

Migration Decision Making and Social Networks

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Not to be cited

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Introductory Remarks

"[... s]tudying networks, particularly those linked to family and households, permits understanding migration as a social product – not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction." BOYD's (1989: 642) quote constitutes the perspective for this summarising paper.

The hypotheses that networks, and not people, are at the centre of the migration process, as TILLY (1990)² asserts, will be debated in the following pages. To this end, we will consider different approaches to explaining migration processes and migration decision-making, with reference to network effects.

According to GURAK and CACES, who edited a well-renowned summary of the discussion in 1992, it is important to differentiate between local community networks, networks of internal migrants and international migrants (ibid.: 152) because of different modes of composition, ways of functioning and opposing constraints. For this reason only international migration is considered here. Furthermore, the focus is on labour migration theories, i.e. we assume that people decide based on mainly economic grounds to enter the migration cycle³. Nevertheless we recognises that these economic decisions are

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² "By and large, the effective units of migration were (and are) neither individuals nor households but sets of people linked by acquaintance, kinship, and work experience who somehow incorporated American destinations into the mobility alternatives they considered when they reached critical decision points in their individual or collective lives." (TILLY 1990: 84 while describing North American immigration history)

³ The differentiation between labour and forced migration should be rejected. Labour migration could also be forced migration, if it involves economically induced shortcomings like unemployment or earnings being under the minimum income for living. This is why FAIST (2000) differentiates migrants according to their degree of freedom.

mediated by other factors; as MASSEY et al. (1998: 8) state: "Although migration is clearly related to differentials in wages and employment (little movement generally occurs in their absence), economic disparities alone are not enough to explain international movements."

Following MASSEY and associates (1998: 50), who state that neither atomistic theories nor structural theories alone can explain migrants' decision-making, the focus of this paper is on intermediating approaches involving the implementation of social networks.

Along with an increasing intensity of the inclusion of social capital, several approaches from different disciplines are presented and evaluated. The concluding section assesses the approaches and focuses on impediments to migration decision-making. This follows WELLMAN and BERKOWITZ'S (1988) opinion that structured social relationships are a more powerful factor for explaining social life than are individual attributes.

General Models

As an introduction we provide a summary on two generalizing approaches that seek to explain migration by using social capital as a main explanandum. The first is the Social Network Theory, followed by the Theory of Cumulative Causation.

Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory highlights the importance of networks in international migration. Once established, networks can lead to so-called chain migration and thus stimulate and perpetuate the migration process. The network approach focuses on the rational actor who takes into consideration the existence of networks. Unlike the Theory of Cumulative Causation, we discuss later, this approach focuses solely on the impact of networks on the migration decision.

According to Social Network Theory, the actor is a subject in different networks which he or she can use rationally to maximise utility. Thus, existing networks can facilitate the decision whether to move or not.

As with all networks, migration networks operate through the creation of social capital. The definitions about what to call social capital differ. The definition which will serve as the foundation of our discussion, is the one put forth by JAMES S. COLEMAN (1990). It describes the value of interpersonal ties and describes networks as an image of aggregated social capital. Compared to human or physical capital, which are embodied in material or individual forms, social capital is embedded in the relations between the actors. Hence, it is frangible and often non-transferable (tied to a certain place). The rational actor uses social capital as a resource similar to material resources to pursue his aim of maximising utility: „Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to various kinds of financial capital: foreign employment, high wages, and the possibility of accumulating savings and sending remittances“ (MASSEY et al. 1998: 43).

The maintenance of social capital is often dependent on single actors highly engaged in its creation. These actors obtain a high position within the given social relations but risk being exploited by others because the maintenance of social capital creates the so-called free-rider problem: some actors may benefit from the product without contributing. For example, migrants may arrive in the destination country and use the social structure and the relations created by former migrants without contributing anything to the functioning of these constructs.

COLEMAN identified different forms of social capital some of which have been applied by FAIST (1997): obligations and expectations, norms of reciprocity and solidarity. Obligations and expectations are

used by the actors to pursue their aims within and through the network. During their journey migrants ask for help from different actors within the migration network, like smugglers, job agents, landlords, etc. These aides purposely create obligations and expect a certain reward for the work they do. Thus, obligations and expectations emerge among the members of a network. This in turn causes the creation of (virtual) social capital depots in which obligations and expectations are compiled. As a matter of fact, migration networks tend to be large in scope. Hence, calculations are often imprecise and cause externalities (COLEMAN 1990). There are two ways of compensating for this mismatch: first, actors are not equal in terms of power or resources available, which means that the more powerful ones could simply assert themselves against others. Second, and more likely, norms of reciprocity and solidarity emerge as a moral standard between the different actors. According to the norm of reciprocity, actors ought never impair people who helped them in the past, but help those who offered help earlier. A prerequisite for the norm of reciprocity is solidarity backed by a feeling of collectivity, which could be defined along arbitrary (e.g. ethnic) or functional borders.

