

Push and Pull in Migration – a Systems Approach Revisited in a Contemporary Context

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This article provides an overview on the contemporary literature on the push and pull factors of international migration, particularly on that from countries in transition to advanced welfare states. The article stresses the importance of the economic factor in the country of destination. This suggests that pull factors are often more significant than push factors, in contemporary international migration.

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Defining migration and migrant

What is meant by migration? The academic discourse has typically pondered the following questions, which make the ultimate difference between migration and tourism, and between migration and work commuting: How far need one travel and for how long to be classed as a migrant? What are the purposes of the trip? How different are origin and destination? How do we handle repetitive trips? (See Zelinsky 1971, 225–226.)

The most comprehensive and revealing description is offered by Wilbur Zelinsky, whose concept has best survived the test of time: “Migration is any permanent or semipermanent change of residence. It is spatial transfer from one social unit or neighbourhood to another, which strains or ruptures previous social bonds.” (See Zelinsky 1971, 225–226). Logically, according to Thomas Faist, the term international migrant refers to “any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country.” (See Faist 2000.)

In Zelinsky’s appealing concept, temporary accommodation of several months, and a fundamental

transformation in the social status of a migrant, from “indigenous”, “local” or “native” to a “migrant” is crucial: The migrant is at least considered to have a pursuit, or some expressed intention, to settle and to become a member – permanent or semipermanent – of the sociocultural context (compare to integration) of the country of destination, which makes difference to tourism or to pure “Gastarbeiter” or “commuter”.

Thomas Faist adds another important feature: Frequently, spatial movement within the same administrative unit is not regarded as migration anymore, it is rather coined as relocation. This is obvious within a county, in a province and even increasingly within one state. One can even argue that moving within the EU, or at least within the Schengen area, as a citizen of one of the member countries would in the future automatically fulfill the criteria of being a migrant. (Faist 2000.) Hence, coming from Slovenia to Germany may in the future be considered as relocation, whereas an Albanian person would still be considered a migrant.

Push and pull in a migration system context

Migration is typically considered a system¹, where there are visible a) push factors, b) pull factors, c) the individual deliberation and decision, d) intervening factors (such as migration policies or best practises, or diverse agencies getting benefit from facilitating migration²), e) possible return migration AND f) a feasible prognosis for future. This final prognosis element, enabling future replication is one of the defining characteristics of the concept of a system. (Bakewell 2012, 9.)

Push and pull factors are the key concepts of the system, and also a key concept in this analysis. The push factor is a force which acts to drive people away from one place and the pull factor is what draws them to another, new location. The active force in push is a negative aspect or condition that motivates one to leave, here from one's country. A pull factor is the driving force that pulls you to a location. This driving force is the positive factor exerted by the locality towards which people move.

In the traditional push-pull model costs and benefits of migrating are determined by push factors of conditions at the origin and pull factors of prospects at the destination. According to Wilbur Zelinsky, actors reach rational decisions “whether and whither” to move on the basis of relative known costs and returns (material and nonmaterial), subject as always to various inertial anchors. (Zelinsky 1971, pp. 221–222.) Migration occurs when the net

present expected value of migrating is positive. (See Ruysen et al. 2012.)

More practically, according to a recent analysis by Kahanec and Fabo, better labor market opportunities, political or economic climate, but also social networks abroad are important push and pull factors. The analysis of push and pull factors and migration constraints indicates that social, economic and political conditions abroad, as well as existing social networks abroad, all increase the propensity to indicate migratory intentions. (Kahanec 2013, 13.)

In a beautiful recent mathematical model by Ruysen et al. (2012), typical factors are wages and (un)employment rates in both the origin and the destination country, which together determine the expected wage differential. Other factors are not only levels of social expenditures, geographical and cultural proximity but also differences in living standards and the sociopolitical environment. (See Ruysen et al. 2012.) Defective or oppressive laws, heavy taxation, an unattractive climate, uncongenial social surroundings, and even compulsion (today, persecution and human trafficking), all have produced and are still producing currents of migration. (Lee 1966, 47–57.)

However, one cause presents as “*primus inter pares*”: One of the best-known migration scholars through times, Everett S. Lee cites another major scholar in migration, Ravenstein, in one particular point: Ravenstein stresses the dominance of the *economic motive*. (Lee 1966, 47–57.)

Also in recent research, surveying empirical findings, the main reason for migration appears to be the search for better economic conditions. Hatton and Williamson (2002) have made an extensive elaboration on the African push/pull factors, and point to the increasing migration pressure in Africa from non-monetary factors such as deteriorating economic conditions as is the case in most African countries. In addition to financial constraints, other factors that enter the decision to migrate are labor market conditions, environmental degradation, migration laws and policies in country of origin. (See Dzvimbo 2003.)

