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DESIRED MOBILITY OR SATISFIED IMMOBILITY?
MIGRATORY ASPIRATIONS AMONG KNOWLEDGE WORKERS
Case study: IT (*Information Technology*) global outsourcing in Romania.

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Abstract: Among the aspects discussed within the globalisation process , the *international mobility of professional workers* assumes considerable relevance. This paper focuses on migratory aspirations among knowledge workers within the context of economic globalisation and market restructuring in Romania. Due to a lack of literature dealing with these issues, the originality of this study consists in its attention to the stage immediately preceding migration – how highly skilled potential migrants plan their migration as well as frame their personal and professional aspirations in their country of origin. The background of this research is then represented by the international outsourcing *strategies of firms* (the flow of capital and companies) to foreign countries and by the new employment opportunities offered by *Information Technologies.*

In general, personal aspirations could be explained either in the form of committed plans for mobility or immobility or a desire to remain immobile. What influences aspirations to migrate is a mixture of pressures from the social environment, market and immigration conditions and personal traits and attitudes. The global outsourcing slightly influences brain drain outcomes, but it introduces brain circulation, virtual brain mobility and the emergence of a *Net bourgeoisie* as features of globally relocated knowledge work.

"My wish is to migrate, have an experience abroad to improve my skills and then return to Romania",
"I have no option…I'm forced to leave. Where? Canada or Australia, they are recruiting IT people",
"Actually, I'm pleased to be working here in Romania and just be virtually mobile".

These short sentences portray the potential immigrant status and condition related to highly skilled mobility today. To what extent do IT knowledge workers want, desire and expect (or not) to migrate and what are the circumstances that enable them to do so? These are the aspects we intend to investigate with this study.

1. Introduction

1.1 The migratory aspirations of highly skilled workers

International mobility of the highly skilled - which refers to the opportunities of qualified workers to capitalize on their skills by moving to other employers and countries - represents an increasingly large and complex component of global migration streams, given that globalisation and the advent of a knowledge economy created a new context for labour mobility, expressing a greater need for qualified professionals. Even if reliable data on skilled mobility is generally scarce, the growing demand and competition for talents in OECD countries is significant - especially in the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK, and more than ever in the Information Technology (IT)[1] industry.

Without doubt, the phenomenon of *highly skilled migration* (or *skill streams*) can assume the features of *brain drain* - the massive flow of intellectual human capital directed to the most developed countries - facilitated by selective immigration polices (Lowell and Findlay 2001) and by knowledge-based metropolitan economies in search of qualified resources (Sassen 1994). This phenomenon, which is nothing new across the whole historical range of migrations[2], is not even due to globalisation itself, while h*ighly skilled workers* and their mobility patterns certainly represent an essential part of the global labour market formation (Sassen 1991).

Skilled migration and brain drain have assuredly been affecting the seascape of many nations: their positive and negative consequences[3] in both origin and destination countries have entered social and political policy agendas and been debated in academic discussions (Lowell B. L. and Findlay A.

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[1] "Information Technology" (IT) is shorthand for Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs).

[2] During the past, demand for highly-skilled workers largely increased, determining territorial movements of people. This phenomenon became numerically distinctive as well as politically and economically relevant during the *1950s and 1960s*. Debates amongst academics and international agencies started, highlighting the negative consequences of brain drain especially affecting southern developing countries (UNCTAD 1975, 1979; Bhagwati Jagdish 1976). A second brain drain phase started in the 1990s, when the current mobility of skills occurred within the context of globalisation and within the widespread diffusion of information and communications technologies (ICTs). This phase, in addition, coincides with the transition to market-oriented economies in most parts of the world, as in the case of the former Soviet bloc, and it reveals a shift in the skill composition of qualified migrants with a strong emphasis on IT and knowledge work. Moreover, brain drain today is not only and uniquely affecting developing countries, but it can also occur at different levels within the *developed* nations.

[3] Initial studies on skilled migration in the 1960s concentrated more on the *labour market consequences* for the workers' country of origin, considering the demand for emigrants as exogenous (Beine *et.alt.* 2002). In addition, with education being largely financed by public resources, damage created in the sending countries was referred to as the imbalance between personal and public/social advantages (Bhagwati 1976). International mobility of skilled workers was given overall consideration within a contraposition of *winner* and *loser* countries (Beine *et.alt.* 2002). In the 1990s, the study of brain drain shifted its attention from the *pushing factors and negative aspects*, to the *pull* factors (demand driven flows, skill shortages, selective immigration polices). Recent literature (Gaillard and Gaillard 1997; Lowell and Findlay 2001; Beine *et alt.* 2001) started to consider skilled mobility as a *potential benefit* for the country of origin thanks to the remittances (Rapoport and Docquier 2003), trade networks (Gould, 1994; Rauch and Trindade 2002), return migrations bringing back new skills and experience (Domingues Dos Santos and Postel-Vinay 2003) and the fostering effect of *local human capital formation* in the country of origin (Mountford 1997; Stark *et al.* 1998; Beine et al. 2001).

2001; Wickramasekara P. 2002; OECD Sopemi 2001; OECD 2002a, 2002b; Unesco-Cepes 2004; CCE DG Research 2003). This phenomenon - even if numerically limited - represents an important intersection of contemporary international migration flows, labour markets and economies.

Unlike traditional migration studies, this article investigates a particular feature of skilled mobility not widely analysed. In most cases in fact, economic and sociological literature - both at the micro and macro level – has more readily focused either on the effects of migration flows on destination countries (i.e. social, economic or legal aspects related to migration and integration), on the effects on countries of origin (i.e. the brain drain, social remittances) or on the overall determinants of immigration. Rather than following a traditional approach, this study looks at *that stage immediately preceding* migration among highly skilled workers. The focus is therefore on the "*potential migrants*", with an attempt to explain how they develop their migratory project (how individuals articulate their motivations, how they decide between aspirations for a career abroad and a life in their own country, and how external conditions and personal decisions could make workers opt for a livelihood abroad).

It is important to underline that we are particularly referring to those qualified workers who actually know that their abilities are needed and requested abroad (due to the skill shortages, the internationalization of professions and the relevance of information technologies). At the same time they are also able to get rewards from their abilities without moving internationally. This aspect represents the specific trait of our discourse on skilled migration: explore the option between mobility (demand driven movements to foreign labour markets and economies, opportunities to work abroad, desires to emigrate) and the immobility alternative (online virtual migration and employment in outsourced jobs)[4].

What we are analysing here may indeed seem marginal or secondary to other migration issues that are more obvious and have more to do with substantial social and economic implications. Nevertheless, we argue that we are making an original and worthwhile contribution to the understanding of migratory phenomena by going through the reasons, desires, individual education and career paths of highly skilled workers. In this regard, we consider the mobility process not just by examining statistical facts and physical flows, but mostly by looking at personal motivations, aspirations and perceptions.

1.2 Global outsourcing influencing international mobility

In the following section, we shall specify the scope of this study, explaining how and why the knowledge economy represented the background of our research.

Globalisation and the advent of the knowledge economy created a new context where not only workers, but also companies are mobile in the global market as a result of their international restructuring and global outsourcing strategies[5]. *Flows of capital* and *firms* - through foreign direct investments and global subcontracting practices – have rapidly increased in recent times, linking

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[4] Not all qualified and skilled workers could have access to skilled labour markets abroad indeed. As recent trends showed, today international migrants are more likely to include qualified and skilled workers who enter low skilled segments of foreign labour markets. Differently, in the case here considered, IT Romanian workers can relate to the IT labour market in their own country and also abroad.

[5] Outsourcing is generally defined as the "practice of handing over the planning, management and operation of certain functions to an independent third party, under the terms of a formalized service level agreement. It is usually, but not always, characterized by the transfer of assets from the customer to the service provider. Increasingly, organisations are both outsourcing customers and service providers. The major IT companies focus on their core competencies too and find it profitable to outsource other functions such as staff recruitment or payroll processing" (Sparrow 2003: 1-2). We consider outsourcing to be a method of economic relations between two firms/actors where one uses and integrates into its process the goods, services and resources of the other.

peripheral places and workers to advanced western economies within the international division of labour[6]. In fact, recent literature has underlined patterns of a skill-intensive international division of labour (Fernandes, Ararora and Asundi 2000) that produced geographic industrial clusters assembling and supplying large professional labour force pools and quality technologies at competitive lower wage rates[7]. An internationally known example is India, where a large software and services industry of foreign firms has been developed (Kattuman and Iyer 2002).

