

LIMEN

Journal of the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

4 (2021/2)



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African girls pumping water in a village, photo: shutterstock.com

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Climate change and other global crises viewed from space

Orsolya Ferencz

Abstract

Space technology is an indispensable part of modern-day existence. Earth Observation satellites are essential in detecting high impact natural phenomena on our planet's surface and atmosphere, in outer space, as well as human activity and influence. There are numerous international organizations operating satellite systems and Hungary plays a crucial role in this sector. This paper reviews the importance of the data provided by satellite systems and how they can be used, and ultimately argues for an expansion of their use.

The research below examines a number of practical sectors that are improved by the use of satellite-provided information. Low-orbit observation satellites carry out land monitoring which helps us understand and react to extensive territorial disasters (such as forest fires and droughts) and agricultural trends. Detecting clues left by human activities such as migration routes can help us improve our security by deploying forces and by providing help where it is necessary.

The paper also takes a look at what atmospheric monitoring can teach us about the human impact on climate change with statistics provided by observation satellites proving anthropomorphic impact. Beyond that, the paper also discusses solar and interstellar impacts on our lives, as well as possibilities in outer space.

Keywords: climate-change, space technology, low-orbit observation

Our home, planet Earth faces many worrying events in the present and just as the technology available for us advances day by day, our challenges become more and more complex. Climate change is one of the greatest issues modern man faces, so taking advantage of the current high-tech sector, and making use of space technology is something we cannot afford to neglect. Aside from the already existing services, which became part of our daily life, the opportunities presented by such a fruitful territory of science could help us ensure the safety of our countries and the future. In this article, I will introduce several projects, which already support us in the process of understanding the great changes in our

surroundings. Only by integrating the best methods created by us can we achieve the betterment of our present and future.

When we first left the bubble of our atmosphere and stepped out of the protection of our planet, we caught a glimpse of the highly complicated system that we are part of. We just realized, how little we know of the “spaceship” we all live in, the one we call the biosphere. It contains adaptive feedback mechanisms of physical, chemical and biological processes; also, each of them is strictly necessary for the presence of life and our survival. A good example would be the Earth’s electromagnetic shield, which as the name suggests, shields us from the deadly amount of solar radiation from the Sun. Though it is a necessary criterion for life to exist, it is not enough alone. The massive water reserves in the icecaps, the oceans’ ecological effects, and the diverse vegetation itself cooperating through countless feedback mechanisms provide the perfect habitat for other lifeforms, and humans themselves. Space research and space activity might just be the best resource to follow up on several global phenomena, such as climate change, but also migration and many others. Nowadays our knowledge of global warming mostly relies on space technology through global observations made by satellites and other devices. These measurements taken by such types of equipment on the Earth’s orbits are irreplaceable and they are the basis of any models created for worldwide changes.

One would think, that only the traditionally referred superpowers can afford to launch satellites since sometimes they are quite resource-consuming, but among the most important Earth Observation or EO sats many are sent by Asian, South American or even African countries. Hungary also contributed greatly to this network of global information collecting through the Sentinel satellite family, which is owned by the EU, but designed and operated by the European Space Agency (ESA) and a Hungarian company supplied its various elements.

So, for what reasons are we observing the planet? What can we see exactly? Marine, atmosphere and land monitoring, emergency management, natural disaster forecasting, security observations and climate observations are just some of the major possibilities in space technology and satellite programs. These services are in many international organisations’ capabilities, just as the EU’s satellite network, the Copernicus program.¹ Nine of the previously introduced Sentinel device family is in low Earth orbit as being part of the Copernicus network. As I mentioned previously, land monitoring is an important feature of this program that explains why it is necessary to invest in these areas of science. Precision

¹ EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY.

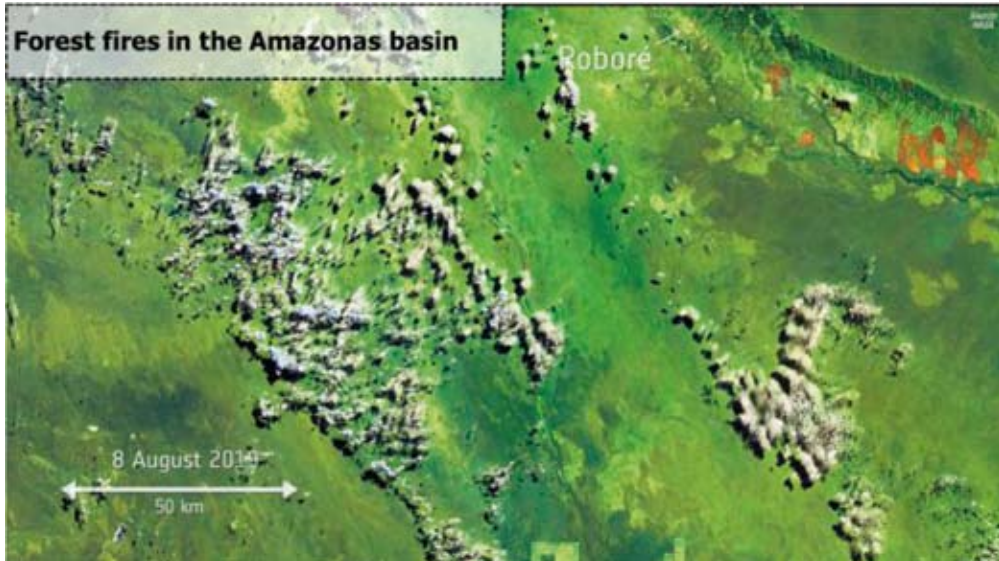
agriculture is a sector, which completely relies on the help of satellites, supporting farmers all around the world. With this method, we can easily measure the number of agricultural products, crops and even estimate their quality, all up from space. This could not have been possible a few decades ago, since these data cannot be acquired from the surface. Through the EU's LMS (land monitoring service) biophysical monitoring, mapping, spatial and urban planning, forest management and water management became accessible to many countries, as well as acquiring data regarding the acclimatization to climate change. Numerous models regarding the protection of national parks and important territories of vegetation rely on these LMS databases to present the changes in forests through the years.

The monitoring of droughts is an essential part of science centred on ecology. Not many people could argue about the importance of such research projects since water is of cardinal value, which cannot be replaced by any other substance on our planet. Droughts cause countless terrible problems around all the continents, from China and India to Africa, Australia and the Americas. The uncontrollable bushfires and disappearing ancient forests are now far from being simply frightening news on television even to the Hungarian people. As of 2021, Lake Velencei has started to lose a significant amount of water. As the problem escalates, more and more people will feel the consequences of it in their daily lives. With satellites, the extensive territorial disasters can be localised, so we can take proper actions to minimise the damage to our surroundings. A good example of this could be the forest fires in Siberia in 2018, which were recorded with synchronised monitoring from space by the Sentinel devices, but I could also mention the Amazonian forest fires recorded in 2019.²

Atmosphere monitoring services are another major project under the EO satellites. The most well-known area of use for these installations is the observation of CO₂ levels around the globe. With this technology, we can measure the amount of CO₂ emission above various industrial areas, and the consequences of forest fires can be easily seen as well. It is often used to create maps and models representing the most polluted areas. This also helps us in localizing the territories, which are in dire need of remodelling regarding the use of sustainable energy. The previously mentioned forest fires are not only a threat to the vegetation but also contribute to exponentially rising CO₂ levels. What we can see based on these recordings and models is that the northern hemisphere, where the proportion of land to water is more than in the southern hemisphere, tends to produce a greater amount of carbon dioxide, especially in the winter, when the flora cannot be used as a buffer as effectively. Regarding the state of the Arctic icecaps and other areas, like Siberia,

² NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY 2020.

it explains the rapid decrease of frozen fresh water in the north. Meanwhile, in the southern hemisphere, the extensive and rich vegetation, like the Amazon rain forest can act as a regulator of this tendency. Although in 2019, when many forest fires took place in the South American continent, or regarding the 2020 Australian bushfires, the rise of the CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere was due to the burning flora.