However, the economic motive needs to be conceptually limited here. The economic motive does not automatically mean labor and employment conditions in countries of origin and destination. The findings regarding (un)employment rates

¹ A set of connected things or parts forming a complex whole, in particular. A set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network.

² Numerous organizations in the market earn their profits from migrants legally (travel agencies, airlines, railways, sea carriers and other transport agencies which often combine services, barrister's offices specialized in migration-oriented issues, etc.) or illegally (organizations of criminal nature which specialize in arranging illegal trafficking routes and smuggling migrants). All the organizations mentioned make efforts to intensify migration in order to maximize profits. Salt stresses the significant role of such organizations and institutions in the migration globalization process that is observed all over the world, and went even further speaking of the business of international migration as an industry, partly owned by governments (visa and permit fees).

in both sending and receiving countries are more ambiguous, dependent on a vast amount of variables. Rather, fixed benefits and costs fit more safely in the theory. (Ruysen et al. 2012.)

Another limiting remark needs to be done with health systems. Interestingly, consistent with the findings of Giuliatti et al. (2013), social and health care factors are not strongly related to the decision to emigrate. The effect of the perception of better social and health care system abroad ends up only marginally significant, although there appears to be a small positive and statistically significant effect on permanent migratory intentions. (Kahanec 2013, 13.)

On the other hand, this limitation does not include the idea of added value of non-urgent medical care. The question about the obvious economic quality, the value of health care operations is in contradiction with Everett S. Lee. Like housing, transportation and individual savings, health care also has a significant economic value, often lucrative for the individual. For example, an acute heart attack is a medical condition, needing fast care, whereas better dentists, non-urgent protetics or slowly progressing eye conditions are not life-threatening, but still should be dealt with, and they often possess a significant economic value and interest. An economic motive, that is.

Push peaks from a country in transition

There are definite, patterned regularities in the growth of personal mobility through space-time during recent history, and these regularities comprise an essential component of the modernization process. (Zelinsky 1971, 221–222.) Few theories have been able to comprehensively interlink the push factor to country of origin societal development. According to Zelinsky, different levels of modernization incorporate definite patterns of migration and emigration. Societies can be categorized, in accordance to their development and level of modernization, to five categories (Zelinsky):

- The premodern transitional society
- Early transitional society
- Late transitional society
- Advanced society
- The future superadvanced society

In the early transitional society, fertility rates are somewhat higher than in the more advanced societies. What is significant, however, is a visibly diminishing mortality: these two factors lead to a relatively rapid rate of natural increase, and thus a major growth in size of population. In the early transitional society, there is also increasing migration from countryside to cities. What is more, there is significant growth in various kinds of circulation. In addition, under certain circumstances, one can observe a small, but significant, immigration of skilled workers, technicians, and professionals from more advanced parts of the world. (Zelinsky 1971, 230.)

In other words, there is a stock of many potential migrants, typically either poor with dissatisfaction with the economical possibilities, or too many young people for the job market. In a recent mathematical model by Ruysen et. al., both the lagged migration flow and the migrant stock have a strong positive and significant impact on current migration, the former indicating dynamic effects stemming from the process by which expectations about future earnings are formed and updated while the latter indicates network effects. (Ruysen et al. 2012.)

In such early transitional society, the onset of modernization (increasing production, rise in material welfare, and improvements in transport and communications) brings with it a great “shaking loose of migrants” from the countryside. If the farmer and his family have neither inclination nor opportunity to desert the rural locality, they have no alternative but to adopt a more labor (or capital) intensive mode of production that yields more food and perhaps more cash per unit area. (Zelinsky 1971, 222.)

Hence, the most effective solution in rural societies in an early transitional society seems to be out-migration, one of that being cities in alien lands with an expanding economy. (Zelinsky 1971, 222.) A transition from a relatively sessile condition of severely limited physical and social mobility toward much higher rates of such movement always occurs as a community experiences the process of modernization.

Finally, the migratory processes in question tend to accelerate in spatial and temporal pace with time. An apparent reason is the steady accumula-

tion and intensification of causative factors within any given community and because of information and effects transferred from more advanced to less advanced regions. (Zelinsky 1971, 222.)

Pull peaks to an advanced welfare state

As discussed earlier in this approach, pull is the positive factor exerted by the locality towards which people move. This pull is particularly apparent to modernized countries that have progressed to an advanced state, as considered by Zelinsky: Significant net immigration of unskilled and semiskilled workers from relatively underdeveloped lands. The earlier net outward movement of emigrants to foreign lands is being overtaken by a significant, if moderate, immigration of unskilled workers from less advanced countries. (Zelinsky 1971, 230.)

In such an advanced country, the decline in fertility has terminated, and a socially controlled fertility oscillates rather un-predictably at low to moderate levels. This is a period of radically shrunken fertility and hence the sharp braking of population growth. Regions such as Western and European countries, Northern America and some of the South-East Asian countries and Australia can be considered to be in this phase.

