

Reasons and Characteristics of the Dynamizing Emigration Intention of the Hungarian Youth

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Abstract

Emigration is considered as a general life strategy for Hungarian young generations. This important process can be observed by the overwhelming proportion of those who leave the country in order to study or work temporarily or for a lifetime. The paper aims to shed light on the most important emigration features of the past decade, scrutinizing the essential reasons for emigration between the ages of 18 and 40. At the international and national levels, migration processes and their dominant social, political, economic consequences are worthy of scientific interest, moreover, both objective and subjective data analysis – explaining emigration – are increasingly demanding. The authors endeavour to provide a comprehensive summary of the most significant socio-demographic and economic characteristics of young generations who are more or less willing to emigrate. Their decade-old proportions, changes in terms of mobility patterns, repulsive and attractive factors invigorating emigration, the migration potential within the country (urban-rural, central-periphery dualities, intraregional inequalities) will be explained in detail. The scientific findings are based on a survey where approximately 10,000 people were questioned in the context of migration potential between 2013 and 2016 in Hungary and abroad.

Keywords: emigration, migration potential, Hungarian youth, spatial inequalities, European target countries, social and economic consequences

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Introduction

Hungarians have been increasingly involved in international migration flows since the 1989 regime change. In parallel with the large-scale immigration at the beginning of the 1990s, emigration towards more developed and inclusive Western and Northern European countries,

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furthermore, the hubs of the world economy (e.g. United States, Far East and Gulf Countries) have accelerated following the new millennium. The examination of this phenomenon has been the focus of scrutiny in several empirical studies (Hárs, 2009; Blaskó et al., 2014; Sik, 2015; Atoyan et al., 2016). Until the EU accession in 2004, the number of Hungarian citizens leaving the country for a shorter or longer periods was growing moderately year by year, nevertheless, afterwards an unexperienced increase in terms of pace of emigration could be traced mainly to the labour markets of the European Union's economically and socially advanced countries. The 2007 Schengen area integration, the labour market anomalies strengthened by the global financial crisis amplifying from 2008, the extremely high unemployment rate of almost 11% compared to the 2000s (in addition to this, the three times higher unemployment ratio of the youth; In 2012, 27.9% – according to Central Statistical Office Employment and unemployment Statistics, 2012), shrinking life strategies, eventually, the opportunities introduced by the German and Austrian labour markets opened on 1st May, 2011, have dramatically intensified the process. It should be emphasized that in the particular case of Hungarians, predominantly economic and political, for a lesser extent socio-cultural and geographic-historical factors explain the strengthening of migration. In terms of the future of the country, in many respects (demographic erosion, decline in the number of births, social, educational and health care deficiencies, the future consolidation of the pension system, the growing proportion of deprived social groups, exodus of rural population, etc.) the current and the future situation would become probably more sinister due to the fact as the most affected age groups are getting younger (nowadays the average age of migrants is 29-30 years). This urging issue led us to concentrate our research on the Hungarian youth. However, it is not a Hungary-specific circumstance as numerous Eastern, Central and Southern European countries are struggling with similar or even more drastic migration.

The initiation of our research in 2013 can be considered as the beginning of the most intensive emigration phase – based on statistical data and various empirical researches. The interval of almost half a decade since then (the exact realization period of the research) provides a relevant scientific basis so as to introduce how the trend of emigration and the socio-economic implications have evolved and will be characterized, especially in the light of younger age groups. Several similar research on the emigration of Hungarians give the same results

in connection with the relevant age groups, target countries and causes (Hárs, 2011; Blaskó et al., 2014; Gödri, 2016; Hárs et al., 2015). According to the data of the Central Statistical Office, 44% of migrants are under 30 years old and 77% have not yet reached the age of 40. Viewing 2009 as a reference year, the number of younger immigrants is doubled practically every year, so that in 2003, eight out of ten migrants came from this age group (Blaskó et al., 2014, SEEMIG, 2014; HCSO Labour Market Mirror, 2015) proving that the exodus of the youth reaches a serious pace. The uncertainty about the future, growing dissatisfaction with education policy and the social welfare system are all motivational sources that intensify migration. These issues explain why a profound examination of the emigration intention may greatly contribute to the assessment of recent and future processes.