Forest fires in the Amazon basin, taken by a satellite, source: NASA

With the atmosphere monitoring services, we can measure the air quality in detail, regarding pollen concentrations and other components, which affect the local population's health. The source and the origin of these polluting elements are also part of the data that can be acquired. Lastly, the forecast services and warning systems rely greatly on these satellite network systems.

Observing land and water surfaces can add to security-oriented databases as well, supporting the border protection of countries. Masses of people traveling from Africa and the Middle East created migration-related issues in Europe that have only worsened since 2016. Satellites can detect the trends of illegal border crossings, not only by land but also by sea. Maritime surveillance is carried out in partnership with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), while border protection is possible with the cooperation of FRONTEX. The European Union also acquires the assistance of satellites when preparing for various external actions.

Not only can we monitor the migration routes and deploy appropriate forces to the affected areas, but also, based on these collected data, we can help people in life-threatening situations, especially when they are travelling by boats.

Aside from the Earth's Observational satellite networks, life without devices around the orbit is unimaginable nowadays. It is simple enough if we think about communication or navigational systems, coordinating the freight non-stop between all the continents. In addition, aside from air travelling companies and shipping services, during the major lockdowns and quarantines in the current pandemic, we all came to know the importance of telecommunication. The assistance that came from the satellite families helped us overcome the problems of social distancing and made education, along with most types of work possible through the internet.

Hence, the EU has focused on working on projects such as GOVSATCOM, GALILEO, ARTES and EGNOS investing a total budget of more than 14 billion euros. With the help of these funds, we are now able to connect people, places and economic sectors, better than before, all around the world.

Aside from the ESA and EU programs, the Hungarian government also concentrates greatly on a national strategy regarding this high-tech sector. The most important areas of the Hungarian space strategy emphasise the significance of research and education since the future programmes are mostly based on today's efforts.³ The achievements of these sectors can be later implemented in the Hungarian industry as well as the protection of borders, and the national security. Since the latter are highly associated with diplomacy, it is crucial to focus a sufficient amount of resources on space. Many investments already came to fruition in the field of agriculture, meteorology or communication, but we could also mention security and protection services.⁴

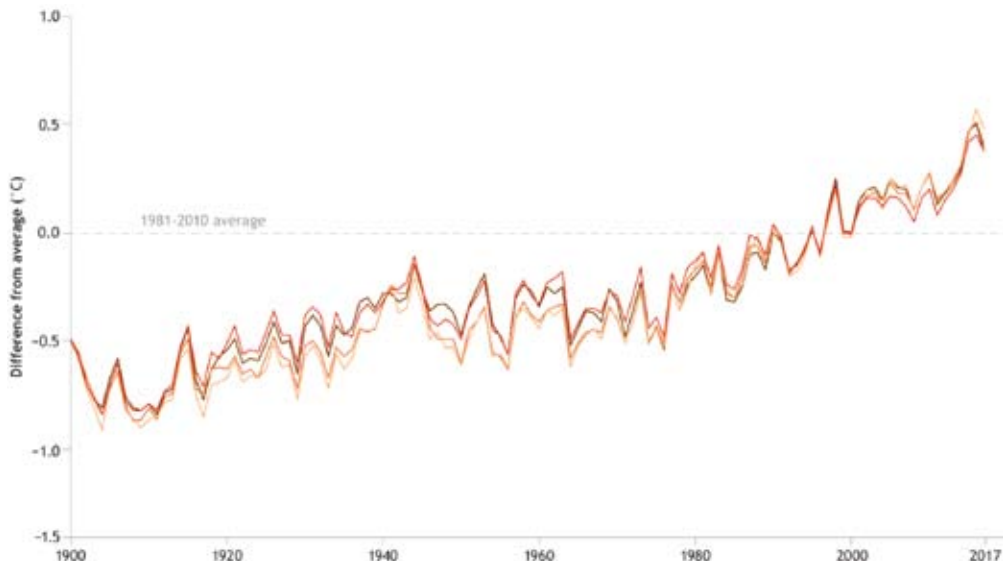
The governmental structure of the Hungarian space activity consists of three different levels. Each level represents authority in a hierarchical position. The entire area belongs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which is represented by Minister Péter Szijjártó. Under his authority works the Ministerial Commissioner for Space Activity, and ESA Head of Delegation. Lastly, the department under that level of decision-making is the Department for Space Activity, currently led by a Head of the Department. Hungary was the first to remodel this sector, and place it under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to make international cooperation much easier. It helped in creating a lot of MOU (Memory of Understanding),

³ LECHNER TUDÁSKÖZPONT.

⁴ ORSZÁGOS METEOROLÓGIAI SZOLGÁLAT.

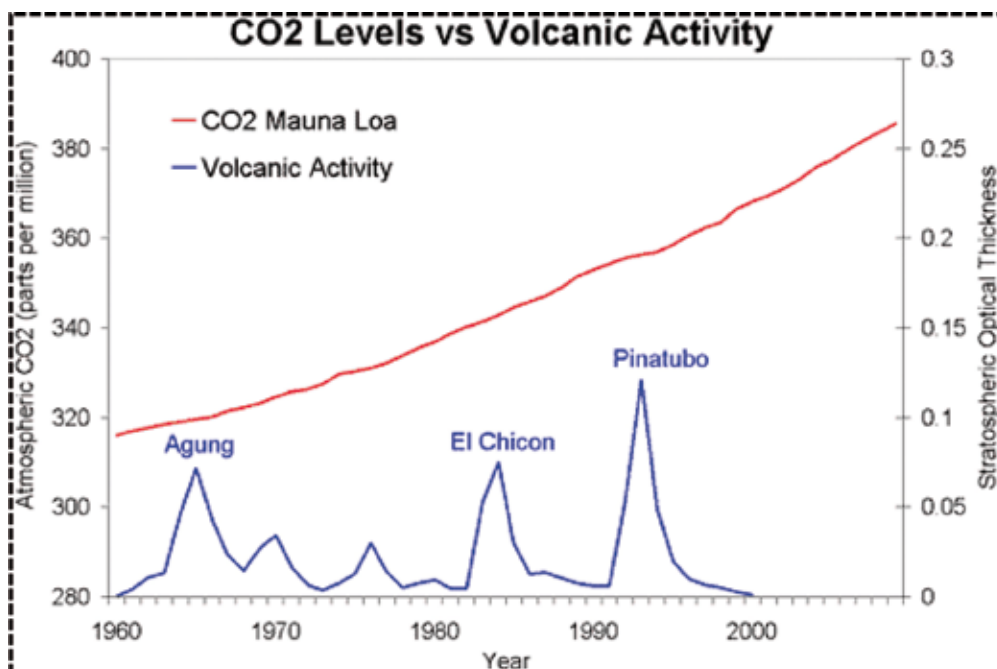
and agreements with different partners from Brazil to Finland, from Singapore to Israel. We could also organize successful negotiations with various actors of the civil sector as well, for example, the Virgin Galactic company from the United States of America. Other cooperation and contracts are underway with Axiom Space.