Different outsourcing arrangements emerged as a response to structural changes (Clott 2004), with firms cutting costs and improving their efficiency[8]. In this sense, we can say that *Information Technologies* somehow facilitated *globalisation* as their nature helped companies to create international partnerships and relocations (Hicks, Isard and Martin 1996). Moreover, *ICT (Information and Communication Technology)* has very different traits from other industries: the main difference is that it refers to *knowledge workers* and *knowledge products*, instead of low-skilled profiles and material goods. In fact, the IT sector deals with the *new technologies* as an instrument of work and as the product itself, without needing physical transport, taxes or delivery costs. The specificity and potential of Information Technologies therefore allow the virtual employment of so called "*brains without a body*", skilled workers employed from afar.

From this perspective, globalisation provided an open field for companies' international industrial restructuring as well as a further expression of demand for skilled human resources[9]. This phenomenon is also being debated today with regard to its short and long-term impacts on restraining or enhancing out-migration and its potential for increasing local employment, wages and economic growth, and so constitutes the background for our research.

2. Sociological hypothesis and questions

In this section, we will introduce the main hypothesis of our study that made us examine the international mobility of highly skilled workers with respect to the global outsourcing strategy.

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[6] From a *theoretical* point of view, we recall the tradition of the transaction costs approach where subcontracting represents the choice that companies make to achieve maximum economic efficiency (Williamson 1981). Subcontracting could be regarded as a particular *recruitment strategy* since the choice between vertical integration and the contracting out of some activities has an immediate association with decisions on recruiting human resources. When effects on the labour force are expressed, they usually examine managerial models and practices that involve *core* and *marginal* labour force or analyse non-standard forms of employment. Little or no systematic analysis of subcontracting as an option for workers' recruitment and mobility has been developed (Ferro, Fellini and Fullin 2005).

[7] A switch from moving *people to work* to moving *work to people* started to occur more frequently, thanks to the nature - and potential - of Information Technologies and to the process of economic globalisation of markets.

[8] During the 1980s, many companies with a strong vertical and hierarchical organisation reshaped into more flexible structures as a consequence of general trends of downsizing, restructuring, re-engineering and just in time manufacturing (Sparrow 2003). Other factors that influenced the trend towards outsourcing include the problems of skill shortage that the IT sector has been experiencing: outsourcing has been addressed as a solution for firms that have trouble finding the necessary skills and recruit workers in their local pools (Nicholson 2001). Other factors are the presence of a more mobile workforce, the increasing costs of software developed in-house, the need to adopt new technologies to speed up system development, the explosion of Internet technologies and services that require a wide range of new skills and investments (Sparrow 2003: 2-3).

[9] Information Technologies triggered intense transformations in production and work and in the increasing needs of knowledge workers, creating complex interconnections between labour migrations and companies' recruitment strategies. The *ICT sector* perfectly represents the contemporary global changes in the market economy and, due to its product and organisation nature, provides significant examples of highly skilled workers' mobility. In fact, Castells (1996: 81-82), commenting on the relationship between knowledge, the economy and the globalisation process, confirms that companies look for profitability and competitiveness by cutting production and labour costs through organisational decentralisation and expanding markets. Information Technologies provide the tools to implement new capital investments abroad and employ a qualified workforce (Castells 1996: 85-90).

In accordance with labour migration studies and world system theories (Sassen 1988; Massey *et al.* 1998), we tested a possible relationship between the *relocation of international firms* and *migrations of highly-skilled workers*. Our aim was to verify a situation perceived as paradoxical. To begin with, we can in fact argue that global relocation keeps the *employed workforce immobile*, creating a mobility of capital, goods and services, but not of individuals. Economists argue that creating the conditions to attract direct foreign investments bring growth and jobs locally; foreign investments, initially attracted by lower wages, create jobs and economic improvement. The growing practice of outsourcing might therefore represent a solution to keep skilled IT workers in Romania and provide jobs and good wages over time, thereby reducing emigration pressures (Martin and Staubhaar 2002).

According to *world system literature* on the other hand (Sassen 1991), foreign capital in developing countries is assumed to affect migration, the argument being that international outflows of labour follow the influx of capital, but in the other direction, creating a mobile population from peripheral countries. This perspective stems especially from the coexistence - particularly in global cities - of dual labour markets of immigrant workforces (unskilled and highly skilled) crossing global boundaries.

Moreover, theoretical considerations suggest that emigration happens more easily and frequently among those individuals who whish to secure and improve their own and their families' economic conditions (Massey *et al.* 1998). In addition, aspects of professional development and improvement to quality of life are more frequently mentioned by highly qualified persons, making young people more likely to consider planning a migration.

Starting from these assumptions, we argued that, *paradoxically*, the global relocation of IT could either represent a factor of *mobility activation* and selective migration for qualified workers or a status of *workforce immobility*. In this paper, we discuss to what extent the aspirations and perspectives on international migration amongst IT knowledge workers are shaped, influenced and expressed within the global outsourcing. In doing so, we can definitively combine the individual motivations and aspirations of workers with the pushing and/or pulling effect of global outsourcing.

More specifically, the main aspects we intend to analyse throughout this paper concern:

(§) What drives and shapes *the aspiration* - or, alternatively, the non-aspiration - *of knowledge workers to migrate to another country*? *What personal and external factors influence the desire and decision to migrate*?

(§) *What patterns of mobility aspiration can we identify among knowledge workers? What traits and features emerge? What implications can we infer from this?*

These aspects will be further examined in the following pages: *firstly,* we review those theoretical approaches that considered migration at the micro level mostly paying attention to migratory aspirations and motivations (§ 3).
Secondly, we explain how the fieldwork research was developed in Romania (and specifically in the city of Cluj Napoca), where there has been a pronounced brain drain trend among highly skilled IT workers in the past and a marked current international outsourcing trend. We then consider the qualitative methodological features of this study: personal narrations and in-depth interviews are in fact the tool that could provide answers to our questions pertaining to the sphere of personal and professional aspirations (§ 4).
Thirdly, we examine the fieldwork results based on our previous assumptions, concepts and questions (§ 5).

3. The migrant's behaviour in reviewed literature

Taking into account the determining factors of migration, much attention has traditionally been paid to social, economic and political aspects from a *macro*-sociological perspective.

An important contribution comes from economic theories on *migration pressure*[10]. In considering the distinction between *wanting* to migrate and actually *migrating*, Straubhaar (1993) defines migration pressure as "that part of migration potential not realised because of restrictions imposed by immigration countries". The migration potential depends on the sum of individuals' hypothetical economic and non-economic gains from migration and it varies with their propensity to translate these gains into a desire to migrate. Moreover, Schaeffer (1993) and Bruni and Venturini (1995) relate their analyses to demographic and labour market conditions in a macro level approach[11]. Their conception of actual migration is determined by the *demand* in destination countries: "migration *demand* [...] is the willingness of the potential destination countries to accept immigrants. Demand for foreign people and immigration laws decide whether and which part of migration potential becomes effective. [...] If no government wants to admit foreign workers there will be no (legal) international labour migration" (Straubhaar 1993: 13). This model therefore considers the desire and ability to migrate shaped by the labour demand abroad.

Conversely, different dimensions have been studied with *micro*-sociological analysis, focusing on the individual level. Our aim here is to review some micro-approaches that could be useful in order to examine the construction of individual migratory projects, explaining how immigrants express, wish, foresee and invest in their employment abroad. In fact, there are not only macro factors (push and pull) affecting people's decisions, but also *micro dimensions* where people evaluate and consider why and how to contextualise their migratory experience.

Migration in general is a process that starts in the *country of origin* before becoming effective. It originates as an *idea* that can then concretely develop or not (Edelstein 2000 a; 2000 b). How migration plans originate and what they consist of are elements related to the more or less *instrumental* consideration and *investment* that immigrants make in their job abroad (Massey *et al.* 1998; Reyneri 2000). This is particularly true when we consider the differences between skilled migrants - who migrate just to get a qualified occupation abroad - and workers who are employed in low-income jobs, despite their higher educational background and expectations.

