

BOOK REVIEW

THE SOCIAL WORLDS OF ROMANIAN MIGRATION ABROAD

Dumitru Sandu, *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate*,
Polirom, Iași, 2010

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1. Overview

The publication of this book is an original and important contribution to the Romanian scientific literature existing until 2010. The work touches various topics from transnationalism, economic development, identity, life satisfaction, brain drain, remigration, being focused on aspects that generate the migration phenomenon, from an historical, social, economic and demographic point of view

Dumitru Sandu examines the migration phenomenon in the light of the results of two sociological surveys carried out in 2006 *Temporary dwelling abroad* and 2008 *The Romanian community in Spain*, revising the characteristics of migration abroad in the 1990-2006 period, in terms of the „social world” concept, a notion that encompasses interaction models of thought, action and identity affirmation.

The volume examines the reasons that gave birth to the migration phenomenon, the aforementioned research aimed to highlighting the effects of migration on those remaining or returning home, but also the necessity to implement some new migration policies in Romania.

2. Book content

Part One: The emergence of new migration system in Romania – Chapter 1 Decision matrix conditioning temporary emigration abroad; Chapter 2 Genesis of the 90s; Chapter 3 Reconstruction stages using the collective memory of migrants.

Part Two: Values, projects and remittances in the migration world – Chapter 4: Return migration as a project and as a state of mind; Chapter 5: Immigrant orientation towards “home” on transnational spaces; Chapter 6: Foreign in his own country: the mentality of former migrants.

3. About the author

Dumitru Sandu, professor doctor at the University of Bucharest, Department of Sociology and Social Work, one of the most important contemporary Romanian

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sociologists, reference name and specialist in migration issues, launched in 2010, the volume of “The Social Worlds of Romanian Migration Abroad” at the Polirom Publishing House.

The book appears in one of the earliest and most read collections of Polirom. The COLLEGIUM collection was “initiated to make available to students and teachers, the so much needed specialized bibliographies, scientific credited, on various fields of study such as psychology, sociology and anthropology, pedagogy, science education, methods, letters, philosophy, media, public relations and advertising, business, economics, law, mathematics, political science, social work, public policy, international relations and European integration”.¹

4. The social worlds of Romanian migration abroad

The migration phenomenon, throughout history, has always accompanied the evolution of human society, but in recent decades, in the context of globalization and European integration, has seen an unprecedented scale not only at the national level, in the Romanian case, but worldwide as well. Motivator factors (subjective, ethnic, national, religious, political, and especially economic) that underlie individuals' decision to emigrate, are the push and pull type, depending on the forms of the capital which they want to improve.

The phenomenon of international movement of the population for personal profit and work, or better said “labour force migration” is one of scale, accurate statistical figures continue to be unknown even after the Romanian 2011 Census. Sociological migration studies therefore should not focus only on the affective-familial aspect, but on a macro level, on the socio-economic causes which determine it.

Because aggregate numbers from the official statistics were considered to be redundant or not entirely correspond to the reality, the research underlying this book “The Social Worlds of Romanian Migration Abroad” focused on the responses of 1,300 Romanian immigrants from all over Spain and another 800 near Madrid. The subjects captured in the survey questionnaire were: satisfaction and dissatisfaction with respect to their identity as a migrant, their perceptions over the native country, short medium and long term intentions and plans, returning plans, ways to stay in touch with relatives and acquaintances in the country (Sandu 2010, p. 195).

We've seen often cases of analysts, journalists, sociologists and politicians going abroad to see “how things really stand, with the Romanians went to work abroad”. As Dumitru Sandu mentions, the social worlds of the Romanian labour force migration fluctuates depending on:

¹ Polirom website available online at: <http://www.polirom.ro/catalog/colectii/collegium/> - viewed on the 1th of March, 2015.

- a) the migration situation: Romanians working abroad-migrants returned at home;
- b) identity orientation: immigrants oriented mainly towards Romania, towards the host country or, simultaneously, towards Romania and the country of immigration;
- c) the migration wave: recent versus late emigrants;
- d) immigrants working skills level: highly skilled immigrants versus those with an average qualification.