As mentioned previously, the space sector provides irreplaceable information along with terrestrial measurements regarding climate change. This creates a scientifically accurate basis as evidence of human responsibility in the current ecological problems. By measuring the average yearly temperature in Hungary, the continuous warming up of the country is indisputable. The yearly amount of tropical nights is also on the rise, which means a temperature above twenty degrees Celsius. This tendency can be seen everywhere, worldwide. The average temperature right now is around 0.8 degree Celsius warmer, than at the beginning of the 20th century. This change is in correlation with the rising levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere that show the same exponential tendency. It is said, that through the Earth's periodic changes, glacier and interglacial eras followed each other, with different levels of carbon dioxide concentration. So one could say that the current tendency is due to something unrelated to humankind, but by observing the rapidness of this warming, and the exponential growth of CO₂, we can clearly see, that this is not a natural phenomenon.



The average surface temperature of the Earth from 1900 to 2017, source: NOAA

This correlation is already proven by scientific means, for example, the data recorded on Mauna Loa, on a Hawaiian base of the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) which works with atmospheric research alongside many others.⁵ Overall, the graveness of this issue is clearly presented through the scientific community, and no argument can stand against it. Volcanic eruptions provide an insignificant amount of CO₂ compared to industrial areas. The strange and rapid rise in air pollution can also be traced back to the industrial revolution, since the major changes started mostly in the last century. This is something we can easily tell using ice samples, measuring and comparing the carbon-dioxide levels of old and newly formed ice. Another important field of research concentrates on the state of the Arctic ice because not only the quantity, but also the quality of this frozen territory matters greatly for the normal operation of the biosphere. Models show, that every year, the amount of “old ice”, which had formed many years prior to the modern measurements, decreases as the warming climate speeds up the deterioration of the polar caps. This proportion of “old” and “new” ice diminishes gradually, which is problematic since newly formed ice is much less durable than the old one. Over the years, the newly frozen ice slowly replaces the unmelted old ice, which indicates the grave changes of the North Pole.

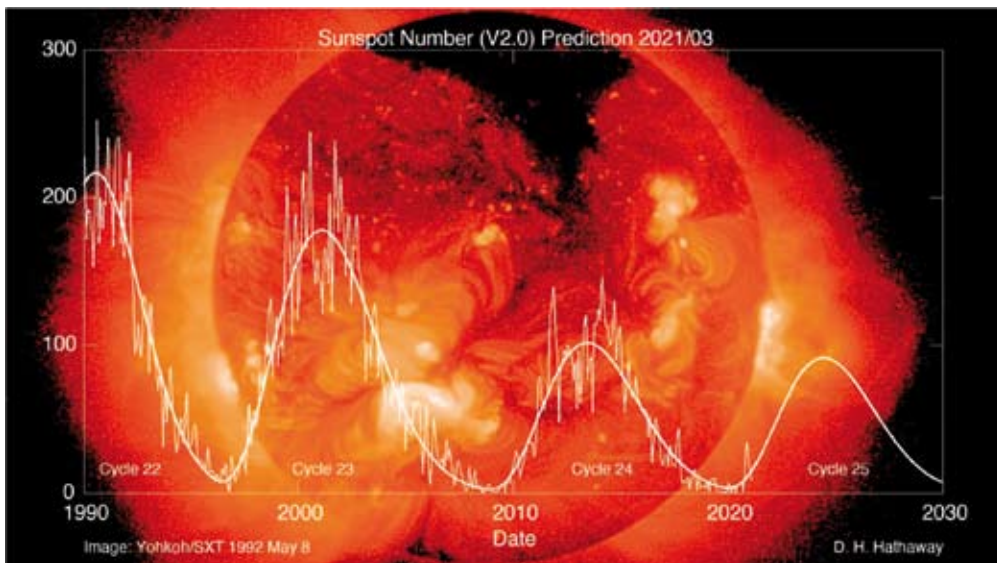


Based on the data of Mauna Loa, source: NOAA

⁵ NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION.

Another indicator of the industrial origin of the rising carbon dioxide level is that the different isotopes of carbon detected in the atmosphere, with different half-lives can show us that human activity produced them artificially.

Earth and the planet's surroundings are not the only focus of our space devices. The Solar System's most important component, the Sun also influences our daily life and future. Research concentrates on the cyclic functions of our star, observing sunspots and other variables. These studies also tried to find out whether there is a correlation between the Sun's activity and the global rise of temperature and carbon dioxide levels, but so far, it seems that the fluctuations in the Sun's activity are not relevant in this matter compared to human influence.



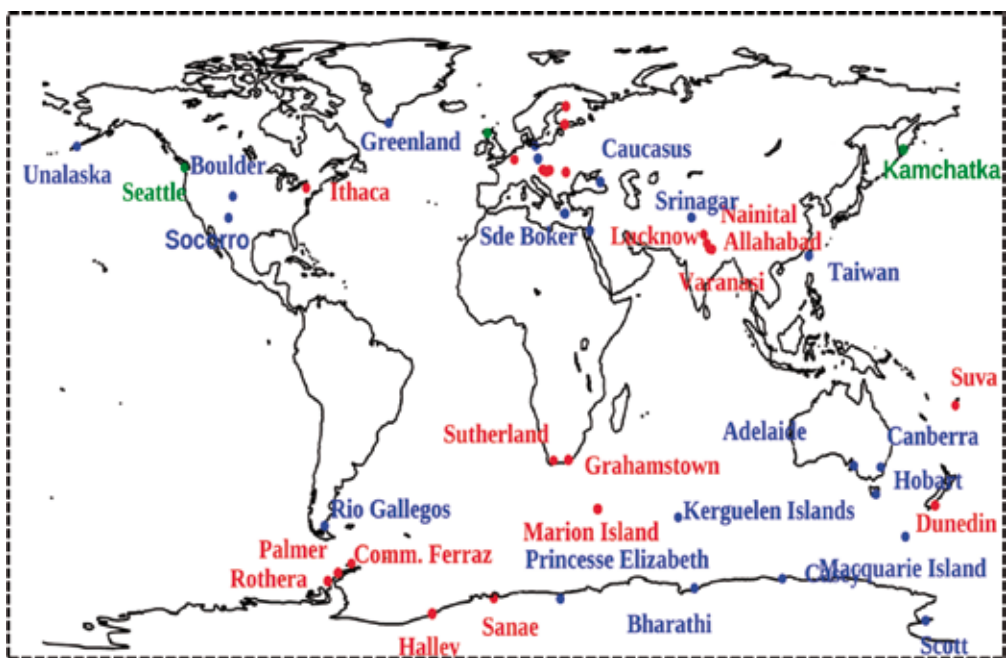
Periodicity of the detected and predicted sunspots from 1990 to 2030

What else can we see through the eyes of EO satellites? Observations about oceanic emissions and absorption are the key to understand the great system that we live in. As it is known, the sea provides a habitat to its own microscopic vegetation called phytoplankton. Billions and billions of unicellular and more complex forms of life from cyanobacteria to eukaryotes make up this crucial part of the ocean's wildlife. As we know, twenty-five percent of our CO₂ emission gets absorbed by the oceans because of the phytoplankton. Although they are not visible to the naked eye, we can measure their concentration through the EO sats.⁶ They contain chlorophyll, which gives a green discoloration to the surface of the waters in high density. This indicator can be the base of the maps the satellites create using images from space.

⁶ EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY 2017.

