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Searching jobs for "better life": understanding employment mobility and well-being of Eastern European migrants in France and Scotland

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Abstract: This paper explores theoretical and practical issues related to employment migration and well-being of Eastern European migrants in France and Scotland. Based on a primarily results of surveys made in Aberdeenshire and Anjou, it questions concepts and policies on migration and integration.

Résumé : Cet article développe une approche à la fois théorique et appliquée des migrations des Est-Européens en France et en Ecosse en relation avec l'emploi. Reposant sur les premiers résultats d'études menées en Anjou et Aberdeenshire, il interroge les concepts et politiques de migration et d'intégration.

Key-words: Employment, Migration, Mobility, Resilience, Well-being.

Mots-clés : Emploi, Migration, Mobilité, Résilience, Bien-être.

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Employment is surely one of the main factor that lead people migrating to places where they hope to find a job and a “better-life” (Chabanet and Faniel, 2007), even if migrations have a long history in Europe (Banens, 2009, Hern, 2008) and are sometimes disconnected with economic realities (Guillemot, 2000). This paper explores theoretical and practical issues related to employment migration and well-being of Eastern European migrants in France and Scotland. We’ll first look at theoretical aspects on mobility and migration, second, focus on migration policies, third, present case studies evidences and we’ll finally discuss migration policies in relation to our case studies.

I. Theoretical aspects: In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in **mobilities** (Urry, 2000, 2002, 2007; Hannam et al., 2006, Papastergiadis, 2000, Cresswell, 2006, Adey, 2010), mixing different approaches, from transport (Fumey et al., 2009) to philosophy. Several studies and migration policies portray mobility as a problem, in a “sedentarist” thinking (Cresswell, 2006). In this case, both imagined mobility of migrants (based on the expectations of potential burden on settled communities) and their physical movement (often exaggerated due to increased publicity and vitality) are often represented as suspect and invasive because they challenge the power of dominant settled groups to regulate movement and to travel freely (Hetherington, Sibley 1995). Others see mobility as ‘romanticised’ (cf. Baudrillard, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987); following emancipatory metaphor of nomadism: in this case, nomads are portrayed as “free people”, defying and critiquing both the settlement and art inspired by the state (Kaplan, 1996). The metaphorical nomad and theories of nomadology counter assertions of purity, fixed dwelling or being, and totalitarian authorities and practices. However, these “romanticised” representations of migrants as “always travelling” portray them as placeless “others”, who can be and should be excluded from the social scene (Sales, 2005, Düvell, 2006). As a result, these discursive categorisations of mobility affect treatment of migrants in dominant political structures and often lead to disempowerment and exclusion of itinerant groups (Stenning et al., 2006; Hudson et al., 2007). From this perspective, mobility is often portrayed as liminality and in-betweenness (forced movement and exclusion).

Emerging **mobile lifestyles** mean changing relations between well-being and place through living and working “on the move”, which need to be understood and adequately addressed by existing social policies. The understanding of “being on the move” involves not only spatial but also virtual mobility and “symbolic travel” (Kaplan, 1996). Movement and migration in this case can be understood as “dwelling” and “being with” the world (Heidegger, 1993), which cannot be limited to displacement within a pre-defined conceptual space or spatial “containment” and “location”. The very mobile being (an exile, a migrant) becomes considered within a moving and changing framework (i.e. territories of waiting, changing landscapes of affiliation into society) rather than defined in relation to always already existing, representational topography (i.e. systems differentiating between (non)/deserving immigrants). In this case, migrants can be seen as “settling within mobility” (Parutis, 2006) or “staying at home” rather than emigrating or assimilating into host societies (Burrell, 2006). Young migrants tend to be more adventurous and mobile, unlike more mature migrants with families seeking long term stability (Okolski, 2004). Young migrants are more likely to be mobile in following their “dream” job or “ideal” location. They may stay in place for a period of time while planning for and anticipating another move to a “better” place. Taking into account these mobile experiences, travel can be considered as both movement and “still” living while keeping family links and sense of migrant community (Triandafyllidou, 2006). Mobility and migration are relational as they are based on engaged and situated mobile being in the world, which challenges “fixed” notions of social integration and territorial structures of service provision (Shubin, 2010; Shubin and Swanson, 2010). The fluid and dynamic nature of mobile lifestyles is also conceptualised in the form of migration circulation, which stresses different

