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### From the village to the city

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

*"Man is of all sorts of luggage the most difficult to be transported."*

(Adam Smith, 1776)



## 1.1 Motivation for this study

Over the last twenty years, following the collapse of the communist regime, Albania has experienced outstanding migration flows within and from the country (Castaldo et al. 2005). Between 1990 and 2005, over one million Albanians emigrated and over 400,000<sup>1</sup> are estimated to have moved within the country (Government of Albania 2005; INSTAT 2001). The focus of the scientific migration debate in Albania has mainly been on the unpredictable<sup>2</sup> rates of external migration. Internal migration, despite being considered one of the most important processes in post-communist Albania, remains under researched (Vullnetari, 2009; King et al. 2008; Bërxfholi 2005; Bërxfholi et al. 2006)

My interest to explore the lives of rural migrants and their adjustment process in the urban areas is grounded in my long-term curiosity on migration processes in post-communist Albania. During my postgraduate studies, I wrote my MSc thesis on internal migration in Albania. This master thesis was based on quantitative data using several surveys data available and had more a descriptive and explorative character. However, it was during this period that I become aware and interested in understanding the people that stand beyond the facts and figures of migration. I experienced that within the body of migration literature in Albania, there is no in-depth understanding of the processes of internal migration, and more importantly of the livelihoods of thousands of rural-to-urban migrants. I could find few empirical studies, derived mostly from census data. Therefore, I wanted to know more about the livelihoods of internal migrants but this time through their voices and experiences. These ideas and interest started to take form while I was writing the proposal for this PhD thesis. At the very start of this project, the idea was to integrate the macro and micro context of the internal migration process as well as combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It was after my first visits to the migrant community in Kamza that my interest shifted completely towards the micro context, the migrant community, individuals and ethnographic approach. Following, I spent 12 months in total in Tirana and Kamza, from which three as feasibility study and nine as fieldwork (chapter 4). The migrant community in Kamza fascinated me. These people have been the main actors of their migration and adjustment process. Together, going through difficult times and situations, they have built their livelihoods in a new urban environment. This thesis can be considered as one of first attempts to understand from an individual perspective the rural-to-urban migrants in Albania.

It is the aim of this thesis to investigate precisely the internal migration process from the migrant's perspective. This chapter first provides the contextual grounds for this research, by offering a background and motivation for the study. It then introduces the objectives of

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1 The population of Albania is 3,143,291 (World Bank 2008).

2 The mass migration in post-communist countries was anticipated however did not follow the same trends and levels everywhere. According to Castaldo (2005), most of the countries in eastern central Europe experienced modest population mobility compared to original expectations. Albania proved to be an exception in the former communist bloc, experiencing one of the greatest migration flows in the two last decades in Europe (Carletto et al. 2004).

the study and the specific research questions. After that, it underlines the significance of this research and outlines the dissertation.

## **1.1 Background to the research**

For a long time now, migration has been a core issue of public debate in the whole world. From an academic perspective, there is a prevalent consensus that migratory movement will continue in the future and will remain one of the focal political and social challenges (Husa et al. 2000). From a demographic point of view, migration accounts for the numerical increase or decrease in the population of a region/country, as well as being an indicator of social changes (INSTAT, 2001).

Albanian society has undergone profound changes in the last 20 years as a result of the democratization of political structures and the introduction of a market-based economy. Migration has been one of the most dynamic features of the country's transition and one of the most important social and economic phenomena (see also King, 2003; 2005, King and Vullnetari, 2003; Barjaba, 2000; Doka, 2005). Even though Albania resembles many other transitioning and developing countries, the magnitude of the observed migration flows, given the time frame and the size of the Albanian population, is exceptional (Mullan, 2001).

Internal migration is expressed in the massive urbanization of some areas and depopulation of others. The internal migration behaviour, dimensions, intensity, direction and motives have been determined by the economic, political and social developments that have occurred in Albania over time (Barjaba, 2000; Doka, 2005; Vullnetari, 2007; Çaro and van Wissen, 2007). The dominant characteristic of rural-to-urban migration in Albania is the collective nature of the movement. People leave villages as families to settle in cities, which contrasts with the individual nature of international migration (Çaro et al. 2010). Internal migration in Albania has fuelled an unprecedented and uncontrolled urbanization process and informal development. The internal migration flows are directed mainly from the remote north toward the main urban centres. Tirana, the capital of Albania, has been the most attractive destination for the majority of internal migrants (UNDP 2002; 2004; Aliaj et al. 2002). According to Potsiou (2010), mass urbanization and informal development is common for Southern and Eastern Europe. This is mainly related to transformation processes that occurred in these regions in the last decades, such as free market economy and urbanization (p. 5). The rapid urbanization process in Albania, although also observed in other Mediterranean and/or former-communist countries, due to its intensity over a short period of time it is unique for Albania (Bërxfholi, 2008 personal communication).

