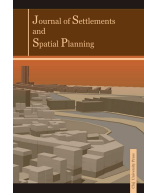




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Current Trends and Spatial Implications of Labour Force Migration from the Upper Basin of Vişeu River, Romania

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ABSTRACT

The migration of workforce from Maramureş historic region towards other regions does not represent a new phenomenon. However, its typology, destinations and spatial implications of this phenomenon have changed considerably in the last years. The international migration has become quasiabsolute and with a high impact along with the restructuring of industry and the overall decrease of the level of living. In this study we aim to make an assessment of the situation of one of the most migration affected areas in Maramureş Depression, which is the upper basin of Vişeu River. Our approach focuses on the causes and geodemographic mutations associated to this phenomenon, its quantitative and qualitative characteristics and especially its impact in the territory. Special attention is given to the social, economic, landscape and perception implications that have led to significant changes in the last years, resulting in morphologic, functional and aesthetic modifications as well as affecting the mentality and level of living of the local communities.

Labour force migration from Maramureş to other regions is not a new phenomenon, yet its causes and typology, and also the spatial implications of this phenomenon has changed considerably in recent years. International migration has become quasiabsolute and greatly developed mainly due to industry destructuring and generalized decline in living standards. This study proposes an evaluation of the situation in one of the most affected areas by labor migration in Maramureş Depression: the upper basin of Vişeu River. We consider the causes and geodemographic mutations associated with this phenomenon, its quantitative and qualitative characteristics, and especially its spatial impact. Special attention is given to the social, economic, perceptual and landscaping implications that have recently triggered significant changes in the functional and aesthetic attitude and lifestyle of inhabitants. The movement of Maramureş people towards the European area to look for jobs that would

give them an alternative source of income (even temporarily), has begun after the revolution against the communist regime in 1989, specifically between 1991-1992. The main destinations for the first migrants have been Italy, France and Germany, where worked mainly in the agricultural and forestry sectors, but also on construction sites.

The reasons of the current nomadism are part of a long history of searching for a job, since the soil conditions in Maramureş region have not ever allowed practicing agriculture enough to support living.

Mobility is a structural fact of this region, as the typical product of a long history. Sheep breeding and forestry have been the two main and traditional occupations of the population. Transhumance, forestry and deforestation are considered the triggering factors for the large-scale migration behaviour.

In addition to the common custom of mobility, the main factor that leads to a large number of migrants

is economic. Firstly, local authorities do not offer any jobs because other than agriculture, no other economic sectors are developed here, except for the services due to the rural tourism development in the region. The local agricultural products are quite cheap; therefore their sale brings not much profit to contribute to the prosperity of a household (e.g. a bottle of milk costs 1 RON (Romanian official currency) in Moisei commune).

Then, a large number of young people have no higher education qualifications and therefore they are not able to get well-paid jobs in the city, thus choosing migration abroad.

Another reason for emigration is the need to ensure a decent living standard for the families that have more than 3-4 children in over 80% of the cases in all three communes. In Maramureș, it is very important for a family to have a house, one of the well-known habits of the inhabitants being first to show their well-being by building a spacious and stately house. Usually, up to three generations live together in a household, therefore there is an active need to ensure an adequate living for the whole family.

From a social perspective, the population living in Borșa, Moisei and Vișeu de Sus areas have developed a real chain of migration, to which most of the families rallied in order to maintain the same wealth level as most people. It is a matter of pride and ego to be working abroad to financially support the family in the country.

Why has emigration increased in the area over the last years? What are the causes that motivate the residents, known for their love for their native places, to emigrate even temporarily? There are a series of factors that are the driving motivation for the decision to emigrate. If nationally, we can mention numerous causes triggering emigration (social, economic, demographic and even political) in case of the upper basin of Vișeu River the main cause leading to a large number of migrants is socio-economic.