The greener the area, the more phytoplankton there is. Using this method, we can gather important information regarding the distribution of sea vegetation, and from the models, it is clear, that the absorbing territories are located along coastlines and in shallow areas. Hence, the dominant emitting part of the oceans is in the centre of the water mass. While the most absorbent locations are where humans interfere with the marine ecology the most. The amount of chlorophyll that we detect can represent the density and size of the crucial phytoplankton populations, so their increase or decrease can also be detected along with the CO₂ emission and absorption just like the breathing of an organism.⁷ This is yet another feature of the Earth Observation satellites.

However, if we return to the planet's surface, we can find Hungary's participation in numerous earthbound projects as well. AVDANet, a network around the globe made by Hungary has stations on every continent, including the Antarctica.⁸ The system is built and operated by the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest (ELTE), and its main goal is to study electromagnetic occurrences in the atmosphere to create references to satellite databases. This research helps in expanding our knowledge regarding atmospheric processes in details that had not been available before.

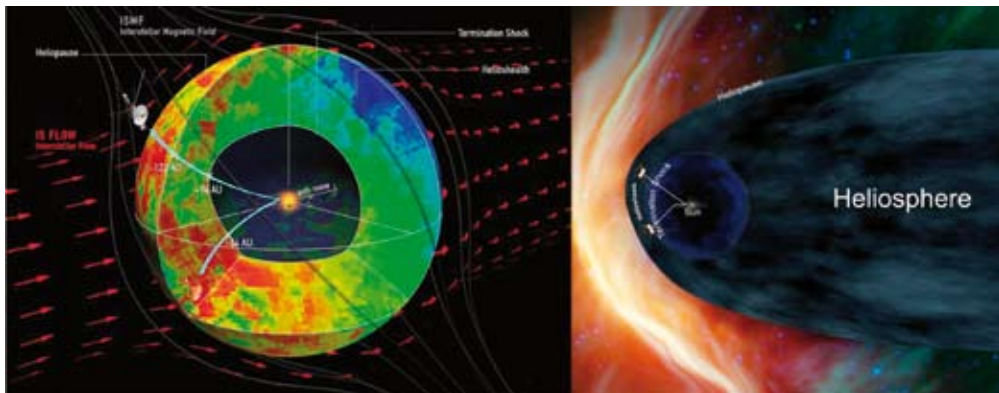


The locations of stations of AVDANet, source: ELTE

⁷ COPENICUS – EUROPE'S EYES ON EARTH.

⁸ NATIONAL CENTERS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION.

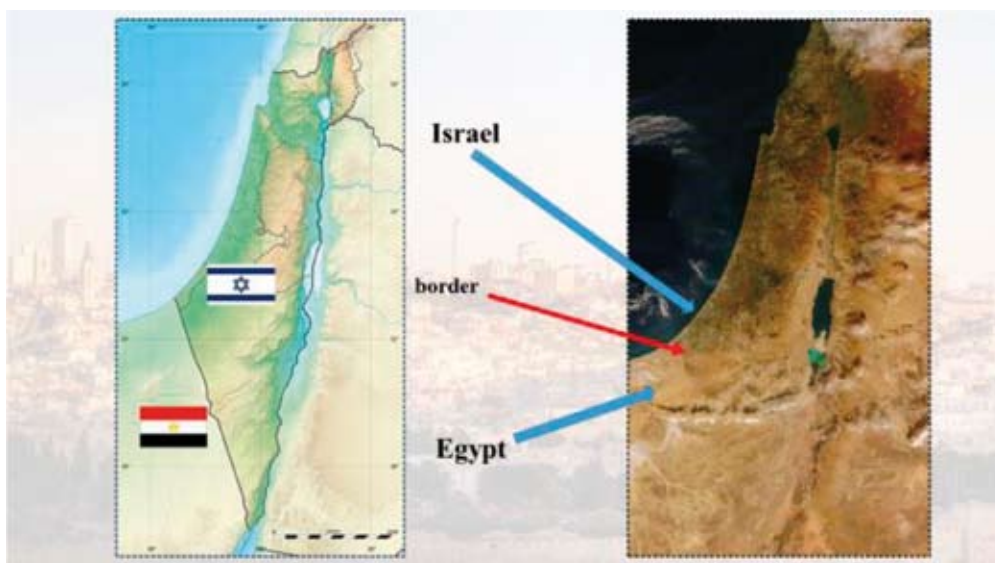
Therefore, with the manufactured devices that we sent up to orbit over the decades and the surface equipment that we built, humanity developed an important and vulnerable network of technology. Studying space weather, which affects our planet and the newly created techno-sphere around it, is not concentrated only on our Sun and the Earth. The whole Solar System, and the way it interacts with the galaxy, and interstellar space is an important matter to investigate. Just as our planet has its own electromagnetic shield, that surrounds us like a bubble, the sun owns a much greater field of protection containing the whole Solar System. The heliosphere of our system protects us to a certain degree. Without these protective shields, life would be unimaginable on Earth. As we interact with our star, the Sun also interacts with the other parts of our galaxy, the Milky Way itself. Studying the structure of these forces can equip us with better insight into the dangers that affect us but remained unknown for centuries.



The structure of the heliosphere, source: NASA

The universe is not a “friendly” space. Even our relatively quiet star can cause tremendous harm to our ecosystem, and the technological infrastructure. The Sun’s bursts have to be monitored to prevent unforeseen incidents. History’s most known example of such an occurrence would be the Carrington event, which was due to a powerful solar flare, it was so strong, that the Aurora Borealis could be seen in Hawaii for days. The geomagnetic storm took place in September of 1859. Although, at that time humanity did not have the complicated electric systems of today, which could have been greatly damaged by this event, it was still recorded in history. We can only imagine the catastrophic consequences that we would have to face if a solar outburst of such scale reached Earth today. The chances of something like this happening are a terrifying one in eight.

Human impact is also a huge factor in changing the planet's surface. An interesting fact is that by satellites, we can clearly see the border between two countries, which was previously just a line drawn on a map. Here the reason is that different agricultural methods left Israel with a greener landscape compared to its neighbouring countries. The border between Egypt and Israel can be observed from space mainly because of the strategies regarding the preservation of vegetation and nature. This is one of the best examples of how we can create great changes with the correct regulations and laws. We should not forget the huge impact that we have on our surroundings, even if we tend to ignore it when we concentrate on the scale of the events around the globe. When it comes to long-term effects, everything can count.⁹



The border between Israel and Egypt

However, studying the global processes in their entirety and making sufficient models including each factor is a step that we must not skip. Only after the correct research, can we start to create adequate measures for the betterment of our current situation. At this point space technology is a necessary element. From communication and other services to climate research, space activity provides numerous opportunities, which are unavailable by any other known methods. As many countries have decided to invest in this territory, more than eighty of them have already sent satellites into space. In 2016, the value of the space market was estimated to be 339 billion US dollars. We still struggle to grasp the rapidness of this evolution in technology that will become a major aspect of the economy. Between 2024 and 2030, missions to

⁹ SKEPTICAL SCIENCE.

Mars are being planned, and the activity of many countries with the lunar projects in mind is increasing as well. Soon it will be revealed how the “value of space” will change our complete economical structure. It is enough if we think about mining in the Solar System, and transporting the raw material back to Earth. So far, there have been attempts to estimate the profit generated by asteroid belts, but what seems more likely in our near future is a project on our closest neighbour, the Moon.