Moreover, the complex issue of migrant adjustment to urban communities has been scarcely addressed, and the actual human stories and voices of migrants are absent from recent migration research on Albania (Cila, 2006; Vullnetari, 2009; King et al. 2008; Bërxfholi, 2008 personal communication; Çaro, 2010). For the first time in the history of Albania, families, individuals and social groups with different modes of dress, mentalities, life styles, background

and other characteristics have moved into urban neighbourhoods together (Dervishi, 2001; UNDP, 2002). The characteristics and backgrounds of rural migrants are confronted by those of the urban population, making it difficult for the migrants to adjust (Çabiri, 2002). The media and the host society expect rural migrants to fully adjust to the urban lifestyle and set aside their traditions and culture (Dervishi, 2001; Çabiri, 2002). Internal migration in Albania often takes place in the form of chain migration. Therefore, social networks, kinship interaction, financial and socio-psychological support gain major importance when the adjustment process of internal migrants is discussed. Chain migration causes specific sociocultural clusters in urban areas (Fawcett, 1989). These sociocultural systems are transported along with the migrants (Erman, 2001). As the migrant population increases in an urban area, they create their communities with their own lifestyle and values, often making the host society feel like outsiders (Çaro, 2010).

In Albania, where migration is a mass phenomenon, it seems reasonable to turn to the statistics to provide the facts and figures on the situation. However, the migration and adjustment process of migrants is a multifaceted phenomenon, and requires both macro-level analyses as well as in-depth and micro-level analyses (Erman, 1997; 1998). This research proposes to go beyond facts and numbers and to focus on the main actors, the migrants with the aim to provide in depth insight into migrants' perceptions, feelings and experiences. This would enhance the understanding of the migration and the adjustment process from an individual perspective rather than in terms of national policies and the host society's perspective. This research focuses on the voices of internal migrants because these voices are missing in the fast-growing Albanian body of migration literature. It is the aim of this thesis to bring forward the voices of the migrants, to understand the migration process from their perspective and to suggest solutions for policy makers based on migrants' concerns, desires and fears.

The findings of this research highlight the situation of internal migrants in Albania and the constraints that accompany them to Kamza. In-depth understanding of the concerns, circumstances and strategies, and of the adjustment process, actual conditions and perspectives of internal migrants will help the government and civil society adopt policies that can confront the problems ensuing from the mass migration and urbanization in the periphery of Tirana. Understanding the migrant's motivation, causes, trends and consequences will help in developing intervention strategies aimed at minimizing the ill effects of these flows and maximizing the benefits that may follow (King and Vullnetari, 2003). For instance, strategies to raise community interaction in this area and others that could target legalization of the illegal settlement will reduce the negative impact of such uncontrolled migration flows.

The innovation of this research is the application of an ethnographic approach and the focus on people's perceptions, feelings and voices. Another unique feature of this thesis is that internal migration is approached from a gender, generation and time perspective following a descriptive, exploratory and explanatory approach based on a variety of data.

## 1.2 Research objectives and research questions

This study is about rural migrants, their migration trajectories towards the city, livelihoods and experiences. It seeks to explore the migration and adjustment strategies internal migrants in Albania go through. In order to explore the adjustment process of rural-to-urban migrants it is important to understand the complexity of migration strategies and migrants livelihoods in the new environment. Hence, the focus of this research is on the migrants' perspectives, their feelings and thoughts, their livelihoods, experiences of migration and their migration strategies. This micro-level study examines individual migrants from their migration decision process to their settling and adjustment process, with migrants being regarded throughout as the main actors in creating livelihoods, developing the area in which they settle and in the overall adjustment process. This research aspires to listen to and present the migrants' perceptions, feelings and experiences in order to enhance our understanding of internal migration and the adjustment process from an (missing) individual perspective in Albania.

In order to do this three research objectives and several research questions are identified:

***First objective:** To provide greater insight into the central role of migration in developmental issues in Albania.*

To explore the migration process as, on the one hand, driven by historical, political, social and economic transformations and, on the other, as the facilitator of socioeconomic and demographic developments in Albania, two main questions are raised:

1. How has the transformation process in Albania since the 1990s affected the levels and patterns of migration over time?
2. What is the effect of migration on the social and demographic changes that followed the transformation process?

***Second Objective:** To provide greater insight into the migration and adjustment process of rural-to-urban migrants. Detail the experiences and paths of early and late migrants, from a generational perspective, in their new environment.*

The adjustment process of rural-to-urban migrants and their migration experiences in the city are examined through these key research questions:

3. How do rural-to-urban migrants take the decision to migrate and what are the migration experiences and paths of migration of the early and late migrant?
4. What are the differences in the adjustment perceptions between early and late migrants and among generations?