The decision to migrate is unique to each individual. The first emigrants „appeared” in the area in 1990-1991, time in which the mining company was still holding the largest share in the economy of the area and still offered jobs. The first to leave were the young, high school graduates from the peripheral areas of the upper basin of Vișeu River, who did not want to follow the family model: father – mine worker, mother - housewife and hoped for a better life. Emigration of locals in the area has intensified in the next years, the most important factor being undoubtedly the economy.

Deindustrialization resulted in drastic reduction of jobs, in some case even in their total lack. In Vișeu de Sus, the woodworking plant and furniture factory were closed, thus thousands of local people becoming unemployed. Subsequently, the immediate effect was the acceleration of migration towards states that would provide workplaces and safer and better

wages. Thus, local people abandoned their hometowns, which were unable to satisfy their needs for a convenient and comfortable lifestyle, therefore for better living conditions.

Basically, the inability of the society to employ the young labour force, due to the major decline of economy in this area, was an important factor for the migration of population. The issue of working women in an area where the male workforce was predominantly required, was another incentive to emigrate.

Another economic reason for emigration was the pressure or need to ensure a decent level of living level for the family, which is generally large in Maramureș.

From a social perspective, most of the families in the rural areas have adopted a specific behaviour in order to maintain the same level of living as all of the people, a matter of pride which is to work abroad where wages are much higher the home and financially support the family in the home country.

The effects of migration abroad in case of all three localities are directly related to the features of the process at the time (increasing volume, circular character, and occupational migration). It is clear that they are not one-way directed. On the one hand, there are effects of migration on the individual migrating, and on the other hand the effects of the same migration action are on the family and household of the individual migrating and also on the home community as a whole. The fact that these effects are in a continuous process of interaction and remodelling makes it practically difficult to separate them (the effects on the migrant have an impact on the household he is part of, the effects are felt both on the community and the households containing migrants etc.).

At the individual level, we can see a change in mentality, meaning that they become more open, easily accepting the new, and bringing a new vision on how they should perceive family and community living. A direct effect on the migrant is the adoption of an attitude of superiority toward those who do not work abroad.

At the household level, the most important effect is the improvement of the financial situation. The money received from abroad are spent for the household. Another obvious resultant is the construction of new housing (especially villas) and the purchase of apartments in large cities (especially in Baia Mare, Cluj-Napoca, but also in Bucharest) which seems to be the case of households that include at least one migrant. The relocation of one of the family members abroad for a certain period of time triggers changes in family roles and functions. Another common situation is to assign the role of head of the household to one of the members left in the country. There are also cases in which raising and education of children is taken over by other members of the household than the parents (grandparents in particular).

In case of migrants with families in Borşa, Moisei or Vişeu de Sus (most of the people with no purpose of definitive settling in the countries where they temporary work), the money sent home are used to support household consumption, build new homes or make savings in the Romanian banks.

Each summer, during holiday period in the Western countries, many of them return to Maramureş. Thousands of migrants arrive in all three localities in the first days of August. In recent years, they have started to build large houses in Moisei and in towns of Vişeu de Sus and Borşa. The effects of migration can be seen everywhere, but in the summer it is a real demonstration of prosperity, success and wealth.

At the European community level the main effect is, at least currently, linked to the increased tendency for migration to France, Spain and Italy. It seems that the regular movements to work in Spain, Italy and France, have become an alternative to even more of the inhabitants of Maramureş region. The import of practices, and of „models” specific to the migration destination area have already begun to be felt.

Locally, there are strong effects caused by remittances of the migrants: the restructuring of the local community, the economic dependence of the local people on the money sent by those migrated and the emergence of a complex migration system from this region towards France, Italy and Spain. In August, trade flourishes and prices rise, dropping dramatically after the leave of the „migrants”. As a result, the annual financial influx does not increase the local economy but the trade sector, and it determines the local workforce to migrate instead of seeking employment on the local market or in closer areas where they could find work in rather unfavorable conditions.

