

Reasons for internal migration in Estonia 1989–2000¹



Mare Ainsaar

Introduction

This study analyses internal migration trends within the framework of human migration as an outcome of interaction between environment, individual needs and subjective decision-making process. The dissertation provides overview about theoretical approaches and empirical migration analyses on three levels: macro, aggregated individual and individual level and includes four chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of general trends of urbanisation in the developed world and reasons of growth and decline of urban population. Chapter 1 comes to the conclusion that, although the settlement of population has been seen often as outcome of production forces, this

may no longer be the case. The second chapter groups reasons of migration and analyses the influence of migration factors on aggregated individual level. Two different approaches – well-being approach and theory of needs are used to elaborate classification of migration components. The third chapter develops a behavioural model of migration decision-making and the fourth chapter analyses the freedom to move on regional level. The unifying element of different chapters of the book is the empirical time-space scope of migration processes in Estonia in 1990s. The aim of this review is to give some short hint to the topics covered in the book.

Migration and well-being

Because of multidimensional links of human migration with individual needs of people, regional development and compatibility of economy, migration influences regional as well as individual well-being. If voluntary migration is a movement towards higher personal well-being, the role of migration can be seen as voting with the feet and it has an equalising effect on regional supply-demand mismatches.

Migration can be a source of increasing personal well-being as well as a source of inequality due to its selective openness to various groups. Beside of being a tool of access for resources in society, freedom for migration itself is a resource. The book argues that the lack of freedom to move can be labelled as “mobility poverty”. Voluntary migration requires always at least some degree of freedom of movement. Freedom is considered to be an ability to decide, to choose; at the same time it can be the absence of necessities, coercion or constraints. Often distinction between negative (from) and positive (ability to) freedoms is made. The both types of freedom are appropriate in migration studies. Independently from negative freedom not to move, exists also positive freedom to move. Reasons causing migration restrictions are marked in migration studies as barriers. Migration barriers are additional sources of inequality, as people will have different access to resources in society, moreover, all reasons affecting migration can become also barriers of movement.

Chapter 2 in the book studies factors affecting individual migra-

Mare Ainsaar, PhD, Research fellow, Tartu University at Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Tartu, Estonia. Article is based on Mare Ainsaar Academic Dissertation "Reasons for move: a study on trends and reasons of internal migration with particular interest in Estonia 1989–2000", University of Turku, Finland, 2004.

tion more profoundly. For example it revealed that possession of economic capital supported mobility in Estonia between 1989–2000 – wealthier people were more mobile. The wealthiest persons mostly moved because of housing-related reasons. However, the hypothesis that economic desert was a large barrier to migration was not confirmed. Standardised out-migration models did not indicate clear evidence of economic barriers to migration on regional level. In the case of some other migration factors the results were quite controversial. For example social capital had dual impact on migration. Children complicated the change of residence, but having a partner made it easier.

General trends of settlement development in Estonia

Most of the history of population settlement development draws a picture of population concentration and growth of towns. A remarkable phenomenon in the 20th century settlement history was the outflow of people from towns. Although in different countries the deconcentration processes emerged at different times, most developed countries have passed this stage during some period of their development.

The urban-rural development in Estonia in the 20th century can be divided into two periods: urbanisation up to 1983 and outflow of people from bigger towns from 1983-2000. Continuous outflow of people from towns into the rural areas had persisted in spite of eco-

nomie, political and demographic changes since 1983. Also population census data from 1989-2000 showed clear depopulation of bigger towns and an inflow of people into the nearest rural hinterland of the towns. Satellite towns and closer hinterland of bigger centres were the most popular settlement types among internal migrants. The whole positive immigration area reached the distance of up to 60–70 km from the towns. The main age groups supporting outflow from towns were people from the age 25 and up, who mostly moved to the closer hinterland of bigger towns, and people from the age 30 and up, who moved to more distant areas.