Thus, social capital is inherent in all networks. Furthermore, its precise form is shaped by various factors; first, as mentioned previously, *network boundaries* (arbitrary vs. functional) influence the form of social capital: ethnic networks intend to help solely members of the same ethnicity becoming a prerequisite for access. In contrast, origin or ethnicity play a rather marginal role in networks defined along a functional border. The question to be answered is what the actor can contribute for the functioning of the network. Feelings of solidarity are generally weaker than in ethnic networks and collectivity is not heavily stressed. Members could be excluded due to their inability to contribute something, whereas members of an ethnic network are supposed to be linked through a feeling of a common destiny which is, in a way, a stronger tie than a functional binding.

Second, the *character of relations* within a given network and the *number of actors* involved are important as well. Strong ties which are common in small and tight groups, like communities and families, are equally necessary for the functioning and the maintenance of a network as weak ones, which play a crucial role when it comes to the reformation of social capital. Members who are integrated in a clique, but have relations to other social actors as well, could play a critical role for the gathering of new information which is also a form of social capital (GRANOVETTER 1973). On the other hand, the information flow is more warranted in close networks than in loose ones because members know and trust each other. Analysing the importance of every single member for the functioning of the network, one can state that small networks are more dependent on individuals and large ones more on the fulfilment of the social roles provided (SIMMEL 1983). Hence, replacement without endangering the existence of the whole network is more likely in large ones. Consequently, it is more likely that a rational actor will choose a large network to migrate into because they tend to be more long-lasting than small ones and thus reduce the risk of movement (MASSEY et al. 1998).

Third, the *scope of the network* is important for analysing the forms of social capital and the effects on the migration decision making process. Social capital embedded in networks could be helpful for the rational actor in a decision making process, not just by generally motivating the actor to migrate. Especially location specific social capital, which is embedded in and, hence, dependent on close social relations, tends to prevent migration. Obligations and expectations which are closely related to family or community issues (e.g. support of the elderly, protection) are often dependent on the on-site presence of the actor. It is almost impossible to transfer these forms of social capital, and the potential migrant may be more likely to stay than to build up new social capital abroad. On the other hand, – as we have already pointed out – „networks make international migration extremely attractive as a strategy for risk diversification or utility maximization“ (MASSEY et al. 1998: 43). Therefore the actor

has to deliberate about the value of local and transnational networks in his personal concept of utility maximisation.

To sum up, the Social Network Approach is valuable in so far as it is the first step towards a more integrative theory than theories which solely focus on specific variables (economic, social, cultural) or on constraint levels (macro- and micro-oriented approaches). It sets aside assumptions that the size of the migratory flow between two countries is solely related to wage differentials or employment rates because, whatever effects these variables have in promoting or inhibiting migration, they are „progressively overshadowed by the falling costs and risks of movement stemming from the growth of migrant networks over time“ (MASSEY et al. 1998: 45). Due to the extension of networks they become not only more and more institutionalised and independent of initial factors but also unassailable for migration policies: „Governments have difficulty controlling migration flows once they have begun because the process of institutionalization is difficult to regulate“ (ibid.)⁴.

Nevertheless the Social Network Approach leaves some issues unaddressed. First, it says a lot about the functioning of networks but nothing about their emergence. Second, assuming that a pioneering migrant abroad is a rational actor: what would be the motivation to build up a network? The benefits for the following migrants are well explained, but what would be the net gain for the earlier migrants?

Theory of Cumulative Causation

The Cumulative Causation Theory differs from other approaches in two ways. First, it does not solely focus on micro- or macro-level variables, as neo-classical theories do. This approach is more integral, as it includes both economic variables and the social and cultural context in which a migration decision is made. Thus, Cumulative Causation is not a purely micro-, nor a purely macro-level theory, but an integral one: the actor is rational but makes his or her decisions in the context of a specific environment and has to cope with different social, economic, and cultural determinants.

Second, this theory is one of the few which explain not only migration decision of an individual, but also the perpetuation of international migration, by scrutinising how the migration of individuals changes the values, norms and expectations of the sending society.

MASSEY and associates (1998) identified some variables which constitute this context and thus affect the migration decision.