Due to the administrative difficulties caused by higher education reforms and the possibilities of studying abroad, the number of Hungarian students attending Hungarian universities and colleges decreased by 25% during the last decade. (Hungarian Central Statistical Office Hungary Report, 2013). The significance of emigration for educational purposes is demonstrated by the fact that in 2015, 50-60% of elementary school students were oriented towards foreign higher education institutions. According to the 2015 report by Active Youth in Hungary 8,000 to 10,000 Hungarian students study abroad at a foreign higher education institution, but this number does not include those involved in famous student mobility programmes (e.g. Erasmus +). For the record, 4-5,000 Hungarian students get to foreign higher education institutions contributed by Erasmus + each year. These students acquire their first work experience in host countries, continuing their socialization in an inclusive and multicultural social environment, establish long lasting social networks, advance their foreign language and interpersonal competences and all these attributes reinforce their migration potential even for a lifetime.

The emigration of the youngest (under 25 years) and their aspiration of migration may be explained by objective factors, including the emerging criticism of Hungary (especially the political climate), the need for high quality education and international experience, language learning, the abundance of opportunities and the desire towards adventure. On the contrary, every second or third student chooses to re-emigrate upon the completion of their studies, though mainly subjective factors, such as the absence of their sociocultural circumstances, the

distance from family members and friends are in the backgrounds. Amongst with these phenomena the most important fact; the significant augmentation in the number of young people seeking to work abroad in recent years, which has been proven in many research projects (Rohr, 2012; TÁRKI, 2015; Kóródi et al., 2016). In our current treatise we scrutinize the intention of emigration of Hungarians between the ages of 18 and 40 participating in the 2013-2017 study.

Methodology

The OTKA (Hungarian Scientific Research Fund) research launched in the autumn of 2013 endeavours to investigate the crucial emigration trends over the last fifteen years using mainly empirical methods. Quantitative and qualitative analyses include three pillars of data collection. The first sample was based on the questionnaire targeting 9,876 respondents (From the total sample 3,373 students of Hungarian higher educational institutions, moreover, all other 18-40-year-old respondents were also involved so altogether 4,806 respondents create the basis for recent Hungarian youth's focused research). The complex Hungarian database was supported by both online and offline questionnaire data collection focusing on the emigration intention, the intensity and seriousness of the intention, the explaining factors and the reasons behind potential emigration.

The second data collection aimed at getting to know how already emigrated Hungarians living abroad (studying and / or working). The questionnaire used in the first case was expanded with questions on quality of life, prosperity, future plans and the possibility of remigration. The online questionnaire was filled by 245 people living in the most important target countries. Thirdly, in order to clarify the results of the research, we prepared 56 semi-structured long interviews during 2016 and 2017 concentrating on mainly Hungarian diaspora in the main migration centres, so we could also look at the social / family / community networks and the characteristics of the migration chain.

Migration theories and the temporal change in factors influencing emigration

Migration is a clearly selective process influenced by age, gender, social status, average income, level of qualification and a number of “softer” factors (e.g. socialization background, attributes of the host society, already acquired knowledge, inner values, family ties). The discourses of 20th century migration are explained by three main theories. (1) According to the neoclassical economic theory (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969), global migratory flows can be linked to the world’s demand and supply system. In this context, developed countries struggling with labour shortages relate higher wages to active-age populations at lower levels of development. (2) The segmented labour market (Piore, 1979), at the global and continental level, emphasizes dual economies built by capitalist countries as the cause of the increasing labour migration. The primary market for advanced states is the high prestige of safe work for those looking for work opportunities, while the secondary market provides prospects for people with lower qualifications. (3) According to Saskia Sassen’s (1988) world system theory, transnational migration has become a by-product of global capitalism. Post-industrial development has generated structural economic problems that appear as repellent factors for the developing (semi)peripheral countries, and a great majority of people choose advanced economically-based places for long-term settlements. According to new theories (Massey et al., 1993), migration is not only maintained by the extension of networks and the improvement of migrant support institutions but also by the fact that the probability of further movements is growing steadily over time. Motivations are summed up when each migratory measure modifies the social context in which the next decision on potential migration is made, by increasing the probability of further migration. This process is called cumulative causality.