temporalities of migration and questions binary understandings of movement in terms of fixity/flow in policy discourses (Potot, 2006). As a result, existing exclusion of migrants in policy frameworks highlights the disjuncture between the fluid subjectivity of young international migrants and imaginations of their movement by sedentary authorities.

In economic literature on migration, mobility is largely described as a key factor for «**integration**» into the employment market (Spencer, 1994, Albu, 2008), but these theories do not consider fluid or “hybrid” international migrations (Whatmore, 2002). International experience has a positive effect on career when going back to national employment market (Perret, 2008), which renders travel and international mobility changeable and difficult to conceptualise only in terms of employment outcomes. Employment remains to be a key factor for integration within a society, but its changeable components (wage structure, earnings potential, psychological and monetary benefits and costs) and dynamic regional labour market variables (wage structure, unemployment, local labour legislative framework) problematise assumptions about linear and non-flexible relation between labour migration and assimilation into host communities. On top of this, job conditions vary (level of income; working atmosphere) and migration does not always contribute to improvement in well-being. There is a variety of other factors which challenge application of assimilation studies in the context of international migrations, including:

- Discrimination from employers when getting a job (« *luckily, I'm blond : I don't look as Roma people* » as was said during one interview);
- Cultural gaps / differences (language, behaviour);
- Difficulties in obtaining recognition for previous qualifications / diploma in country of origin when moving abroad;
- Legal barriers (to enter employment market abroad), linked to international migration policies and legislation against illegal workforce.

The «**Pull / Push**» theory applied to international work migrations explains attractiveness of overseas employment market (pull), thanks to higher income¹ (El Mouhoub and Oudinet, 2006), better work conditions and job opportunities. Economic, political, social or even religious crisis in the country of origin can interfere as a push impact, forcing migrants to leave their own country. We must also keep in mind that it can also lead to **brain-drain** relative to space and «pillage» / spoliation of Southern countries' elites by the Northern ones (Zacharie, 2009). We must also consider the issue of integration of the migrant populations within the host society: migrants are not always welcome and can suffer from racism / xenophobia (Gonzalez Perez & Somoza Medina, 2004).

¹ The fact that higher salary explains the attractiveness of certain territories is also debated in literature (Lall, Selod, and Shalizi, 2006; Katz and Stark 1986b): in certain cases, migrations can happen even knowing that the salary will be lower than it was before leaving.

The **human capital model** has also often been raised to explain difficulties of migrants to find a job (Guillemot, 2000, Reitz, 2002). The rare relationships that migrants have when settling abroad partly explain their ghettoization / clusterisation (having to work within the national/ethnic community) or their problems to enter “official” employment market (whereas they often have to cope with informal work).

II. Policy aspects:

Policies dealing with migrations, even if often inefficient (Castles, 2004), essentially mean introduction of restrictions or barriers to integration and assimilation (Costoiu, 2008). Mobile populations tend to be portrayed as threatening and suspicious, which is often the case with the Roma migrant experiencing xenophobia / segregation (Delépine, 2008). At the EU level, recent migration policies, created in order to limit migrations from the New member states in the enlarged Europe, focus on two main aspects: policies against illegal labour (Tapinos, 1999) and policies in favour of migration of highly qualified workers (MISEP-OEE, 2009) or seasonal migration (Pollard et al., 2008).