The first is the enlargement of networks. Once established, networks tend to perpetuate the migration flow because they lower the risk as well as the expected costs of migration. Every new migrant could help (un)intentionally to expand the network and thus provide more and more detailed information about routes of migration, the destination country, and the possibilities of earning money and getting shelter/assistance abroad.

The second is the distribution of household income. As stated in the Relative Deprivation Approach, households compare themselves to others, and there is little evidence that one will motivate a family member to migrate when there is income equality among them. But after a few households have

⁴ FAIST (2000: 94) adds from a political science's view: "[...] in liberal democratic immigration states, the presence of immigrant groups on their territory carries implications for human, civil and social rights. These claims form the basis for subsequent migration from the same region, subverting the original intentions of policy-makers concerning temporary labour migration, the selective import of human capital migrants, or the limited recognition of refugees from a particular country during a specific conflict. Through international human rights discourses and domestic rights expansions niches of opportunity open for migrant networks that foster specific mechanisms such as family reunification."

improved their income situation by sending pioneer migrants abroad, we can observe a certain motivation among other households to follow suit in order to overcome the emerging income inequality between them.

Another factor, which is particularly important when talking about south-north migration, is the acquisition of land in the country of origin as an old-age provision. In developing countries, where pension systems are ineffective or inaccessible for a huge part of the population, the purchase of land functions as a substitute. Migrants buy this land with money they earned abroad but do not till it until they return: „This pattern of land use lowers the demand for local farm labour, thereby increasing the pressures for out migration“ (MASSEY et al. 1998: 47). But even if they tilled the land, they would be more likely to use modern machinery than to hire farm workers. This increases the pressure on the local population to search for work abroad.

The core of the Cumulative Causation Theory is the influence of culture on migration and vice-versa. Getting in touch with a different society and a highly diversified labour market leads migrants to migrate again in order to attain and to maintain the level of prosperity they have reached. This leads not only to repeated migration, but motivates the non-migrants to migrate as well. Those who are not able to migrate tend to expect migration from other household members. Thus, over time migration not only changes the attitudes of the individual, but also influences community values and expectations. The social environment tends to expect migration or at least support migration. Members of the community who refuse to migrate are likely to be sanctioned. Migration finds its way into the complex net of values and norms and consequently into the socialisation process. Finally, migration becomes a value itself and gets embedded as culture a of migration in the perception of obligations and expectations of every single actor.

When it comes to the professional skills of the migrants, one can observe that the distribution of human capital is a crucial factor for the initialisation and the perpetuation of the migration process. The first to migrate are quite often well educated and motivated. This leads to the so-called brain-drain, which means that the most qualified workers look for work abroad, whereas the less educated stay behind. Thus the reinforcement of the receiving economies goes hand in hand with the depletion of the sending economies. Educational programmes in the latter ones are seldom helpful: they could indeed enhance the educational level, but this often amplifies migration.

Finally, according to the Segmented Labour Market Theory, there is an emerging structural demand for migrant labour in the receiving economies because jobs are quickly branded `immigrant jobs` and local workers refuse to fill them.

The integral value of the theory is that the approach not only focuses on micro- and macro-factors, but also takes into account the meso-level (networks) and the opportunity structure. Furthermore, this approach could explain the phenomenon of ethnic niches in the labour market due to the labelling of certain jobs as `immigrant jobs` (MASSEY 1998: 50). Nevertheless once migratory flow has become established, it „becomes less selective in socio-economic terms and more representative of the sending community or society“ (ibid.).

But the theory is also problematic because some of the factors mentioned are not generally applicable. As already stated, the aspect related to land distribution and the organisation of farm production is more or less only applicable to south-north (not east-west) migration, and it could not explain why people from urban areas should migrate.

When it comes to a comparison of Social Network Theory and the Theory of Cumulative Causation one could state that they are similar in that both pay attention to the social environment within which a

migration decision is made and explain the difficulties of controlling the migratory flows through policy measures. Moreover both theories show that the „movement of people has a powerful internal momentum“ (MASSEY 1998: 49) which perpetuates migration regardless of any control efforts of sending or receiving countries. The difference lies in the scope: whereas Social Network Theory focuses solely on the effects of networks, the Theory of Cumulative Causation takes this as only one factor in the decision-making process. Furthermore, Social Network Theory could not properly explain the creation of migration, but only the perpetuation. The creation as well as the vanishing is explained in the framework of Cumulative Causation.