In his study on the characteristics of migration abroad between 1990 and 2006, Dumitru Sandu (Sandu 2010, p. 7) has studied labour force migration over the more obvious stages that have characterized Romania as it follows:

- a) 1990-1995 – Pioneering stage, or individual exploration stage. At first went only those who already had social relations abroad (on the line of kinship, ethnicity, religion, etc.), or internal migration experience that can be converted into foreign search ability of niches suitable for work, a high tolerance for risk, a strong pressure to emigrate due to the unemployment, the accelerated impoverishment or pronounced relative deprivation;
- b) 1996-2001 – Or collective exploration of Europe, especially the Western part through migration, during which Romanian emigration achieves the maximum degree of dispersion;
- c) 2002-2006 – Began with the free movement of Romanians in the Schengen area, characterised as a reconcentration period, focusing on national spaces according to the skills and average expectations of Romanian temporary emigration. (...) Romanian emigrants began to settle on the labour market abroad, especially in Europe (Sandu 2010, p. 8);
- d) after Romania adhering the European Union.

Regarding the professional aspect of emigrants, Dumitru Sandu mentions, in the present study (chapters one and two) an important aspect, namely that “many of the Romanian mass emigration peculiarities derives from their familial ties and that the men predominant work in construction and women in household or eldercare jobs. In terms of employment, the typical Romanian immigrant is a builder, if it’s a man or maid, if it’s a woman.” (Sandu 2010, p. 24)

Chapter three *Reconstruction stages using the collective memory of migrants*, brings into discussion the immigrant labour force in the host country. The chapter concludes that migrants looking for work already have a “relative in the destination country” that arranges a job for them, most often clandestine or illegal employment. The percentage of people working on the black market is comparable to that of those who have a formal commitment in the host country. “Illegal work is particularly high for domestic and agricultural jobs in the destination country.” (Sandu 2010, p. 75)

Chapter four *Return migration as a project and as a state of mind* brings to the reader’s attention another important aspect the remigration. “The returning

intention to the origin country or remigration may be associated with consumer inputs (employment, income and public services), needs or preferences for own or family consumption and institutional constraints that affect what migrant can earn in a given country.” (Sandu 2010, p. 81)

The returning intention, in Romanian migrants perception are directly associated with the availability and quality of employment. According to the survey those who manifested a certain intention of returning to the homeland: “currently have an uncertain job, were fired, were told to look for another job, monthly income decreased lately, in recent months was more difficult to find a stable job, have an unregulated status on the labour market”. (Sandu 2010, p. 28)

The occupational vulnerability affects the intention to remain in the host country, but the final decision and the return probability of depend on many other factors, that tend to change constantly. “The trend of return is rather influenced by the future plans or individual abilities to adapt to economic changes, and not by the regulated status on the labour market of the host country.” (Sandu 2010, p. 29)

In the last two chapters, *Immigrant orientation towards “home” on trans-national spaces* and *Foreign in his own country: the mentality of former migrants*, Dumitru Sandu brings into discussion some advantages and disadvantages of working abroad, extremely important aspects for the study of migrants professional status evolution.

The advantages are mainly financial (financial gain, high living standards, better jobs, working experience, broadening the horizon of knowledge) and disadvantages especially regard family and emotional problems (family division, suffering etc.), but the professional aspect are important too (not working according to their preparation, brain drain, Romanian economy lacks of specialised working force etc.). “People with experience working abroad are perceived as more dynamic, with a work ethic similar to the Western one, more optimistic and confident in their own abilities, with an entrepreneurial spirit.” (Sandu 2010, p. 138)

We could say that “migration is more of a short and medium term benefit for the work market than a solution for the demographical difficulties generalised in the economically developed countries... but people talk more and more of re-migration and therefore other demographical consequences.” (Netedu 2008, p. 94)

5. Conclusion

In terms of consequences of temporary living abroad, it seems to be a prevailing opinion that the phenomenon “is good” on a personal and familial level: reduces poverty, leads to property accumulation (a house, a car), and access to a better school for children and possibly migrants can open a business. Even the fact that the work mentality changes, is viewed as a plus, migrants have a better work focus, risk taking, accountability and new professional skills etc. However, there are many other obvious malfunctions for the families and the community in the origin country, such as the aging population, unqualified staff etc.

As Lupu (Lupu 2006, p. 106) mentions “mainly from political reasons we highlight the positive effects of the phenomenon. The negative effects are of importance especially at the structural institutions level that ensures a normal functioning of society.”

The decision to return in the origin country, or not, is influenced primarily by the income level associated with the probability of finding a job. Ultimately, the immigrant does not want just a place to work in the destination country but a job much better paid than those existing in the origin country.

References

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