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**The `Brain Gain Hypotheses` of Transition Countries Elites
and Socioeconomic Development in Their Home Country
(Albanian Emigrants in Italy Sample)**

by

Brunilda Zenelaga, Kseanela Sotirofski

Aleksandër Moisiu University

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The ‘Brain Gain Hypotheses’ of Transition Countries Elites and Socioeconomic Development in Their Home Country (Albanian Emigrants in Italy Sample)

by

Brunilda Zenelaga*, Kseanela Sotirofski**

Abstract

Migration of high skilled workers, known as brain drain, is a relatively spread phenomena in both developed and developing countries. The brain drain phenomenon of the countries of the South-East Europe is determined to a large extent by common “push factors” such as troubled economies, political instability, severe unemployment, and lack of respect of human rights, including the right to work. All these are especially true for post-communist societies, which are faced with the challenge of including the educated elite in the transition reforms that must take place to intensify bonds with the European Union. Brain gain consists of those “pull factors”, policies and strategies which create the conditions for encouraging the return of qualified nationals. From a point of view of duration, degree and impact on the development of the country, Albania constitutes the most striking example of brain drain in South East Europe. Indeed, Albania has one of the highest emigration rates in the world: during the 1990s almost 40% of lecturers and researchers left the country. Among these, 66% hold a PHD title. There are many examples of experts and students who study in Italy, and it is estimated that only 5% of them will return. Several reasons may explain the massive migration of high skilled workers from Albania, but this study is limited with those who went to Italy for study reasons. The main aim of the study is to carry out the main issues related to the reasons why the Albanians study in Italy and the ways they can be motivated to turn back and contribute to Albanian socio-economic development. A brief summary of related literature review, some qualitative data collected from semi-structured in-depth interview with 37 Master and Ph.D. students studying in Italy will be analyzed. The interviewed persons had emigrated for a better education. Among all traditional factors that determine the possible brain gain to Albania the authors find that the factors like socio-economic state, higher education system, government politics related to the orientation of returned students studying abroad, the teaching of democratic and transparency feelings and thoughts, the promoting of European rights and values, freedom, solidarity and security and the notification of European universities as an actor on the global stage are statistically important. Also some statistical data from CESS (Center for Economic and Social Studies) and Institute of Statistics related to Brain Gain process in the country will also be analyzed. This paper also attempts to assess the future trends of Albanians’ move to Italy for study reasons and the turning scale to the country after their studies.

Keywords: brain gain, brain drain, migration, transition

* Ph.D. candidate, University “Aleksandër Moisiu”; e-mail: brunazenelaga@gmail.com

** Ph.D., University “Aleksandër Moisiu”, e-mail: nelasotiri@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Migratory processes in Albania represent a traditional phenomenon of developing countries. Migratory waves of Albanians towards Western Europe and the some other countries started as early as 1990's with the ending of communist regime. Mostly, emigrants were of second and thirds generations, which represent a source of intellectual capital that can be effectively used in the process of developing the country. Their experience and financial potential could provide a new source for sustaining development through engagement in the academic, administrative and business life of the country.

The main aim of the study is to carry out the fundamental issues related to the reasons why the Albanians study in Italy and the ways they can be motivated to turn back and contribute to Albanian socio-economic development.

Among the objectives, we can mention: *first*, to briefly review the different aspects of the brain gain, its potential direct or indirect effects on the development of the home country; *second*, to discuss the empirical evidence on the nature and size of the brain gain in Albania, *third* to analyze some future tendencies of Albanian students who study in Italy, their projects for returning to the place of origin and their contribution on the development of Albania.

2. The "Brain Gain" Hypotheses. Theoretical view

Human capital flow entails an international transfer of resources in the form of human capabilities and skills (Ndulu, 2004). Conditions as trade liberalization, growing emphasis on the knowledge economy, development of advanced ICT services, etc., has encouraged international labor mobility (Knight, 2005). One distinctive pattern of this mobility is the migration of skilled personnel from developing- to developed countries, often termed as 'brain drain'. The main concern, from a developmental perspective, on the outward flow of skilled people from the developing world arises from the negative consequences on growth and income levels back home. In addition to the unaffordable loss of the considerable investment undertaken in generating these skills, already poor source countries lose their potentially most enterprising and ambitious young population, limiting future leadership and stifling the development of a more dynamic private sector (Ndulu, 2004).

The 'brain gain' hypothesis, which represents the knowledge and skills contribution of migrants outside of their country as potential resources for the socio-economic development of their home country, is getting momentum.