3.1 Developing migratory projects

In this section, we begin by including a *cost and benefit analysis* of determining factors in migration and then review the micro-sociological approaches that deal with migrants (and pre-migrant) behaviour. This will aid us in understanding contemporary migrations at an individual level.

In developing their migratory project, *potential migrants* consider and evaluate various *conditions*: (a) the person's *dissatisfaction* with his/her present economic, family, political or social conditions compared with the expected situation in other countries, based on information from personal experiences (travels, study abroad) or from other sources (friends, the mass media, books); (b) the conviction that personal *improvements* and the fulfilment of aspirations are very unlikely to be accomplished in the country of origin; (c) the idea that desires concerning one's personal, social and economic situation could be *fulfilled* in another country. Through a process of *anticipatory*

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[10] Migration pressure theories are often considered an expression of political concern about inflows of immigrants, rather than as an analytical concept (Bruni and Venturini 1995).

[11] The strength of their argument consists in the *separation* of migration potential from observed migration flows. At the individual level, this means that the desire to migrate must precede the actual migration, and it is not certain that a person wishing to migrate will eventually succeed in migrating.

socialisation[12], the potential migrant is supposed to have knowledge of lifestyles, values and information, (d) to know the practical possibilities for migration and the entry regulations and (e) to weigh up all the benefits against the costs of migration.

What the migrant actually considers in his/her evaluation and decision to migrate is in fact a combination of push and pull elements articulated at a personal, family, social and economic level[13]. The concept of *migratory project* goes beyond the mere rational and economic calculation and the sole intentions of the migrant. On the contrary, it includes the local context and dimensions explaining why people emigrate and with what perspectives.

The migratory project is influenced by the *expectations* that migrants have for their future/possible life abroad and by the deprivation they feel for not being able to fulfil their aspirations[14]. Moreover, migratory projects are shaped by a *migratory knowledge* comprising networks of relations, circulation of information, ethnic chains to organise, support and integration of migrants. Not all emigrants move through migratory chains obviously, but this is a key aspect of today's flows (Reyneri 1979; Portes 1998)

Furthermore, migratory projects have traditionally been considered in light of their *duration* - long/permanent and temporary. The length indeed influences the social-cultural and labour identity of migrants[15]: seasonal foreign workers, for example, face the working period abroad as a temporary experience and have no interest in local integration or assimilation. When migration plans are longer, the dynamics to keep up one's own culture and social relations can vary, if not even conflict, with the local integration and assimilation process[16]. However, the sole duration can not exclusively explain labour migration movements that have become more *complex* and *articulated* with modern and easier transport connections, international circulation of information and cultural and socio-demographic changes in the countries of origin.

In general, we can assume that migratory projects are differently formed before emigration takes place, but the boundaries between the intervening features are evidently very permeable: motivations and plans in fact change often over time, influenced by local conditions and by economic, social, cultural, personal and legal dimensions.

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[12] The hypothesis of anticipatory socialisation actually stresses the influence that the acquaintance and familiarity with foreign lifestyles, culture, information and ideas can have on determining people's plans. This will be also explained in the following paragraph.

[13] It is important to remember that migration is a selective process in which migrants represent a very small portion of the whole population.

[14] While the neoclassical hypothesis of the determining factors of migration considers the micro level of migration decision-making, attributed to income differences among countries, the new economic sociology proposed the concept, based on social psychology (Merton and Kitt 1950) of relative deprivation affecting the decision to migrate. This concept refers to an individual's perception of living in worse conditions than the reference group. This comparison demonstrates that people's desire to improve their status and migrate is not influenced by income disparity, but by their personal position in the social stratification. This explains why the decision to migrate does not necessarily imply a condition of unemployment, as those who have a job can also realistically consider a move abroad (Zanfrini 2004).

[15] Rack's classification (1988) based on the reason and characteristic of migration considers immigrants variously according to their *project's duration* – short, medium or long – and relates this to the *personal investment* in the experience abroad (the *Gastarbeiter*, the *Settler* and the *refugees*).

[16] Considering the differences between migratory projects, Reyneri (2000) proposes to include the following dimensions in order to study the various behaviours of migrants:
   a. The social and cultural level of integration and homogeneity in the countries of origin and the degree of exposure to the norms, lifestyles and aspirations of destination countries.
   b. The characteristics of emigration, from the migratory projects to the legislative burdens.
   c. The level of social organisation in the country of destination and its capacity to integrate and assimilate people from other cultures
In the country of destination, immigrant social organisations can develop in different ways according to the cohesion and extension of relationships related to the immigrant national community, family or local clan, or become isolated.

3.2 Micro sociological approaches to migration

Considering how micro-sociological literature has been studying the *migration project* and *decision-making process* on an individual level, we realised that most approaches were mainly centred on the adaptation and integration phase of immigrants in the host society[17]. Two micro-approaches, explaining why some individuals migrate and others do not, are particularly significant.

Firstly, the studies of *migration systems and networks* emphasise the role of family and informal networks in facilitating migration for some potential migrants but not for others (Boyd 1989; Böcker 1995). Applied to the *migration field*, the social network analysis concentrates on the structural relations among individuals along their migratory path. Migrants are connected to one or more social networks determined by family and friendship relationships and by territorial, ethnic, professional or religious association.[18]. This approach assigns a central role to the different kinds of *flows* (human resources, financial and technical) that exist between emigration and immigration countries. On the whole, we find references to the migratory project of single individuals, given that personal decisions are affected by each person's networks and that networks represent mechanisms that characterise and regulate outflow migration systems.

The second approach refers to the *new economics of labour migration*, showing that migration of some, but not all family members, can constitute an important risk-reducing strategy (Stark 1995; Taylor 1999). The motivation and decision to migrate is transferred from the single individual to the family, despite the fact that just one person effectively migrates (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark 1991). In fact, families have their own strategies to allocate resources in different labour markets – local, national and international – in order to maximise profits and minimise risks. Emigration is not just a permanent separation, but more often a temporary move, and it therefore represents a new way of defining relationships with the community of origin (Zanfrini 2004).

New Economic Sociology pays attention to the push factors considering the *community* to whom the potential migrants relate and refer. Today, because of the diffusion of communication means in peripheral countries, the community of reference for potential migrants may not just be their physical one in the country of origin, but also the one residing in the country where they wish to emigrate (Zanfrini 2004). To conclude this account, we recall the concept of *anticipatory socialisation* (Merton and Kitt 1950; Alberoni and Baglioni 1965) referring to those mechanisms that influence potential migrants, introducing models of behaviour and consumer styles. This in fact represents one of the most important factors that attracts people to a better quality of life abroad. Both these perspectives explain why migration is easier for some individuals than for others, and why some individuals decide to stay or to migrate.

3.3 Aspiration and ability to migrate

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[17] We refer to the *formal-relational* approach expressed by Siemmel (1908) who focused on migration as a social relationship, characterised by a belonging to the social group of origin and to the group of destination. In the *psycho-culturalist* approach, attention is paid to the immigrant as a free entrepreneur. Another micro approach is the *humanistic-situational* one, focused on the sphere of values, from a perspective of cultural adaptation or continuity with the past (Znaniecki 1958). The *ecological-social* approach focuses on the interaction of immigrants – and their original culture – with the host society (Park 1936).

[18] Applying network analysis to migration studies, we find the *migration chain* concept (Reyneri 1979). The migratory chain explains the way former relationships of migrants are a magnet for those who decide to migrate. The perspective of the migratory chain has been interpreted as a mechanism of attraction and this underlines the variety of relationships that connect social factors before migration and their mechanisms of change and transformation (relationships can be broken, transform, overlap, be substituted etc.). Network analysis reveals how networks change within the migration experience: first they are weak and related to psychological, cultural and material help, then they answer the needs of ethnic grouping, culturally mediating between the country of origin and destination country (Scidà 2002).

A recent study proposes an analysis of pre-migration determining factors and attitudes, starting from the consideration that not only do people wish to migrate, but also that they might be unable to do so. This approach is not suggesting a modelled theory, but it tries to empirically deal with different features of contemporary migration and non-migration that remain unexplained by traditional theory.

