involved in a learning process that can be observed as many have taken up practices to which they were not accustomed to before. For instance, they begin to use Internet tools like Skype or Messenger in order to better communicate with their off-springs. However, the existence of the contact is not enough to ensure the success of transfers. The family and friends back home need to have an absorption capacity which could allow them to correctly decrypt the messages received. Therefore, in order to facilitate the contact and to ensure the right decryption of the messages, family members equally learn about this new way of life, new rules and a new code of behaviour that enables them to actively participate in the lives of the migrants. Some of them become involved in back and forth movements between the destination countries of their relatives and the home country. They may leave in order to pay simple visits or even for longer periods to take care of grandchildren making it ever harder to distinguish between mobile and sedentary. Some of them might even decide to settle abroad with their children or kin, though the elder generations seem to have more difficulties at the level of social integration and to conserve stronger ties with the home country. This is particularly strong when they do not know the language of the destination

country. Grandparents seem to be the main channel of transmission of the Romanian language and values to their grandchildren born outside Romanian borders. For the second generation, especially for those born to mixed families ties with Romania seem to be very loose. In their case, it is rarely the parents who familiarize them with their Romanian heritage, but these 'sedentary' grandparents and kin who thus take an active part in preserving the Romanian identity.

Conclusion

In the era of new technologies, the absence and the presence can no longer be thought of as being in opposition, as migrants can nowadays be absent and present at the same time. Instead of considering migration as an event triggering a double absence (Sayad 1999), due to the development of information and communication technologies migration can nowadays generate a double presence on behalf of the migrants enabling them to actively take part in the life of their home community (Diminescu 2005).

Mobility is the story of a people who have recently gained their freedom and who learn and change constantly; it is a story of becoming both of those who take up this mobility practices and of their family and friends that stay behind in the home country. Mobility not only transforms the lives of those directly involved in it, but it also affects the lives of family members and close friends who may at first sight seem 'sedentary'. Where do we draw the line between migrants and non-migrants? What distinguishes them? Is geographical distance really a frontier one cannot overcome? These are some of the challenges research on migration will have to meet.

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