All in all, life on Earth can only be preserved with a great amount of knowledge about the universe and our surroundings. For the sake of our ecology, expanding our boundaries in almost every aspect of our lives is necessary. Let us pursue the most advantageous route that humanity can take.

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‘Climate Migration’: what role for research in the age of post-truth?

Calum T. M. Nicholson

Abstract

The era of ‘post-truth’ is often described as one in which there has been an objective rise in the number of untruthful statements in the public sphere. This paper not only makes the case that the era can, perhaps, alternatively be described as one in which there has, conversely, been a decline in the faith people have in the very idea of objective truth, but further argues that this decline is entirely rational.

Through an examination of the emotive but contested theme of ‘climate migration’, the paper argues that technocratic institutions have long traded in epistemic equivocation, which is beginning to undermine public trust in ‘expertise’ and the process of public policy. To restore this trust, researchers must not only seek to be ‘policy relevant’, but also be vigilant against the pattern of equivocation which is evident in policy-oriented discourses such as that on ‘climate migration’.

Keywords: climate change; migration; post-truth; climate mobility; policy

A few months before the COVID-19 pandemic began, in November 2019, perhaps the leading journal on climate change, *Nature Climate Change*, published a Special Issue on ‘Climate Migration’. Perhaps the most prominent paper in this collection was a comment piece titled ‘Climate Migration Myths’, co-authored by thirty-one leading scholars on the topic.¹

This paper was significant for a particular reason: its premise, rather than its conclusion, was that we cannot coherently talk about ‘climate migration’. From the outset of the paper, they argue that we need to question, not confirm, the ‘assumption that climate change causes mass human migration’, because ‘migration is not solely driven by climate change’, but instead by a ‘mix of climatic, socio-economic, cultural and political factors’.²

¹ Boas, Farbotko, Adams, Sterly, Bush, van der Geest, Wiegel, Ashraf, Baldwin, Bettini, Blondi, de Bruijn, Durand-Delacré, Fröhlich, Gioli, Guaita, Hut, Jarawura, Lamers, Lietaer, Nash, Piguët, Rothe, Sakdapolrak, Smith, Furlong, Turhan, Warner, Zickgraf, Black, Hulme, 2019, pp. 898–903.

² Ibid. p. 902.

They went on to note that ‘even when climate change does play a role, it remains difficult to determine the extent of its influence’. From this, they make clear that ‘categorizing climate migrants as distinguishable from “non-climate migrants” is not empirically possible in most, if not all, circumstances. As a consequence, predictions of mass climate-induced migration are inherently flawed’.³

None of these startling statements would provoke much controversy among researchers who have worked on this topic for some time. If there is one pattern that holds true across literature on the topic, it is precisely that we do not know what ‘climate migration’ is supposed to be, as distinct from ‘non-climate migration’, nor – by extension – who ‘climate migrants’ are, relative to any other sort of migrant.

This absence of controversy among the initiated is at least in part attributable to the general findings and, indeed, the intellectual and moral tenor of migration studies. Among scholars, migration decisions are widely understood to be ‘always mediated through complex political, social and economic structures’.⁴ In making these decisions, migrants themselves are also conceived as conscious agents who respond to their environment with a plurality of subjective mores, motives and forms of meaning, rather than simply passive ‘victims’, driven blindly by environmental hazards.⁵

However, the absence of controversy is also partly attributable to the specific findings – or lack thereof – of research on ‘climate migration’ itself. Indeed, within this sub-field, it is broadly agreed that ‘no accepted definition of “climate migration”.... actually exists’,⁶ and that attempts to quantify ‘climate migrants’ are ‘on shaky ground methodologically, and fail to recognise the multi-causality of migration and... climate change adaptation efforts’.⁷ Such attempts are seen to give ‘the illusion of a deeper understanding of [causal linkage]’,⁸ and that climate change should be at best ‘understood as a threat or impact multiplier, rather than being a tangible risk that a person can be exposed and vulnerable to’.⁹ ‘CM’ has therefore been argued to be an ‘intrinsically equivocal concept’,¹⁰ perennially unmoored from any actual constituency. There are migrants, but there are no

³ Ibid. p. 902.

⁴ HULME 2014, p. 509.

⁵ GEMENNE 2011, pp. 41–49.

⁶ NASH 2019, p. 8.

⁷ Ibid, p. 6.

⁸ Ibid, p. 6.

⁹ SCOTT 2020, p. 10.

¹⁰ NICHOLSON 2017, p. 49.

climate migrants – ‘there is no solution to “climate migration” because “climate migration” is not an issue in and by itself’.¹¹

As such, while the premise of the *Nature Climate Change* article is hardly controversial among experts, it was nevertheless unusual and significant to see such a clear and emphatic declaration that the concept is a non-starter, by such a large group of leading scholars, in such a prominent journal.

Their statement may nevertheless seem puzzling to those who have not worked directly on the topic. Because, at a general level, it seems intuitively self-evident that climate change will impact human migration. However, the question is not whether, at some *general* level – familiar to complexity theorists – everything affects everything else. Rather, the question is whether we can ever actually identify any *specific* person, or group, who we can say were driven exclusively, or overwhelmingly, by climate change. And what is gained, and what is lost, when climate change is privileged in our analysis of the so-called ‘drivers’ of migration?

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For example, sometimes we hear that Syrian refugees were fleeing drought caused by climate change,¹² or that drought caused internal migration that caused conflict.¹³ However, these causal claims are defined by their exclusion of the all-important role of social and political context. What political-economic factors influenced the drought?¹⁴ What political tensions led to conflict? What political considerations led to the need to migrate internationally, rather than internally? The dominant factors in all these are often – indeed always – political, as disaster risk reduction scholars have long argued.¹⁵ There is a real risk that, in reframing forms of migration as ‘climatic’ as opposed to political or economic, we engage in a form of political ‘greenwashing’ – absolving political actors of their responsibility, and ultimately failing to understand the factors that may be acted upon to improve things, regardless of whether one’s goal is to protect migrants, stop migration, or both.

As such, the term ‘climate migration’ has unfortunate consequences both for research and for policy. But what actually is the problem with the term itself, and the causality it implies? There are a number of ways to describe these problems, but perhaps the clearest way is to identify the flawed metaphor that the concept ‘climate

¹¹ MAYER 2016, p. 301.

¹² KELLEY ET AL 2015, pp. 3241–3246.

¹³ BRIGGS, 2021.

¹⁴ SELBY ET AL 2017, pp. 232–244.

¹⁵ SCOTT 2020.

migration' holds implicit, and indeed, which lies at its foundations – a metaphor that is, essentially, derived from Classical Mechanics.

As we all remember from school, Isaac Newton's Three Laws of Motion are as follows:

- a) That an object will remain as it is unless acted upon by a force;
- b) That the movement of an object is proportional to the force applied to it;
- c) That every action leads to an equal and opposite reaction.

It would seem to be this model that underpins and frames our thinking when we think about 'climate migration'. It is, after all, a causal concept which assumes that:

- a) A person would otherwise not migrate unless acted upon or motivated by some external force (in this case, climate change);
- b) That their migration, once it occurs, will then be proportional to that external force;
- c) And that the degree of 'threat' or 'challenge' so-called 'climate migrants' pose to the receiving society will be proportional to their numbers.

It is arguable that this metaphor is always implied when we talk about so-called 'climate migration'. However, to the extent this is true, it is simply an inappropriate, and therefore flawed, metaphor in the context in which it is applied. This is because it presumes that people – call us *terrestrial bodies* – can be understood and modelled as physics does celestial ones; it presumes that we are inanimate things, rather than animate people – people with our own minds, mores, motives, and forms of meanings, inclusive of our highly subjective understanding of risk.

