NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND LABOR MIGRATION

ELENA ADUMITROAIE[1]

Abstract

Surveying existing literature, this paper investigate the influence the new information technologies have on people's decision to migrate. There is very little evidence that NITs promote migration on a large scale but there are many case studies that show how NITs can be used to influence people's opinion and experience of migration. With every new communication technology invented, what we are seeing is an increase in the range of options migrants have to communicate with their families and friends abroad and an increase in the frequency of those interactions. Attempting to illustrate both positive and negative implications of the roles of NITs in roumanian migration, this paper surveys research that demonstrates how NITs are used in maintaining family relations, in sustaining cultural identities, and in supporting a family from abroad. Then we will see how the risks associated with international migration can be mitigated by access to information concerning destinations, conditions of migration, and the maintenance of contact with family and friends, both prior to and during the migration journey. Also, the use of NITs can change the reality of living abroad through qualitatively and quantitatively enhanced linkages, which can allow migrants to maintain traditions while abroad, such as celebrating a cultural festival or religious ceremony, making friends or finding a spouse of shared cultural origins or religious background, or simply finding the products that are dear to them and originate from their countries of origins.

Keywords: new information technologies, migration, children left behind.

Introduction

The world is changing. Permanently, the old structure is diverted by the new findings and the unprecedented opportunities for transformation and development that accompany them. We live in the Information Age. Now it's sufficient to have a computer connected to the Internet and a mobile phone to get in touch with the realities of the most diverse corners of the world. Moreover, the huge development of information technologies causes substantially changes in interpersonal relationships. Currently, many relationships are developed and maintained despite large geographical distances that separate the individuals. Physical proximity is no longer a

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[1] Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi. E-mail: adumitroaie_elena@yahoo.com

prerequisite for the development of interpersonal attraction and for the birth and the maintenance of a relationship. People can exchange ideas in real time, share their emotions, even if they are hundreds or even thousands of miles away.

It seems logical to think that there is a close connection between migration and the development of NITs. In earlier times, people who chose to work abroad could only maintain their relationships with loved ones through telegrams, letters and postcards. Distance affected the speed and reliability of interpersonal contacts acting as a major obstacle when choosing a job away from home. Today cell phones, the Internet, and the reduced cost of landline telephones have significantly changed the ease and timing of keeping in touch. The ubiquity and accessibility of these new information technologies enable emigrants to remain in contact with the people from whom they are geographically distant.

The new communication services have particular significance for emigrants. For instance, by providing immediate access to individuals wherever they are located, cell phones expand the symbolic world that may be little related to the immediate practical surroundings of either speaker and intensify the domain of (migrants') social connection. Once part of a new information network, distance becomes irrelevant to those who migrate, allowing its direct, simultaneous and extensive relationships of cooperation and exchange with those left behind. In other words, although physically absents, migrants can be socially presents in life of family and friends home.

NITs strongly influence on labor migration, acting as the main agents of a global spread of the phenomenon. As Castles (2007) suggests, the new information technologies coupled with developments in transportation and cultural change are "making it normal for people to think beyond borders."Technological innovations and social changes linked to NITs are validating and reinforcing human capabilities of rapid information sharing. Awareness of proximity between countries and regions through media images and personal experiences of the world mean that ICTs are in fact "bringing the world closer together".

'Promoting' migration through new information technologies

Global media and their representations of foreign lands through news, advertisement, film and entertainment, are amongst the important sources of information available to people who are considering migration [Wood and King, 2001]. The media deliver images concerning host countries, which in the case of the developed countries may include stereotypes of prosperity, comfort, wealth and opportunity and for the developing countries, poverty, instability, and a much idolized paradise.

ICTs supplement the traditional channels of information such as word of mouth, locally advertised work opportunities and the shared experiences of family and friends who have themselves migrated. For better or for worse, these images can have tremendous impacts on the final decision to migrate and the destination chosen, especially in those for whom migration is already an option [Hargreaves and Mahdjoub, 2006].

Research has shown that individuals acquire through the use of NTIs a more realistic picture of migration, which helps them to understand and foresee the repercussions and implications of their acts [Castles, 2008].

Migration necessarily entails risks. These risks can be mitigated by access to information both prior to and during the migration journey. Access to information concerning destinations, conditions of migration, and the maintenance of contact with family and friends are important factors, especially for international migrants [Ros et al, 2006].

