

Between rurality and urbanity: Indicators of social integration of Albanian rural to urban migrants

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Abstract

Integration of rural to urban migrants represents a complex experience of learning and adapting to a community with a new and different culture. Despite the changes in the way of living and the modifications of cultural values due to social interaction and coexistence with urban subculture, most of migrants moved from village to the city retain a sense of rurality. Internal migration in Albania often takes place in form of chain migration. Therefore, the concentration of migrants to the peripheral part of the city, rural social networks, kinship interaction, financial and social support impact their social and cultural integration to urban subculture. This paper aims to highlight indicators of social integration of Albanian migrants moved from village to the city. Data for this paper was obtained through a quantitative survey method. 400 surveys were conducted with Albanian migrants moved from villages to Korça city which remains the second most important destination, besides Tirana, for migrants from rural areas of the southeastern part of Albania. Descriptive and correlative statistical analysis was used for data interpretation. Rurality is not only a territorial unit, but derives from socially created meanings. The study showed that sense of rurality impacts the patterns and strategies of integration of rural to urban migrants to the city.

Keywords: chain migration, integration, social network, rurality, role of tradition

Introduction

Albanian rural to urban migration is characterized by massive population of urban areas and depopulation of rural areas. For the first time in history of Albanian Census the number of people living in the city overcome the number of people living in the village. 53.7% of Albanian people live in urban areas while 46.3% live in rural areas (Albanian Population and Housing Census 2011). These demographic and social developments are closely related to modernity.

Among the main push factors which impact the decision to migrate from village to the city remain economic conditions, low income, unemployment, low access to public services, etc. While the pull factors are related to better opportunities to employment and education, the living standard in urban areas etc. Albanian rural to urban migration has affected a lot the urban community mainly in terms of high urban concentration of the population, rapid and wild urbanization, risk of `ruralisation` of urban areas, concentration of internal migrants to the peripheral part of the city, mainly to informal areas, related to the “flocking effect” of migration. People moved from village to the city face the challenges of integration to the host society. They carry on values, norms, ideas, features of rural subculture which differs from the urban subculture making even more difficult their social and cultural integration to the city life.

Migration of people from villages to Korça city and their patterns of social and cultural integration to the host society is the focus of this study. The aim is to highlight the dichotomy rurality-urbanity which characterizes rural to urban migrants.

Korça city remains the second most important destination (besides Tirana) for rural to urban migrants from the southeastern part of the country (Vullnetari J, 2012). Korça is the most important regional pole of the southeast, located along one of the most important trade routes connecting Albania with the Balkans and European countries, through Macedonia and Greece. Korça region has experienced internal and international migration as well. A large number of people have moved from villages to Korça city. Based on statistical data it is estimated that in 2005 the number of people living in Korça city was 85.590 people. In 2005 the number of people moved from villages to Korça city was 2.456 while the number of people who left the city was 1.163. In 2008 the number of people moved to Korça city was estimated 716 people (from which 524 women and 192 men), while the ones left (mainly to Tirana and Greece) were 614 people from which 178 women and 436 men (Statistical Bulletin of Korça 2008). In 2009 the total number of people living in Korça city was 86.596, the number of arrivals was 925 while the number of people who left the city was 572.

Based on statistical indicators from INSTAT regarding the change of residence at district, city or village level, it is estimated that during 2001-2011 the total number of Albanian people who have moved from village to the city was 280,863 individuals. The number of people who have moved to Korca district for the same period (2001-2011) was 6.989 with a prevalence of rural to urban movements (INSTAT 2014). Internal migration during 2001- 2011 is characterized by the displacement of the whole family unit which remains a typical feature of Albanian rural to urban migration.

Migration of people from rural to urban areas brings social and cultural changes to both sending and host communities. This brings into the focus the issue of integration of migrants to the urban subculture.

Albanian rural – to urban migration

Rural to urban migration in context of Albania predominantly affects the whole family. People leave village and move to the city as a whole unit family. Cultural values, norms and traditions of people moved from village to the city face to the ones of urban people and affect the way they integrate to the host society. In Albania context family and family ties are important factors which determine the decision to migrate and the choice of destination as well (Vullnetari 2007). These connections based on family and kin ties which affect the migration patterns creates what is called 'chain migration'. Internal migration in Albanian society often takes place in the form of chain migration. Therefore, social networks based on family and kin ties, financial and social support remain of great importance on integration of rural to urban migrants to the city life. Chain migration leads to the creation of separated social and cultural groups in urban areas. As the number of people that move from village to the city increases, they create their own communities within urban areas, with their own values and lifestyles, that differ from the ones of urban subculture.