People do not necessarily wait to be acted upon by some external force in order to take action, be it to migrate, or indeed to do anything else; when we are compelled to react to external factors and our circumstance, we do not necessarily do so in a linear fashion that can be predicted based on, or extrapolated from, an understanding of the factor or force in question; and once we have taken the action in question (in this case having migrated), we do not necessarily provoke a level of reactive hostility, let alone 'cause problems', in proportion to the scope and scale of the action itself.

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Philosophers of Science have long drawn an important and useful distinction between Science and Scientism. Put simply, if *Science* is a set of methodologies and tools for excavating material facts that are of contextual use for society, *Scientism*, by contrast, describes those circumstances where we believe science may also serve as a guide to excavating the ‘truth’ of what society’s values ought to be. While presenting itself as an exercise in the former, ‘Climate Migration’ would appear to in fact be an example of the latter.

The concept of ‘climate migration’, therefore, is not in actual fact a *scientific* one. We cannot simply extrapolate from a quantitative understanding of the physical science of climate change to understand, let alone predict, the qualitative impact of climate change on migration, or indeed the impact of migration on society. Rather, ‘climate migration’ would appear to be a *scientistic* concept – an attempt to stretch and apply the idiom of science well beyond its range of competence, and thus coherence.

We can plainly see the resulting incoherence in the empirical literature on ‘climate migration’. As I’ve argued elsewhere,¹⁶ the result of this flawed metaphor is that, in lieu of saying anything clearer, the literature – in an effort to say *something* – lapses into six tendencies.

The first is *contradiction*. For example, in a 2021 piece, Ingrid Boas writes that ‘there is no direct connection between climate change and human migration’, before proceeding, in the same piece, to refer to ‘the issue’, ‘this issue’, ‘this highly complex issue’, ‘such movements’, ‘the movement’, ‘people...deeply affected’, ‘the matter’, and ‘how this type of mobility unfolds’, and ends the piece by stating that ‘the issue of climate mobilities is real’.¹⁷ Within this is a contradiction – or perhaps a sort of epistemic superposition – where it is first denied that there is a discernible relationship between climate change and migration, but also then claimed that there is one. This is what we might call ‘Quantum Reasoning’ – where the speaker occupies contradictory positions simultaneously. Like Schrödinger’s Cat, the idea of ‘climate migration’ is both dead and alive at the same time. The contradiction brings to mind an observation of Andrew Abbott, who wrote, in reference to the hegemony of causal explanation among sociologists, that ‘action and contingency disappear into the magician’s hat of variable-based causality, where they hide during the analysis, only to be reproduced with a flourish in the article’s closing paragraphs’.¹⁸

¹⁶ NICHOLSON 2014.

¹⁷ BOAS 2021.

¹⁸ ABBOTT 1998, p. 3.

The second tendency is *logical tautology*. In these cases, statements are made that are necessarily true, as they include both possible options, but not useful, because they do not determine or project which option will, in fact, be the case. Examples include statements to the effect that ‘environmental change is equally likely to make migration less as more probable’;¹⁹ that there is a continuum from forced to voluntary migration;²⁰ that some people will flee areas of climate stress, and others will remain;²¹ that ‘people are as likely to migrate to places of environmental vulnerability as from these places’;²² and that ‘we see highly varied forms of human mobility and immobility’.²³ All these claims are true because they could not be otherwise: they are pure tautologies – incontrovertibly true, but completely useless as a guide to understanding, let alone action.

The third tendency is *arbitrariness*. In these cases, a specific case or anecdote is cited, about a particular event or community, where environmental factors have some bearing on a societal outcome. However, it is in the nature of these very specific instances that one cannot induce general claims about the impact of climate from them, transcendent of local social, political, and economic circumstance. A community may indeed have to react to an environmental change of some sort. However, the formulation of this reaction will inevitably have much to do with local culture – inclusive of priorities, attitudes to risk, and so on – to the extent that it is impossible to induce a general causal ‘law’ between the environmental ‘independent variable’ and the societal ‘dependent variable’, which may be applied deductively to other cases.²⁴

The fourth tendency is the use of *platitude* – that is, to make claims that are general and sweeping in nature, but which nevertheless offer us little if any guidance on what might occur in any specific case or circumstance. For instance, to state that ‘there is a causal connection between climate change and population movement, but this is often not direct and is mediated by a range of factors, playing out in different ways’.²⁵ Sometimes such general statements are in fact framed as negations, describing what is missing. When people talk of the need for a governance framework for ‘climate migration’, they are not offering a clear

¹⁹ Foresight: migration and Global Change (2011) Final Project Report (London: The Government Office for Science). p. 6.

²⁰ HUGO 2010, p. 12.

²¹ BARNARD – WEBBER 2010, p. 40.

²² Foresight: migration and Global Change (2011) Final Project Report (London: The Government Office for Science). P. 6.

²³ BOAS 2021.

²⁴ OLIVER-SMITH 1999.

²⁵ Ibid.

explanation of what is needed, but rather, simply describing – by negation – what we lack.

The fifth tendency is what we might term ‘*category laundering*’. In the same pieces, we might see a panoply of different terms that all seek to explain the same causal relationship between climate and migration. For instance, in Boas’ 2021 piece, these include ‘climate migration’, ‘the climate/migration nexus’, ‘climate mobilities’, and ‘mobility in the context of climate change’.²⁶ The variety of terms suggests a topic that is ill at ease with itself. For, if the underlying ontological claim is stable, why the need to continue shifting the categories we use? And if the claim is unstable, what precisely are the terms describing? Indeed, if they do not share so much in common as to have an identical referent, then what specifically sets them apart? Perhaps, however, if the central causal claim is not clear, the language is simply being ‘laundered’, as one would launder money, in order to arrest any logical chain of critical investigation.

The final and sixth tendency is what we might call ‘*epistemic can-kicking*’, or equivocation. This is the tendency to tacitly acknowledge the failure of current research by simply calling for more research. Boas’ piece, again, provides a good example of this. Despite earlier writing that ‘there is no direct connection between climate change and human migration’, she goes on to add that ‘climate mobilities is [sic] an important subject of concern, in need of further research’.²⁷ However, she does not make clear how future research might avoid the errors in present research that have led to the need for more.

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It is for all these reasons that the *Nature Climate Change* paper took a *rejection* of the term ‘climate migration’, and the causality it implies, as its premise. However, in reframing the research agenda to instead focus on ‘climate mobility’, the 31 co-authors either do not escape the causal assumption they seek to avoid, or if they do, then they are no longer really talking about climate or even migration *per se*. That is, they’re either engaging in a distinction without a difference, or they are doing something so different as to be essentially irrelevant to any discussion of climate or migration. This is a provocative claim, and requires some explanation.

