

CHANGING TRENDS OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN THE REGION OF SZEKLERLAND¹

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Abstract

Migration for the purpose of employment is an important social phenomenon. The following study provides insight into the situation of labor migration in Szeklerland after the change of regime. It outlines the most important trends that define this social process from 1990 to the present and indicates the changes along which the different periods of labor migration can be separated. The study discusses the changing perceptions of the connection between migration and development. The last subchapter contains an analysis about the phenomenon of decisionmaking in the context of new lifestyle trends resulting from migration.

Keywords: labor migration, Szeklerland, development, migration decision

Introduction

Labour migration to foreign countries has been an ever-present social phenomenon in the Szeklerland area since the change of regime. Inhabitants of the region were quick to seize the opportunities of travelling and working abroad created by the post-1989 period, being a locally widespread phenomenon with several underlying reasons. We may mention at the outset that the livelihood difficulties experienced prior to the regime change in Romania (shortage of staple foods and household goods, challenges in meeting the needs of household management) rendered it impossible to meet the bare necessities of life to the point

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that residents of the area saw foreign employment as their best and quickest solution for making up for the wants listed above. Secondly, reference needs to be made to a social historical fact according to which employment of a shorter or longer duration far away from home functioned/functions as a practice woven into the fabric of culture that often proved to be applicable as a solution to the everyday problems of the people living there. The region's inhabitants opted for the direction and duration of labour migration and defined the goals to be achieved in accordance with the political-economic situation of the specific era.

The dynamics and intensity of labour migration characteristic of the area sparked the interest of researchers very early on. Placing the focus on the period following the regime change, we performed the first research on the topic (Bodó 1996) in the framework of WAC – Centre for Regional and Anthropological Research, Miercurea Ciuc, in the years 1995-1996. This was followed by many similar programmes addressing the issue systematically, while several other projects were launched whose central point was not migration yet they touched upon this question as well. Starting from the mid-2000s, the migration research workgroup established within the Department of Social Sciences at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania also joined the research efforts. Our investigations first of all follow the approach and methodology adopted by cultural anthropology, being complemented with relevant results of sociological surveys. Over the years, several hundreds of interviews were conducted with migrant workers emigrated abroad from the region. In the course of the related analyses, we sought to integrate stakeholders' migration experiences into the social-cultural context of the region. We endeavoured to provide a picture of this phenomenon that presents the major particularities of migration prevailing in the region on the one hand and that reveals the trend-like changes along which the periodization of the more than two-and-a-half-decade-long process is outlined on the other hand (Bodó 2008, Biró–Bodó 2009). The phenomenon shows a correlation with international migration trends and at the same time bears the features corresponding to the local cultural patterns.

In what follows, I will provide a brief outline of these trend-like changes and the periods corresponding to them. A characteristic feature of the post-1989 period is that migrants keep the receiving (social) environment at a distance and focus on the money they can earn, making up for the shortages they face at home being the exclusive goal of their travel. Already starting from the early 2000s, a shift can be

observed in labour migrants' attitude, showing the signs of transnationalization. This means that foreign workers no longer seclude themselves from the alien world and do not see making money as their sole motivation and a form of migrant life, but exploring the alien world and living it to a certain extent are also considered essential aspects. Migration in this case entails neither distancing from the foreign environment nor breaking away from home, but it facilitates attachment to two places in the same time. This shift is made possible by certain factors that can be associated with an increased ease of mobility, simplified forms of communication, and not least foreign employment becoming formalized. Besides, recent years have seen the emergence of a third era in this respect. This period can still be marked by features of transnational migration, but this time change is indicated first of all by certain migrant attitudes that point to the automatization of the phenomenon (people travel abroad to work even though circumstances in their homeland are not that compelling anymore; therefore, it is not only push factors that prevail, but pull factors are also given a major role) – the duration of foreign employment is increasingly extended, it becomes unforeseeable, and there are no clearly defined objectives that would place time limits thereon. Priority is attached to project-based approach that relies on rapid and not always predictable job transitions instead of long-term planning (Bodó 2012, 2016a,b).