Carling (2002) introduces the concept of *involuntary immobility* as the tension between the aspirations to migrate and the (in)ability to do so[19]. The model he proposes aims to understand how individual characteristics and immigration polices affect personal aspirations and abilities to migrate[20]. In his view, the *aspiration* to migrate is affected, at a macro level, by the social construction of the meaning of e/migration (Rafael 1997; Rugkåsa 1997) and by the emigration environment, which consists of the historical, social, economic, cultural or political setting that encourages (or discourages) migration[21]. In this constructionist approach, the environment contains different projects, and emigration is one embedded with social and personal meanings and with stereotypical images and expectations. Varying commitments of people towards such projects create different outcomes of migration[22].

At the micro level, *aspiration* is considered through the individual factors that influence people's desire to emigrate, such as gender, age, family migration history, social status, educational attainment, personality traits and social networks. The other dimension considered is *ability*, the realisation of the wish to emigrate: on a macro level it is most significantly affected by restrictive migration policies in destination countries and also by the existence, in countries of origin, of circumstances like diaspora or irregular migration networks. The ability to migrate is realised through different methods, each of which meets different *barriers* both at the micro level and at the macro level, associated with foreign migration regulations.

The model proposed by Carling represents an empirical tool for studying pre-migration, taking into account the conditions and determining factors that affect people's choices and opportunities to move.

3.4 Psycho-social approaches

The perspective and study of potential migrants and migratory aspiration is a scarcely explored area in sociology (Faist 1997:247; Massey et al. 1998:12). Additional contributions come from other fields such as *clinical psychologists*, whose studies have generally been based on post migration narratives[23]. Such studies emphasised the psychosocial variables that define migratory

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[19] He especially explored the development of aspiration-into-ability to migrate among Cape Verdeans, in particular considering the influence of restrictive immigration polices.

[20] "The aspiration/ability model places the possibility of involuntary immobility at the centre of the migration process. This is important for two reasons. First, the massive extent of unfulfilled dreams about migration needs to be explained within a framework of migration theory: not only why these people wish to migrate, but also why they are unable to do so. Second, it is difficult to give adequate explanations of actual migration flows without relating to the widespread frustration over immobility. The migration flows that we observe are, in this sense, only the tip of the iceberg of wishes to migrate" (Carling 2001:1).

[21] "Potential destinations are an important part of the emigration environment, but they are present through the locally existing, discursively constructed ideas about these places. This is a characteristic of the migration decision-making process that has long been recognized, whether it is conceptualized in terms of imperfect information or discursive constructions" (Carling 2001: 26).

[22] "This is in fact a central theme in time-geography, how people initiate projects (i.e. emigration) with reference to ideal type versions that can be considered both as historical entities, rooted in the flow of life, and as ready-made blueprints, preserved in the store-house of culture" (Hägerstrand 1996: 653). "People's *wish* to migrate will often be based on ideas about a culturally defined blueprint 'emigration project', but if they do migrate, their own particular experience is likely to diverge from this ideal type version" (Carling 2001: 26-27)

[23] In particular we mention a study on migrant women conducted by Edelstein (2000 a) among 100 women, using narrative and discourse analyses. Edelstein finds that migrant women identify the responsibility of the migratory project in another person (the one determining it), they experience long farewell periods and they dream about the future

projects and possible traumatic distress[24]. Moreover, even if not directly applied to migration issues, the Maslow psychological theory studying the human needs hierarchy shall also provide useful insights[25]. While research in these fields is also not abundant[26] (Kran 1991; Espin 1999), what psychological approaches generally underline is the importance of examining the context of migrants and the necessity to know both sociological and socio-anthropological data about the process of contemporary migrations. Unlike the traditional emphasis on the economic factor of migrations, an integrated approach considering the complexity of its object is claimed including social, political and psychological variables and qualitative analyses (Tousignant 1991).

4. Fieldwork: strategies of firms, stories of workers

In this paper, we are providing some results of a more extensive study that analysed the *recruitment strategies* of foreign workforce among *IT firms* – to what extent companies' decision-making can influence international migration flows – and also how *foreign workers* shape their *aspirations* towards mobility. Our focus here is obviously just on the workers.

The entire research project was carried out between 2001-2004. While investigating the strategies that ICT firms in Italy adopt in order to recruit skilled foreign workers, a common trend of outsourcing and *delocalizing software development activities* noticeably emerged in *Romania*. The reason we specifically mention Romania is that it is the traditional location where many Italian firms (mostly based in the northeastern region) delocalise a portion of their activities (especially low-skilled ones from the fields of manufacture, garments, textile, but also highly-skilled ones from the technology and electronic sectors).

Moreover, Romania resembles important aspects of the global market economy: local firms working in international outsourcing for foreign subcontractors, growing foreign direct investments, a developing Information Technology industry, a highly skilled delocalisation process and a major national issue related to the brain drain migration of scientific and intellectual resources.

Therefore a *red line* had been followed, from the employers in Italy to the recruitment pool and delocalisation field in Romania. Tracking the edge in Romania, we examined the *subcontractor side* and investigated the *personal interests*, *aspirations* and *motivations* towards international mobility of IT workers employed there.

The fieldwork took place in 2003 in the City of Cluj Napoca. The city had been identified as a growing destination for the foreign software industry. Although Cluj is not a *technopole* like Silicon Valley or the Indian Bangalore, it nonetheless represents an important IT concentration of Technical

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countries. The dimensions taken into consideration are very personal and intimate and there is little investigation of labour aspects.

[24]Some researchers divided the psychological aspects of the migratory project in stages (Sluzki 1979; Sundquist 1994; Espin 1999) emphasising the prior phases to migrating – the difficulties, the personal living, the family - that create a correlation with the quality of their life beforehand and adaptation in the destination country (Portes e Rumbaut 1996).

[25] Psychologist Abraham Maslow explained what directs and sustains human behaviour and human motivations (1943). Maslow proposed the theory of hierarchy of human needs, saying that lower needs must be satisfied before moving to the next higher level (physiological and more basic needs; needs for safety and security; needs for love and belonging; needs for esteem and need of self actualization). When we consider the case of highly skilled workers and their motivations to leave, we could consider the relevance of fulfilling an esteem need (need for the respect of others, need for status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation, dignity), need for self-respect (including such feelings as confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, and freedom) and self actualization need (characterising people who are problem-focused; incorporate an ongoing freshness of appreciation of life; have a concern about personal growth and an ability to have peak experiences).

[26] We mention the *ethno-psychiatrist* approach analysing the clinical aspects of nostalgia and memory; the *etzio-pathogenetic approach* indicated the pre-migrant personality as a cause of successive disorders (Bensmail 1990-1991); the *psycho-pathological* view of the alienated migrant drew on studies on positive selection or self-selection.

Universities and foreign firms and should be considered in a view of local/national economic development.

4.1 Methodology

From the outset, the qualitative method appeared to be the most appropriate and suitable option for testing our research purpose, due to its assumption and the scarcity of studies on this subject. Moreover, because we intended to study the migration projects of skilled workers, the nature of this information is itself qualitative and it is therefore complicated to analyse it differently .

We employed in-depth interviews of Romanian IT workers[27], asking them to provide their personal stories and articulate their aspirations and experiences: their university education, their job career, work conditions and perspectives, their previous experiences abroad and their future aspirations and motivations to migrate (or not). Many sub-tales and arguments during interviews were encouraged with additional questions, following the natural storytelling course[28].

Individual aspects related to the *self-aspiration* emerged in relation to the possibility, necessity or desire to migrate and in relation to larger projects of personal and professional fulfilment. As a result we can say that individuals provided accounts of their life projections and their desired living and working conditions. The fact that interviewees are *potential migrants* – they could eventually become or decide to become effective migrants – makes them explore ideas characterised by complexity or charged with emotion. Because narratives refer to the way people learn about, explain and organise experience (Bruner 1990; Cortazzi 1993), the stories told by our interviewees resulted in a method of (possible) self-representation and life/work evaluation, whereby people could attach meanings and understanding to their life and ideas.

Because the arguments discussed are related to a sphere which includes personal plans, wishes and aspirations, we are well aware that interviewees could be tempted to provide more positive or untruthful images of themselves. This *risk* has been avoided by testing the perspectives expressed with the feasibility and coherency of real facts and experiences.