In order to avoid the causal assumption, the authors emphasise the need for ‘research that better accounts for the nonlinear complexity of mobility in the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

context of climate change and social change, to counteract the ‘linear “crisis” and “mass” migration assumptions’ – built on attempts to quantify and predict ‘climate migration’ – that are widespread in the news media and policy discourses. To do this, they define ‘mobility’ as encompassing short and long-term movement; near and long-distance movement; movement to and from a particular location; impacts of such movement on places of origin, transit and destination; the realities of multicausality; and immobility.²⁸

However, if they are indeed avoiding the idea of ‘climate migration’, and if the intentionally general phrase ‘context of climate change’ is used to keep the causal relationship between ‘climate change’ and ‘mobility’ vague, it does raise the question of why they privilege ‘mobility’ as a societal effect of climate change? Or indeed, why do they privilege ‘climate’ as an influence on ‘mobility’? Surely, by the inclusive logic of ‘climate mobilities’, climate affects everything, not just migration; and mobility (to the extent this refers to movement rather than just society in general) is affected by everything, not just climate? What, therefore, does the ‘climate mobility’ framework advance, in terms of a positive project for understanding the societal impacts of climate change? The problem is, when everything is amplified, the risk is that nothing is clarified. If we can say *anything*, or even *everything*, we’re actually, logically speaking, closer to saying *nothing* than we are to saying *something*. We are, at any rate, no better than when we started.

These paradoxes typify where research on the relationship between climate change and human migration is in 2021. After more than two decades of research, there remains little to no clarity as to what ‘climate migration’ is, or who it could possibly refer to. To talk coherently on the topic requires one to make a mechanical causal claim. But the moment we make such a claim, we are no longer talking usefully about the real world. This is a paradox that has stalked this topic for at least a decade – the elephant in the room at every conference on this topic.

Yet, curiously – and as the *Nature Climate Change* paper I’ve mentioned itself shows – these problems have not actually slowed the topic down, nor tempered interest in ‘it’, whatever ‘it’ – ‘climate migration’ – is supposed to be. In her 2019 monograph, *Negotiating Migration in the Context of Climate Change*, Sarah Nash has demonstrated that various institutions are engaged in – to draw on a metaphor from finance – what we could call a sort of intellectual self-trading, or perhaps ‘epistemic manipulation’, in which they are involved in ‘creating knowledge [in response] to... calls they have had a hand in creating’.²⁹ What is the motivation

²⁸ BOAS ET AL 2019, p. 902.

²⁹ NASH 2019, p. 180.

for this sort of incestuously circular relationship, which overlooks the elephant in the room? As one of Nash's interviewees admits, in a moment of startling candor: 'we have to position the organization in a way that we can apply for adaptation funding, and green funding, and climate funding'.³⁰ In short, elephants become less visible if people's livelihoods depend on ignoring them.

At this point, it's worth considering: why are we interested in 'climate migration' at all? It is undoubtedly for important and valid reasons.

First, since the end of the Cold War, climate change has become the most politically resonant branch of the sciences. We care about climate change because a) the data shows the climate is changing, and that these changes are likely anthropogenic, and b) we are worried about the societal consequences of a changing climate.

Second, and also since the end of the Cold War, migration has become perhaps the most politically resonant theme within the social sciences. These two trends dovetail together, because, in the spectrum of supposed causal societal impacts of climate change, migration has – plausibly enough – been presumed to be low-hanging fruit for research and policy. Indeed, it seems almost 'obvious' that climate would be a major 'cause' of migration, just as it seems 'obvious' that migration might be a – if not 'the' – major 'effect' of climate change.

One's interest in migration may come from various positions, of course. Some have a humanitarian interest in the well-being of migrants, others a national security – or indeed cultural – interest in stopping migration. These concerns are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but in either case, the concern pivots on a presumption that we can a) determine the relationship between climate and migration, and b) distinguish a 'climate migrant' from any other form of migrant.

However, the problem is self-evident: while the science of climate change seems reasonably clear, the social science of its impacts simply *is* not. Where there is a pattern of conclusions in social science, it is that conclusions cannot – or at least have not – been drawn. But this failure to find answers to our questions is not, arguably, something we need be too distressed about, for there is something that failure very usefully encourages us to reconsider: the role and responsibility of researchers.

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As researchers, and especially social scientists, where do we believe our real value lies? Naturally enough, most would argue it lies in *producing* knowledge – finding

³⁰ Ibid. p. 50.

answers – that can form an evidence base for efficient and effective policy-making. However, there is an argument to be made that this is only half the role, and perhaps even the less important half. The other role we play is far less glamorous, and often far less welcome, but potentially of far more consequence. This role is not so much to provide *certainly in our answers*, as it is to *clarify our questions* – and if needs be to literally *clear away bad questions* that may, far from being the means by which we solve our collective problems, actually be expressions, or symptoms, of those problems.

The meaning of this may make more sense if we first reflect on the concept of ‘post-truth’. There are, it would seem, two different ways to interpret the idea of ‘post-truth’. The first is focused on the *producer* of knowledge, and the second on the *consumer*.

On the one hand, the ‘post-truth’ era can be seen as one in which there has been an objective *rise* in untruthful statements in the public domain – ‘fake news’, ‘alternative facts’, and so on. This author is sceptical of this argument, simply because ideology has always filtered how we see the world. The primary difference today is not in the existence of falsehood or obfuscation, but rather in how fast and how wide such beliefs can spread, largely due to social media.

On the other hand, the ‘post-truth’ era can be seen as a time in which there has been a *decline* in the trust people have in the very idea of objectivity, and increasingly – and perhaps rightly – in anyone who claims to be an objective, authoritative expert, free from any ideological filter. The exceptional thing about the ‘post-truth’ age seems to be less that more ‘untruth’ is being produced than before, and more that people are increasingly cognizant of just how political all the knowledge they consume in fact is.

And indeed, why shouldn’t the general public be sceptical of any claim to expert authority, particularly where it involves society rather than just science? Take, for example, the literature on ‘climate migration’. Despite over twenty years of research, clear conclusions have yet to be drawn, and there is little clarity as to what the object of concern even is. As argued, contradictions litter the literature; institutions advocate for action, even when they themselves admit they do not know who the subject of action would be; and there are constant calls for more research, and more funding, even as no one can state clearly how new research might avoid the pitfalls of old research, not least its inappropriately mechanical framing, and therefore how further funding might be usefully directed. Why,

therefore, should anyone believe such ‘experts’, after the repeated failure to find conclusions, and the leveraging of such failure to appeal for more funding?

How we talk – and how we fail to make sense – when we discuss ‘climate migration’ may not reveal much about the world itself, not least the *effects* of climate change, or the *causes* of migration; it may not ‘provide great insights into the lives of the people being labelled’. However, it does, perhaps, reveal something about how mechanically we think in our modern, technocratic cultures; it can ‘provide insights into the people and organisations that use [such labels]’.³¹ And it is therefore perhaps entirely reasonable that there is a growing scepticism of technocratic authorities and institutions.

When we look across the political spectrum, from the neopuritan left to the neonationalist right, what we see are antithetical movements that are nevertheless united in what they both reject. Specifically, they share a general rejection of a model of thought and ‘governance’, dominant in the West for half a century or more, that is founded on a culturally specific and mechanical idea of what constitutes ‘truth’, and particularly a rejection of the people who claim to be ‘experts’ and authorities in this mechanical worldview, and who claim it as a basis for both governing society, and engineering justice.

The way we discuss ‘climate migration’ is, perhaps, best understood as simply an expression, or symptom, of a particular way and culture of thinking and seeing the world – a sort of secular faith in the authority of technocratic experts in apolitical ‘truth’ – that has lost its nimbus. This loss has in part been because of that culture’s failures – notably the cataclysm that was the 2008 financial crisis, and more recently the attempts at nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan. But this culture’s loss of authority is also in part because of its hypocrisies – the realisation that it is no less political or ideological or self-interested than anything that came before, and no more dispassionate or objective than any alternative.