Only estimations have been published about the exact number of emigrants from Hungary to the developed states of the EU. Statistical uncertainty is reinforced by the spectacular difference between the figures of Hungarian and foreign mirror statistics (e.g. Eurostat, Destatis, Statistik Austria, etc.). Albeit, it is intricate to navigate ourselves among the plethora of calculations the number of Hungarian citizens who have been living and working since 1989 is 350,000 to 600,000. Despite the fact that – based on Eurostat data analysis – Hungary has lost the lowest

number of its citizens (in light of proportion within the total population) from the post-socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, the magnitude of the process and the persistence of many reasons strengthening migration predict serious social, demographic and economic erosion. According to the relevant research of CSO and SEEMIG, in 2014, approximately 31,500 Hungarians have left the country for at least a year which volume is half as high as in 2013 and six and a half times more than in 2009.

Examining the total migration potential, the socio-demographic and income status, features of emigrants have been fundamentally changed since Hungary's integration with the EU. Compared with recent particularities, a decade ago significantly more men chose emigration, the proportion of people below the age of 30 has been marginal among 30-40-year-olds, serious migration potential among the unemployed, the Roma population and those living in Western and North-Western Hungary (Hárs, 2011) was outstanding. Among features of human capital, the knowledge of the foreign language was of utmost importance, moreover, previous foreign studies and / or work experience encouraged further emigration. At this time, even adventure seeing was a crucial factor, whereas nowadays when anyone can start working abroad within one and a half week (job, accommodation, budget), this attitude seems to fade away.

The characteristics of young people's emigration intention and the predominant motivation reasons

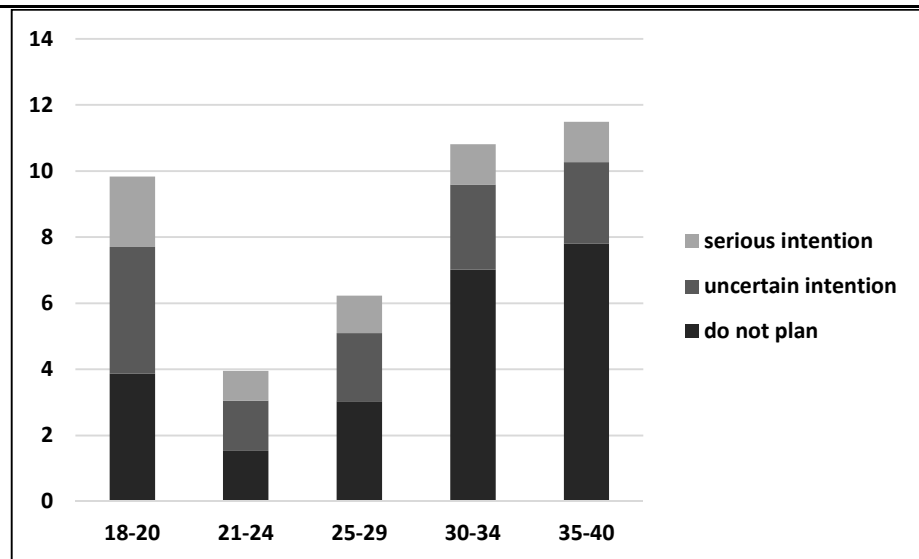
Demographic characteristics of young Hungarian emigrants

Research on the emigration processes of recent years has shown that in contrast to the status quo in the 2000s, there is a negligible surplus concerning the number of men in terms of gender distribution, but in some cases almost equal gender rates can be seen among emigrant Hungarians (Blaskó et al., 2016).