Studies on Albanian rural to urban migration show that family and kin ties determine not only the decision to migrate and where to migrate but the housing choice to the country of destination as well. New migrants tend to settle in houses and apartments that are close to the ones of migrants who have moved to the city earlier. This trend of migrants' grouping on the basis of family and kin ties provides to the new migrants who come from village to the city a feeling of continuity of rural lifestyle even while they are living in the city. It is worth mentioning that in a sociological viewpoint terms 'urban culture' and 'rural culture' are considered as relative and conditional mental constructs. The terms 'urban culture' and 'rural culture' refer to a system of values and the lifestyle that characterizes the individuals who live in urban areas and those who live in rural areas, which nowadays are not as separate categories as they used to be in the past. Moving from village to the city brings important changes to the life of internal migrants in terms of education, employment, economic and social opportunities, family relationships, etc. (Rye F, J 2011, King & Skeldon 2010, Vullnetari 2012). Migration studies point out the impact of migration on social and cultural transformation of urban areas due to migrants' efforts to integrate to the host society.

Based on the meaning of 'urban culture' as the way of living in the city and the meaning of 'rural culture' as the way of living in the countryside, it is worth highlighting some characteristics of urban lifestyle compared to rural lifestyle. The city is characterized by heterogeneity. Heterogeneity, social mobility and dynamism of urban life promote flexibility in the way of behaving which leads to more tolerant attitudes. Urban subculture is characterized by more tolerant attitudes towards changes, innovations, recent trends in general. On the other hand, the preservation of tradition and traditional forms of social organization and socially behavior is the most significant feature of rural subculture.

Urban society is mainly characterized by individualism and secondary relationships. It has a more individualized way of living, where people are generally closed within their personal interests, family, work, generally indifferent and sometimes contemptuous of those who come from the countryside (Fuga & Dervishi 2010). In contrast, in rural areas the integration of individuals into the social entity is mainly based on common goals and a common way of living. A typical feature of rural community is a social and cultural system based on family and kin ties which remain strong and decisive for the worldview and lifestyle of people living in rural areas. This is apparently reflected in attitudes, behavior, way of thinking of people living in the village.

Rurality is not only a territorial unit, but derives from socially created meanings (Mormont 1990; cited article. Rye, F. J. 2011:173). The meaning of rurality as a mental category allows us to understand its impact on people actions and attitudes, including both the decision to migrate and the strategies of integration to urban subculture, as well as patterns of social interaction with the host society.

Research Methodology

This paper is part of a wider study regarding internal and international migration in Korça region and its social and cultural impact. Data for this study was provided through a quantitative survey method. 400 surveys were conducted with Albanian migrants moved from villages to Korça city.

Systematic probable sampling was used for the survey of people moved from village to the city. The survey was first piloted on 50 subjects to test the level of clarity and comprehensibility by the respondents. It was statistically tested as well, to prove the accuracy in data distribution and the relationships between the variables. Data provided through the quantitative method (survey) was statistically processed in SPSS program, version 20. For data analysis and interpretation descriptive statistics were used; Pearson's chi-square test to test the relationship between variables; correlational analysis; crosstabulation of data, as well as comparative descriptive analysis to compare the ratio difference between two or more groups of subjects.

Results and Discussion

Indicators of social integration

Integration of rural to urban migrants to urban life represents a complex experience of learning and adapting to a community with new and different subculture (Çaro E, 2011). Despite the changes in lifestyle and modifying cultural values of migrants moved from village to the city due to social integration to urban society, most of them still retain a sense of rurality.

Their tendency to be grouped and localized to the peripheral part of the city creates the possibility for them to share the traditions and norms of the village.

This complies to the assumption of Tittle and Stafford (1992) that people living in the peripheral areas of urban centers are more homogeneous, have strong social boundaries, show less anonymity and fewer aspects of urbanization. In context of our study, it is evident the concentration of rural to urban migrants to the peripheral part of Korça city (mainly section 10, 18) which are dominated by people moved from villages who keep strong family and kin ties and allow them retain a sense of rurality.