Micro-Economic Approaches

First there should be a short appraisal of intermediating theories emerging from an economic background (for a deeper discussion see Dragoş's paper). STARK and BLOOM, as very influential critics, challenged the assumptions and conclusions of the (neo)classical theories. They shifted the research foci from individual actors to larger social units like households and families. The assumed reason for migration was expanded to include both the maximising expected incomes and also minimising risks and loosening „constraints associated with various kinds of market failures, apart from those in the labour market“ (MASSEY et al. 1998: 21). Subsequently, studies on the new economics of migration examine manifold market failures and relative deprivation on household levels.

Former studies consider migration as a risk-reducing strategy to overcome economic risks on different markets by sending a household member abroad for a certain amount of time. Studies concerned with relative deprivation explain migration through migration decisions stimulated by a relatively low income level of a household as compared to other households that the migration-favouring household knows about.

The shortcomings of these approaches are that they just shift from an individual to a aggregated household level disregarding intra-household processes.

Other economists like BAUER, EPSTEIN and GANG (2000, 2002) or MARTIN and TAYLOR (1996) include network effects into their models. MARTIN and TAYLOR, for example, explain the increase and decrease of net migration in a period following a major economic transition in reference to network effects, although they do not explain in detail how.

BAUER and colleagues (2000) model the network effect by including the wage differential, the number of immigrants at a location⁵, the origin-village's total experience in the host region and the total number of origin-village members currently in the host region. They assume an inversely U-shaped relationship between wages and number of immigrants at a location, and that migration depend on village-specific effects, i.e. social networks created among people from the same place of origin. Although general dependencies could be shown, research findings from other social sciences suggest that migrant networks are not shaped by whole villages or other locations but are dependent i.a. on the social structure of the location (cf. e.g. BOYD 1989, KOSER 1997, WILPERT 1992). Furthermore, a general dependency is not very striking because of a general effect of the law of large numbers.

⁵ The number of immigrants in a location is difficult to determine because of statistical insufficiencies due to undocumented and naturalised migrants. The research on illegal migration (e.g. ALSCHER et al. 2002) suggests that there a large number of illegal migrants in most host countries. In countries like Germany, the official statistics heavily distort the figures on migrants residing there because of insufficient definitions. Both impediments could have an impact the analysis on network effects.

In another paper BAUER et al. (2002) measure the network effect against the so-called herd effect. The latter should imply that a migrant follows other migrants without knowing them or having their knowledge, and disregarding her own knowledge of other places; in their own words: "Behavior is rational on the supposition by new emigrants that previous emigrants had information that they do not have." (ibid.: 3) Herd effects would therefore result in inefficiencies. However, in our opinion network effects might result in inefficiencies as well, due to bounded rationality or other goals than pure economic one. Although sometimes it could be rationale to "follow the flow", especially in cases of bounded rationality, the lemming-like effect should appear only in exceptions. BAUER and colleagues allow network effects and herd effects to coexist. This leads them to the following conclusion: "Finally, herd behavior enables us to understand how an individual makes a decision when there is more than one country that provides the immigrant with the same level of network externalities." (ibid.: 24) This conclusion is only defensible on the assumptions of their model. If more than wages and number of migrants are included in the model there would hardly be "the same level of network externalities".

The studies considered do not provide a satisfying explanation of migration decision-making using network effects. They overgeneralize the way networks are important for the decision-making process and cannot explain the correlation between networks and the actual decision.

Social Network Hypotheses

A significant body of literature shows that social networks can play a leading role in explaining decision-making in the migration process (BOYD 1989, GURAK / CACES 1992). Unfortunately, some of them only provide general hypotheses about the correlation between the decision-making process and the networks influencing this process.

Even though GURAK and CACES (1992: 156) postulate that "[t]rust and affinity can attract people to migration as well as keep them in the origin area," more decisive hypotheses can be built. However, they are more valuable in a heuristic sense to get to a conclusive approach than are detailed models, as FAWCETT (1989) suggests.

RITCHEY (1976) formulated three hypotheses on how social networks influence the migration decision making process:

- According to the affinity hypothesis the probability of migration decreases as the density of the network of friends and family in the origin society increases.
- The facilitating hypothesis states that social networks can facilitate migration because social contacts based in these networks provide support, e.g. by lending money or helping to find a job in the place of destination.
- The information hypothesis shows a correlation between the tendency to migrate and kin and friends living abroad who provide information on migration and life abroad. It also points out that migration is directed towards the places where the social contacts are located.