The Relationship between Migration and Development in the Light of International and Romanian Experiences

The present study attempts to present but a small segment – as part of a large-scale analysis – of the research on labour migration in the Szeklerland area, highlighting the relationship between migration and development. Prior to that, a brief introductory review will make references to the studies of Haas (2010), de Haan (2000), and Taylor (1999) in a bid to outline the crucial points of paradigm shift emerging in the works examining the relationship of migration and development. Overviewing the relationship between labour migration and development theory approaches is particularly suitable for promoting the consideration of labour migration phenomena as a natural social process.

The first of these I would like to mention is the neoclassical migration theory that attaches a key role to migrants in evening out the developmental differences

between the various regions. This approach (Bertram 1986, Fraenkel 2006), which we may consider the optimistic branch of migration theories, looked on migration as a factor resulting in equalization between countries/regions of origin and countries/regions of destination. They found that the individual utilizations observed in the migrant-producing environment would be aggregated (e.g. money sent home) and would set in motion macro-level development processes therein. This is a primarily economic approach and does not take into account the sociocultural aspects of labour migration.

The above-described optimistic scenario discussing the relationship of migration and development will later switch to a more pessimistic script (see Taylor 1999), as investigations revealed that this process leads but to a fleeting success, and the negative effects of the phenomenon are becoming increasingly present: social disintegration is gaining momentum, dependency and inequality are intensifying, worsening levels of poverty can be perceived in the environment of origin, and labour migration also promotes permanent departure from one's original milieu.

A more nuanced take on labour migration will subsequently (Capello 2007, Jenkins 2000) regard family and household as the defining unit thereof, approaching the phenomenon from the perspective of livelihood. In this scenario, migration efforts are driven by a basic human need whose starting-point is the willingness to improve families' opportunities to earn a living. A related concern is local development (Sen 1999): residents of a given area take the cultural paradigms specific of their region as the guidelines along which they perceive the lifestyle scenarios they can choose from. Accordingly, the effects produced by labour migration are manifested in migrants' individual efforts in such a way that they can become elements of the individual and regional/local development (de Haas 2010). Under this approach, the role of macro-level impacts seems to be minor compared to that of the family and the individual.

Research materials on labour migration from Romania following the regime change also give a prominent role to the analysis of the connection between migration and development. The study published by a group of authors consisting of Anghel, Botezat, Cosciug, Mana, and Roman (2016) introduces labour migration from Romania directed towards Western Europe as the most dynamic process in this respect in the European area. Considering the socioeconomic effects of labour migration subsequent to the regime change, researchers examine the economic implications observable in the homeland in the wake of the remittances sent to the

country of origin and attempt to assess the extent to which return migration helps launching and operating enterprises in the home country.

As yet another researcher looking into the situation of migration and development in Romania after the political changeover, Feraru (2011) also places the focus on the effects produced by remittances but at the same time calls attention to the need of performing further microanalyses with a view to investigating the phenomenon beyond the macroeconomic indicators, as examining the effects of remittances reveals that these are mostly achieved at the micro-level, i.e. at the level of family economies and settlements.

Several national and regional research and publications are connected to the name of Dumitru Sandu (2000a,b), their central topic being labour migration following the regime change. If we direct our attention to the sections of these works that focus on development, we will find that the financial gain produced by migrants becomes apparent first of all in family economies and through attempts at improving individual/family livelihood. The most typical cases include: covering current household expenses, paying debts, housing construction or renovation, purchasing durable goods, increasing welfare, or children's schooling.

Anghel's (2009) case study is focused on a Romanian town and presents how in the context of a given settlement migration appears in the development of inhabitants much rather than in that of the settlement, while a further analysis (Badescu–Stoian–Tanase 2006) deals in particular with the cultural effects of migration, viewing its utilization as some sort of social capital.