Overall, we can differentiate two types of responses intended to explain the meaning of aspiration: one could be called the "*arcadia response*" ("if I could choose, I would definitely…") where people express an ideal future and possibility, being aware it would be the best possible option and that such a condition is not likely to eventuate. On the other hand, most people expressed a "*pragmatica response*" in which individuals *realistically and consciously* evaluate their desired and possible scenarios and make their consequent decisions while assessing their abilities and potential and combining these with personal/family/sentimental and professional needs, immigration schemes, local and global labour market conditions.

Interactive talks, ideas and meanings were therefore developed through reasoning out the possible, likely and desired types of migration.

5. Workers' aspirations and projects

The decision to emigrate requires personal attitudes, information and resources; overall it is affected by a mix of (social and economic) push and pull factors, unfulfilled *expectations*, a sense of deprivation of consumer goods or self professional actualization and accomplishment. We shall

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[27] We interviewed 29 Romanian IT workers living and working in Romania, in the city of Cluj Napoca and Bucharest. Interviews have been analysed with the Nudist software program for qualitative analysis.
[28]Interviewees covered aspects related to their education and employment history. More wide-ranging aspects such as the perception of the local/national IT labour market, salary conditions and employment opportunities, and (mostly) aspects related to the presence of foreign firms were discussed in terms of career prospects, job conditions and working environments. Intervening questions refer to what Schütze calls "*Immanente Nachfragen*" (1977; 1983).

therefore say that the migratory project is not just the outcome of a simple rationale and economic calculation, but it also includes a wide range of motivations and perspectives.

In this section, we explain the mobility aspiration types that emerged in our study and the factors influencing them.

In our fieldwork, we learned about the experiences of IT Romanian workers who either spent a period abroad or conversely, never moved from their country. All interviewees agreed they had been considering migration, but not all of them expressed a particular desire to do so. We therefore made a distinction between different kinds of aspirations that we attributed to different mobility features:

- ➢ *The committed migration plan*, a strong will and motivation to enter the international labour market and leave Romania.
- ➢ *A desired* aspiration to *mobility* as a potential experience abroad – mostly a *temporary circulation*.
- ➢ A desired, but *impeded mobility* (or forced immobility) which implies the failure of the migration project due to obstacles and barriers mainly related to immigration legislation.
- ➢ Aspiration to a *content immobility*, an aspiration to stay in Romania and not to migrate, but to instead create a life and a career in their own country.

Below we begin by highlighting the *factors* affecting the decisions to migrate, then explain the *aspiration features* introduced above.

5.1 Framing migratory projects

Because projects and aspirations can switch easily from short to long term and *vice versa*, it is important to carefully consider the project length as less predictable and more variable over time.

Besides all the elements influencing the conditions and decision to emigrate, a few aspects need to be mentioned as being critical to the motivation plans. *Age* affects the attitude towards an experience abroad: because young people are still into a growing phase of their career, they have a greater tendency to look for improvements and chances abroad, as they are also more adaptable to new conditions and environments.

> But now I'm 36, I'm too old and less appealing to foreign firms. All the young people that are now finishing university know new things, they are well prepared and they can also accept cheaper salary offers from abroad than a person of my age and experience (RW_08; RW=*Romanian Worker_Interview n. 08*).

Another issue is to what extent migratory aspirations are the result of individual plans or are influenced by the social, personal and family environment (Stark 1991). The *local social environment* in Romania is actually a significant aspect. The close relationship with other IT students, workers and groups of peers, the exchange of ideas and information have an influence on providing examples, narratives as well as information. To a certain extent, IT students and workers are therefore socialized to the idea of migration by their peers and IT workers group.

> At university we talked a lot of going abroad. You look forward, you think about the things you could do. At that time there were not many foreign firms. Many left. There was much talk and we heard lots of stories (RW_01).

In this context, a *myth* of the *brain drain* emerged, explained by the *social pressure* on IT people to emigrate and by the *socially constructed image* of the *successful emigrant abroad*, who can enter into prestigious and rewarding occupations. The socially recognised meaning of highly skilled emigration could in fact provide a *status* not just to the migrant him/herself - thanks to a career and life improvement socially recognised by the community to which he or she now belongs - but also to the family left in Romania.

We previously explained how the decision to migrate is transferred from the single individual to the family as a risk sharing strategy, and how family and local community expectations could influence people towards migration plans (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark 1991). Moreover, emigration usually provides the family left behind with a way to maintain economic stability through payments from the family member abroad (Reyneri 2000; Zanfrini 2004).

In our case, the IT *profession* itself generates the social expectation that the best IT workers are those who leave due to being recruited by the international market. Because working abroad means being a successful person (*emigration* means *high professional* achievement), IT workers are consequently influenced by social pressure that is put on the individual. Being an *IT brain* therefore implies being a potential migrant (*emigration* means being a *success* back in one's own country).

The social pressure and *mythisation* of IT mobility is also the result of the *media*'s portrayal of IT workers, public and political debates, University environments, exchanges of personal information, transnational relationships and online connections.

> There was a period when there was lots of pressure. People, colleagues and friends were moving to Canada and the US. Those are thoughts that occur when many people are moving, many colleagues; you feel the pressure. The system was pressing us to leave and they were just fitting into this system (RW_09)

> There is a myth here that "if you go abroad, you're very good". But it's not like that. When I last went home to visit my family, I visited my teacher from high school, who asked me, "Why aren't you abroad? In MIT? In the States?". This is my home, and I don't care about their jobs (RW_05).

Highly skilled migratory planning results from an *individual decision*, but personal and family relationships in one's homeland can actually curb plans, due to both the importance of affective roots and also because one's migratory plan might not match the partner's.

> Migration could be an option. I thought of this, but for the time being, I have to stay here for my family and my private life for the next couple of years (RW_09).

> After college I was given an offer to go, but felt that I was not ready. Somehow, I now feel that I'm ready to go. I have the experience and the position. Now that I might want to go, I have to give my wife the chance to go to university and I'm not sure that this is the right time to go abroad (RW_11).

> Usually it's easier to migrate when it's just you, and not a couple. I would also say it's easier to migrate if you are a boy (RW_12).

In terms of *implementing* the labour migration project – i.e. finding a job abroad, new accommodation, obtaining a work permit – the highly skilled do not appear to follow or rely on the support of *ethnic or family chains* and communities abroad – as flows are basically demand driven and affected by national immigration regulations.

> We also have cousins abroad, but we are not necessarily going where they are. They said they can help us by letting us stay at their place, but it depends on where we get a job (…). We are applying for the US lottery visa. I would also apply to Canada because with our computer skills we have the chance to go and we both speak English (RW_06).

We confirm what Meyer (2001) found, showing that engineers and information technologists tend to move through more *institutional migration channels*, such as direct recruitment or relocation agencies (Findlay 1990), and less through personal or ethnic networks or global professional organisations. As we interviewed IT workers who are still in Romania – who may or may not leave – we cannot say how effective their job search strategy through personal networks might subsequently be[29]. Nevertheless, we can confirm that IT workers in Romania and those abroad are definitely

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[29]In some cases, it clearly emerged that international labour markets can become linked through specific networks of interpersonal and organisational ties (Poros 2001; and as examined in Mexico by Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994).

maintaining *networks* across time and space. From our fieldwork we cannot confirm that social ties in pre-migration networks are the primary cause and means affecting the decisions of who migrates, the destinations and the future prospects for physical and occupational mobility. However, we can confirm that *virtual transnationalism* of highly skilled IT workers exists and keeps migrants and non migrants connected throughout the world[30].

5.2 Committed aspiration to mobility

The committed aspiration to mobility refers to a strong desire to emigrate and the passionate motivation to accomplish this plan. This aspiration is obviously affected by pull factors (the economic appeal of higher salaries abroad), but the *monetary reward* itself does not solely explain this committed personal objective, which is then shaped by more individual aspects as a need for self professional actualization (Maslow 1943) and a sort of master-plan of life improvement.

Considering firstly the *economic aspects* affecting the decision to move, we can confirm that the migratory aspiration among interviewees was influenced by the *attractive conditions* in the destination countries, especially in terms of *higher salaries* (pull factors).

> To be frank, the programmers in Italy are no better than ours. I heard that they pay programmers a lot in Italy. You learn about the different society and culture, but you go there to get more money. This is from an IT worker's perspective, but it's the same for blue-collar or construction workers. And it's also better for the CV (RW_01).

