

University of Szeged  
Faculty of Science and Informatics  
Doctoral School of Geosciences  
Department of Economic and Social Geography

**GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF RETURN MIGRATION TO  
HUNGARY**

Thesis of Ph.D. dissertation

**Gábor Lados**

Supervisor:

**Dr. Zoltán Kovács**

member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,  
professor and head of department

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## I. Research background and history

The number of migrants is growing continuously both on global and European scale. The group of migrating people are very diverse in terms of socio-economic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, education, marital status) as well as motivations (volunteer or forced migration). Migration has a number of advantages and disadvantages both for the receiving and sending countries, that need to be dealt with at the national or regional level.

Migration studies have been in the forefront of scientific research, however, return migration became more and more significant – especially in East-Central-European context – because of its opportunities for regional development (BARCEVICIUS, E. *et al.* 2012, NADLER, R. *et al.* 2016). Newly acquired professional skills and the broadened personal and business network could be beneficial for both the individual and the home country. Nevertheless, return might be experienced in many ways, which means that the transferability of these skills is not the same for each remigrant. This dissertation is aimed at the microgeographic analysis of return migration to Hungary.

In Hungary, return migration has been examined using predominantly quantitative methods (e.g. analysing socio-economic characteristics of migrants), or has been referred to in country reports on international mobility, while qualitative research on this phenomenon has been quite limited in scope (focusing e.g. on hospitality, education or aged migration) so far (RÉDEI M. 2007, ILLÉS S. 2013, KINCSES Á. 2014, IRIMIÁS A. – MICHALKÓ G. 2016). The migration process can result in significant changes in personal characteristics (e.g. identity), but in Hungarian literature there is little empirical evidence on this issue (LADOS, G. *et al.* 2013, LADOS, G. – HEGEDŰS, G. 2016, HEGEDŰS G. – LADOS G. 2017). In my doctoral thesis, I evaluated identity changes of Hungarian citizens returning from abroad based on Sussman's identity change model (SUSSMAN, N. M. 2011), which divides remigrants into four groups: affirmative, subtractive, additive and global identity shifters.

This novel approach examines return migration from the individual's point of view providing more detailed insight than other methods. With this knowledge, possibly more effective return migration policies can be developed and implemented because this approach does not regard returnees as a homogeneous group but as individuals with varying aims and problems.

## II. Research questions

Because of its multi- and interdisciplinary character, migration studies have a very diverse theoretical background. The main approaches are the neoclassical economic theories (which highlight economic and financial aspects of migration), the structural perspective (which focuses on the benefits of return migration from the viewpoint of the sending country), the transnational approach (which emphasises the differences that exist between particular geographical contexts), the migration network theory (which interprets migration as an information network among people with migration experience) or the socio-psychological approach (which underlines the changes in personal attributes of migrating individuals). From the above approaches, the latter one – socio-psychological – is used in this dissertation to examine the phenomenon of return migration.

The main research question of this dissertation is: **How do different re-migrant groups evaluate their return from abroad to Hungary?** Furthermore, I analyse the process of return and the future migration goals from different aspects.

Therefore, the principal aim of the current work is to present and evaluate the migration behaviour of different groups of Hungarian return migrants. In my research, I have examined several factors (e.g. identity change based on foreign job experience and marital status), which can provide thorough understanding of return migration to Hungary.

In addition, there is a significant emphasis **on comparing Hungarian returnees to other East-Central-European ones**. Hence, I have outlined the main features of (both out- and re-) migration in the European Union, and presented initiatives supporting return migration.

In my doctoral thesis I proposed three hypotheses. First, I evaluated the preparation for returning using the following hypothesis: ***Hungarian returnees are deliberately planning to return home***. The whole process of return is largely influenced by resources (e.g. tangible and intangible capital) that have been mobilised during migration and the individual's preparedness (CASSARINO, J-P. 2004).

The second hypothesis referred to the differences amongst returnees. One of the key themes of migration research is the extent to which migrants can find employment in their own skills. Interviewees were divided into two groups based on their foreign work experiences: low skilled (mainly ISCO 4-9) and high skilled (ISCO 1-3) remigrants.