Generally, the positive aspects of "brain gain" phenomenon could take such forms *as incentives to acquire higher education, remittances, return migration of skilled professionals, and the creation of business networks*. This hypothesis also presumes an additional qualitative gain acquired through the experiences gathered by living in an industrialized country (Hunger, 2002).

Economists have conventionally argued that international migration may determine the development of the source countries (Beine *et al.*, 2001). According to Docquier and Rapoport (2004), migration may also have some positive feedback such as remittances, schooling incentives, and return migration after obtaining additional skills, which will certainly contribute to the economic development of the source countries.

One of the possible benefits of migration on source regions pointed out by existing literature is given to the view of schooling incentives, which has been emphasized by a series of recent studies (e.g., Beine *et al.*, 2008; Di Maria & Stryszowski, 2008). It is called "brain gain," which suggests that the emigration of skilled laborers may provide incentives for those left behind to invest in human capital, and human capital is one of the key determinants in the long-term economic growth according to the endogenous growth theory (Romer, 1986; Lucas, 1988). When emigration is temporary or the decision on schooling investment is made according to future migration opportunities, this kind of "brain gain" is much more likely to occur in the sending countries (Mayr & Peri, 2008).

The recent “new brain drain literature” discusses the brain gain coming either from the presence of educated migrants in the host country, such as the promotion of trade, capital flows and technology transfers, or from their absence from the home country, when they are successful abroad, and motivate more higher education in the home country, with the hope or expectation that the newly educated will have the possibility to emigrate and work successfully in another country (Lucas, 2004). Brain drain literature deals with the brain drain induced brain gain, which may even result in a net brain gain that raises welfare and growth in the home country (Schiff and Ozden, 2006).

More analytically, emigration may increase if the difference in the return to education abroad and at home is positive, which would subsequently generate higher expected returns on human capital, raising enrolments in higher education (Stark, 2002). With some reservation for bad quality data of a cross section of 37 developing countries, Beine et al. (2001) found a positive and significant effect of migration prospects on human capital formation. Carrington and Detragiache, (1999), computing emigration rates by educational level for a large group of 50 developing countries found similar results. In a more recent more refined paper, Beine et al (2008), using similar cross-section data, found a difference in the impact on human capital depending on the relative size of the emigrated highly qualified persons and the size of human capital in the home country.

2. The “Brain Gain” phenomenon in Albania

Substantial changes have occurred in Albania in the past 15 years as it recovers from a hard and restrictive communist system. The country has overhauled its economy and political institutions as part of the transition to democracy and market economy and made enormous strides in recent years with improved economic performance and sustained growth. In the last 15 years, the phenomenon of emigration has been at the core of economic and social changes occurred in Albania. By the end of 2005, more than 25 percent of Albanian citizens were estimated to be living abroad. No other Central or East European country has been so affected by emigration in such a short period of time.

Talking about the return, a recent set of studies suggests that more than half of Albanian emigrants, especially in Italy, are willing to come back to their country of origin – but only after on average 14-17 years in their country of destination (De Zwager et al., 2005; Gedeshi et al., 2003). The return of emigrants is potentially important for the economic growth of Albania, as they may bring back capital, foreign work experience and new ideas. Levitt coined the term *social remittances* to call attention to the fact that, in addition to money migrants export ideas and behavior back to their sending community (Levitt, 2001)

As we mention in the introduction session, one of the main topics of this paper is focused also, is the analyze of ‘brain drain’ phenomenon in Albania.

Educated and capable individuals are an obvious precondition for capacity development of a country. Publications of Centre for Economic and Social Studies suggests that about 50 percent of all lecturers, research people and intellectuals in the country, most of them young and trained in part in Europe, have left Albania since 1990. Nearly 66 percent of those Albanians known to have carried out a PhD in Western Europe or the US since 1990 have either emigrated from Albania, or never returned after their graduation. This emigration continues even nowadays, with a significant group of talented and successful students remaining abroad after finishing the university or post-graduate studies there (CESS, 2005). According to Gëdeshi et al. (2003), in Albania around 67 % of the scientists who received Ph.D. in the West had emigrated. 51 % of the emigrated scientists are under 40 years old and 67 % are males. 63% of the scientists, especially young people, actually are working in Albania plan to leave the country for a long time or forever (Gëdeshi et al., 2003).

Statistical data shows the extent of the massive “brain drain” in Albania as well as the opinion of young people who consider the future of the country as very pessimistic.

Another study of UNICEF (UNICEF, 2001) observed that 53% of the young people (aged 14 to 17) would like to live in another country in the future – mainly in Western Europe and North America. Each year are leaving the country approx. 3000 students to study abroad (mainly Italy, France, Germany, USA) which makes about 30% in comparison with the number of the students started the studies on the Albanian universities (Albanian Institute of Statistics, 2010).