These were complemented by HUGO (1981) :

- The conflict hypothesis says "that intrafamily and intracommunity friction of one kind or another is a significant factor impelling migration among some groups." (ibid.: 203)
- According to the encouraging hypothesis, family members are encouraged by the family to migrate for a certain period of time, for example as a risk-reducing strategy to secure the household income (cf. STARK 1991)

According to HAUG (2000: 123) only three hypotheses are relevant upon closer examination: the information hypothesis can be regarded as a specific case of the facilitating hypothesis, and the

conflict hypothesis can be interpreted as the inverted effect of the affinity hypothesis. This leaves the affinity, the facilitating and the encouraging propositions as the hypotheses that are worth considering.

Both the affinity hypothesis and the conflict hypothesis are problematic in our opinion because CACES and associates (1985) discovered the effect of "competing auspices", which means that a potential migrant can have affinities to several, however excluding, networks. In this case it would be crucial to include a hypothesis about the strength of the social relations.

With regard to the value of information within the migration decision process, FAWCETT (1989: 678f) adds more hypotheses:

- "Family relationships have an enduring impact on migration. Policies, rules and even norms may change, but obligations among family members are of an abiding nature.
- The credibility of the source has much to do with the effectiveness of communications. Family members are trusted sources for information about migration - more so than migrant recruitment agencies.
- Information is better absorbed and retained when the vocabulary and dialect are close to everyday language. Such compatibility is more likely when information about places is provided by relatives, as opposed to mass media sources.
- Family members become role models through their achievements in foreign countries; such models have more behavioral immediacy than information about labor market disparities."

KOSER and PINKERTON support these findings on the information issue in their study about asylum seekers: "[...] there is a consensus that social networks – particularly personal networks – are viewed by asylum seekers as the most trustworthy sources of information. What is interesting, however, is that while personal networks are trustworthy, they may not necessarily be accurate" (2002b:16).

MASSEY and associates (1993: 460f) add the following propositions from a general network perspective:

- Once someone has migrated internationally, she is very likely to do so again, leading to repeated movements over time.
- Independent of former individual migration experience, the probability of international migration is higher for someone who is related to a person with prior migration experience or a person living abroad.
- The greater the barriers to movement, the more important should network ties become in promoting migration since they reduce the costs and risks of movement.
- Within households the probability of migration rises if a family member already endures migration experience.
- At the community level, people should be more likely to migrate abroad if they come from a community where many people have migrated or a large knowledge of migration is available.

KOSER and PINKERTON (2002b: 10f) conclusively deduce certain ways in which social networks influence the migration decision-making process: social networks influence migration selectivity (who migrates), the migration timing (when someone migrates) and the migration destination (where someone migrates to).

The hypotheses presented are important heuristic means to get to conclusive models. However, they do not represent those models. HAUG (2000) and MASSEY et al. (1987) use the hypotheses to formulate approaches for empirical testing (see sections below).

Rational Choice Approaches

Beyond micro economic approaches rational choice theories from other social sciences utilise the value-expectancy theory to explain migration decision-making (DaVanzo 1981, DEJONG / FAWCETT 1981, HAUG 2000, KALTER 1997). The approach used by HAUG, which explicitly includes social networks, will be discussed in more detail here. She claims that the subjective nature of an individual's decision to migrate has not yet been adequately captured (cf. HAUG 2000: 126).

According to KALTER (1997) migration decision-making should be divided into three phases: thinking about migrating, planning to migrate and the actual act of migration. However, TILLY disagrees from a non-decision-theoretical point of view: "It is not very useful to classify migrants by intentions to stay or to return home, because intentions and possibilities are always more complex than that – and the migrants themselves often cannot see the possibilities that are shaped by their networks" (TILLY 1990: 87). HAUG only considers the *act of migration* assuming that the distinction is due to sub-processes (ibid.: 108f).

HAUG uses the *subjective expected utility theory* to model migration decision-making while using an extended resource concept. The model is a derivation of the *expected utility model* which assumes that actors only have limited access to information. Potential migrants, hence, try to maximize their subjectively assessed utility (less the assessed costs) of migration regarding economic, educational, cultural and social resources in different places⁶. It is assumed that the extension of the rational choice model, especially the inclusion of social capital, increases the explained variance. The actors compare the total amount of utility to be gained from of the location-specific capital (which is built by the above mentioned resource dimensions), at the place of origin and the place of destination they are considering. The reference to location-specific capital is based on the assumption that the utility of some resources is geographically limited (see as well DAVANZO 1981). The attractiveness of the place of origin and different places of destination is determined to a high degree by the endowment of these places with location specific social capital.