The Relationship of Migration and Development Based on Research Experiences in the Szeklerland Area

In what follows, I will outline several aspects of the research experiences that are related to the migration process from the region of Szeklerland to foreign countries in the period following the regime change and that look into the correlation between migration and development. In the early 90s, the effects of migration materialized undoubtedly as a financial gain aiming to make up for the shortages experienced over the preceding decades. Later, the relationship of migration and development took on a new dimension as a consequence of transnational features (Bodó 2016a). In this period, development continues to appear most dominantly in the context of the

family home, and we can see few examples of financial benefit produced by labour migration that would contribute to the economic prosperity of the source region. Although we can find some examples of launching successful enterprises, there is a much higher number of cases where the money earned is invested in the households. Just as with international and Romanian research experiences, results obtained in Szeklerland suggest that money sent/brought home is spent on improving housing conditions, purchasing new motorcars, and acquiring durable goods.

We should take notice, however, of certain factors that, besides financial gain, point to some forms of utilization that may act indirectly as a development factor for the environment of origin. Above all, I will mention the phenomena of tacit knowledge and tacit investment. In terms of labour migration, the issue of brain drain comes up very often: this is used in reference to the phenomenon during which the migrant-producing environment loses some of its productive, innovative manpower owing to the migration abroad of part of its skilled workforce. Countering this term, new phrases emerged such as brain circulation or brain gain, indicating that migrants acquire different types of knowledge during their work abroad, and they can convert it into material capital upon their return home – provided that their home environment is open to new knowledge. In this case, work experience means knowledge capital that can be invested, but life experience and knowledge gained in another culture, through leading a different lifestyle, operating under a different timetable, and being adapted to a different work culture can also become development factors.

Learning itself can become a factor able to facilitate the development of the originating environment. We encountered two cases where we could observe the concrete possibility of linking labour migration and learning. One of them is when learning is an explicit motivation – besides earning money – underlying labour migration, and the knowledge gained in the process can be put to use in the home environment with a view to improving the chances on the labour market. The other phenomenon connected to learning is when labour migration income is used to cover the costs of the children's further education or, if we are talking about young migrant workers, to pay their own tuition fees.

I should also mention here the utilization aimed at improving the families' quality of life. This means a development that cannot be measured with the metric of money: it is not explicitly a financial increase but a set of changes occurred in terms of value orientation, regarded as an effect of working abroad. A shift away from

material values towards post-material ones that comes into view in the families' everyday life indicates that with plenty of time to observe another culture migrants incorporate some changes into their homelife that is gradually shifting value dimensions towards recreation, leisure time spent together with family members, and changes in the relationship between each other (moving away from paternalistic relationship to forms of partnership). Influence on family lifestyle can be first of all observed in the case of young families, and subsequent research addressing this issue will bring to light how family welfare and well-being can be interconnected in these lifestyle changes.

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The chapter below makes part of a study that investigates changing lifestyle tendencies emerging in the context of labour migration with regard to Szeklerland, with particular focus on the dimensions of value orientation and consumption, elements of labour migration connected to learning, and changing trends in migration-related decision making. These thematizations within the new possibilities of approaching migration and development are turning towards the dimensions of lifestyle reaching beyond material aspects.

The research was conducted under the sponsorship of MTA's (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) *Domus* programme, the analysis also having been carried out within its framework.

The present research – as a sequel to previous years' investigation on migration – revealed that labour migration from Szeklerland had taken on increasingly transnational features, also pointing out that the individual's role in migration attitudes is coming more and more into the foreground. Albeit family environment continues to be an essential factor, an increasingly dominant feature of the labour migration process will be the emphatic integration of these "impacts" into individual lifestyle. These trends can be observed in certain elements of the migration process such as learning, consumption, decision models, and changes in the related attitudes.