Studies on migrants confirmed that they owned and regularly used mobile phones to remain connected with their friends and family abroad, both during the migration journey and once they reached their final destination [Schapendonk and Moppes, 2007]. Many also confirmed use of Internet services both as preparation for the journey and throughout its process.

These services and technologies that ensure secure and rapid exchanges and communications regardless of geographical distance, have become huge business, generating substantial profits. Personal computers, internet, mobile phones, money transfer services have experienced tremendous development with the impressive growth in the number of people who choose to travel and work abroad. Also, the unprecedented growth of international migration and mobility is due to advantages in information and security offered by NTIs [Diminescu, 2007].

These services are being used every step of the way and are serving to reduce many of the risks involved, especially with irregular international migration. Opening up doors to employment, transportation, and money transfers, services offered along the way, very often through ICTs (such as access to computers and the Internet or mobile phones), mean that migrants are for example less likely to be victims of theft since they no longer need to carry large sums of money with them to cover all expenses of their crossing. "The availability of services reflects migrants' demands and facilitates the step by-step migration process that characterizes the journeys of most migrants" [Ghosh, 2006].

NTIs help maintaining relationships with family and friends back home

The Internet, emails, webcams, instant chat applications, blogs and personal websites have diversified the possibilities for interaction across distances. Emails in particular allow many migrants to stay in regular communication with family members and have for many significantly increased the quantity of messages exchanged with family members abroad [Wilding, 2006].

Online photo albums, where users can upload and share images, are also allowing migrants to document their lives abroad and give a glimpse of their daily life to family members. 'Connected relationships', where physically distant members of a family have a sense of proximity through technological mediums, is blurring the distinction between 'absence and presence', and developing a sense of being at home away from home [Wilding, 2006].

With the instantaneous delivery of email and affordable international phone calls, migrants can be involved in the daily happenings of their family to the contrary of letter writing which delivers old news. The ability to hear a person's voice and to exchange communications in real time, without the delays of international postal services, is expressed by migrants and their families are important aspects in maintaining relations at a distance [Horst, 2006].

People who migrates feel they are still a part of the family, they find the news at the same time as the others, sometimes even before them, they maintain sufficient communication so that the relationships with friends and family not to break.

"Cardboard Parents"

Bewitched by the promises of a distant and abundant land, increasingly more Romanians choose to work abroad. Perfectly adapted to the realities of the world and aware of the higher possibilities of obtaining better paid jobs abroad, Romanians easily leave their country, family and friends with the stated purpose of making money to support their family and to impress their friends. However, the emigrants soften their bitterness caused by the departure with the promises of a continuous and 'real' contact to their loved ones left home through the new and attractive technological breakthroughs.

The studies conducted in Romania in order to identify the short and medium term effects of parental separation in children, shows that while maintaining a consistent communication, parent-child relationship suffers, and the NTI cannot compensate for the physical absence of parents.

In a study conducted in 2007 by the Social Alternatives' Association the participants were asked: "How do you maintain contact with parents / parent after their/his departure to work abroad?" Respondents said in a vast majority of cases, that the preferred way of maintaining contact is by telephone (96.3%). The alternative ways of communication differ from a residential environment to another. Rural respondents considered the receipt of money and / or packages proper means of communication with the absent parent. Poor rural computerization makes the email communication an exclusively urban reality. The frequency of communication varies from urban to rural areas, except for the telephone communication which is made weekly. As for the money as a "communication means", the highest frequency is found in rural areas (rural - 81.8%, urban - 53.1%).

Another Romanian study realized by the Soros Foundation show that in the absence of more frequent visits from the parent gone abroad, the new communication technologies are the key to keeping the link between kids and parents. 92% of the children with both parents left to work abroad, and 82-83% of those with only one parent left, talk on the phone with their parents at least weekly. Internet is used much less for parent-child communication: only 10-15% of the children communicate through email or Messenger with their parents abroad.

The main topics of migrant children and their parents are related to educational achievement, family relationships and various desires of the children. The weight of these topics varies significantly depending on the biological gender of the absent parent. Children discuss less about their problems or the nature of their relationship with the person who remained to take care of their home with their migrant fathers. Survey data also shows that in many cases (40-50%) are avoided discussions about children's feelings.