Hence, the hypothesis stands: *High skilled returnees can better utilize their foreign work experiences on the Hungarian labour market than low skilled migrants.*

The third hypothesis concerned the continuity of migration: *due to negative experiences in post-return phase, return may be a temporary state.* In general, neither emigration nor return migration per se can be regarded as a permanent, final move. According to the literature, in many cases return migrants re-emigrate due to personal reasons (e.g. alienating from home society, feeling of isolation) or the general economic-social conditions of the home country (e.g. lower wage levels, unpredictable political environment).

### III. Methodology

During my doctoral research, I applied several methods to analyse migration processes. Based on existing databases (e.g. KSH, Eurostat, UN, ONS, IMF) I used secondary analysis to reveal the magnitude, spatial characteristics and temporal changes of out- and return migration.

I used secondary analysis of the research results of a CENTRAL EUROPE financed project, called ‘ReTurn: Regions benefitting from returning migrants’ (2011-2014), which are in line with the first hypothesis of the dissertation. During the project, an online survey was conducted among emigrants and returnees in 2012. The aim of the research was to explore the motivations for migration. Return migrants were defined as people who were aged over 15 years old and had returned to their home country after being employed abroad.

On the one hand, target groups of the questionnaire were contacted directly via e-mail, social networking websites and the online media. On the other hand, migration organizations acted as entry points to contact Hungarians living abroad (e.g. Come Home Foundation). The study covered a total sum of seven countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia) (N=1913), from which the Czech, the Polish, the Hungarian and the Slovenian samples were used for this dissertation (N=844).

Furthermore, I conducted interviews to analyse return migration and possible effects of Brexit on migration. The group of the interview partners included *i)* return migrants, *ii)* Hungarians working in the United Kingdom, and *iii)* experts who have insight on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

Interview survey with Hungarian returnees aimed to highlight the most important motivations of (re)migration and other factors behind the migration decision itself. Between 2012 and 2015 I made 48 semi-conducted interviews with Hungarians returned home, who had 1 to 10 years of foreign working experience. Demographic composition of the returnees was similar to previous international and Hungarian research results: most of them were men, from 20 to 34 years old, and had a university degree. The proportion of people returning from the United Kingdom and the United States was over-, while those returning from Germany and Austria was underrepresented in the research compared to official data.

Composing the sample, my primary goal was to select interviewees and divide them into two groups based on their foreign working experience: lower and highly skilled migrants. Then, these groups were supplemented with the category of marital status. A snowball method was used to recruit potential respondents, so interviewees offered additional people to be interviewed. The first inquiries started from a personal network of contacts, followed by additional snowballs launched through research networks, community interfaces and migration organisations. The sampling ended when there were no new perspectives or themes represented by the interviewees.

The theoretical framework of the evaluation of the research results was based on the cultural identity change model of migrants (SUSSMAN, N. M. 2011) with which it is possible to predict migration paths of different returnees in the future. The model distinguishes between several groups of return migrants according to how smooth or problematic the return process was, and how they evaluated their return. This theoretical construction could contribute to a more accurate understanding of changes in the personal traits of migrants, while also predicting potential migration decisions in the future.

Interviews were mainly conducted in neutral locations, but some meetings were held at the workplaces of returnees. In one case the interview was made via Skype, and another returned migrant refused audio tape recording so I took notes throughout the interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were analysed using a qualitative data analysing software, NVivo 11. Anonymity of the interviewees were guaranteed throughout the research by using alias.

In the dissertation the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit) was also examined, and for this purpose further interviews were conducted. This research had two separate parts. In the first one, potential interviewees have been recommended by previous respondents. I interviewed a total sum of three migrants who

were living and working in the United Kingdom via Skype between December 2016 and February 2017. These interviews were also transcribed and analysed using the above-described protocol (anonymity, NVivo 11).

Though, there is a growing number of literature dealing with Brexit, its effects on Hungarian migration are scarcely discussed. This is why I decided to conduct interviews with experts who are likely to have insight on the Brexit. I interviewed three experts in May 2018.