The analysis follows four aspects and is structured into four subchapters – namely: (1) consumption and investment, (2) ways of spending leisure time, (3) learning as investment in human capital, and (4) making decision with regard to labour migration. The subsequent paragraphs will be discussing the fourth subchapter.

Decision Making on Labour Migration

When it comes to migration, leaving one's own environment is preceded by a reflection process of a shorter or longer duration followed by the decision. The place, actors, and social environment of decision making are crucial factors of the migration process. It makes a difference whether the individual considering working abroad can take the decision by him-/herself or s/he needs the permission, consent, or approval of someone else. Decision making is influenced by sociocultural factors that do not only highlight the phenomenon of migration but place it in the context of the specific family, kinship, and local environment. The micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of society (state, local, family) have different approaches towards the individual's migration plans, and these attitudes may create any number of situations between the two extremes of prohibition and individual free choice that can influence migration attitudes.

The new economics of labour migration looked into migrants' behaviour in the early 90s and once again put the spotlight on the family and on migrants' source household (Massey et al. 1993, Stark 1991) as the new contexts of the individual's migration behaviour – this has also become the centre of interest that endeavoured to contextualize migration-related decision making.

Decision making in regard to labour migration from Szeklerland has developed in conformity with the changes in the migration phenomenon throughout the past two and a half decades. Investigating foreign employment that started with great impetus following the political changeover, we found that migrants' efforts were directed at putting their money earned working abroad to use so as to make good the accumulated deficits of family households. Relevant decisions have also been made within the family environment or quite frequently even in wider (social) relationships, including relatives and neighbours. According to the practice dating back to the pre-1989 period, cooperation was one of the most effective ways of managing the consequences of shortage economy. Hence, a high degree of cooperation between the family members, relatives, and partly neighbours/circles of friends became necessary, which thus exceeded the context of any single family and brought the individual's opportunities for action into the dense network of mutual assistances and returns of favour. As a corollary, the individual's leaving the family household every now and then during the years after the regime change (may have) caused disruptions whose elimination required setting in motion the very same networks that had already been

established in the years of shortage economy. Therefore, decisions could only be made with much more careful planning, with much greater deliberation, and with the involvement of a wider network of relationships. A change occurred in this situation starting with the 2000s. With the intensification of globalization trends, migration acquired increasingly transnational features. All of this engendered a strong individualization process, which in turn brought about changes in migration-related decision making. This time, coming to a decision about foreign employment is not influenced anymore by the wider network of relationships and not necessarily by the family but by the individual him-/herself. Having said that, taking such a decision does not affect the individual alone, as each and every migrant has their own family environment that – even if does not fully reserve the right to decide – formulates its opinion, acknowledges it, or objects to it. Although it does not act as a barrier, it still (may) exert(s) a certain degree of influence on the individual's determination.

A number of other factors also make their contribution to the individualization of decision making:

- Some of the benefits earned while working abroad are also put to use outside the family household. It is not an uncommon occurrence that utilization, investment, or spending of the income also takes place based on individual considerations, as the objective pursued is often connected to the individual's ideas.
- It continues to be a common situation that foreign employment is put at the service of the family's material prosperity, serving the pursuance of a common goal. Nonetheless, even these cases show that the very decision determining the foreign employment of one or two family members remains primarily within the competence of the migrant(s) concerned. This situation is also brought about by the increasingly transnational characteristic of labour migration from Szeklerland: leaving the region behind cannot be described anymore by the paradigms of the Big Leap, the great departure, but it is much rather seen as a "normal", now widespread phenomenon that does not necessarily call for careful considerations on the part of the entire family. All the same, materials collected during the fieldwork suggest that some differences can be observed when it comes to decision making: the progressively individualized decision-making process shows certain variations along

different groups and situations. These differences become most visible through the categories of age and gender.

Decision Making According to Age

When migration-related decisions are discussed in correlation with age, we cannot avoid those age-dependent preferences that lead a migrant to decide for working abroad. The ideas formed about reaping the gains from working abroad evidently differ for each age category also in terms of how much they are attached to the given family household and to what extent they affect the individual alone.