In our sample, female surplus (male 40.1%, female 59.7%) was found among respondents (comparing with the total Hungarian population in 2011: male: 47.5%, female: 52.5%). It can be stated that women have almost the same level of intension than men, although return a greater number of them remigrate after shorter or longer period of work. In our research, the following question was raised about the intention: "Are you planning to go abroad for a year or two in the next two or three years?"

Such a question can be considered a strict variable in light of the measurement of plan and intention. In order to focus more precisely on the internal validity of the research, i.e. the severity of the migration intention, we have integrated a number of auxiliary questions as filters. These include, for example, employment or the aim of learning behind the migration intention, mobility is planned whether for short or long term or forever, and which target countries, regions or settlements are the most popular individually. These statistical “interventions” will make it possible to separate the slightly vague group of those who are seriously intend and the “dreamers” who just ponder about. In terms of intention, in the ‘not planning emigration’ category the proportion of the two sexes is nearly equal (male: 42.6%, female: 43.3%). Both sexes show actually the same ratio with less decisive intention (male: 37.8%, female: 36.9%). The definite intention (‘yes, ready to go’) was already quite the same (male and female: 19%). It is important to emphasize that women who decide to emigrate are usually not independent, but leave the country together with the husband, children and other close family members, and for them the social connections already established in the host country are more important (Knörr, 2000). Besides this, the likelihood of mobility grows after the consolidation of the foreign existential base. To sum up, our research gives evidence to the fact that in recent years women’s participation in emigration has increased compared to the previous periods. The phenomenon can be explained by several factors, on the one hand, with the change in the social judgment and involvement of women (individual careers, labour market status, family expectations), on the other hand, by the expansion of the network, thirdly by the strengthening of the institutional system.

Fig. 1.
Proportion of
different age-
groups in light of
emigration
intention (n=4806)
(ages; %)



The age distribution of our sample also confirms the strongest emigration intention of the youngest groups, as shown in Fig. 1. It can be clearly defined that serious (planned) emigration intentions are the highest in the 20-29 age group. From a socio-demographic point of view, the likelihood of the intentions of the younger generation, especially those at the beginning of their twenties, is becoming more and more serious. In the case of the thirty-year age group, the proportion of people staying in Hungary is higher because of their fidelity to the family, the already achieved higher social status and the fear of insecurity and failure, while the number of those with serious intentions is outstanding compared to the group of hesitant. In the case of the 18 to 40-year-olds, the planned serious migration intentions can be defined as 5-25%. The cumulative intention (an uncertain and definite plan) falls below 50% in the examined age group (31-34, 37-38, and 40-year-olds). In terms of the future perspectives of the country, it will be a matter of priority whether these intentions would turn into realization and what proportion of the actual emigrants will return.