The pull factor is indeed, by many, considered an even stronger incentive than push: Ruysen et al.'s results indicate that immigrants are primarily attracted by better income opportunities abroad and much less by income at home and by employment rates both at home and abroad. High public services are found to discourage migration from advanced countries BUT exert a pull on migration from developing countries, confirming the welfare magnet hypothesis. (Ruysen et al. 2012.)

In other words, we again return to the economic motive: Many studies explored recently by Ruysen et al. find a significant effect of income differentials between the origin and destination country. (Ruysen et al. 2012.) An advanced, rich country with a high-quality welfare system possesses a significant pull character.

Indeed, according to Solimano, primary determinants of migration lie in the economic gains for the migrant and his or her family. These economic

gains are often approximated by wage, benefit and income differentials, in comparable currencies and purchasing power, between the origin and destination countries. Also other important factors, ranging from the availability of social services and housing, to personal safety, and other indicators of the quality of life and human development, are also part of the decision to migrate. (See Solimano 2010.)

We can expand on Adam Smith's classical economic theory: "Migration is a balancing factor between labour supply and demand in different locations." The mainstream neoclassical microeconomic theory allows the assessment of individualized costs and gains associated with migration to benefits achieved for living, be it salaries, monetary or other benefits making life easier. In other words, migrants aim at maximizing their incomes, which means maximization of profit on investment in migration. (Kupiszewski et al.)

A fundamental sociological concept, formulated by Stouffer, elaborated by Kupiczewski et al. (2013) is the intervening opportunities theory linking a destination to which migration takes place with the number and quality of opportunities attractive to the migrant between the place of origin and destination and at the destination. (Kupiszewski et al.)

Migrants from less developed countries, who consider public expenditures a safety net, prefer countries with rising social expenditures, providing some indication for the welfare magnet hypothesis. (Ruysen et al. 2012.)

In addition to a good economic standing, already existing diasporas in a potential country of destination play a major role: popular dynamic factor is given by network effects, which suggests that having friends and family from the same origin living in the host country lowers the monetary and psychological costs of migrating and thus increases migration to that country. (Ruysen et al. 2012.)

From both a sociological but also a practical political view one may add the importance of relative deprivation: Both immigration policies and migration networks usually reinforce each other in the following way – policies (if not totally restrictive) and migrant & migration networks lead expectations for migration to grow more rapidly than the actual chances for legal migration. From an en-

ogenous point of view, this points to the typical s-shaped diffusion curve. Yet exogenous factors – such as curtailed migration may end this dynamic of relative deprivation which, if left on its own, would foster migration until all of those who are available have migrated. (See Faist 2000)

Kupiszewski et al. further ponders the current diaspora discourse: In the existence of a network of family and friends is of crucial importance to potential migrants, as it diminishes monetary and social costs and the risks of migration. Empirical evidence suggests that migrants often rely on the assistance of relatives or countrymen while arriving at the country of destination. The networks were identified as a form of social capital, referred to as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network or more less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition”, convertible into other forms of capital. The networks are on the one hand the results of migration (as any single act of migration adds to the capital for the acquaintances of those who emigrated), and a propeller of migration on the other (the greater the capital, the lower the costs of migration). (Kupiszewski et al., 40.)

Conclusion: Pull more important than push, especially existing diasporas and the welfare state

From the above we can estimate migration, at least semipermanent mobility of persons to particularly occurs from a transitional country to an advanced one. Significantly higher GDP, better labor market opportunities, a functioning social welfare system, political or economic climate, but also social networks abroad are important push and pull factors.

One of the most important factors for migration is the economic motive. Health and medicine systems are in current academic discourse not considered as the most important motive, but if we consider it comprehensively, as non-ambulant added value (such as protetics, or better equipment) increasing life quality, this can also be considered as another factor with an economic dimension.

Push and pull factors are not automatically equally important in the final decision to migrate from a country in transition: Immigrants may be primarily attracted by better income opportunities abroad and much less by income at home and by employment rates both at home and abroad. High public services are found to discourage migration from advanced countries BUT exert a pull on migration from developing countries, confirming the welfare magnet hypothesis.

An advanced, rich country with a high-quality welfare system possesses hence a significant pull character from transitional countries. Still, the question remains, whether it is possible to disentangle the expected income effect from the benefits of social rights empirically? Both seem to be highly correlated in practice. Yet if true the US should be less attractive than Sweden.

Other important factors, ranging from the availability of social services and housing, to personal safety, and other indicators of the quality of life and human development, are also part of the decision to migrate.

Finally, existing networks, or diasporas, are of great importance: Popular dynamic factor is given by network effects, which suggests that having friends and family from the same origin living in the host country lowers the monetary and psychological costs of migrating and thus increases migration to that country

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Forthcoming

Kupiszewski, Marek, Jakub Bijak, and Anna Kicing, The Use of International Migration Theories in Migration Forecasting—A Practical Approach.



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