The rational actor consequently decides in favour of migration when $SEU_{mig} > SEU_{stay}$ with $SEU_{xy} = \sum_n (p_1U - p_2C)^7$ (adapted from HAUG 2000: 112ff). This leads to an indifference curve

analysis between the net utility in the place of origin and destination. Social capital can have either an additive or an multiplicative/interaction effect on the other types of capital. HAUG concludes that social capital has more an effect on its own than a strengthening effect on other types of capital⁸.

HAUG (ibid.: 122ff) claims to work on a multi-level basis because, following FAIST (1997), she introduces structural variables as the macro-level, and social capital as the meso-level into the rational choice model. In our opinion this approach is only an endogenising of variables of different dimensions (taking place on diverse levels) into an individual actor model. However, we regard it as seminal to include all these variables into a model.

The model is extended to take into consideration the costs that arise due to the risks of trusting persons who are not trustworthy. "The decision to migrate is made on the condition that the

⁶ The resource concept is based on the distinction between different types of capital made by BOURDIEU and COLEMAN.

⁷ SEU = subjective expected utility; mig = option to migrate; stay = option to stay; x = location under consideration; y = types of capital; n = all different singularities under consideration; p = probability of occurrence; U = utility; C = cost

⁸ Although it is empirically difficult to show the additive effect. (see Haug 2000: 122 & 200ff)

subjectively expected total utility of migration less the *opportunity costs* caused by the loss of use at the place of origin is higher than the total utility of staying at the place of origin" (ibid.: 129⁹). In this context HAUG (cf. ibid.: 127ff) discusses different types of risks and perceived risks facing potential migrants. Her discussion of perceived risks refers to distinctions made by different authors: one group considers migration as a risky action (e.g. MASSEY et al. 1993); another group regards migration as a risk-averting behaviour (e.g. STARK 1991). In our opinion it is a matter of perspective: migration can reduce insecurities while, at the same time, the actual move to the destination country can be risky until the process of resettling takes place. HAUG therefore concludes: "Because migration is a risky investment, it can be assumed that only risk-loving persons or persons whose costs can be considered as low will migrate without the outlook of having a supporting social network abroad. Pioneer migrants have different reasons for their decision to migrate than followers who have social capital in the place of destination. Pioneer migrants often have above-average education (DaVanzo, Morrison 1978) and come from the social middle class of the country of origin (MacDonald, MacDonald 1964, Massey 1986, 1987, Massey, España 1987" (HAUG 2000: 133¹⁰) HAUG states that pioneer migrants are not necessarily more willing to take a higher risk than their followers because the former probably have more resources other than social capital available.

In sum, HAUG provides a rational choice model that is useful for explaining chain migration. It makes use of the abovementioned hypotheses on social networks and even includes different life cycle events in order to arrive at a genetic explanation of migration (cf. HAUG 2000: 140ff). The cumulative migratory process is explained coherently using threshold and diffusion models (like MASSEY et al. 1993 and FAIST 2000; see also the section on the relational approach). However, the model is not immune to general critique of rational choice models, namely that actors are regarded as rational where they are only „bounded rational“ (SIMON 1957). Haug, indeed, discusses framing models to bolster this general weakness but does not integrate these insights coherently.

Multi-Level Analytic Models

Multi-level approaches, like the theory of cumulative causation (MASSEY 1990) or the analysis carried out by MÜLLER-MAHN (2000) combine multiple levels of analysis with a longitudinal perspective. As shown in detail in the section on general models, they provide a detailed review of interconnections among individual behavior, household strategies, community structures and national political economies. They indicate that inter-level and inter-temporal dependencies are inherent to the migration process and, therefore, give it a strong internal momentum. The dynamic interplay between network growth and individual labor migration, migration remittances and local income distributions creates powerful feedback mechanisms that lead to the cumulative causation of migration. These mechanisms are reinforced and shaped by macrolevel relationships within the larger political economy.

Although MASSEY and associates (1998: 57) assume that these models are testable using a combination of individual-and aggregate-level data and longitudinal data, it is doubtful that such

⁹ translation by TF; emphasis in the original

¹⁰ translation by TF

comprehensive data on all variables is available to test the whole model¹¹. The approach can be viewed as a comprehensive attempt to model migration processes. It is inappropriate, though, for conceptualising migration decision-making.