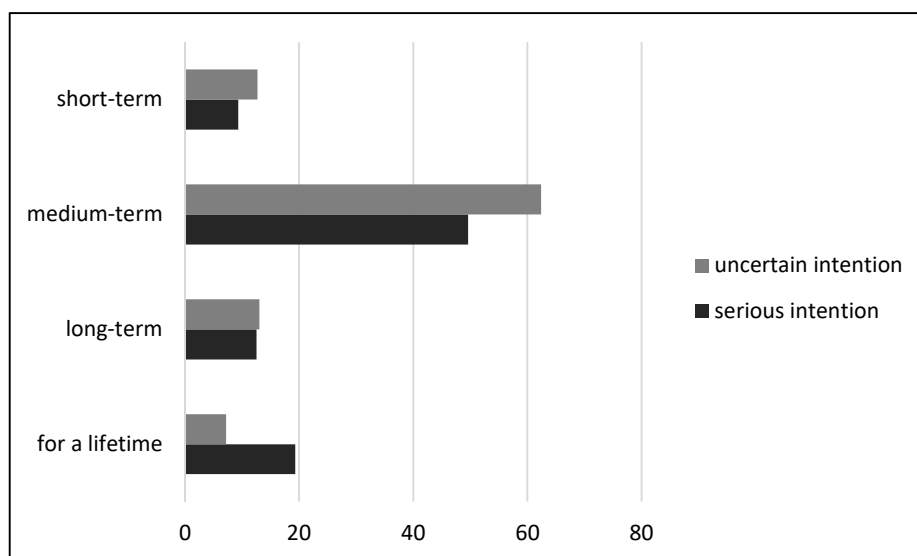
The strength and duration of emigration

Defining emigration potential is not a simple task (Gödri et al., 2013). The results of our research can only be used tangibly in order to estimate the expected future movements. Instead these findings may be considered as predicting information (Sik el al., 2016) that help getting

to know the intensity and possible realization of the expected intention in detail.

Within the confines of the questionnaire survey, the three categories gave a basis for assessing the possible intention of the respondents (See Fig. 1.). Additionally, some specific supplementary questions concerning the place and duration were enclosed so as to clarify the seriousness of the intention. The duration of the planned employment was divided into four phases (Fig. 2.).

Fig. 2.
Migration
potential
according to the
determination of
emigrants'
intentions and the
planned duration
of the mobility
(n=4806) (%)



Three different types of categories exist (shorter and longer-term and (final) emigration) defying the cumulative migration potential (Sik, 2012; Gödri, 2014). However, during the analysis of our database, the 1-5-year work plan marked a remarkably high level so we also separated a "medium-term" category. The proportion of short-term workers (below 1 year) with uncertainties is obviously overwhelming than those of having serious plans (9.7%, 12.1%). Even for those belonging to the medium-term category (62%), the group of uncertainties is more significant. Migration intentions are strong for students (young people) living with their parents and for the unemployed social strata, however, seldom reach final achievement. Looking at the long-term planners and finally those who already left the country (26.1%), the trend is clearly reversed and the determined intention goes far beyond the uncertainty. Our 4 years of scrutiny has proven that the proportion of decisive

migration is increasing, and on the other hand, young people are likely to gain their first work experience on the foreign labour markets, thirdly, the migration intention of the financially independent young Hungarians becoming steadier.

Factors and geographical distribution affecting immigration intention and target country choice

Table 1.
Push-Pull factors
influencing the
choice of target
countries

Push factors	%	Pull factors	%
economic and financial problems	39,4	economic, financial and material factors	35,3
lack of adequate jobs	20,5	quality and competitive jobs	14,3
dissatisfaction in politics	8,2	job and life experience in inclusive, multicultural surroundings	9,8
uncertain future	7,9	language learning	6,1
Mentality	6,2	mentality	6,1
low living standards	6,1	natural environment	4,2
social conflicts	5,1	appreciation	4,1
low level of appreciation	4,6	prosperous future	3,8
other influential factors	1,4	open, inclusive society	3,4