Young People

With regard to the young age-group, it must be observed at the outset that they tend to be more heavily present among labour migrants in Szeklerland in the past decade. In addition to their numerical growth, it is a relevant development that their symbolic weight has grown too in this area. The “rejuvenation” of labour migration does not imply, however, that young people have gained some kind of a leading position in the mental acceptance of the phenomenon, but it rather indicates that labour migration from Szeklerland has become a pluralistic phenomenon without an age category (as middle-aged men were in the first half of the 90s) that would substantially determine the phenomenon.

Implicitly, young migrants deal with the issue at a far more individualized level. Their goals are much more individual goals such as: quenching their thirst for adventure; getting to know another world, another culture; learning foreign languages; acquisition of consumer goods for their own account (cars, electronic equipment, housing); supplementing tuition costs; instruction/training; learning. Experiences gained among peer group members and friends play into the decision-making process with particular emphasis. They usually let their family know about their plans once they have already arrived at the decision to seek foreign employment. The interview subjects almost invariably reported that their family had noted with concern the decision they had come to. Some parents are very protective of their child and find it hard to accept his/her decision, while some others have an easier time convincing their family members that they have made the right decision – this latter scenario is

particularly the case in families with a history of foreign employment. Family antecedents make decisions and accepting them much easier.

They were actually rather supportive, it's just that they were afraid of how things would turn out, as I'd be staying with a foreign family, a family of total strangers – I didn't have any information, and it was unofficial, so if anything would happen... In retrospect, if I were to leave now, I might not even take that step. I've heard so many things since then, and I could've ended up with any kind of family, so I got very lucky. Really, they were just being protective, otherwise they supported me, as I explained it to them – and my parents would understand it – that there was my window of opportunity since once I started working, I'd have to take a leave of absence or would have to quit, so complications would arise, and starting a family would not be far ahead either, and they understood it. (woman, 24 years)

Young people who have become somewhat independent and are not completely dependent on their parents anymore (have finished their studies or have already gained some experience in the domestic labour market) are much more likely to make individual decisions, and virtually their families only take notice of their decision. Also, in the case of young people still studying (having a student status), their family environment does not create barriers on the path of the young worker, while it is true that they usually plan to leave for a short duration. A greater parental concern is expressed about the decision or repeated attempts to dissuade are made on the part of the family in cases when the young person still pursuing his/her studies is also planning on the temporary suspension of his/her university studies in order to leave for an extended period of time. However, experience shows that even in the above-described cases these young adults manage to push on with their employment plans.

Middle-Aged People

The representation of middle-aged individuals is still very high among the labour migrants from Szeklerland. They do not play the decisive role they had one and a half decades earlier, yet their number is still considerable. Reaping the rewards of migration in their case takes place much rather within the context of the family. This is also accounted for by the fact that a large part of them have already started a family some time ago, and their efforts are obviously more focused on improving or

maintaining the family's material prosperity. It should be noted, however, that the decision – of whether or not to go working abroad – is taken individually even in the greatest majority of these cases. Discussing the matter with one's spouse, consulting with him/her about it is certainly very important, but the interviews made revealed that the decision was relatively easily accepted in the respective families. The small part of these goals are individual ones, just as in young people's case: extending and/or modernizing the family house, purchasing a motorcar, paying for children's education, less often travelling, leisure activities, or recreation. Among members of this group, we can encounter more frequently the push factor of unemployment or low earnings, and a surprising number of respondents also mentioned that this was their only chance of seeing the world – while making money.