Overall, migrating is a tough experience and it is the outcome of a deep and intense assessment. The *economic advantage* and attractiveness of a job abroad are unquestionably important factors. Moreover, it is no longer the case that considerable *frustration* with the Romanian environment or even a strong dissatisfaction with one's current job (or the inability to find one) are leading to the idea to move abroad, as it used to be for many skilled Romanians who left in previous years (push factor). Indeed, today's IT workers in Romania can find *reasonable work* and economic fulfilment in their country, especially if employed in a foreign company. For this reason, migration of highly skilled workers is influenced by economic reasons, which alone do not explain individual movements.

Accordingly, we could highlight a distinction between *committed motivations* – which are voluntarily activated and relate to a short or long-term planned mobility - and more general *desired aspirations* (§ 5.4).

Among those expressing a commitment to migrate, we found that those expressing a *temporary* investment or *concrete and target-oriented* aspiration mostly aimed to maximise the economic salary differential.

> My husband and I are discussing where we could go. What we are earning is almost acceptable and we have quite an easy life, but if we want to have children it's going to be more complicated. We thought about going abroad for 1-2 years to save money and maybe return and run our business in Romania (RW_06).

Others expressed *long-term prospects,* such as a personal *life master plan* that goes beyond the short-term or target-oriented experience. The aspiration, in this case, turns into a committed and

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On the other hand, a recent study on IT and highly skilled Romanians living and working in countries other than Romania confirms that social and ethnic networks were not employed as a job search recruitment strategy (Ferro 2004).

[30] All interviewees reported on their many IT friends who left Romania, showing that the diaspora of brains basically followed the same routes and geographies. We actually find elements of *virtual-transnational* relationships between emigrants and their contacts in Romania (Ferro 2004) and traits of a *connectivist understanding* (Meyer 2001). New, cheap and more efficient communication methods allow migrants to maintain their home-based relationships and contacts transnationally (Vertovec 2002). New technologies are at the heart of today's transnational networks and they certainly reinforce pre-existing social patterns. We can therefore argue that the Internet and *electronic tools* can represent not just a means of communication *per se*, but are places and tools to enhance feelings of belonging, create international connectivity and maintain a vivid social and personal link to a place.

voluntary plan, involving professional and personal spheres and investing in more extensive changes for future life.

> My plan is for my whole life. I want to become a wealthy person. Maybe one day I will return to Romania. I have a family, my wife and me. I'm doing my best so that my children will be Australian and have everything they could want. In Romania, you have to work a lot and fight a lot against corruption and bureaucracy, you have to argue with everyone, things depress you (RW_07).

This committed plan requires individuals to successfully accomplish their aspiration through *steps* and committed *decisions*, such as learning a foreign language, gaining proper professional experience and surfing the market and immigration entry programs in order to find the most suitable destination.

> I took a language text to go to Australia, and after that I can start the immigration papers. The assessment phase: I need to prove that I have the skills for a good job. For this reason it's good that I'm working for a Dutch firm here in Romania. In Australia they need programmers and they want to see that I am a programmer, so I'm sending my references and diploma. Then you get a certain mark, points for your experience in your domain and your age, so you can immigrate. I got high score because I'm young, very well educated and have experience in a field they need. A colleague of mine went to Australia. He stayed there for 2 years, he enjoyed it there and wanted to become a citizen and applied for it. If I succeed with my papers for Australia, I will sell my property here, the flat that I bought with the money I gained working in the Netherlands (RW_07).

In this sense, the aspiration to migrate is accomplished through personal attitudes, professional abilities and constructive actions, which are shaped by a *desire* to be professionally and economically fulfilled and also by a *personal attitude* (a sort of "migrant personality").

> You need to have the will and desire. I know good colleagues of mine, smarter than me, more skilled than me, but they are happy in Romania and do not want to go elsewhere even if it may be better. They are pleased with what they have here and don't want to go. You have to be smart and good and know how to move and you need to believe in this idea (RW_06).

> If I wait, I will lose points. I'm young, I have a good CV now and have maximum points and I'm devoted to this dream that I always had (RW_07).

Being employed by *foreign firms in Romania* could indeed represent a way to subsequently be prepared for international labour market competition (§ 5.6), to obtain training experience in working procedures and gain a pre-migratory socialisation for the western work environment and practices.

> To start with, I'm trying to learn all I can about this domain and become an expert in a field. This is why I tried to get a job in a foreign firm in Cluj. The job is more interesting, you deal with programs that are used abroad, and you learn how to work the way they want (RW_07).

For those committed to migration however, international outsourcing represents only one possible and remote chance to rely on. Those who really want to emigrate are those who *directly* seek a *job opportunity abroad* and do not wait for that opportunity to come knocking at their door (as for the desired aspiration, (see § 4.5).

> Those who wanted to go are already abroad. They left by themselves (RW_13).

> If I want to go to Germany, I just go there (RW_10).

5.3 Disheartened aspiration and aborted mobility

On the other side of the coin, a personal regret about not being able to go abroad - or about having being forced to return to Romania – emerged from the fieldwork. The migration aspiration here concerns an ideal and ultimate state of migrant reality that is either improbable or rather impossible to accomplish, mostly because of the immigration barriers and negative market conditions that

impede it. In times of economic recession, in fact, *immigration regulations* could ultimately play a role in *the expulsion of the skilled foreign workforce (forced returnees)* that might otherwise compete with the locals[31].

We called it a *disheartened aspiration*, because it usually terminated in an *aborted mobility*. It affects people who expressed a strong interest in moving or remaining abroad, but did not ultimately succeed in their aim. A sense of frustration therefore characterises their aspiration to attain the status of successful immigrant[32].

Our findings indeed offer a parallel with Carling's study (2002) based on the Cape Verdians' aspiration to international mobility[33]. Recalling the *aspiration-ability model* towards migration, we can confirm the concept of *forced immobility* (a manifest aspiration to migrate and an inability or an impediment to accomplish it).

> After two years, when the contract ended, it was not easy for me and my Romanian colleagues in the Netherlands. In the beginning, I was not sure, but after 6 months I thought "Yes, I will stay here and live here". (…) The company had financial problems so I got fired. I received some unemployment benefits and I tried my luck there, but as a foreigner, I needed a work permit and I also didn't speak the language well. So I stayed there and tried to find a job. I said, "Why go back to Romania?" and I had my wife with me for three months. (…) Finally I had to leave because I couldn't renew my permit. (…) And now, I'm back in Romania, and I'm nostalgic. I had to completely alter my lifestyle there, that's why it's probably hard for me to give up and let that memory go. I didn't have to worry that much about money there, well…there are things I could not afford, but I had less stress. But it was not good because we could not have a status, and we didn't know how long we could stay there. But at least it was better than here (RW_11).

> In 2000 everybody was going abroad. I also thought it was a good idea, I was in the mood for leaving and it was no use staying here without trying a life elsewhere. And I tried but something went wrong. I wished to stay abroad, but the problems were too big, some with legislation and some personal, and now I'm here. My future now is very uncertain. I wish to become a businessman or to find employment if I fail (RW_10).

Foreign skilled workers abroad largely depend on external economic and legislative conditions as well as on companies' willingness to keep them or dispose of them abroad. Being a *non-EU worker*[34] in the European labour market - even if regular and highly skilled - could certainly imply a *weaker* and more *vulnerable* status, a reduced contract negotiating power and limited job search freedom. The aspiration to move therefore also depends on its actualization of the immigrant status and rights.

> Getting citizenship means that you have all the rights, you're a Dutch citizen and you have a better life. You become subject to local laws, you have another way of living. If I am a Dutch citizen, I can travel to other countries, I can even work in other countries. I can do all that and nobody asks me anything. I can move freely in Europe and find the job that I like, in Germany, in the Netherlands or anywhere else. You get more opportunities and more chances and you don't depend on your company's permit to work (RW_07).

5.4 Unexpected and desired aspiration

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[31] It is in fact true that some countries (i.e. Canada, Australia and New Zealand) have admission programs for qualified workers, especially IT professionals due to labour shortages in this field. Nevertheless, in Europe and in the US at present, the procedures to obtain work permits are not that easy or quick even for highly skilled workers.