As a third method, content analysis was used to discover potential impacts of Brexit on migration decisions. This analysis aimed to explore migration-related opinions that can read on one of the most popular Hungarian blog dealing with migration, called 'hataratkelo.blog.hu'. With this method I could analyse narratives of migrants that were not influenced and manipulated by the media. I summarised all the migrants' opinions that referred to Brexit between 1 March 2016 (the first opinion about Brexit) and 30 June 2018. Altogether, there were 262 results, but the majority of them were linked to another website (which has almost the same name as the above blog, 'hataratkelo.hu'). Among the results, there were 61 posts related to news and statistics about Brexit or to opinions of migrants. This latter group has been narrowed by the host country of the opinion holder, so finally there were 26 opinions analysed, besides interviews.

As a final point of this dissertation, I highlighted practical utilization of the research results targeting migration organisations and decision-makers.

#### IV. Summary of the research results

This dissertation consists of two major parts. The first part is a descriptive section (chapter 3 and 4) that contains a literature review of international migration in general and a description of the main features of emigration from East-Central-Europe, including Hungary. The second one is an explanatory, analytical section (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8) that examines return migration using secondary (e.g. online survey of Re-Turn project) and primary data.

##### **1. In my doctoral research I compared the characteristics of East-Central-European returnees highlighting the main motivations for migration.**

Respondents of the questionnaire survey included: *i*) emigrants, *ii*) potential return migrants, and *iii*) returned migrants. Those, who did not want to return home to

their motherland were minority within each nationality, while the rate of return was the highest in the Polish and Hungarian samples. The length of emigration might be a reference to linkages between the migrant and the home country. In the short term (<1 year) mainly the Czechs and the Poles planned to re-migrate, while in the medium term (1-5 years) those were mostly Hungarians who had intentions to return. Hence, the results of the survey are consistent with the literature that emphasises the temporary nature of emigration (KOVÁCS É. – MELEGH A. 2000, HORVÁTH Á. 2016).

In terms of motivations for emigration, responders highlighted *i*) higher wage levels, *ii*) favourable career opportunities, and *iii*) higher living standards in the host country (Figure 1). Hungarians had the largest expected foreign salaries which might be an indicator for the effects of the global financial and economic crises in 2008 (e.g. rising mortgage interest rates). Regarding foreign salaries, Hungarian and Polish respondents had lower qualifications than their Czech and Slovenian counterparts, mirrored also by their foreign wage levels.