Heckmann (2005) identified four types of migrants' integration to the host society including: structural integration (employment, housing, education, access to health services, political rights, etc.); cultural integration (changes in behaviors and attitudes of migrants due to adapting to the norms of the host society); interactive integration and identifying integration (sense of belonging expressed in terms of loyalty to one's own ethnic, local, regional, national identity). Based on this model, it is emphasized that the social dimension of integration of migrants to the country of destination is related to what Heckmann calls interactive integration, which includes social interaction, friendship, intermarriages, membership in various organizations, etc (Heckmann, 2005: 13-15, cited article at King & Skeldon 2010: 1635). The social environment is an important factor that significantly affects the integration of migrants to the host society, as it is related to social interaction between people moved from village to the city and the host society. The local context in which social interactions between migrants and host society occur varies from a number of institutions (administration and public service institutions, schools, companies, hospitals, etc.), to public spaces such as squares, public transport, shops, residential complexes. It also includes the private sphere (family relationships, marriage, friendship) (Gsir, S. 2014). A number of studies show that migrants being surrounded by citizens in their social environment (neighbourhood, work, school, etc.), are more likely to integrate easily to urban life compared to those who are part of a social environment that is mainly dominated by other rural to urban migrants.

Referring to data provided from the survey it is estimated that the results of Pearson's Chi-square test to evaluate the relationship between variable 'social environment in neighbourhood' and variable 'the degree of integration in urban life' showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables:

$$\chi^2 (30, N = 400) = 73.22, p = .000 < .05. \quad (1)$$

Also, the results of Pearson's Chi-square test to evaluate the relationship between variables "social environment at work or school" and "integration in urban life" showed that the relationship is statistically significant:

$$\chi^2 (24, N = 400) = 37.74, p = .037 < .05. \quad (2)$$

These results support the findings of other studies regarding the impact of social interaction on integration of rural to urban migrants to urban life. The workplace/school can be defined as a mixed site (public and private) in terms of everyday contacts and interactions (Amin 2002). On one hand, the workplace/school

constitutes a space where dialogue, communication or interactions are mandatory, but on the other hand, it offers opportunities for strengthening social interactions and relations. Being surrounded mainly by townsmen in their workplace or school migrants moved from village to the city appear better integrated in urban life due to frequent social interaction between them.

There are two important factors which affect the degree of social and cultural integration of migrants to the host society; duration of stay in the city and age. Results of Chi-square test showed that there is a statistically significant influence between 'duration of stay in the city' and 'degree of integration in urban life':

$$\chi^2 (308, N = 400) = 373.25, p = .006 < .05 \quad (3)$$

This means that the longer migrants stay in the city, the better integrated they are. On the other hand, results of correlation test between variables 'age' and 'integration to urban life' show that there is a negative association between the two variables. This means that the older migrants who move from village to the city the less integrated to urban life they are. The value of the correlation coefficient shows that the relationship between variables is weak, but statistically significant:

$$r (400) = -.232, p = .00 < .01 \quad (4)$$

This is explained by the fact that integration of people coming from the village to the city is a complex and dynamic process that depends on a number of other factors that co-influence. Social integration leads to greater cultural integration of migrants. The cultural integration of migrants to the host society is related to behavioural changes, changes in attitudes, practices, values, and lifestyle in general. Based on these components of the cultural system, the degree of cultural integration of people moved from village to Korça city has been identified based on the definition of Algan et al (2012) for cultural integration as the measure in which migrants share the same values or behavioural patterns with the rest of the host society. Cultural integration of rural to urban migrants regarding the change in lifestyle, attitudes, behaviour, cultural values is a complex process that occurs over time and in a spatial context. The spatial context is related to the impact of urban social environment and density of social interaction with urban society on the extent of changing lifestyle.

To point out the relationship between urban social environment and social interaction with urban society with the extent of change in lifestyle, Pearson's chi-square test was used.