[32] Among those IT workers abroad who found themselves trapped in the economic downturn in 2001, quite a few lost their job. The main problem for them had been losing the work permit sponsorship that made them eligible to live and work abroad.

[33] In that research, workers were mainly low skilled that could not find legal entries abroad in order to emigrate.

[34] The fieldwork took place before the EU expansion to the Eastern countries. Nevertheless, the EU integration process is not regarded by interviewees as providing effective free circulation and workers rights.

Most interviewees expressed their desired aspiration to international mobility as the wish for a short-term job and life experience abroad. While not based on personal committed and planned strategy, this aspiration is expressed as a *desire* for a *temporary move* and a permanent *return* to Romania. Being too dependent on external conditions however[35], the fulfilment of this aspiration ends up being quite unexpected. In fact, in our fieldwork we met workers who had been temporarily transferred abroad, while none actually explicitly asked or looked for an opportunity that just happened – and we referred to it as an *unexpected and unplanned mobility*.

> I didn't know what I was supposed to do in the Netherlands. They said I had to go there to get training. I had never thought of it before, but I also thought it was a good chance to see other places and get higher salaries. So it was a decision: "OK, let's go somewhere else and see" (RW_04).

> We went to Italy for the Euro conversion, because they needed more people working. I was there for the company requirements and the particular economic and market circumstances, namely the Euro change. I never planned it, it just happened (RW_03).

Even if they didn't explicitly look for it, workers recognise that being involved in a *foreign company* can expose them to mobility opportunities and contacts abroad.

> If you work here for a foreign company, even if it's not very famous, you can have opportunities to go abroad. Maybe some people moved this way, like my friend in Japan, but it's not really automatic. It's just whether they need you there, because you're important (RW_12).

> We work in different parts of the world, but basically most Romanians work in Romania, but two colleagues are in Kuwait, which is one of our clients. It's a temporary mobility in any part of the world. We do exchanges, some colleagues went to New York for a month and some others went to London. It's a good benefit. But the decision to go is not yours; it's made for you and you're just told about it (RW_05).

Such desired aspirations of mobility include an *interest* to go abroad for the economic, cultural and professional experience, but also a resolute *perspective* to make it just temporary and not to last a lifetime. In this respect, we are addressing the possible conversion of aspirations into effective *migratory projects* with the *aim* to save money, help the family in Romania and then *return*.

> I didn't expect to be in Italy for so long. The client there was happy and asked me to stay there longer. I also considered staying there, but I wanted to stay close to my friends, my family, my home. With my firm we had a consultancy contract with the client, and it was specified that they could not hire us. We were excluded from the contract. They didn't offer me this however, but I guess I would have said no anyway. There I was in a foreign environment, even if it was very nice and all the people were very kind to me. But when I had my blues…I felt integrated though. But I felt lonely. Even though I had some Romanian colleagues and friends there, it's not the same thing. I was missing Romania (RW_14).

> My migratory project is to have a certain time abroad, to have an experience, save some money and then come back to Romania. Your heart is always there and you can not live your experience abroad. I also thought of going to Germany. I considered going abroad for a couple of years to buy a house in Cluj, as renting or buying is becoming very expensive (RW_02).

While many would actually oppose the view that "there is nothing so permanent as a temporary migrant", this better reflects post-war European immigration patterns, with foreign workers imported as temporary guest workers who then developed substantial permanent communities. We cannot resolve the question of whether temporary migration is a prelude to permanent settlement or not these days, but there is some evidence that this may be less the case than in the past. Factors affecting the migratory project and the duration of the experience abroad also include modern forms of transport and communication. It could be argued that temporary migrants are less likely to move

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[35] We refer to the foreign company strategy affected by factors like skill shortages, cost of labour differentials, immigration regulations.

into destination countries with a long-term aim of settling in that country, which was previously the case. Moreover, high skilled migrants can especially benefit from the nature of IT jobs and of back and forth circulation.

5.5 Satisfied immobility

In our fieldwork, we were able to find examples of international mobility through outsourcing, matching the workers' *interest* to gain money and enrich personal and work expectations, with a clear and committed *intention* to return to Romania. We could likely find aspirations for short experiences abroad that hardly turn into a real intention to permanently emigrate. Unlike *brain drain*, this form of *mobility* creates a framework of temporary and limited international migration and generates a *brain circulation*. Outsourcing can obviously encourage workers in Romania to seriously consider working abroad – because it exposes them to *foreign environments* in direct and indirect ways. Nevertheless, it also stimulates workers to *evaluate* the *chance* to go abroad as opposed to the *chance* to get a reasonably good job in their own country. For this reason, we could say that, along with or against the *desired temporary mobility,* workers expressed a *content* and *satisfied immobility* in Romania.

> I sometimes considered spending time abroad, but I started here in Romania, with this firm, at this level and with these responsibilities. Then I saw that the employer trusted me and I also wanted to give them trust. I also received offers to go to Italy and the UK. But I said "why? For double the salary? To live far from my wife and family?". If I were unlucky here and had not been able to find this job, I may have gone. But I didn't want to. I was asked by others, I got offers from a University professor. I also received some offers by people we worked for, our clients. And some guys who worked here and then went abroad also asked me to go with them. But I always refused. I don't regret it, I'm happy with what I did (RW_09).

> It's like asking the bear if he wants some honey…everyone wants to live better. It's not just a question of salaries. It's not that I didn't want to stay abroad, but it's a balance that you need to keep and not break. I like Italy and I have friends there. I had a good time there, but I am Romanian. I'd also like to get more money, but sooner or later you have to go further and none of us who went there actually thought of staying there and I chose to stay here (RW_14).

The aspiration to go abroad is certainly balanced by the evaluation of what the *international market* can effectively offer. In fact, employment abroad does not necessarily mean having a better working situation than being employed in Romania. The aspiration is therefore mediated by a personal and professional *evaluation* that the most rewarding thing is not to migrate, but to remain.

> I got an employment opportunity to work for Microsoft. It was a kind of recruiting test on the Web. I got a really high score and Microsoft contacted me, via mail. Then we talked for an hour, but nothing came of it because I still had to finish University. But I didn't consider going there previously, because all my friends are here and the only reason I could go there is for the money, but I already have that here. Redmond is the Microsoft Silicon Valley, about 50,000 employers. I didn't want to go there to work on testing tasks, and not as a developer. They were not looking for developers, but I don't like testing. I like to create software and I can do it here (RW_05).

> It's a balance that you need to keep and not break. I'd also like to get more money, but sooner or later you have to go further and none of us who went there actually thought of staying there and I chose to stay here (RW_19).

Working for a foreign company in Romania offers professional expertise and personal and economic *fulfilment* that can compensate for the appeal of a job abroad. What explains how aspirations become (or do not become) real migratory projects is the distinction between those *highly skilled with committed aspirations,* who would migrate autonomously in any case, and those who might find themselves facing conditions to *migrate,* and decide not to leave their country.

> I never thought of looking for a job in Italy. You can consider it if you have the chance and the opportunity that comes to you. But I was not looking for it. There is the aspiration to do for ourselves,

to do your best and to have a challenge. This is why I came to this firm here in Cluj, which was following the challenges of the market more. I know that in Romania I could not live as if I were in Italy, but this is also a challenge. I could do it if I really wanted to. But there was also the opportunity to work well in Romania. I feel happy here and I was also very happy in Italy, but just for the time that I spent there. I didn't want to live there (RW_14).

You always think that there is something better than what you are doing, and you also look at other countries. But you can not live like that, always surfing for the best. For me it has been good to have a better chance here in Romania, by our standard. I know I could have had more abroad, but I don't need it. I can have my career here in Romania. When there is no job and no chance here, I would look abroad. As long as I have the chance to live well here, I wish to stay here (RW_01).

There is more than one who is not interested in going to Italy. The IT Romanians who go abroad do it for money. Those who stay, they need to find reasons to stay, so we try to negotiate salaries and a logic of professional growth (RW_IF_07).

Being employed in outsourcing for foreign companies is specifically and uniquely related to the tools of *Information Technologies*: e-mails, video conferences, messengers, remote controls, Internet labour flows. Online *virtual labour* shows how skilled work could be performed from a distance, providing technical knowledge through the specific features of the Internet. It also shows how complex and diverse the interconnections of IT practices with labour migration are, as we address particular forms of brain mobility that come under the definition of *brains without bodies*: work is mobile while workers are immobile - this is in fact what we have called *virtual mobility*.