***Third Objective:** To understand the interaction between gender and migration in Albania and to explore the experiential differences for men and women migrants.*

To obtain more insight into the role of women and men in the migration process and to detail their emancipation strategies following migration these research questions are raised:

5. How do women and men participate in the household migration project?
6. What types of emancipation strategies do migrant women employ in the new environment?
7. What are the strategies used by rural migrant men in the city to situate their traditional masculinities in the context of wider socioeconomic developments and urbanization.

In addition to these research objectives and questions, following the data collection and preliminary analyses a new concept emerged. The linkages between international and internal migration from the perspective of internal migrant and the importance of such links in the process of development of the migrant community

### **1.3 Outline of the dissertation**

This dissertation consists of a collection of chapters, a subset of which is published and submitted in journals. Each chapter is treated as a piece of puzzle that explores an important dimension in the lives of rural-to-urban migrants in Kamza. The main goal of the overall dissertation is to construct a complete picture of the migration process and experiences of individuals and households, step by step. I will now present an overview of the structure of this thesis by outlining the contents of each chapter.

**Chapter 2** focuses on the characteristics and specificities of migration in Albania prior to the 1990s. It presents in a historical perspective the economic, sociocultural, political background and a brief account of migratory movements from the time of the Ottoman imperial occupation, and specifically the migration during the 45 years of the communist regime. This historical account is presented in order to construct an understanding of the extraordinary contemporary migration.

The contemporary internal and international migration in Albania, following the communist regime, is further explored in **chapter 3**. The main goal of this chapter is to provide greater insight into the central and developmental role of migration for Albania and it answers research questions 1 and 2. As a first step, this chapter sketches Albania's historical, economic and sociocultural background. As a second step, it describes a chronology of migration triggered by the major economic and political developments in the historical, social and economic background. It then explains the simultaneous influence of economic and



political transformations on migration levels, patterns and directions, and of migration on the further social and demographic transformation.

**Chapter 4** on methodology explains the methodological choices and the research approach used in this study. It considers the position and importance of qualitative methodology by focusing on the ethnographic approach and multi-stage data collection. This chapter provides an overview of the stages of the fieldwork, the development of contacts in the field the different methods applied. It then proceeds with the approach to analysis, a descriptive background account of the research sites and follow up with some reflections on the fieldwork.

The research findings are presented and explored starting with **chapter 5**. The emphasis of this chapter is to introduce the social, urban and demographic context of the research sites and to communicate the voice of rural migrants and their livelihoods in this context. It set up Kamza as an emerging city, focusing on the consequences of the massive internal migration for this community, and then it explores the migration process and experiences of rural migrants. This chapter establishes the grounds for the exploration of the ways rural-to-urban migrants adjust in this suburban area, which is further developed in chapter 6.

**Chapter 6** enhances our understanding of migration and the adjustment process from an individual perspective based on the internal migrants' perceptions, feelings and experiences, thus providing answers for research questions 3 and 4. It examines issues around the migration decision-making process, the settlement process and migrants' everyday lives. This chapter introduces the conceptual model of the adjustment process using the resource-based model. It explains that migrants, depending on different stages of migration and personal characteristics, require different resources to satisfy their needs, goals and demands. Moreover, it explores the migration process, from the migration strategy and decision to move, to the settling strategy, migration experience and adjustment process.

**Chapter 7** provides answers to research questions number 5 and 6. It addresses the undervalued role of women in the academic discourse on internal migration in Albania. First, it explores the role of women in the migration process of the larger household. Second, it details women's emancipation strategies following migration. Third, it compares the strategies and experiences of mothers and daughters. The chapter starts with brief background information on gender relationships within Albania in order to contextualize this work. The empirical core of the paper explores the neglected role of women in the migration process, arguing that women are not simply passive participants in migration projects, while identifying their main emancipation strategies.

Linking to chapter 7 the next chapter (**chapter 8**) goes a step further and focuses on male migrants, aiming at a better understanding and a comprehensive portrayal of gender and the migration interaction discourse in Albania. This chapter explores the strategies used by rural migrant men in the city to situate their rural masculinities in the context of the wider

socioeconomic developments and urbanization (research question number 7). It provides some brief background information on masculinity, patriarchy and gender relationships in Albanian culture. It then discusses the researcher's positionality and addresses men's negotiation of their masculinities in the new environment with respect to generations, individual characteristics and the role of women.

Having explored the different adjustment processes of internal migrants (chapter 5 and 6) in a gender and generational context (chapter 7 and 8) **chapter 9** aims to investigate the connections between international and internal migration through social and financial remittances and the role these remittances play on shaping the livelihoods of internal migrants in their new environment. Financial and social remittances are shown to improve internal migrants' quality of life, assisting their adjustment process. In recognition of the complexity of migrants' household livelihoods, this chapter illustrates the diverse ways that households make use of international migration to achieve their own move from village to city to construct a livelihood.

**Chapter 10** discusses the research's key findings, drawing together its main conclusions and suggesting a number of research and policy recommendations. It underlines the strengths and weaknesses of this study, as well as potential areas for future research.

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