There is also a polarization of the local community in „the poor” and „the rich”, meaning those who did not migrate and those who did. The distinction, however, is relative and not necessarily general, but still creates strong stereotypes and local attitudes revealing the superiority of a „migrant” against a „local”.

The most visible effect of the money sent home in recent years are the large houses built in all three villages. If this behaviour first developed due to the insecurity of migration to Italy, lately the investments in housing have become a profitable investment for some. In this respect, if for some house construction is the purpose of migration after which migrants planning to return, others think they will return in time for retirement, and for them a house is an investment that reduces their costs when old.

For example, many people in Moisei commune have invested their earnings in houses. Thus, the traditional appearance of the area has therefore completely changed, the typical buildings of Maramureş being replaced by the new and modern housing.

Another type of investment behaviour of the migrants coming back from west is the idea of opening small businesses in Romania. All three localities are situated in the historical part of Maramureş, which has a well developed tourism, providing the opportunity to open guesthouses. Thus, many migrants send money to their families in the area to build rural guesthouses. Emigration consequences in the area are felt in the local economy, but also in the social, cultural and demographic contexts.

There are both positive and negative consequences in the local economy, which are eventually interrelated. The main positive effect is the local economic development. With the money sent migrants financially support their family. For their families, this money represent an alternative income that contributes to raise their living standard and implicitly increase their purchasing power. In July-August period, trade flourishes in the area and prices increase, even though they decrease after the departure of the migrants.

The negative aspect of this phenomenon refers to the dependence of the local people on the income provided by those who migrated. This financial influx only determines the development of trade and makes labour force emigrate instead of seeking work on the local market.

Building houses in such short time and in somewhat competition driven by „whose house is bigger?” had another effect, which was the increase of land price.

Maintenance and especially house warming brings out other problems. Urban heating plants were out of use a long time ago and since there is no gas network, wood is the only source for heating.

Most of the migrants use their houses only in summer and think of them as „the future houses for when retired”. As almost all of them plan to return to the home area, investing in homes is considered to be a profitable investment and low costs for the old age. Until then, there are already quite a few emigrants trying to transform their houses in guesthouses. Borşa Tourist Complex Area and Wine Valley in Vişeu de Sus are distinctive evidence of this situation.

Emigration was beneficial in the context of industrial restructuring in the area. Italy, Spain and Germany were a „salvation” for those unemployed and left without jobs. If they had not found the „solution” of emigration, all of them would have remained in the area, without any income.

The emigration of a large number of the working population has also a negative effect: workforce shortage in the area. As a result, an opposite phenomenon has occurred, that of immigration towards the upper basin of Vişeu River. It is however a seasonal migration, the immigrants coming from different parts of Eastern Romania and aiming to work in construction

and agriculture, ironically as it is precisely the work of most of the locals who migrated in the Western Europe. Yet, the major difference between immigrants and emigrants is given by the superior earnings of the migrants who work abroad.

Socially, the effects of migration are predominantly negative in the upper basin of Vișeu River and they refer to the dissolution of families, but especially to the situation of children who were left in Romania by the parents emigrated in the Western Europe, which has become a social problem.

According to data registered by the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Maramureș, in 2009, in Moisei, 185 children were left „without parents”, meaning that they have both parents working abroad.

The leave of the parents leads to a redefinition of family relations and since the child is very young, in most cases they determine the break of parent-child relationship. Those who remain to take care of the children, most often the grandparents, are then considered the children's parents and they are often addressed to as „mother” and „father”.

In shaping the personality of children, the danger is greater at young ages because, in the absence of affection, their personality is developed in disharmony even from the beginning. Many of these children do not trust themselves, and may gradually develop conduct disorders, become verbally and physically aggressive, and because of frustration and anxiety have a strong emotional lability.

Parents motivate their choice by the fact that they want to provide their children a „better future” and try to fill the lack of presence and affection that cannot give them daily with money and gifts.