Current policies managing job-related migrations tend to focus on economic factors structuring access to labour markets and work strategies of mobile people, while often overlooking complex experiences (social, cultural, emotional) of migrants in their search for better living conditions (Spenser, 1994; Anderson et al., 2007), even working conditions (Bazillier, 2008, Davoine and Erhel, 2006), but not taking enough attention on territorial aspects (Guillemot, 2008). These policies do not take into account complex mobility practices including affective relationships with existing immigrant communities, family support strategies, travelling behaviour and cultural links (Sales, 2005, Düvell, 2006). Moreover, the emphasis on "managed migration" (Home Office, 2006) and "chosen migrations" (Sarkozy², 2006) often links employment mobility with a perceived "culture" of self-sufficiency and justifies their marginalisation as "non-belongers" to the detriment of local economies (DWP, 2006; Attali, 2008). While existing literature offers insights into shortcomings of these policies (Warnes, 2004; Sales, 2005; Bertossi, 2006), it does not quite bring out the importance of place and mobility in the processes of spatial organisation of society. This paper develops a holistic understanding of the territorial systems of employment, which do not only "accommodate" migration, but work with affected people to improve their well-being in France and Scotland. Recent literature also questions the impact of free movement of people (Klugman, 2009, Pecoud and de Guchteneire, 2009, Gilpin et al., 2006), that could be seen as opposite to the actual restrictive laws³.

National policies also play an important role for migrants' integration (Fougère and Safi, 2008, on naturalization policies), as we've seen in France with the debate on national identity (E. Besson, autumn 2009). In UK, the definition of integration and cohesion (Home Office, 2003) are based on a common vision and sense of belonging; diversity of backgrounds is valued; similar life opportunities and strong relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace and neighbourhood. In France, the last definition of integration (Ministry of Work, Ministry of Immigration, 25/11/2009) is based on the length of stay (at least 5 years), the job tenure (employed for at least a year), the contract length (at least a year with the French enterprise) and willingness to «integrate» (language, cultural norms).

In our case studies (Anjou, France and Aberdeenshire, Scotland), we notice that local authorities, NGO' specific policies to migrants or international links at university level also interfere on the concentration of migrants. As an example, Angers is now well known to offer support to migrants: it explains why, in the recent months, Angers attracts them because of its well-developed networks of support for mobile people, especially thanks to a strong activity of migrant associations. This good «reputation» let the Mayor (left wing) think that Angers may become a « new Sangatte », as he stated in December 2009⁴ after facing increasing number of migrants arriving in Angers and having to face first of all accommodation issues. The recent increase of asylum demands within the region⁵, especially in Anjou, may also explain its attractiveness.

² Nicolas Sarkozy, in February 2006, as Minister of the Interior, in a pre-project for a new

law: « *L'avant-projet de loi présenté par le ministre de l'Intérieur Nicolas Sarkozy au Comité interministériel de contrôle de l'immigration définit les contours de sa nouvelle politique d'immigration choisie et non subie* ». Durcissant les règles d'entrée et de séjour des étrangers, cet avant-projet suscite d'ores et déjà des réactions de rejet à gauche et à l'extrême-droite ». (Raizon D., 8/2/2006, France, Sarkozy veut «une immigration choisie». Archives Radio France International : http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/074/article_41762.asp).³ The recent position (November 2009) of the French Government against informal employers (23/11/2009: X. Darcos, Minister of Work, and E. Besson, Minister of Immigration) or suggestion of a new regulation policy to informal workers under certain conditions (25/11/09) express a defensive position against free migrations.⁴ http://www.ouest-france.fr/actu/actuDet_-Angers-debordee-par-une-vague-de-migrants-_3636-1155555_actu.Htm⁵ Asylum demands within the Pays-de-la-Loire region in 2009 : Loire-Atlantique : 255 persons have asked for asylum (193 in 2008, same period : +32%) ; Maine-et-Loire (Anjou) : 283 (159, +78%) ; Sarthe : 121 (110, +10%) ; Vendée : 86 (62, +39%) ; Mayenne : 52 (83, -37%). (Source : Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides, from 1/1/09 to 30/9/09).