Reasons for population outflow from towns

Analyses of the migration literature point to the dominance of lifestyle-related preferences and housing factors among the reasons used to explain the migration turnaround. However, different authors use varying methods and sometimes conclusions about reasons are based more on assessments than on empirical evidences. The first and second chapters of this book present a more thorough analysis of migration before and after turnaround in Estonia, following the same methodology.

The country study revealed that the main forces behind the migration reverse were non-economic reasons. Most remarkable change in the reasons of migration during migration transition was the increase of housing-related migration. Economic reasons pre-

served their third position after groups of family and housing reasons. In order to analyse the mechanism of deconcentration, it could be fruitful to pay attention to the fact that the migration turnaround usually begins from the bigger towns. This might indicate that those towns possess some characteristics that promote deconcentration. Simultaneously, the hinterland of those towns experience often the highest growth rate because of migration. The analysis of the reasons of internal migration in Estonia in the 1990s gave the following results: even though the overall employment-related migration decreased, the employment-related migration among in-migrants into the capital increased. At the same time the percentage of those, who left because of housing-related reasons, was doubled among the out-migrants from the capital. The population of the capital increased primarily because of study migration and, to a lesser extent, employment-related migration and capital lost people because of housing reasons.

Theory of migration

Different chapters of the book employ a variety of approaches to migration. Distinction into two broad categories can be made: macro level and individual level explanations. As a result of simultaneous factors on the macro level, the total migration flows are results of a demographic and migration potential of different population subgroups, regional differences in well-being, alternatives to migration and, finally, freedom to move. Population preferences, migration alternatives

and perceived well-being differences determine the place utility.

Population potential of different social groups. General migration trends are shaped by different groups of population and their demographic potential determines the dominance of preferences among total flow of migrants. Different population groups have different needs and therefore also different preferences. For example results from Estonia showed that different age groups of migrants emphasised different factors of well-being, important in their lives. It was also assumed that migrants take into account several aspects of well-being in migration process. Empirical analyses suggested that the character of those aspects tends to vary depending on the triggering reason of migration.

Regional differences in well-being (place utility). Cumulative amount of individual well-being possibilities within a region makes some areas more and others less attractive. Most theories of regional dislocation emphasise the concept of production space (economic space model, spatial growth model, endogenous growth theory). Geography of production is important as long, and to such extent, as human settlement is influenced by the means of production. The role and influence of different sources of well-being vary in time and, therefore, the attributes of a successful region change as well. For example, ties between economic activities and settlement differ in an era with developed communication technology compared to an agrarian. Human needs and preferences shape the place utilities, and the characteristic features of a suc-

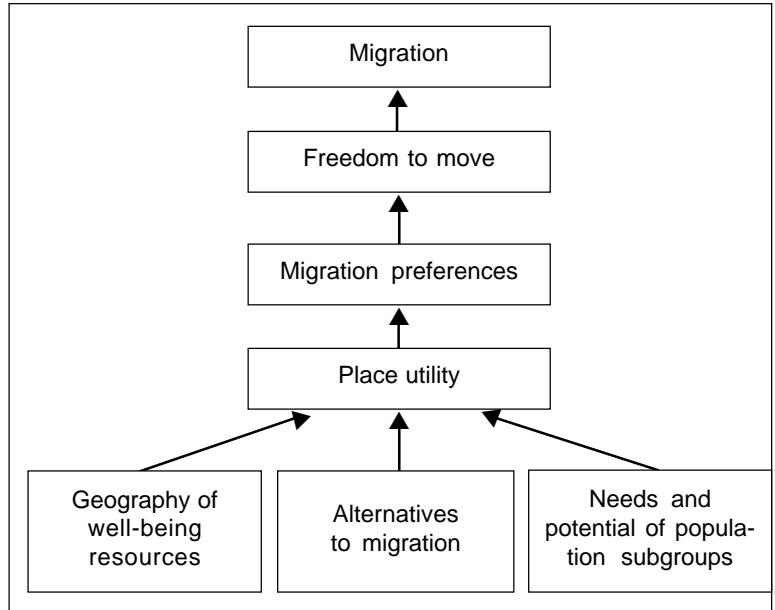


Figure 1. Macro level migration levels

cessful region can change over the course of time. The most important factors from the viewpoint of migration magnitude are the place utility disparities produced by regional well-being differences. A hypothesis was posed that the primary reason of migration could be the factor, which is the most deficient among regionally differentiated well-being factors. For example, housing reasons would prevail in a society, where there is a high wish to change the living conditions and at the same time major differences exist in the regional housing markets, which allows fulfilling those needs.