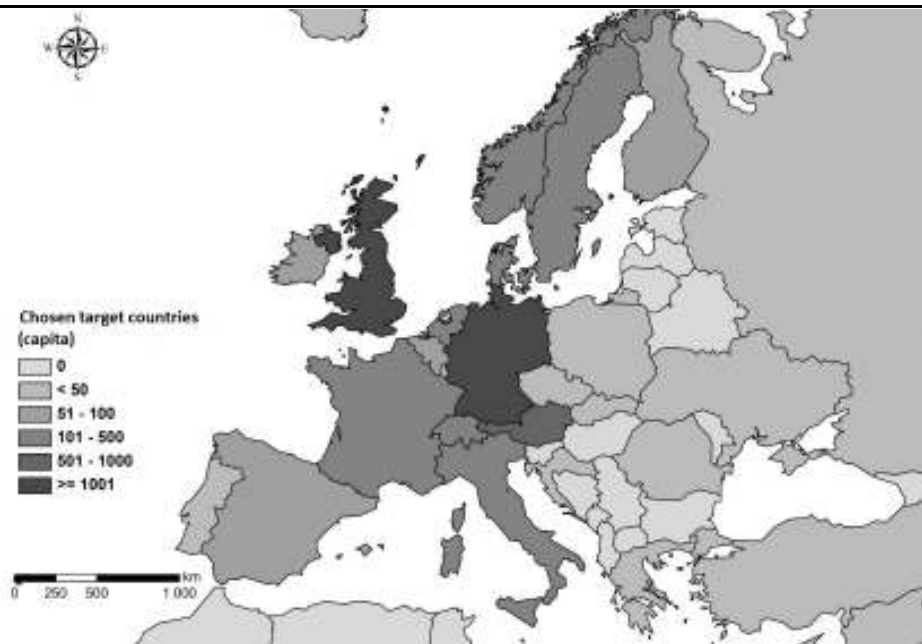
The material and economic dissatisfaction is the main reason for emigration both globally and in Hungary evenly. For the Hungarian youth, on the one hand, the macroeconomic situation of the country, the stagnant GDP since 2010, the increasing inter- and intra-regional inequalities caused by maldistribution of the social systems, and the low level of average wages on the individual level, the enormous levels of debts burdening predominantly low and medium social strata groups, the lack of savings are considered as the most crucial components leading towards emigration. It is worth mentioning that distance from the home country also perceived as a circumstance influencing emigration. The lack of flexible job opportunities (e.g. distant working, part-time jobs) providing competitive wages for qualified capita is the other main pushing factor for emigration. During the nearly four years of empirical research, the critics of the political climate, the uncertainty in the persistent future prosperity, the never-ending combat for “survival”, and the diminishing of living standards have increased significantly. Due to such a general dissatisfaction, Hungary is increasingly lagging behind its Central and Eastern European counterparts on a global scale. A great

number of independent international comparative surveys give evidence to the above mentioned process: According to World Democratic Audit 2016 results, among the 154 countries included in the analysis, Hungary is ranking as the 44th (between Jordan and Romania), the Life Satisfaction Index ranked 107th (between Gambia and Libya). The Better Life Index for 38 countries in the OECD is ranked 32nd, between Greece and Russia. These independent findings equally underpin the results of our empirical survey, in the fields of income, satisfaction with life, and civic engagement Hungary owns the most deficits. Another remarkable repulsive factors appear in terms of the dissatisfaction with mentality, moreover, the hindered life strategies caused by the perpetual financial and existential struggles in the past, present and future.

Certain elements of social capital notably increase migration intention. Among the indicators of human capital foreign language knowledge, former foreign labour market experience and the vague linkage to the national values, traditions. (Sik et al., 2003; Castles et al., 2003). Interestingly, one of the main factors amplifying emigration – the emergence of strong and reliable social networks – is an inconsiderable factor based on the perception of the surveyed young generation. It plays an indispensable role in finding adequate jobs and facilitates financial supports, although unburdens the integration into foreign communities and enhance the courage to start new businesses. According to a surprising result of our research, for the young people who are planning to move to Northern European states and other rural neighbourhoods of the Western European countries, quality natural environment became one of the most important influencing factors.

Recapitulation the push-pull factors from the main repulsive reasons registered by Lee (1966), health, housing (such as lack of social housing) and the serious deficits of equal human rights are the most outstanding motivation factors to leave the country. Among the push attributes, seeking a better health, social and educational system did not appear to be a significant motivation for the perception of Hungarian youth, but the other factors influencing it – with smaller or greater proportions – coincide with the generally accepted factors worldwide.