Although the money sent by parents to their children help improving their living standard, emotional costs cannot be measured, and the improvement in the financial situation is on the contrary not effective in case of expected learning outcomes. Furthermore, the child may understand wrongly that the family does not matter and that they live in a world governed by the power of money.

The strongest effects are felt in cases in which both parents work abroad. In case of families with only one parent working abroad there is a smaller negative influence on the child. In these cases, the one who stays at home takes over all the parental roles and gives the child enough attention, affection, but also control. This way, the risks of separating children from their parents to which they are exposed are limited.

To argue for example in case of the School No. 2 in Moisei, out of the total of 439 students enrolled in the school year 2009-2010, 41 had both parents working abroad and 56 students had only one parent left, which is about 22% of school pupils enrolled in the grades 1 – 8 that had at least one parent abroad in the academic year 2009-2010.

The most negative effects of parental migration are:

- difficulties in raising children;
- lack of parental model to guide the child on the system of values;
- decrease in attention for school and school performance of the children;
- increased risk of dropping out of school.

The cultural effects of immigration may be though considered positive. The cultural benefits of immigration can be seen in the accelerating change of mentality. By emigrating, people come into contact with cultural diversity, with a certain level of education and advanced technology. Western society provides migrants in the area more chances than they can have been offered by the Romanian society. From a behavioural standpoint, migrants have „embraced” several positive aspects from the developed countries: lifestyle, have acquired new experiences and knowledge with positive effects in their subsequent individual development, have borrowed attitudes and habits, learned a foreign language even if not in school, etc.

However, they have not yet learned to bring their contribution and involve in the community they belong to and how to lose the individualism.

From a demographic perspective, the consequences of emigration on the communities located in the upper basin of Vișeu River are negative. The numerical loss due to migration is relatively low, since out of those who leave the area very few settle permanently in the western European countries. However, a significant change occurs in the age structure of the population, the aging population increasing in this area.

Most migrants are aged between 20-40 years, mainly active persons that do not contribute to national social security. At the same time, a significant part of those who emigrate are in the age range with the highest fertility, which leads to the decrease of fertility rate in the upper basin of Vișeu River. Birth rate drops relatively slow in recent years and the evolution of births abroad registered a continuous growth in the period 2004-2010, which can be concluded in the fact that as the birth rate is declining in Romania, the birth rate abroad is increasing. For example, in 2008, there were born 347 children abroad and only 335 in the study area, while they all belong to the migrants from Borșa, Moisei and Vișeu de Sus localities, which shows an increasing birth rate abroad. We can therefore state that, demographically, migration has a positive effect in the European countries, whose population is growing of at the expense of the area under study where we note the population loss by reducing the birth rate.

Even if these children are Romanian citizens, they have a good chance to become citizens of the states in which they were born (Italy, Germany, Spain) and integrate in the respective countries. There is also a possibility that in the future the migrants' children born

overseas will return with their parents and will integrate into their local community.

The effects of migration in Europe are less striking than in case of the analysed area, given the small number of local inhabitants from Borşa, Moisei, and Vişeu de Sus and Maramureş out of total migrants coming from the Eastern Europe and from other continents.

The flow of migrants affects the destination countries although not significantly and their influence is both positive and negative. The economic consequences are clearly positive. The immigrants coming from the upper basin of Vişeu River are considered numerous and cheap labour force, but especially less demanding, at least in the initial phase of emigration, when they easily accept any job and the amount of money offered, even if it does not cover the work performed. Eventually, all of the immigrants from here have come to be appreciated in some European countries for their reliability and professional skills. Therefore it is not in the interest of the Western European countries that the Romanians return home.

We show below the main migration destinations separately for each locality, because the order of preference is not the same, according to the data provided by the municipalities of the three cities (see table 1):

Table 1. The main migration destinations of the inhabitants from the upper basin of Vişeu River.