To this very day, my parents are against me going abroad, but if there's no other job opportunity at home, there's nothing left for me but to get a job abroad. My daughters have already got used to me having to leave, as I do it only so that I can help them. (woman, 46 years)

The Elderly

Representatives of the ageing population are not missing either from the group of migrants, being present, of course, in smaller numbers. Our research experiences have shown that making individual decisions about foreign employment is even more typical of this group compared to the middle-aged respondents. They communicate their decision to the family only after they have given due deliberation to the matter. As a rule, the family members have mixed feelings about the decision, but they accept it after all. Here too, the goals are mostly family-related, especially when the younger generations need to be helped out. All the same, cases are not uncommon either when the no longer young, retired person lives apart from his/her family and decides for foreign employment with an eye to improving his/her living conditions: renovation, modernization, or better furnishment of his/her own separate house, health maintenance, travelling, or recreation. We also know of some examples when the desire to explore the world was present as an exceptionally strong driving force. By the account of our elderly interlocutors, the younger members of their families were rather surprised than resisting to the idea. It must be pointed out that the image

presented about the elderly participants was formed essentially based on women's experiences, as we have found and interviewed more female workers than male ones.

Well, at first, they didn't even want to talk about it or hear about it at all, but then – as I always tell them I'm doing well – they stood by me after all when I let them know I'd be going to Hungary. They understood that I could use the money, and this way I had a better chance to help them too. And I'd like to provide for my dear grandchild in every way. They took the news well; of course, I'll be missing them and they'll be missing me too, but if one can earn a better living there, then it's more worthwhile. The relatives also took it reasonably well although I figured they'd be asking where an oldster like me was going. But it wasn't that way, they even supported me. (woman, 63 years)

Decision Making According to Gender

Women

An essential preliminary observation that should be made with regard to women is that their participation in the field of labour migration shows a sharp upward rise. We may call this a trend-like change not only at the level of Szeklerland but also internationally. For some time, women's role in migration was seen merely as a function of men's determination. As such, women's decision making was not given prominence either in the body of relevant research, especially in situations where there was a high level of women's dependence on the male family members. Considering the region under study (i.e. Szeklerland), the situation is somewhat altered by the fact that here women's finding employment away from home has for a long time constituted a culturally accepted practice (at first, working as domestic servants in the town, while later, during the years of socialism, taking on jobs in various factories and thus subjecting themselves to a lifestyle of constant commuting that came with it). One of my previous research on women's foreign employment has already stressed (Bodó 2017) that in the present context women take their own decisions and communicate them with their families only once they themselves have already become convinced that they have made the right decision and are able to make the other family members as well see things their way. Their motivations vary

according to age: young girls formulate their ideas in a way typical of young people in general, this age-group showing no effective difference between men and women. On the other hand, middle-aged women take their decisions of leaving after more careful thinking and longer deliberation than men do. We can find among them individuals who have lost their jobs or do not earn enough or some private life issues (became widowed or divorced) make them take a serious step, i.e. foreign employment. In fact, these decisions are not hard to make because of the strong resistance they face (mostly from family members) – since they can overcome it with relative ease – but because leaving the family household needs to be organized more carefully in their case. Once they have successfully cleared away this obstacle as well (organization of domestic work, of family life), they no longer have problem taking the decision.

My mother supported me on the one hand, while my husband was against it on the other, as I had never been abroad before and then why would I want to venture into the unknown, and he was concerned about what would happen... jumping into the fire for the first time... but then we had a talk, and he also agreed that his salary alone wouldn't be enough to pay for the graduation ceremonies and the university studies, and I'd better gave it a try too. Then he finally agreed. The relatives agreed right from the start and told me I was making the right decision to go, as I couldn't earn enough here to make ends meet, while there I could make more money in a couple of months than I would do here over the course of a year. (woman, 44 years)

Men

Young men take their decisions under circumstances that are no different from the young women's. Their reports revealed that they had made their decisions independently and their family had not created any obstacle to their decision. Their goals were mostly individual goals, as already mentioned above with regard to the young age-group. For the middle-aged, the purpose of leaving can be considered far less individualistic, as for the most part they are having in sight the improvement of their family's livelihood. They stated most emphatically that their decision had been backed up by the family and they had had an easy time breaking the initial resistance, smoothing the differences of opinion. Many explain this by claiming that their decision was so logical, so practical, in fact the only appropriate one, that there was

really nothing to consider or argue about it. Although fewer in number, but some of them referred to the man's role as the head of the family, which entitles them to expect that the family members should accept their decisions without disputing or resisting.