III. Evidence from case study in Anjou (France) and Aberdeenshire (Scotland):

The paper is based on case studies in Anjou (France) and Aberdeenshire (Scotland), which explore the effects of migration from Eastern Europe on the host communities. To provide data for this study, a quantitative survey was administered to a sample of approximately 215 'new' (since 2000) immigrants between June and September 2009 in the selected localities in Aberdeenshire and Anjou. The purpose of this survey was to provide a baseline of employment and living conditions, as well as to analyse a number of key issues facing these groups in terms of social interactions, participation in community activities and indicators of cohesion. The survey was conducted with migrants representing 8 nationalities (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, Georgia). Parallel to the survey phase, a total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with migrants from the study countries. The absolute comparison between France and Scotland could not be done due to imbalance in data sources (East-Europeans were numerous in Scotland and there were only few of them in Anjou), but the research highlighted key trends in employment mobility and well-being of migrants in the case study areas:

- Aberdeenshire: East-European Migrants linked with job opportunities, but not looking for «integration» within the Scottish Society.
- Anjou: very few East-European Migrants, most of the ones we've met were in Anjou in relation with their studies (university link, high level of qualification) and not looking for job opportunity first of all, but had a strong interest in the French culture (language, architecture, history... as explained during interviews). They met a French girl/man and decided to settle in Anjou to stay/live together. The Roma population is a specific case, as their life is «on the move» and they got self-mobile employment.

If we compare these preliminary results, we notice that in Scotland, the main reason for migrating was employment (88% out of more than 220 questionnaires) whereas in Anjou, family/personal reasons were the most important.

On the one hand, our paper examines migrants' motivations and intentions for coming to work in France and Britain and compares them with the actual experiences of working and living abroad. Our findings suggest that migrants see their mobility as a mechanism for maintaining their quality of life, restarting their career or maintaining their employment status. As a result, migrants' understanding of well-being is strongly related to stability of job and income, which they see as the means to deal with the stress and psychological traumas of socio-economic transition in their home countries. Unsurprisingly, migrants with high educational and work qualifications accept low-wage jobs and mediocre living conditions in order to maintain

stability. Many of our respondents consciously, if reluctantly, made trade-offs to minimise their reliance on the state and other sources of support, which can increase their dependence and vulnerability. In the surveys and interviews, we notice that job match has a positive effect on migrants' feeling integrated:

On the other hand, many of the migrants demonstrated very limited connections with the actual places of their living in France and Britain. Our results demonstrate that many of the Eastern Europeans developed limited engagement with place because of their experience of previous migration and attempts to find constancy through the very changeableness of their dwellings. Similarly, temporariness of doing a certain job was an important aspect of migrants' well-being as they were prepared to tolerate certain jobs for a period of time in order to gain experience and improve language skills. Our research suggests that this is related to migrants' life-cycle and career plan, which means that their well-being also involves different temporalities and non-linear forms of living. This is reflected in migrants' ability to consider their well-being in temporary phases rather than through permanent patterns by being "flexible" workers, which are available at short notice for an uncertain period.

IV. Migration policies facing case study results:

This paper will finally discuss migration policies (Clochard, 2009) and their effects at different levels (from EU to local authorities), pointing out certain misunderstandings between actors attempting to promote a stronger social cohesion, via national integration (Banton, 2001).

Employment policies are pointed out in France with the new regulation system ("Pôle emploi") and the contracts signed between Job centres and employment agencies such as Manpower, Adecco, Adia, Randstad: they tend not to accept people not speaking well French as these people seem to be less likely to find a job within a short time⁶. There are here clear evidences of discrimination against

⁶ Cf. Envoyé Spécial, 4/3/2010, « Pôle emploi : une fusion sous pression ». This French TV news program pointed out in early March 2010 that « Pôle emploi », made from the rapprochement of the ANPE and the ASSEDIC since December 2008, is not migrants who are assumed to be less employable than locals, whereas migrants are often more flexible and harder workers, as seen in Scotland where they work long hours in fish factories or in construction industry. Another aspect of employment policies in France and Britain is that mobility tends now to be compulsory, forcing people to migrate when they are made redundant / laid off, but with no consideration to their own private life and wishes (Fol, 2009).