They send us a request. There are ten people here and ten in the US and each one has a pair correspondent. I have to do the same work of an American guy; I'm working with him. We cover 12 hours and they cover another 12 hours. And every two weekends I have to work and stay on call. If they have problems, I help out. We work with e-mails, we make calls, we talk and collaborate. When they have something to develop they send the request and we do it. It's assistance, and providing services and development when they need it (RW_06).

5.6 Outsourcing: a migratory launching pad or a Net-bourgeoisie incubator

Evaluating our fieldwork within larger assumptions of the IT outsourcing process and the brain drain problem, we could make an argument for the potential growth and role of a sort of *Net bourgeoisie*, which refers to that segment of skilled IT workers employed by foreign firms in Romania. Economically quite well-off and well-educated, this group of Romanians is in fact interchanged and linked with western social, cultural and economic environments. Without ascribing any potential role, we simply foresee that they could be a leading sector in the direction of a more structured and globalised economic recovery. It is not true that the explicit aspiration of these IT workers has been identified in their commitment (or explicit aspiration) to develop the national Romanian and local economy. Nevertheless, we were able to discover how the aspiration to self-actualization merges professional and personal aspects of having an IT job, remaining in Romania and participating in the economic recovery and emancipation of the national industry.

In Romania it is much more chaotic, but I think that somebody can make a bigger difference here than in the west. I mean, we can. In Romania everything is unfinished, there's so much to be done (RW_09).

In a private company in Romania, there might be better chances for you to be valued than in a state company. In some cases you could find better options to stay than go abroad. The more foreign firms there are here, the more employment opportunities and salaries grow. There is more money coming into Romania and all the money coming into types of salaries goes back into the economy; it creates an effect. And IT people can attract lots of money here (RW_06).

Everyone wants to live better. It's not a question of salaries. It's not that I didn't want to go abroad, but it's a balance that you need to keep and not to break. I like Italy (…) but I am Romanian. (…) There is the aspiration to do things for ourselves, to do your best and have a challenge. This is why I

> came to this firm. (…) I know in Romania I could not live as if I were in Italy, but this is also a challenge. I could do it if I really wanted to. But there was also the opportunity to work well in Romania. (…) I know many good ones who have left, but there are also those who stayed and they can take up the challenge here also (RW_19).

> I know many have left and are abroad, but we are here and sometimes I think it's harder to stay instead of leaving, but if we also decide to leave, who is left then? (RW_10).

From this perspective, the economic and social changes that are slowly taking place in Romania give people a chance to finally obtain *motivating IT jobs* and get reasonably good salaries through foreign firms. Outsourcing is therefore recognised as the instrument that can provide *IT brains* with a motivation to stay in Romania and provide that country a chance to economically develop by building up international business relationships.

> The situation is getting better now and outsourcing is the solution. Romania is the *new Eldorado* for soft development for the expansion (RW_16).

> If people have a decent salary here and start getting good jobs here they would not emigrate (RW_05).

> With outsourcing, Romanians can learn entrepreneurial culture that is different from the local one. Otherwise they are too isolated from the development of skills (RW_19).

> I like foreign companies because they have good management, are more efficient and serious, and you learn how to work. Romanian companies are not very well organised; you try to make your way to life. In this foreign firm, I can learn the same things I would learn abroad (RW_12).

In some cases, being employed in a foreign firm was truly a *launching pad* for an international move abroad. From our fieldwork however, we could find few examples revealing that this type of employment ultimately creates *brain drain* effects, with *temporary brain circulation* being more likely. Labour mobility resulting from outsourcing can occur when there is a matching of *external conditions,* such as economic growth and skill requirements, strategically integrated *company relationships* between subcontractor and contractor, a *work environment* open to the employment of foreign resources and an individual drive to gain work experiences abroad. In this way chances to leave can materialise, but this can hardly be considered an explicit expression of permanent migrations of highly skilled IT workers.

6. Conclusions

This paper investigated a specific area of migration inspired by *skilled workforce mobility* and *firms strategies*. Little research could be found exploring this relationship, which ultimately implies a reassessment of perspectives on migration, and exploring the viewpoint of potential migrants, their desires and motivations. In conclusion, recalling our initial *paradox,* we cannot confirm that flows of capital activate flows of workers, but we cannot even say that IT relocation keeps workers completely immobile. The discourse should instead introduce a *rethinking* of physical migration, instead considering virtual mobility and brain circulation (Aneesh 2000).

With this research, we therefore make a contribution by further investigating the ways and consequences of contemporary highly skilled migration from an innovative perspective. We aimed to study how the international labour mobility of knowledge workers could take place and to what extent it is influenced by conditions and elements of economic modernisation and globalisation. In doing this, we need to strengthen our framework based on the economic restructuring of globalised markets and *information technologies*, a global sector in which companies freely move capital, resources and labour and which shows how *knowledge workers* have become *crucial* today.
We wished to analyse two aspects in particular:

(§) What drives and shapes *the aspiration* - or, alternatively, the non-aspiration - *to internationally migrate among knowledge workers*? *What personal and external factors influence the desire and decision to migrate*?

The migratory projects and attitudes towards migration can be activated and influenced by a *pre-migratory socialization* caused by media and information, university environments, students and peer workers' experiences and connections. In addition, a role is played by the *IT myth* of successful migration as a pushing individual/family/community factor affecting moving prospects. *Immigration polices* can represent a pull factor (the IT selective programs for long-term IT specialists, especially for overseas destinations), but they also create barriers for workers and firms. *Outsourcing* does not widely influence aspirations to migrate, but it certainly affects knowledge of migration and primarily the cultural, economic, business familiarity with western environments. In this way, it promotes circulation of information, knowledge and relationships. We could say that working in outsourcing may be an incubator for an experience abroad that could turn into a real opportunity, depending on personal attitudes and external conditions (such as skill shortages, market trends, and demand-driven aspects like companies' strategies to recruit and employ foreign workers).

(§) *What patterns of mobility aspiration can we identify among knowledge workers? What traits and features emerge? What implications can we infer?*

In analysing the migratory projects of IT workers in Romania, we could form a typology of plans according to personal interests and investment and external constraints or opportunities. Plans of *desired mobility* expressed by workers consider temporary mobility a positive aspect of working in outsourcing and an ultimate desire to gain experience abroad. In this case, the aspiration to migrate is low and the ability and willingness to move are not leading to any explicit migrant behaviour. S*atisfied* immobility pertains to those individuals who are content with the opportunities and conditions of employment in a foreign firm in Romania (introducing the concept of *virtual mobility*), and who express a positive interest in making their life there. *Committed* plans refer to those unwilling to emigrate, independently by working in outsourcing for foreign firms. Finally, *impeded* mobility – or forced immobility – involves those who had previous plans for international migration, but failed in their projects because of negative market trends or restrictive immigration polices.

Despite the models highlighted above, it is clear that when studying *aspirations*, we deal with personal, family, social, cultural and market dimensions at the same time. We could rephrase our discourse by saying that, by contrast with the influence of *external conditions* (immigration regulations, market conditions, labour shortages, firms strategies), individual aspirations can tend towards "*change/mobility*" or "*status quo/immobility*" as a mixed result of social pressure towards migration and a migrant personality.

On the whole, what we found to be significant is that *outsourcing* can truly affect highly skilled mobility by lessening *pressure* towards emigration and making occasional forms of temporary and short term mobility available, so that workers can accomplish some of their *professional* and *personal aspirations* and still maintain a stable presence in Romania. From this perspective, outsourcing can mainly create places of business, cultural and social exchange with western environments and improve workers' skills, knowledge and information. For this reason, we mentioned the emergence of a *Net bourgeoisie* as a group of Romanian professionals involved in

the IT sector and western economy that could become a possible leading sector for a structured and internationally based recovery of the country.

To conclude, we finally highlight the importance of the qualitative research tool that allowed us to investigate such features with deep insight, significant findings and a wealth of information. Given the limited validity of our results, based on a short number of personal cases in a certain Romanian city, we could indeed argue that some aspects have a wider implication. This gives credit to the fact that narratives of personal and professional aspirations (of mobility) should receive larger attention among migration studies.

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