Access to alternatives to migration. Migration is only one possible outcome of subjective regional place utility differences. Other alternatives for migration can be commuting or local adaptation strategies. General economic development is often associated with

improvement of transportation and communication, which in turn increases individual options. In order to benefit from those alternatives, people should have some access to them. For example, commuting leads to greater freedom in choosing the place of residence and the place of employment. Accordingly, people will have greater ability to fulfil their individual well-being preferences. Still, migration or commuting, would require some extra resources, compared to a settled lifestyle. Availability of those resources and lack of barriers can be called freedom to move.

Behavioural approach

Unlike macro level approaches, the behavioural approach in migration research strives to explain individual or household migration by analysing different stages in migration decision process. The third chap-

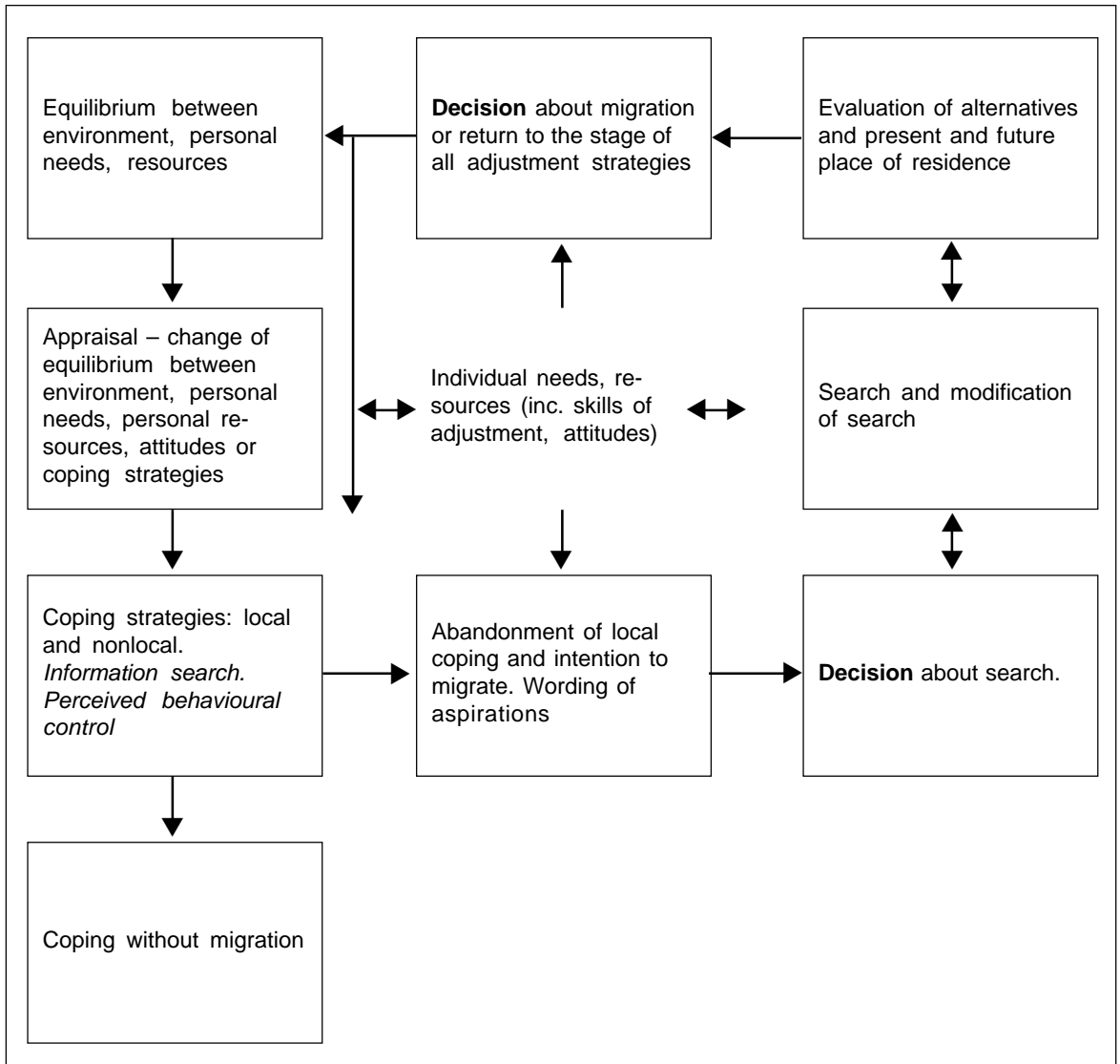


Figure 2. Behavioural migration model (Source: Ainsaar 2004)

ter of the book constructs a theoretical model for migration behaviour on individual level (Figure 2). The theory is based on the assumption that migration behaviour originates from individual needs, and migration is only one adjustment option among several coping strategies to improve wellbeing.

Settled people live in a situation of equilibrium between perceived environmental differences, personal needs and personal resources for adjustment. Change in any of these components can lead to a change of equilibrium and to the appraisal situation. Several relocation theorists have pointed out the

importance of the stress as a trigger of the process. However, in the qualitative survey many respondents claimed that despite discomfort they did not feel any stress. At the same time, there were cases where the presence of stress was a reason of migration. After comparing his/her needs, available re-

sources for adjustment and the present situation, a person perceives some ill-being or possible higher well-being in other area. Migration could be one option among adjustment strategies. Yet, there are several reasons, why migration is not always the option that is actually chosen.