Fig. 3.
Main target
countries of the
Hungarian youth
having serious
intentions on
emigration

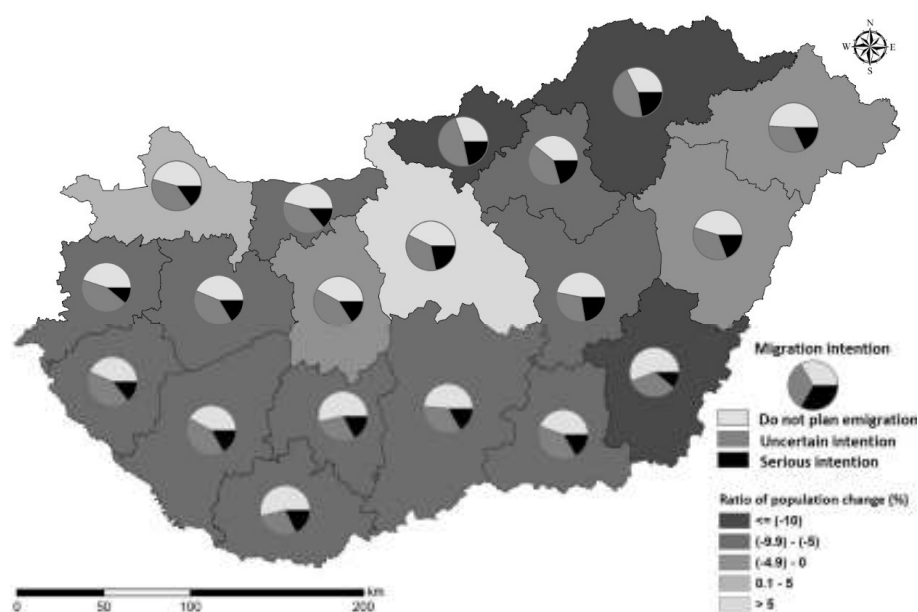


Over the last two decades, the spatial distribution of mainly Western and Northern European target countries (preferred by the Hungarian youth) is almost unchanged. Notwithstanding, after the liberalization of the German and Austrian labour markets (1st May, 2011) led to the exodus of masses of Hungarians causing the slow alteration of spatial patterns throughout Europe. Currently, in the great majority of cases, emigrated Hungarians chose Germany and the United Kingdom as their place of foreign settlement, furthermore, these states are ranking as the most desired target countries for those having serious emigration intentions though. Remarkable target areas of emigration are large cities and their agglomerations. Austria is ranked third, but nearly 35,000 Hungarian workers and students commute each day or week because of the geographical proximity. Succeeding popular target countries are the North European welfare states (especially Sweden and Denmark), Switzerland, the Netherlands and France. Analysing the social structures, Germany and Austria have a higher proportion of maximum secondary school graduates, while the United Kingdom, the Northern welfare states are more likely to seduce highly qualified strata. In the beginnings, primarily blue-collar workers arrived to the UK, whereas during the last decade, the ratio of white-collar qualified Hungarians started to flood segments of British labour markets. For industrial workers, Germany is

the most desired country in general, while Austria for tertiary labour – mostly tourism and trade (Hárs, 2010).

Examining the territorial features of Hungary, the dichotomy between the rural countryside and the metropolitan areas and villages of rural areas are clearly outlined in terms of migration potential. While 41% of the young people in the capital, 45% of the country's other urban areas, 44.5% of the residents of the rural areas insist on staying at home. Villagers represent 40%, urban population (except Budapest) 37% and Budapest 35% of the respondent who just hesitate in terms of emigration. The sharpest spatial inequalities appear within the group of planned emigration: 23% of the capital, 16% of the other urban population, lastly 18.5% of rural inhabitants.