The Relational Approach

This concept was developed by THOMAS FAIST who was looking for an explanation for general migratory¹² flows using social capital and migration networks concepts while refining rational choice and systems approaches. His modelling was influenced by references made by Portes (1995) to relational aspects in studies of ethnic self-employment in the field of economic sociology. „The terrain on which migration processes play out lies beyond the agents themselves. A relational analysis neither denies individual agency nor disregards macro-structures.“ (FAIST 2000:17) In his eyes, this approach is very different from “social science based on categories and attributes” (ibid.) and builds on concepts of social and symbolic ties, social capital, local assets and the transnational social space. “In a nutshell, the two puzzles of simultaneous relative immobility and mass migration, and concomitant transnational spaces and immigrant adaptation are inextricably related. Migrants usually cannot transfer social capital abroad without pioneer migrants and brokers who help in establishing migrant networks and link up with institutions in migration networks. Chain and mass migration develop when social capital does not function as a local asset but as a transnational transmission belt. Once social capital is internationally transferable, adaptation in the country of destination or readaptation in the emigration country proceeds on a new level – in transnational social spaces.“ (ibid.)

Modelling migration processes, FAIST distinguishes between three different levels of consideration: the micro-level (degree of freedom / autonomy of the individual), the meso-level (relations between individuals and groups) and the macro-level (surrounding opportunity structures). According to the author, an individual has three different possibilities to react to a change in her opportunity structure: in situ adaptation, voice or exit. These options are always related to the degree of freedom possessed by an individual. In situ adaptation refers to staying in the place of origin and adapting to the new change, voice means to influence the change made and exit is the option to migrate. The meso-level, then, is the explanatory level for actions taken.

FAIST conceptualises migration decision-making by extending network theory, which he considers too structural (cf. FAIST 2000: 16 & 54), beyond the mere consideration of ties. He differentiates between social and symbolic ties (cf. ibid.: 15). Social ties are the linkages between persons, i.e. they exist when persons interact with each other. Symbolic ties, on the other hand, are assumed to be shared or common meanings, memories, future expectations and symbols of participants of a group. In our opinion this distinction is dispensable and does not increase the value of the model; rather, it mixes up the clear concept of social ties. This is especially true when FAIST further defines social capital as “[...] those resources that help people or groups to achieve their goals in ties and the assets inherent in patterned social and symbolic ties that allow actors to cooperate in networks and organizations¹³, serving as a mechanism to integrate groups and symbolic communities.” (ibid.: 102) Social capital is

¹¹ MÜLLER-MAHN tests the concept qualitatively using anthropological methods.

¹² Incomprehensibly, FAIST restricts the definition of migration to a residence period abroad of more than three months (FAIST 2000: 18). This conceptualisation leaves important “new forms” of migration unconsidered, like forms of shuttle migration stated by MOROKVASIC (2004).

¹³ FAIST is also quite unclear about the distinction of categories like network, group and organisation

used here in two different ways: first, as the resources and strategies individual actors can mobilise through ties and second, as properties of co-operation in networks. "This conceptual sinew helps to delineate the concrete mechanisms of transfer and convertibility of migrants' capital across nation-state borders. It produces a tight and rich coupling between mobility and immobility, between migration and post-migration processes." (ibid.: 14) The conclusion is that social capital (and networks through which social capital is transferred) is the driving force behind the decision to stay or move (after a significant change in the opportunity structure). Social capital works as a local asset in local networks and as a transmission belt in migrant networks (ibid.: 123). Because individuals face varying degrees of difficulty to transfer social capital from one place to another and to utilize it, different forms of migration emerge (non-migration, circular, return, family, seasonal migration) (cf. FAIST 1997: 203).

The functions of social capital, which works through mechanisms of obligations, reciprocity and solidarity, (selection of potential migrants; diffusion of migration; bridging networks, groups, organisations and adaptation of migrants in place of destination and in place of origin after return) determine the migration process (cf. FAIST 2000: 121ff). This is because, from a individuals' view, social capital offers access to resources of others, offers improved information as well as control and authority over others (cf. ibid.: 111ff). From the point of view of collectives, it facilitates co-operation and reduces costs (cf. ibid.: 103). Migration decisions are therefore made regarding access to and the content of networks and depend primarily on trust towards significant others; cost-benefit calculations only arise thereafter (cf. ibid.: 38) "The most relevant units constituting meso-levels are households and families, groups of kinship, the reference community, but also friends and acquaintances in the workplace, and groupings such as ethnic, religious and political associations." (FAIST 1997: 204)

The migration decision-making process is divided up into pioneer migration and the formation of networks with a subsequent diffusion of migration (cf. FAIST 2000: ch. 6).