A study conducted by the Center for Information and Documentation on Child Rights in Moldavia showed that the telephone and parcels represent the main channels of connection between children and their migrant parents. Regarding the frequency of communication, most of the children (44 percent) mentioned that they communicate 2-3 times a week. Every eighth child questioned communicates daily with his/her parents who are abroad, and a fourth of the respondents communicate weekly. Fifteen percent of the respondents communicate with their migrant parents only several times a month, and about 2 percent of children communicate less than once in a 2-3 months period.

Despite the fact that children have frequent conversations with their parents, they don't tackle subjects such as their emotional state and the everyday difficulties they have to face. Reasons for this include the high cost of phone conversations, the difficulty of dealing with more delicate issues on

the phone, and children's desire that the communication between parents and children should focus on the household, the child's success in school and their need for money and other goods. Before leaving, most parents made a plan and established some rules according to which children should lead their lives, and communications between parents/children/caregivers are centred on the assessment of the development of the plan. For some children, telephone conversations take place only at certain intervals or in emergencies. These circumstances make it difficult for them to share their ordinary problems, their sorrows, situations or events that could be of interest. [Child Rights Information Center, 2006].

Romanian immigrants and the Internet

Urgent need to communicate with loved ones left at home favored NTIs penetration among the Romanian population, especially in families where someone has gone to work abroad. In this context, it may be useful to examine the contents of various sites which deal with migration. These sites can make Romanians feel closer to their home country and their loved ones; these sites can collect large quantities of information, photos and life stories to serve as a bridge between immigrants and native communities, so that, over time, these sites began look like real "cyber village" where one may share useful and interesting experiences [Benitez, 2006].

Thus, NTI may be the mean of restoring ties between same professional category specialists, in order to turn brain drain into gain employment, and to encourage persons who have left to work abroad to participate in the economical life of the country of origin [IOM, 2005].

A look, albeit brief, on the websites of the Romanians abroad, reveals the problems facing the Romanian communities outside Romania: the problem of adapting to new living and working conditions, the need to consult the media in their native language, the problem of a proper education (to see, for example, the situation of many Romanian communities recently formed by the Romanian who emigrated abroad - to work, to study, to get married, etc..), the preservation of cultural specificity (religion, beliefs, customs, etc.) and native language in a foreign country; in the end (but not least) – a factor that's quite difficult to put into the "equation" and to statistically evaluate: the desire, a word and a feeling that is quite frequently expressed in cyberspace, either on Romanians' online publications from abroad, on websites of Romanian communities from abroad, either on blogs or discussion forums. Perhaps not a coincidence that one of the sites made for Romanians who work and live abroad bears the same name: nostalgia (www.rdt.dordetara.ro, established radio station of the same name) [Todi, 2009].

Romanians' online publications and sites clearly express the intention to establish a communication between Romanians from everywhere. The project "Romanian in the World" meets the needs of Romanians to communicate in their native language, to know what is happening in different Romanian community at large distances from each other, to be informed about what is happening in the country and to preserve and promote the idea of "Romanian".

As representatives of Romanian culture, these sites have the following objectives:

- to promote cultural events (The Romanian Festival in Nuremberg, German; The Romanian Festival in Turin); for example, the site www.theromanians.ca, with Art and Culture as main topics (www.artimmex.com), written in Romanian and English, from Toronto, by an organization that distributes books, newspapers, magazines, music and films from Romania and offers subscriptions to newspapers and magazines.

- to initiate the creation of clubs and cultural centers (Flame Cenacle Fan Club of listeners of RDT – Nostalgia Radio);

- to provide travel programs on demand;

- to present the scientific and cultural achievements of Romanian abroad (Romanian artist Romeo Niram is exposing the first time at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Lisbon, a series of paintings inspired by the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi);

- to submit news of interest concerning the work of Romanian consulates abroad;

- to comment on political events from the country;

- to promote the Romanians sites from different countries;

- some sites tell the Romanian immigration history from different parts of the world;

- Others (particularly those in Canada) offer to those who wish to emigrate to this country many useful and detailed information: from the necessity of choosing a consulting firm, completing documents, cost issues, presenting the interview, obtain the citizenship, to what should be done on arrival in Canada: renting an apartment, improve language, finding a job, getting a driving license, monthly expenditure, national currency, the Romanian communities or those with virtual offices and their contact [Todi, 2009].

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