Borşa	Moisei	Vişeu de Sus
1. Italy	1. Italy	1. Germany
2. Spain	2. Spain	2. Italy
3. Great Britain	3. France	3. Spain
4. Germany	4. Germany	4. Austria
5. Austria	5. Portugal	5. Belgium

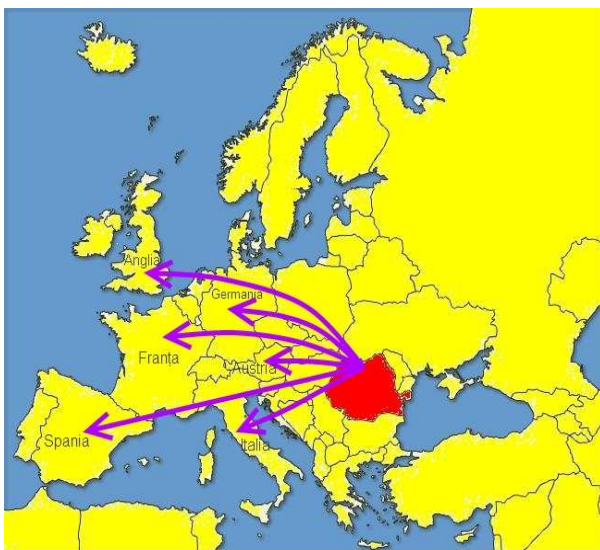


Fig. 1. Map of Europe and the main destination countries of migrants from the upper basin Vişeu River.

Migration in the three regions has begun immediately after 1989. The first peak of departures was recorded in the period 1997-1998, which were illegal migrations, the phenomenon increasing especially after January 1, 2002. Maramureş area has practically been emptied in this period, at least in case of the young population. The number of residents emigrating came to register a significant proportion of the total population of the area, leaving behind the children, women, the elderly, along with a few male population that have not yet migrated.

Data on the number of people emigrated from the three localities are only qualitative and approximations are relative, as there are no clear data and recent statistics that would allow an accurate analysis of the phenomenon.

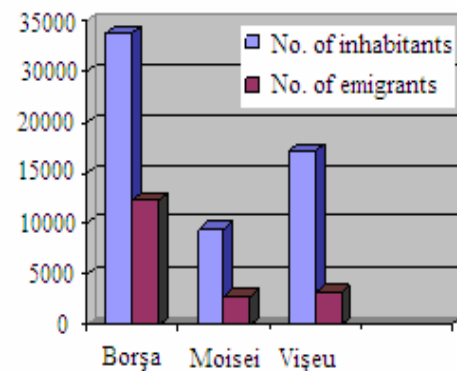


Fig. 2. The number of migrants in relation to the number of inhabitants (2010).

In case of all three cities, there is a high percentage of youth in the migratory flows, most of the people belonging to the main age groups 18-26 years and 26-35 years. The total number of emigrants belonging to the two age groups, separately for each community is as such: Borşa - 78%, Moisei - 68%, Vişeu de Sus - 63%. The distribution of migrants by age is shown in chart below, situation resulted from the estimates provided by the offices of the local authorities of the three localities (see fig. 3).

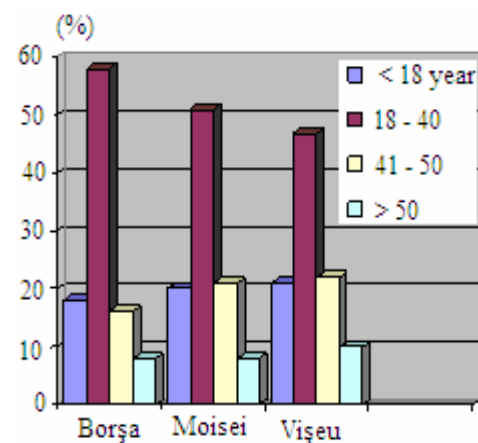


Fig. 3. Distribution of migrants by age (2010).