Indeed, I was very young when I first went abroad to find a job. My parents were reluctant to agree, but I was a very stubborn child, and so I went off into the real world. My little brother remained at home, and that meant a lot to them. Neither mum nor I regretted that I had gone to take my chance. No doubt, I had a very tough time back then, was homesick, and wanted to come home almost every week, but there was no way to do that, and I'm glad I was able to overcome my homesickness and stay there for six years.
(man, 27 years)

A common characteristic of the studied population is that decisions are made at the level of the individual. For young people, the purpose of labour migration is also formulated along individual ideas. Albeit the middle-aged and the elderly make their decisions themselves, the family context as a much stronger determining factor of the migrant work's purpose plays a more prominent acknowledging, accepting role.

Regional Development Policy Aspects

Given that labour migration is an essential regional feature, it must be taken into account if we are to deal with its future fate. Experiences gained through research programmes indicate at the same time that labour migration from the Szeklerland area to foreign countries is a regional modernization factor of utmost importance. Individuals working abroad convey a substantial amount of knowledge, experience, and technological know-how to the source environment, bring home new tools, as well as new values, norms, and lifestyle models. Labour migration does not only come with financial gain, but it means acquiring new knowledge and skills, being in fact a certain kind of learning and socialization process.

Its dominant practice in the 90s has gradually transformed. Those undertaking labour migration are now making efforts to remain attached to both places, their source environment and the milieu wherein migrant work takes place. Looking at it from the perspective of the Szeklerland area, this relationship is particularly favourable to all sorts of transfers given that the countries chosen as the location of migrant work can be usually characterized by parameters that qualify as examples to

be followed, adopted, used, and learned by the actors of Szeklerland. Whereas before bringing home financial assets, tools, and technologies constituted the elements of the transfer directed towards the region, this has by now come to include a series of further components. A growing number of actors involved in labour migration look upon values, models of individual lifestyle and family living, methods of relationship management and organization as features to introduce to and adopt in their homeland. Therefore, it may be said that this practice represents a considerable innovation potential for the region. And this is a development policy reserve whose analysis and regional exploitation deserves our full attention. It is quite apparent that the different age-groups and professional categories take part in creating the innovation potential in various ways and to varying degrees. Members of the young generation, the women, and individuals and families wishing to transcend the lifestyle and role models of their immediate environment are the actors who “learn” the most and “transfer” the most towards their homeland. Needless to say, they all endeavour to make use of the elements brought home and to adopt them in their source environment, and they have, of course, varying degrees of success. However, it is conceivable that we can find and adopt incentives and procedures that could grant a greater, more prominent role in the region to the accumulated innovation potential as compared to its present exploitation rate. In any case, the first step taken towards this end may be the acceptance of labour migration in the area as a natural and essential regional component.

All this may stand for the beginning of a regional thematization turn, but it must be borne in mind that its practical application is not an easy task to handle. New trends of regional development, representatives of the bottom-up models in particular also prefigure that connecting the micro- and macro-levels can be a cumbersome development policy task. If the endogenous capacity represented by labour migration includes the innovation of a great many individual lifestyle models, then this is a positive fact by all means, but it does not imply that all this will mechanically fit together into a regional development. There is no guarantee that the multitude of individual innovative careers will be able to cross the structural barriers of the region without any sort of assistance. The Szeklerland area is typically characterized by – and not exclusively in the field of labour migration – a great deal of spot-like initiatives/experiments, which do not necessarily lead to structural changes. All these issues are such that exceed the scope of research in the narrow

sense, but they may carry the potential to create a productive cooperation between the researcher and the stakeholders of regional development.

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