Fig. 4.
Correlation and spatial inequalities concerning migration intention and population change between 2001 and 2015



The above mentioned ratio demonstrate the strong willingness of the capital's young population (based on their openness, claim for multicultural and inclusive communities) to leave the country. In the peripheries and the dilapidated post-industrial settlements the traditionally conservative social policy framework has stabilized/blocked the social mobility channels. However, their fidelity to Hungary might be explained by subjective reasons such as family ties, importance of friendship, agricultural activity and the lack of reliable

information on the foreign labour market and the ways of successful integration.

Summary

Investigations of mobility within Europe in the fields of international research are at the forefront of scientific interest expressing high demands for objective and subjective data and the presentation of social, economic, political and cultural mechanisms explaining migration. Central and Eastern European countries, which have undergone successful / hampered economic transition since the regime changes, moreover, are burdened with the effects of demographic crisis, play an increasingly important role in terms of international migration. Despite the fact that Hungary was perceived as a popular host country in the 1990s, following the years after 2000, it gradually became a sending country. The rate of emigration of Hungarians is reaching unprecedented levels for decades. Recently the estimated number of Hungarians working or studying abroad is somewhere between 350,000 and 600,000 (8-10% of the 4-4.5 million-labour market). For both the emigrant Hungarians and those planning to emigrate, Germany, the United Kingdom and Austria are preferred target countries, where Hungarian diaspora can be found predominantly in economically developed metropolitan areas. The average age of migrants is 29 to 30 years and is steadily decreasing, proving that emigration is an emerging option among the young generation who are willing to choose education at foreign institutes, employment in foreign labour markets, family formation and career development within foreign circumstances. There is an equal number of women and men out of the country. Concerning individual movement, men are overrepresented, whereas women regularly move together in pairs with members of the family.

The intensity of emigration decreases as people getting older so the 21 to 30 year-olds have the most decisive migration intentions. There is a negative correlation between the intensity of emigration intention and the length of stay. The weak, uncertain future emigrants prefer short and medium-term foreign stay, whilst those having serious intention consider to leave Hungary for long-term or even for a lifetime. Migration is a selective process. In general, the decision-making of those particular social groups is apparently more serious who own the plethora of opportunities (young people, having diverse human and social capital)

and constraints (dissatisfied, pessimistic, discriminated) catalysing each other. The most cardinal repulsive factor for decades is the lack of macroeconomic stability, individual financial problems and adequate jobs. This is coincided by growing dissatisfaction with political life, diminishing of life prospects, fears about future uncertainty and the gradual emergence of social conflicts. The Hungarian social composition is seriously asymmetric: The proportion of deprived groups are getting widespread, in parallel the middle class is shrinking. Sharp territorial inequalities are reflected in connection with the willingness to migration. Strong and long-term migration intentions are more significant in economically underdeveloped regions (e.g. the former strongholds of the socialist heavy industry, ex-mining districts and underdeveloped regions). The young population of the Western Hungarian counties is less concerned with moving abroad, but their livelihood is greatly improved by the opportunities of the nearby Austrian and Slovakian labour market. There is also an obvious centre-periphery duality, because the highly qualified, independent urban youth has the most serious emigration intentions. The cumulative results of our four-year empirical research support the Hungarian young generation's rising willingness towards emigration from year to year both in terms of further education and employment.

One of the most significant problem of Hungary – burdened by a great number of social, political and economic conflicts – to stop / mitigate the extreme tendencies of Hungarians' emigration and the growing nature of serious emigration intention. It would be possible only with policy interventions (economic and social reforms) that maintain – or even develop – living standards, diminish social inequalities and guarantee future prospects.

Many possible avenues of further migration-specific scrutiny have already opened up. As younger and younger Hungarians get involved into the process, a particular analysis on high-school students may bring pioneering results amongst with the examination of remigration. Based on our empirical data and many similar research outcomes, the ratio of emigrants consciously leaving the country in order to strengthen financially and existentially is increasing. Their re-integration into the Hungarian society, the new endeavours finally, their views in terms of Hungarian political, economic, social circumstances might give a wide fields to be analysed.

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