The emergence of a migrant network is explained by employing threshold models of collective action (GRANOVETTER 1978; MACY 1991; MARWELL et al. 1993). However, the very first migration, the pioneer migration remains unexplained. FAIST (2000: 149ff) sums up the hypotheses for the process of setting up a migrant network as follows:

- (1) many ties among individuals and groups promote collective action within networks at the place of origin
- (2) the content of the ties needs to extend the specific reciprocity and focused solidarity (that appears in close kinship based groups) to a generalised reciprocity and diffuse solidarity of a however bounded group (e.g. religiously, ethnically, nationally bounded)
- (3) network centralisation tends to have a positive momentum on the building up process of networks
- (4) the value of centralisation increases with an increasing heterogeneity of benefits derived from social capital; this helps to circumvent hindering brokers, viz. gatekeepers
- (5) on the other hand, brokers are important as focus persons by influencing small subgroups in large networks to make the large network migrating

FAIST (2000: 151) concludes that broker-induced territorial exits are the rule. "In most instances, a relatively small cadre of highly interested and resourcefully tied people produces migrant networks." (ibid.) The selection of migrants thereafter is done by organisational recruitment, personal contacts or brute force¹⁴ (ibid.: 145).

¹⁴ the latter aspect refers to politically induced or natural hazard induced migration

The further development of the migration network and the evolution of chain migration is explained by employing concepts of innovation diffusion (COLEMAN et al 1966, ROGERS 1995). These concepts explain, similar to the cumulative causation theory, self-feeding mechanisms of migration¹⁵.

FAIST builds a coherent relational approach for explaining migration which shows the importance of social networks at each stage (start & acceleration, climax, deceleration) of the migration process. He even discusses the immobility question¹⁶ and the concentration of migrants¹⁷ in some places of the world. Although he claims to go beyond previous research on social networks and migration, which explains the directions of migration but not the volume (FAIST 1997: 188), his concept does not fulfill this claim. In this respect, he can only provide general causal hypotheses. Furthermore, the approach cannot explain the crucial pioneer migration phase.

Conclusion

Having addressed various approaches to explaining migrant decision-making, it is important to reflect on the question posed by FAWCETT (1989: 679): "Can we focus on labor market data and ignore the cultural dimensions without serious loss of explanatory power?" We think the approaches presented here make clear that it is not reasonable to leave social and cultural dimensions aside. Moreover, social networks are crucial to explaining conclusively migration processes and decision-making.

As BOYD (1989: 642) states: "migration should be understood as a contingency of historically generated social, political and economic structure in host and destination countries channeled through social relationships which impact on individuals and groups." If we take this as the point of departure to evaluate the approaches presented, all of which try to integrate social network effects, the *micro-economic models* (as far as they were considered) seem inadequate. They incorporate social interactions only on an aggregate level and, hence, can only describe correlations without explaining the causations or individual migration decision-making. The *social network hypotheses* presented should all be taken into account when conclusively modelling the decision-making process, although they do not represent independent theories. By contrast, the *multi-level approaches* are the most comprehensive models. In our opinion, they address important factors and are able to explain migration processes conclusively. However, they are not very feasible for testing because of the amount and quality of data required and the difficulty involved in obtaining such data. More practicable is the extensive model developed by HAUG, which uses *rational choice* theory. Shortcomings here are the rationality assumption of the potential migrants and the difficulty involved in testing some of the hypotheses she makes. Finally, the relational approach of FAIST does provide a substantial model for explaining migration and decision-making process on a relational basis, taking into account individual and structural dimensions. The main impediment here is that it cannot explain the initial and crucial phase of migration, the pioneer phase. Also, the relational analysis can only account for general causations and not the volume of migration.

¹⁵ While the cumulative mobility concept proposed by Faist (2000: 155f) is conclusive, the cumulative causation of immobility proposed is not: "The idea is that decisions to remain immobile contribute to subsequent immobility [...]" (ibid.: 129) This is not conclusive because, without a significant change, people do not decide "not to migrate". Hence, there cannot be a self-energising effect because they just do not decide.

¹⁶ In FAIST's words (2000: ch. 5): "why are there so few migrants out of most places?"

¹⁷ Or as FAIST (2000: ch. 6) puts it: "why so many migrants out of so few places?"

However, especially the rational choice and relational models are good starting points for a better understanding of migration decision-making. They point to the fact that network theories (and their derivatives, the diffusion models) as well as threshold models of collective action are valuable to consider, particularly when one is interested in the explanation of emerging migrant networks. What should be considered in future research is also that all theories presented here have a blind spot on the gender issue. HEERING et al. (2004: 326) show that migratory patterns and migration decision-making is likely to be gender dependent. This must be included in future models on migration decision-making.

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