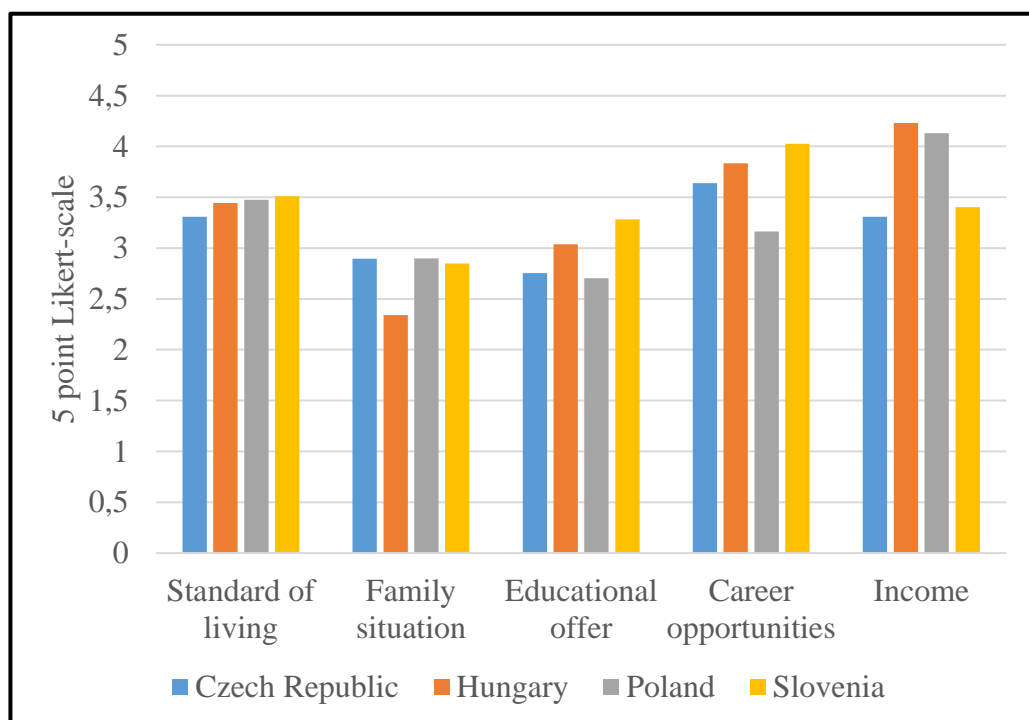


Figure 1.: Motivations for emigration of East-Central-Europeans

Source: online questionnaire of the Re-Turn project, 2012

In the case of return motivations, Czechs and Slovenians were more influenced by the relatively better living conditions at home and other macro-factors (such as social services), while Hungarians and Poles returned because of family reasons

(Table 1). The difference between return motivations suggest that Hungarians and Poles consider more important and return mainly because of micro-factors, so return initiatives in these countries should consider the role of family (e.g. initiatives should support the return of other family members too, such as reintegration into nursery, kindergarten or elementary school or support in job seeking).

	Czech Republic, N=32	Hungary, N=38	Poland, N=50	Slovenia, N=22
Standard of living	3,88	2,87	3,20	4,05
Family situation	4,00	3,53	3,72	3,91
Proximity to friends	3,65	2,87	2,90	3,45
Educational offer	2,37	2,03	2,54	2,77
Career opportunities	2,87	2,82	2,93	3,27
Income	2,81	2,39	2,66	2,90
Landscape/natural environment	2,44	2,45	2,57	3,68
Social services (child-, health-, elderly care)	2,19	2,37	2,50	3,55
Cultural life/nightlife	2,32	2,45	2,14	2,68
Social benefits system/security	2,16	2,13	2,40	3,36

Table 1.: Main motivations for return of East-Central-Europeans<sup>1</sup>

Source: online questionnaire of the Re-Turn project, 2012

## 2. I examined migration plans of Hungarian emigrants living and working in the United Kingdom in the light of Brexit.

According to the results of content analysis and interview research, four types of migration plans could be recognized among Hungarian emigrants living and working in the United Kingdom: *i*) staying on the island, *ii*) moving forward to another country, *iii*) returning home, and *iv*) doubtful. The majority of opinion holders and interviewees wanted to stay in the United Kingdom. The Brexit and its potential effects on migration were only a secondary motivation for those who

<sup>1</sup> Values are based on 5 point Likert-scale.



plan to move forward or return home. The group of doubtful migrants, however, worried to become unemployed as a consequence of the Brexit, and neither moving forward to another foreign country nor returning to Hungary were an option for them.

**3. A comparison was made between East-Central-European initiatives aimed at supporting return migration.**

Returning home from abroad is supported by several national and regional initiatives and programmes, which are different from each other in terms of goals, target groups, geographical coverage or types of support. On the one hand the most commonly used initiatives focus on re-attracting, re-integrating and re-employing migrants, and on the other hand they try to retain people at the home country. The most successful initiatives tend to support return migrants in many ways, such as re-attracting and re-employing people at the same time. Investigation of Hungarian return initiatives revealed that there had been relatively few experiences of working with re-migrants, and they focused on small target groups (e.g. researchers, young adults working in London).

**4. Based on cultural identity model of migrants, I made distinctions among Hungarian returnees.**

According to Sussman's identity change model there are four types of identity of returnees based on their relation to the cultures of the home and the host countries: affirmative, subtractive, additive and global. During the analysis the model was completed with the factors of foreign work and marital status, thus each identity shifters could be easily identified.

Returnees with affirmative identity were mostly low skilled migrants with family, who aimed to retain their original identity. Emigration was mentally challenging for them, in general there were uncomfortable working environments and conflicts with colleagues. Because of their limited language skills, they could not integrate into the host society. In addition, in most cases they worked with Hungarians, which resulted in their isolation from foreigners, so their Hungarian identity strengthened. Because of negative experiences, migration was regarded as a failure, so they experienced their return as a relief.