An initiative taken by UNDP and Albanian government is the first step taken in Albania for having back home the “brain” that have studied abroad. The program is implemented by the Council of Ministers under UNDP regulations for nationally executed programs.

The activities taken by the program are: identification of graduate students that are engaged in scientific activity abroad, bringing together Albanian students abroad in conferences and workshops taking place in Albania, facilitating the activity of the Diaspora Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, facilitating the creation of a fellowship scheme for CEOs with the most important public enterprises, creating and enabling legal and regulatory environment for the inclusion of overseas graduates in the Albanian civil service. (UNDP, 2000).

The main result of the program is to establish an enable environment for highly skilled Albanian to contribute to Albania’s progress and development. Albania’s future success and competitiveness are closely linked with the establishment of an enabling environment within the country for skilled individuals to give their contribution.

3. The study methodology

This article presents the results of 37 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 37 graduated students who follow Master and Ph.D. programs in Italy. The interviewed people had been graduated in Italy (24 students) and in Albania (13 students), but all have emigrated for a better education. The interviews have been conducted during the period July -March 2010. From 37 respondents, 23 were female and 14 male. All students were from 30 to 35 years old. The table 1 shows the respondent’s categories divided according to gender, university affiliation and branch of study.

Gender		University affiliation					Branch of study				
Female	Male	Universita' degli Studi di Siena	Universita' di Pisa	Universita' degli studi di Brescia	Universita' cattolica del Sacro Cuore	Universita' degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro	Economy	Psychology	Political Sciences	Engineering	Jurisprudence
23	14	13	3	6	6	9	9	8	6	7	7
Total: 37 respondents		Total: 37 respondents					Total: 37 respondents				

Table 1. Respondents categories

The interviews were collected by using the technique of snowball, following a semi-structured format by giving to the respondents full allowance for discussion. All interviews were in Albanian. Some students didn't like to be taped during the process of their interviewing, so we wrote down the main points of our conversation with them. The other interview-narratives have been registered and then taped. They have been collected by a technique of non-representative sampling which tried to capture the diversity of experiences of Albanian students, men and women of different university affiliations in Italy and of different branch of studies.

4. Limitations of the study

The method used on this study is the qualitative one, based on the interviewing process.

One limitation of this study include *external validity, or the generalization of the study findings*. Looking that our sample size is too small (only 37 people), it will be difficult to generalize the findings. In fact, the aim of our study is to show the tendencies and not to make generalizations.

Another limitation of our study *is the way we chose the sample by using the technique of snowball*. Snowball sampling is a method used to obtain research and knowledge, from extended associations, through previous acquaintances. By targeting only a few select people, it is not a specific indicative of the trends within the result group.

5. Analyze of the study findings

It is estimated that every year 3000 Albanians enroll in Western higher education institutions—mainly in Italy, France, Germany, and the United States. (The Economist, 2002.) This means that 30% of Albanians enrolling in colleges and universities do so in the West. Foreign-educated students of the post-1990 generation have left Albania for education abroad and, generally, are not biased against a possible return. However, they tend to settle wherever opportunities are highest.

According to the data taken from the Italian Ministry of Instruction, of University and of Research (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca), during the academical year 2007-2008, Albania was the first country with most students in Italy. 11.415 Albanian students studied in the Italian Universities. From them 4.659 were males and 6.756 females. The most preferred branches of studies for the Albanian students are: Economy, Jurisprudence, Medicine, Political Sciences, Philosophy, Engineering etc. (Devole, 2008).

In our study we interviewed two different samples of Albanian students in Italy: Students who have been graduated in Albania and have decided to continue their Master or PhD studies in Italy (13 students) and them who have been graduated in Italian Universities and decided to continue studying at the same university, or at another Italian university (24 students).

The semi-structured interview was divided into 3 sessions:

First session aimed to gather information about the reasons why students have decided to continue studying instead of working and why they have decided to study in Italy and not somewhere else.

Second session contained questions about the students' plans about returning to Albania in the next three years, or staying in Italy, and the reasons for returning or not returning to Albania.

Third session's purpose was to identify students aspirations about their preferred employment sectors and their vision for the future.

In this session we also took information about the interviewers self-perception about their contribution on the socioeconomic development of Albania.

5.1. Analyze of the first session findings

According to the interviews answers is clearly showed that two are the main reasons why students, after have been graduated, have decided to continue still studying instead of working: *First*, because they prosper to find a qualified job that requires a good qualification as Master or PhD degree; *Second*, because many of the interviewed students have tried to find a job after they have been graduated, but they could find only part-time and unqualified jobs with low salaries and have gotten low level of working satisfaction.