Traditional migration policies tend to focus on **integration**, but we faced different understandings of integration during our interviews:

- Stability of job and income ("If you speak the language, you can freely choose your job, you don't need to share your flat with another 6 people... that's integration", K, 13/06/09)
- Limited reliance on the state ("I don't want to depend on anyone – drawing on welfare is like begging", L, 13/06/09)
- Socialising with other migrants ("New migrants coming to Peterhead learn to speak Russian, not English, in order to communicate at work", O, 27/06/09).

These different understandings of integration (Aprile, 2009) question the way in which integration is defined within the migration policies, but also question the idea that migrants are willing to settle in the host country whereas it is not always the case: during our interviews, lots of migrants were rethinking of having a professional experience in Aberdeenshire or Anjou before moving to another place or returning in their country of origin. In that perspective, lots

of aspects of traditional migration policies are not suitable for these new migrants who are mobile (Cortes and Faret, 2009) and experience multi-territorial practices (Vélasco-Graciet, 2009).

These policies present a vision of “sustainable development” through assimilation of “new” migrants, while misinterpreting the actual experiences of “new” migrants and their well-being aspirations (Potot, 2006; Fibbi and D’Amato, 2008). The paper demonstrates that many labour migrants continue to live and work “in-between” places, so that their trans-national experiences cannot fit into traditional patterns of integration and assimilation. Through the investigation of working practices of Eastern European migrants, the paper argues for re-conceptualisation of migration in terms of **resilience**, which reflects migrants’ abilities to react and recover from stress and traumas of socio-economic and political change experienced in their “home” countries. It therefore argues for different policies which take on board this resilience and provide social assistance for migrants not only to integrate into new communities (Dureau and Hily, 2009), but also to recover from the stress of transition. It suggests that territorial governance can be improved through incorporation of the informal support networks, nongovernmental employment structures to support geographically mobile groups and improve community cohesion.

The concept of **transnationalism** seems to us the closest concept to explain the living of Eastern Europeans met in our two different regions. That concept can be perceived as between Integration and Segregation. It takes into account the creation of economic, social, identity and political links between different countries (Fibbi & D’Amato, 2008). It also includes the «cross-fertilization» brought by both the migrant and the origin and host societies (Vertovec, 2003). Finally, it helps to understand the migrating circulation on how a migrant can put his migrating experience to profit in both societies of origin and of adoption.

Conclusion

The actual economical crisis may strongly impact international migrations in Europe, as we’ll try to explore its implications in our future research. On the one hand, we expect the shortage of job opportunities and reduced demand for foreign work-force. On the other hand, economic crisis might contribute to an increase in xenophobia linked to unemployment growth, as we’ve just noticed in France at the regional elections in March 2010 with the high level of extreme right wing party (National Front⁷), even if most of the recent research shows no link between the inflow of migrants and unemployment growth (Portes and French, 2005, Gilpin et al., 2006), and stresses out that “*migrant workers make a positive contribution to the regional economy*” (Green et al., 2007, p. 102).

working very well. The 4 millions unemployed included in «Pôle emploi»’s listing are not receiving a good consideration from the 45 000 agents of Pôle emploi or even from its subcontractors as acting / temporary agencies who are not willing to look after people not speaking well French!...⁷ The National Front results on March 21 went up to 22% in Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and up to 19% in Languedoc-Roussillon and Picardie, regions of the South and the North of France where high unemployment is seen as in relation with high proportion of migrants. http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/infographie/2010/03/22/regionales-lesresultats-par-parti_1322331_823448.html

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