The variable 'change in lifestyle' was measured through these sub-variables: 'change in mentality', 'change in way of speaking', 'changes in traditions, rituals' and 'changes in family relationship'. The results of the test showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between variables: 'social interaction with urban society' and 'change in lifestyle' of people moved from the village to the city:

$$\chi^2 (120, N = 400) = 164.59, p = .004 < .05 \quad (5)$$

The results of the test also showed a statistically significant relationship between the variable: 'friendship with townsmen' and variable 'change in lifestyle' of people moved from village to Korça city:

$$\chi^2 (60, N = 400) = 102.66, p = .001 < .05 \quad (6)$$

3.2. Links to rural social environment

A number of studies have focused on the impact of migration (internal and external) on the development and emancipation of sending communities, through financial and social remittances (De Haas 2006, 2007; Vullnetari & King, 2003, 2009; Levitt 1998). There are few studies which find that links to country of origin affect not only the transmission of practices, behavior patterns, ideas, and values (acquired during the migratory experience) to the country of origin, but also slow down or hinder the integration of migrants to the host society. Albanian rural to urban migration generally occurs as a family project (INSTAT 2004, Vullnetari 2012). People leave the village and move to the city as a whole family. However, in many cases, young people move to urban space leaving behind their parents and family members (wives and children). Even when migration takes place as a family project, migrants moved to the city leave their relatives or friends in the countryside, maintaining frequent contacts and ties with them.

The continuity of links to rural social environment, through contacts, calls, mutual visits and the density of these connections is an important variable that affects the degree of migrants' integration to the urban subculture. However, it is worth mentioning that links to rural social environment depend on the geographical proximity to Korça city as well as whether those who came from village to the city have left relatives/family members in the village or not.

To point out the impact of links to rural social environment to the integration of migrants moved from village to urban subculture or the extent of maintaining features of rurality while living in the city, we refer to statistical indicators provided from the survey.

The variable 'links to the rural social environment' is a variable created from grouping several other sub-variables (calls to relatives/friends left in the village, mutual visits to relatives/friends in the village).

To measure the level of reliability (internal consistency of scales of the survey), or the extent to which all the statements of a test measure the same concept Cronbach's alpha was calculated (Alpha = .758). This value shows a high internal consistence of test scales. While the variable "rural way of living" was measured through these sub-variables (preserving traditions, rural mentality, way of speaking) (Alpha = 0.582). Results of Chi-square test showed that there is a statistically significant relationship

between the continuity of links to rural social environment and maintaining features of the rural lifestyle:

$$\chi^2 (70, N = 400) = 119.95, p = .00 < .05 \quad (7)$$

This indicator supports the assumption that 'continuity of links to rural social environment' impacts preserving the rural way of living.

To test the strength and direction of relationship between the two variables Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was used. Results of Spearman's Correlation showed that there is a positive and weak relationship between the two variables, but statistically significant:

$$r (400) = .268, p = .000 \quad (8)$$

This means that the more frequent and intense links to rural social environment, the greater the tendency to preserve the rural way of living.

3.3. Contacts to the village and the role of tradition

A series of studies on migration and integration of migrants point out that the role of tradition remains stronger even when living in the city among migrants who continue to keep in touch with relatives and friends to the village compared to those who don't (Petkovic 2007, Ozdemir 2003, Vullnetari 2012,

Nikaj 2012). People moving from village to the city are characterized by a strong connection to tradition compared to people living in the city. This is what Petkovic (2007) describes as acceptance of tradition and traditional forms in all parts of social organization and daily behavior of people living in the village. Due to strong ties with family and kin, respect for tradition constitutes a characteristic feature of rural subculture.

This is more evident when it comes to generational expectations.

Living in large family units and sharing a strong sense of community allow people living in the village to share certain values related to obligation to take care of family members and relatives, the sense of responsibility towards them, especially for the elderly, mainly sons to parents.

These attitudes are an expression of patriarchal tendencies of Albanian society, which are more evident in rural areas and remain more stable against changes. Even while living in the city (which is characterized by individualism, autonomy and close family interest) elderly migrants moved from village to urban areas still show the same expectations towards new generation.

Related to this the study showed that there is a positive association between links to rural social environment and preservation of tradition among migrants moved from village to Korça city. Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was used to test the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables: 'links to rural social

environment' and 'remaining the tradition'. Results of the test showed that there is a positive, weak, but statistically significant relationship between the two variables:

$$r(400) = .356, p = .000 < .01 \quad (9)$$

This means that the more frequent the connections to rural environment, the greater the tendency to preserve tradition among migrants moved from village to the city.