What should be noted regarding the population is that parents have started to take their children in the countries where they work, where they attend school, or others give up. We witness a gradual depopulation of these settlements, be it temporary considered: for example in Borșa town, almost half the population is working abroad (12,125 people out of 26,984), a disturbing report on the demography of the area.

If at first the migratory flow consisted entirely of men, women staying home to take care of children and household, in recent years the ratio of women in the migration flow has increased. This situation is possible because the role of the mother in the family has been taken over by the grandparents, thus family profits increasing even more since both of the parents are working abroad.

Currently, the ratio between women and men migrated abroad in the three localities is shown in table 3.

Table 2. Distribution of migrants by gender.

Localities	Women (%)	Men (%)
Borșa	35	65
Moisei	41	59
Vișeu de Sus	49	51

As shown in the table, men are still the main category of immigrants, but if we take into account the high number of women who have already decided to seek a job abroad, we can assume that their number will soon come very close to that of male migrants. This type of migration is however still low in intensity. The return migration in the upper basin of Vișeu River yet deserves a further analysis in the future.

The integration of Romania into the European Union and with it the free movement of labour force in Europe can only facilitate this process.

Those who have so far returned to the area are quite few. There are only a few families that have returned to the village, and opened small businesses like Italian restaurants, but especially construction companies, putting into practice what they learned in the European countries. Their investments are considered successful and likely to survive on the local market. It is also important that they provide jobs to the people of their home communities.

Lately, those who returned to the area or who have this intention have focused their investments mainly on tourism. Some of them are building guesthouses, while others are giving this destination to their own houses. The households located suitably, in neighbourhoods near Borșa Tourist Complex or in the neighbourhood of the Wine Valley in Vișeu de Sus, are converted into guesthouses and hence generating revenue.

We should also note the wish of migrants to temporarily return in the country to finish their studies,

especially the high school (their choice is the private high school, George Pop Băsești, the Branch of Vișeu de Sus), or the university studies, preferring the long distance form of studies (their choice being the University of Spiru Haret, the Branch of Sighetu Marmăției. However, those who return to enrol in the higher education system are very few and considered exceptions among migrants.

We cannot yet speak of return migration in case of people from Borșa, Moisei and Vișeu, although for most of them, the country of their employment is not seen as the country in which to spend the rest of their life, but as a place to earn money and then return „at home”, in Borșa, Moisei or Vișeu de Sus. Even if migrants have integrated into the European society, many of them being young and open to innovation, realizing the better living standard, still at the end of holidays spent in the home area, they all say that, they „are going back”. They do not return home, but to a place they feel alienated, unnoticed.

The return migration to Borșa, Moisei and Vișeu de Sus could be stimulated by providing exemption from taxes for those returning from abroad and in desire to open their own business in the settlements in the upper basin of Vișeu River.

As discussed above, the international labour migration from Maramureș, the upper basin of Vișeu River (Borșa, Moisei, Vișeu de Sus), involves a series of remarks:

- international labour migration is not definitive;
- most of the money earned abroad are transferred to Romania;
- migration has increased since 1998;
- the average income earned abroad is about 20 times higher than the average income in Romania;
- about 40% of the women work illegally;
- migrants are mainly young people between 40-50 years;
- the share of young people who left school and did not graduate high school is very high (about 25%);
- they perform jobs that does not require special training;
- about 73.2% of the people migrate especially to Latin countries;
- Italy, Spain and France are the most common destinations;
- the main cause of emigration is economic.

Therefore, building the Europe of tomorrow cannot be achieved without consensus regarding international migration, and without developing a common migration policy. Knowing the actual migration flows, its features and dynamics allows defining and adjusting the economic and social balance. Migration cannot (anymore) be considered as an instantaneous, unpredictable phenomenon, the movement of persons having multiple causes: historical, behavioural, socio-economic, etc.