Subtractive returnees were mainly low skilled singles, who could improve their language skills. They had negative experiences in the return process, so the possibility of re-emigration is relatively high in this group.

Two types of return migrants could be regarded as additive identity shifters. One of them are highly skilled returnees migrating with family, while low skilled single returnees also belong to this group. Both subgroups aimed to benefit from emigration (e.g. improve language skills, acquire new skills, build social network), while hold their original identity. Besides these common characteristics, they evaluate their return differently. Returnees with family mentioned that decision for move back to Hungary was made at the household level (mainly because of the pressure from children), but they would have preferred to stay abroad. Hence, the chance for re-emigration is possible for this subgroup. Low skilled single returnees were overqualified to their foreign work but could benefit from it. They were re-employed in their original profession with their newly acquired skills (mainly language skills) in the Hungarian labour market, so they evaluated their return as success.

Finally, in most cases, global identity shifters were highly skilled single returnees, who could easily find a new job with their skills (such as management skills, use of new techniques and methods), and reached job advancement, so they could successfully improve their career life. In their case, migration appears as a conscious stage in the career strategy, because they could flexibly adapt to new working and living conditions abroad.

In the sample used for empirical research, additive identity shifters were the most common type followed by subtractive and global types. Results of the analysis are similar to the characteristics of Hong Kong and Japanese returnees, which are categorised by Sussman as negative-minded societies.

##### **5. I evaluated the utilization of foreign work experiences after return.**

The utilization of foreign work experience largely depends on newly acquired skills. In the dissertation I separated interviewees into highly and lower skilled migrants based on their foreign work experience. In migration discourses, it is widely accepted that lower skilled migrants are very likely to be affected by brain waste, as losing their knowledge during emigration. However, empirical results demonstrate that low-skilled migrants can also benefit from foreign work

experience after their return. Such useful knowledge could be, for example, the improved language skills. Almost each highly skilled returnee mentioned job advancement, improved management skills and broadened professional network as a consequence of migration. Like global identity returnees, highly skilled ones could also easily re-integrate into the Hungarian labour market due to their relationships with former employers.

#### **6. I highlighted the influence of micro- and macro-factors on migration stages.**

In the various stages of migration (before emigration, during emigration, after return) the importance of micro- (e.g. proximity to family and friends, career development, standard of living) and macro-factors (e.g. wage level, natural and working environment, host society) was emphasised by interviewees. The roles of these micro- and macro-factors were compared for lower and highly skilled returnees. There were differences in motivations for emigration, as highly skilled migrants left Hungary mainly due to micro-factors (e.g. career development), while lower skilled migrants were motivated by foreign wage levels (macro-factors) the most. During emigration both groups emphasised macro-factors, such as working moral, host society or social services of the host country, which generally gave a positive impression to the interview partners. During return to the home country mainly micro-factors played a considerable role, when family reasons and job advancement motivated migrants in their decision.

#### **V. List of publications related to the thesis**

- HEGEDŰS G. – LADOS G. 2017. A visszavándorlás és az identitásváltozás kapcsolatának vizsgálata a hazatérő magyarok példáján. *Területi Statisztika* 57. (5): 512-536.
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- LADO, G., HEGEDŰS G., KOVÁCS Z. – BOROS L. 2015. Oda és vissza – Az elvándorlás hatásainak és a visszavándorlás lehetőségeinek értékelése hazánkban. In: FÁBIÁN A. – BERTALAN L. (szerk.): *Otthon a Kárpát-medencében*. Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem Kiadó, Sopron, 115-136.

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- LADOS G. – HEGEDŰS G. 2012. A re-migráció európai és hazai lehetőségeinek értékelése a munkaerőpiac szempontjából. In: NYÁRI D. (szerk.): *A VI. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia, a MERIEXWA nyitókonferencia és a Geográfusok Országos Konferenciájának Tanulmánykötete*. SZTE TTIK Természeti Földrajzi és Geoinformatikai Tanszék, Szeged, 509-523.