The study showed that elderly try to preserve and pass down to the youth certain traditions related to mutual visits between relatives, traditions related to wedding ceremonies, funerals, births, etc. The tendency to maintain these traditions among migrants moved from village to the city is related not only to links with rural social environment, but also to other factors such as migrants' experience, duration of stay in the city, the presence or absence of elderly in the family, etc.

Conclusions

Considering the aim of this paper it is worth mentioning that integration of migrants to urban subculture is closely related to social interaction of them to the host society. Dimensions of social integration include social interaction, friendship, intermarriages, mutual visits etc.

Urban social environment remains a determining factor of social integration as it affects the degree of social interaction between people moved from village to the city and the host society. The study pointed out that social environment in the neighbourhood, workplace, school etc. impact social interaction and integration patterns of migrants to urban life as well.

Results from the study led to the conclusion that rural to urban migrants being surrounded by townsmen in their social environment (neighbourhood, work, school, etc.), appear to be better integrated in urban life.

Urban social environment affects not only the degree of social interaction between migrants and host society but also impacts the type of relationships created between individuals.

The study showed that migrants located in a social environment where there is a large concentration of townsmen are more likely to create close friendly ties with them compared to migrants who live in a social environment dominated by migrants moved from village to the city.

Integration of migrants to the country of destination is a complex process that occurs over time and in a spatial context. The cultural dimension of integration is related to aspects of lifestyle changes. The results of the study showed that coexistence with urban subculture has significantly influenced changes in lifestyle for the vast majority of the respondents. While living in the city migrants begin to adapt to urban lifestyle regarding changes in values, cultural norms, traditions, etc., resembling more and more the host society. An important factor in this context is social interaction to the

host society. Data from the survey highlighted the impact of urban social environment on changing the lifestyle of rural to urban migrants. The study founded that in perception of people moved from village to the city changing the lifestyle means improving the material conditions that facilitate their way of living, such as: comfortable house, close distance to work/ school, better conditions at work, more free time, greater opportunities for entertainment, etc. Regarding this, the study showed that while migrants seem to be more included within urban community, they do not appear fully integrated in urban subculture and still maintain a sense of rurality. Their cultural integration is a dynamic and evolving process. The study pointed out some indicators of rurality among people who moved from village to Korça city, such as:

- Strong connection to tradition and norms of the village, mainly influenced by their social concentration in certain parts of the city and the continuity of links to rural community which make it difficult for them to create a clear urban identity
- Lack of trust towards townsmen reflected by the tendency to maintain and strengthen social networks based on family and kin ties
- Too much care and concern on the way their actions or behaviors are being perceived by the rest of the population, especially by townsmen.

Integration and social inclusion should not be considered as stable situations or given facts, but as dynamic social processes which often operate through contradictory mechanisms. On one hand there are forces and mechanisms which push migrants towards inclusion, on the other hand there are personal strategies, informal social networks that facilitate their integration to the host society. Duration of stay in the country of destination remains of particular importance in this sense. The longer migrants live in the city the stronger and more complete is their integration to urban society. The study also showed that young people moved from village to the city are more willing to adapt and integrate to the host society, while the elderly are more willing to isolate within the migrants' community.

Regarding the above findings and conclusions reached it is worth mentioning that a whole understanding of migrants' integration to urban society lays the need for further research regarding personal sources and individual characteristics of migrants as well as migrants' social network. Integration to the host society is not only a function of material and social resources, or duration of stay, but also a matter of individual characteristics: readiness, feelings, mutual perceptions, etc. The way people perceive each other affects the extent to which they interact. These perceptions become a source of labeling and prejudicing which directly affect the degree of social interaction between migrants and host society. Another important variable which must be taken into consideration in this context is related to the social networks of migrants. Social networks facilitate the process of adaptation and integration of migrants to the host society. It is recommended to study the impact of migrants' social network on their integration to the country of destination as well as

identifying whether they are 'urban' social network or rural kin- based social network. Next, furthering the research on internal migration will demand better understanding of gender dimensions of migration process. Migration patterns and integration of women migrants to urban society should be another priority area for future research.

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