After I have been graduated in Psychology (clinical branch) at University of Tirana, I tried to find a job at list as a secretary in a non-profitable organization or something like that, because I knew that with a bachelor degree I couldn't work as a professional, but it was impossible to find a job. After 6 months of waiting, I started working as a cashier at a Supermarket of Conad (Italian supermarket in Tirana). I worked there for one and a half year and having contact with some Italian staff, I took information about the Master (laurea specialistica/ magistrale) and I decided to follow it (K. L, female 31).

According to the interviews results, studying abroad for many young people in Albania means have a better and a more qualified education than studying in Albania. The main reasons the interviewed students listed about studying abroad in general are: (a) They hope to bearer a contemporary know-how, a global way of thinking and another working ethics; (b) Having a foreign diploma, students hope to get more chances for a better working position in Albania, with a high salary, and better chances to find a job even in country of studying.

Study in Italy, especially has been chosen by the interviewed students because:

First, they knew the Italian language and were familiar to Italian culture, so it was comfortable for them to be integrated into the Italian university system.

Second, Italy is a country geographically near Albania and students could get information easily about the university programs and scholarships.

Third, because they have cuisines and friends who live in Italy who could support them at least at the beginning of the studying and living process in Italy. From 37 interviewed students, 31 had chosen in the beginning to study at a university near their friends and relatives. For students who have been graduated in Italy was more easy to follow Master and PhD studies at another university because during the first years of studying they had understood the Italian university system, had gathered information, and created more contacts with people who deal with the academic sphere, so they were better oriented about studying in Italy.

I was only 18, when I first came in Italy. A friend of my father supported me at the beginning when I arrived in Siena to study Political Sciences at University of studies of Siena (Universita' degli Studi di Siena). After I was graduated I followed even the Master studies at the same university and branch. Now I'm a doctoral student for Geopolitics at University of Pisa. Universita' degli studi di Siena didn't offer that study program when I decided to follow the doctoral studies, and I took information that Universita' di Pisa did it, so I was registered at the doctoral competition, made the exam and won. (K.B, female, 30).

5.2. Analyze of the second session findings

As mentioned above the second session of the semi-structured interview contained questions about the students' plans about returning to Albania in the next three years, or staying in Italy, and the reasons for returning or not returning to Albania.

According to the answers of the interviewed students we classified the target group in four categories.

1. *First group* is composed by students who were certain to return to Albania. These were mainly doctorate students to whom was offered a part-time working contract mainly from private universities in Albania, so they had a very clear vision about their employment sector and see their future mostly in Albania. Recently in Albania many private universities have been rolled out and a large sector of employment for the new academics has been created. Among all students them who are graduated or have finished master and doctoral studies abroad, are the most preferred to be lecturers at the Albanian universities. The interviewed students of this category answered “Yes” to the question “Are you planning to return to Albania in the next 3 years?”

Part of this group were even two students who had earned a scholarship from the Albanian state (Scholarship of Excellence) and according to the contract they had assigned to the Albanian state, they must return to Albania and work at least 5 years in the Albanian public institutions.

Many students confirmed that they will return to Albania, because Italy do not offer chances for their employment even because of the recent financial global crisis. This category of students considers easier to make career and to find a job in Albania than in Italy. Some of the respondents of this category mentioned that they would not prefer to live abroad and some other considered as a strong reason for returning to Albania the fact that their family was living there.

2. *Second group* is composed mostly by students who followed Master e Laurea specialistica/ magistrale, but even by doctorate students. They aspired to stay in Italy for working reasons. The students who were following master, confirmed they would like to continue doctoral studies in Italy as well. This category of students answered “No” to the question “Are you planning to return to Albania in the next 3 years?”. They listed a lot of reasons why they would not prefer to return to Albania.

Some factors that push them to stay in Italy are: (a) the Albanian political and social instability (b) the insecurity in the working place in Albania (c) low salaries and low standard of living in Albania (d) low work ethics in Albania (e) unpleasant Albanian life style (e) have lost ties with Albania (f) high level corruption for finding a job (f) personal reasons.

Some other factors that pull them to stay in Italy are: (a) better possibilities to find a prestigious job (b) their families live in Italy also (c) high work ethics comparing to Albanian work ethics (d) better salaries comparing to Albanian salaries (e) personal reasons.

3. *Third group* is composed by students who were planning to move to another country. Some students mentioned countries like, Denmark, Holland and Germany which, according to them, have not been affected by the global economic crisis as much as Italy or some other European countries and offer good chances for their employment. So this category of students replayed also “No” to the question “Are you planning to return to Albania in the next 3 years?”