Interviews with migrants showed that triggering factors of migration appeared individually, as well as in combination with many other reasons. Similarly, there could be one or many reasons of relocation. Some reasons originated from past, but some were constructions of future life histories of people. Even though the need for change usually emerged before the opportunity of relocation, there were some reversed cases where the stimulus (opportunity) emerged before the appraisal of internal needs. This could be interpreted, as a change of equilibrium caused by perceived opportunities elsewhere. Two principally different relocation strategies were found:

- 1) Pull migration, or migration mainly towards higher well-being without a preceding feeling of serious ill-being.
- 2) Push or ill-being migration, where relocation took place mainly because of poor conditions in the current place of residence.

Interviews indicated that people tend to set up some preliminary non-commensurable conditions that must be met in a successful migration process. Often one criterion included some economic limitation on resources, and the second criterion was related to the triggering reason of migration. The survey revealed that the principal decision on migration was made after collection of information on market situation and other options. In order to decrease the information processing effort, people did not evaluate all available options, but often excluded many potential destinations already at the initial stage of selection. People's strategies of search for a new place of residence depended on their resources (time, money, information, actual needs, assessment of own potentials). In the assessment of different possibilities some values could be exchanged for other, more important values. Both, non-compensatory rules and conjunctive rules were used.

There have been long discussions on the rationality of behaviour of human beings. Interviews with migrants indicated that people's behaviour carried several rational elements that were used to decrease costs in terms of time and resources. Although most of the arguments for the change of the place of residence were rational, there were some references to emotion-based decisions. The general rational approach was also somewhat supported by the results of the Migrant Survey, which revealed that, irrespective of directions or factors of migration, all respondents were more satisfied after the movement than before.

Notes

- 1 PhD thesis defended at Turku University in 2004 at the Department of Social Policy.

References

- Ainsaar, M. (2004) Reasons for move: A study on trends and reasons of internal migration with particular interest in Estonia 1989–2000. *Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, Ser B 274, Humaniora*, Turku University, p 222.



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