Is very difficult to decide. I came in Italy when I was 18 and now I'm 32. Living 14 years in Italy means that a part of me is Italian. I'm studying mechanical engineering (laurea specialistica) at University of Studies in Brescia and I'm very concerned about finding a professional job ether in Italy or in Albania. I have loose contacts with people in Albania and I think it will be difficult for me to be employed there, but on the other hand this financial crisis in Italy has created big obstacles for us, engineers to find a job. I think I will go to Germany and will try to find a job there. (I.R. male, 32).

4. *Fourth group* is composed by students who are uncertain about the decision to return to Albania or to stay in Italy. Most of them answered “Maybe” to the question “Are you planning to return to Albania in the next 3 years?”. Some of the interviewed students were pragmatist and confirmed that they will stay in the place where they will find a better job.

Looking that many of students leave Albania on international student visas, they have no choice but to return once these visas expire (AIIS, 2005). During their interviews, students showed the problem of the lack of possibilities for renewing their visas. For most of them this lack of possibilities would be a strong reason for returning to the country of origin.

5.3. *Analyze of the third session findings*

Third session's purpose was to identify students aspirations about their preferred employment sectors and their vision for the future.

According to the students response we identify that for all students, them who were planning to return to Albania, them who were planning to stay in Italy, them who would like to move to another country, and the undecided students, the most preferred sector of employment was the academic sector. People considered this sector as more safe and prestigious and that allow them to be in contact with the scientific world.

Other preferred sectors for the student who were planning to return to Albania were private sector as the well paid and public administration as a sphere who offers good chances to make career. People who were planning to stay in Italy listed non-profitable organizations as a good sector of employment for them.

As we mentioned above, in this session we also took information about the interviewers self-perception about their contribution on the socioeconomic development of Albania.

A considerable part of the interviewed students consider very important the role they play on the export of the new ideas and behaviors back to their sending country and according to them this is the most important contribution for the development of their home country. As we saw in the literature review Levitt consider this contribution *social remittances* in addition to *economical remittances* that migrants export to the country of origin.

The interviewed students also consider more their experience than their financial potential as an important source for sustaining development through engagement in the academic and administrative life of the country.

5.4. *The analyze of the variables influence on the returning decision*

During this study we took in consideration some variables: (a) gender (b) branch of study (c) familiar situation. We came to the conclusion that there is an affinity between them and the decision to return or not to Albania.

(a) We came to the conclusion that more female than male are planning to return in Albania. The female interviewed students expressed their need to have a support for finding a professional job and in Albania they have that kind of support by them relatives and friends. We saw a tendency of male interviewed students to make more efforts to find a job in Italy or to move in another country. They perceived themselves as more independent and expressed less the need to be supported by friends and relatives.

(b) Branch of study also seems to have a correlation with the decision of returning in Albania or to stay In Italy. We came to the conclusion that there is a slight tendency that students who study on Economy and Engineering plan to stay in Italy or move to another country. This because they think they have chances to find a professional job in these countries. On the other hand students who study Psychology and Political sciences have a tendency to return to Albania, because according to them Albania offers better chances for their employment. Students who study jurisprudence compose the category of the undecided people because, as they confirmed, they do not see good possibilities of employment neither in Italy nor in Albania.

(c) We also fund a correlation between familiar conditions and the decision to turn in Albania. Students who have their family members in Albania (consort, children and parents) are more willing to return to

Albania. The decision of them who have their family member in Italy depend on the family decision to return to Albania or to stay in Italy. On the other hand students who have their fiancée or their partner in Italy (who is not an Albanian) are more willing to stay in Italy or to move to another country.

6.Conclusions

The survey reveals that a considerable number of Albanians studying abroad are contemplating the possibility of return although few have definitely decided to return upon completion of their degree requirements. Although income is a concern, it is not the primary concern. Thus, career-related issues are more important than income for respondents currently studying abroad.

As we mentioned in the literature reviewing, the ‘brain gain’ hypothesis, represents the knowledge and skills contribution of migrants outside of their country as potential resources for the socio-economic development of their home country.

The survey results showed that the qualified students should be consider a very important part of human capital, and human capital is one of the key determinants in the long-term economic growth of a sending country. The educated migrants in the host country, bring in the country of origin the promotion of trade, capital flows and technology transfers.

The emigration of a significant group of talented and successful Albanian students, is followed by their hesitation to turn back after finishing the university or post-graduate studies in the host country.

In order to motivate the “brain gain” process and its influence on the socioeconomic development of the home country, some careful and continues politics should be undertaken by governmental and non-governmental institutions in Albania.

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