Faced with this ‘post-truth’ moment, and in the context of climate change, researchers arguably have a clear role and an important responsibility. Yes, we should identify patterns in the real, empirical world of people where we find them. But where such patterns are not forthcoming, and there is instead a compensatory pattern of equivocation in the ideal, conceptual world of politics, we should identify that too, particularly where there is a clear pattern of repeated failure, and subsequent attempts to launder that failure, and engage in intellectual self-trading or epistemic manipulation.

³¹ Ibid. p. 138.

Without identifying patterns in the real world, we will not be able to build evidence-based *public policy*. But without identifying patterns in what people say and do to disguise that they've failed to find empirical patterns in the real world, then it will not be possible to build *public trust* – and indeed trust will be lost, as it has been. And without trust, no one – least of all researchers – will ultimately be in a position to advise anyone; authors are only authorities if enough people believe them. As researchers, we therefore have a role – and surely a responsibility – to encourage caution as much as confidence in our knowledge, and to invoke humility where, as a society, we risk hubris in our actions. This is needed in many areas of knowledge today, but certainly in the context of the social sciences around the societal impacts of climate change, and particularly with regard to the effects of climate on human migration.

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Social and Cognitive Domain Influence in Migration Networks

Ede Énekes – Imre Porkoláb

Abstract

Drawing on the migration network theory, this article analyzes the cognitive process leading to the decision to migrate in the Mediterranean region. While migration scholars identified the importance of social networks and the role of the diaspora beforehand, to our knowledge, no qualitative study exists that articulates the cognitive and perceptual biases as a significant factor of illegal migration in the region.

We argue that the decision to migrate is mainly based upon the social influence and perceptual biases that shape the migrants' "pseudo-environment." This article uses the European Commission's study of the communication channels used by migrants in Italy as an illustrative case study. Referring to this study, we might raise the question of why do people accept the risk of being kidnapped, raped, or murdered without relevant information about the destination and their future? Is it under higher control, or is it a self-organizing and emergent pattern? Either way, we can argue that the decision to migrate is not an individual process but rather one that is influenced by smuggling groups, NGOs, home societies, and diaspora groups. Moreover, it is based on biased and distorted information. The cognition of potential migrants picks up these influential messages and creates a mental image – a pseudo-environment – that might or might not represent the real environment. However, the decision to migrate is a reaction based upon the illusion of this pseudo-environment regardless of whether it is a good representation of reality.

In conclusion, this article proposes an approach that emphasizes the social influencing and perceptual biases that inherently shape the dynamics of mass migration.

Keywords: illegal migration, cynefin, social influence, social diffusion, migration network

Introduction

This article aims to analyze the cognitive process that leads to the decision to migrate. According to the global sample of Gallup's World Poll between 2015 and 2017, 15% of the adult population of the world (more than 750 million people) is willing to migrate, while only 1.1% made actual preparations to do so.¹ In this study, the scope is limited to illegal mass migration to the European Union, where migrants enter the territory of the EU through illicit means.

This analysis focuses on the information that the decision is based upon, the source of the information, and the social influence that shapes the pseudo-environment of potential migrants. As decision making is a cognitive process, it is inherently subtle and could be subject to social influence, social contagion, and perceptual biases that altogether shape the perceived reality (pseudo-environment) of migrant populations. This is why we use the OODA loop model (Observe – Orient – Decide – Act), as a tool, to understand the decision making process, and also to illustrate how situational awareness can be improved in an individual's decision making as well as in the social context.

As Walter Lippmann argues, “the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance.”² Consequently, human cognition establishes oversimplified mental models of reality and people act upon them regardless of the accuracy of the representation. We also question whether the decision to migrate is based on a rational cost-benefit calculation or is a subject of social influence.

As a result, we suggest inquiring about the social and psychological factors that impel some to migrate, exploring the differences between the actual and perceived environments of potential migrants, and offering useful models to comprehend and mitigate illegal migration in the region. Overall, our focus is on the possible sources of the disparities between the actual and perceived environments, and how we might be able to shape it.

¹ ESIPOVA ET AL 2016; ESIPOVA ET AL 2018.

² LIPPMANN 1922, p. 4.

Literature in migration theory

E. G. Ravenstein laid down the fundamentals of modern migration theories in his 1885 work titled *The Laws of Migration*.³ This study identified certain factors like infrastructure, distance, the call of a labor market, and commerce that drove migration throughout the United Kingdom. Based on Ravenstein's widely admired findings, a set of scholars developed a theoretical background to migrate based on economic and demographic functions.⁴

Everett S. Lee's migration model of 1966 served as the basis for the widely applied *push-pull model* that explains the reasons to emigrate as a net effect of those factors and the obstacles between the country of origin and the country of destination.⁵ However, this model only took into account the aggregate effects of the push and pull factors and failed to explain empirical observations.⁶

To overcome these shortcomings, neo-classical economic theories explored the dynamics of migrant flow based on economic drivers. These theories were built on two basic assumptions: (1) Individuals are rational actors who tend to maximize their well-being based on economic differences between origin and destination countries, and (2) the interplay between these actors tends to reach equilibrium in the marketplace.⁷ These findings highlighted the interactions between the agents but did not explicitly address feedback mechanisms or systemic behavior. Also, the model was not able to explain empirically observed patterns.⁸

Based on the fundamental notion of Ravenstein's "Laws," Zipf proposed a model that is based on the positive correlation between migration and the difference between two economies, and the negative correlation between migration and the distance between the two geospatial locations.⁹ This model became known as the '*basic gravity model of migration*'. As a refinement of the basic model, scholars introduced other variables to mitigate sampling biases and provide a better fit for the observed behavior.¹⁰ This is called the '*augmented gravity model*', and it acknowledged diaspora as a major factor of migration.

³ RAVENSTEIN 1885.

⁴ HARRIS – TODARO 1970; JEROME 1926; LEE 1966.

⁵ LEE 1966.

⁶ MIGALI ET AL 2018, p. 15.

⁷ BORJAS 1989.

⁸ MIGALI ET AL 2018, p. 15.

⁹ ZIPF 1946.

¹⁰ BODVARSSON 2013, p. 65.

Recognizing diaspora as a factor drove attention to *migration network theories*. There is nothing new in the notion of migration networks: early scholars explored the central role of social networks in migration in the 1920s.¹¹ In 1967, Tilly and Brown explored the “auspices” of migration referring to the social structure between sending and receiving communities. Later on, the term “migration chain” was introduced referring to the same phenomena.¹²

In 1989, Monica Boyd also claimed the importance of social networks in international migration.¹³ As she highlighted, social networks are not just “conduits of information, and social and financial assistance” but more comprehensively shape the outcomes of migration systems.¹⁴ This model explains the outcome of migration as a result of the interaction between individual decisions, socioeconomic factors, and social networks.¹⁵

Douglas S. Massey in 1990 described migration systems as self-perpetuating phenomena caused by the creation of social and economic structures that keep up a certain level of flow even though “the structural determinants that prompted it in the first place no longer exert their force.”¹⁶ Massey highlights the self-reinforcing nature of migrant networks as every new migrant is a conduit for valuable information about migrating and also decreases the expected cost for possible migrants within the same network.¹⁷

In 2008, Sonja Haug bridged the gap between the individual decision model and the effect of the migration network by analyzing the “role of social networks in migration decision-making”.¹⁸ Haug analyzed the role of social networks in terms of social capital, where a higher social capital in the destination country is positively related to a higher migration level.

It is worth noting that while these theories acknowledge the social influence on the macro level, the cognitive and social-psychological aspects – as well as the underlying decision-making context – have not yet been articulated. These theories are predominantly based on a rational choice model and do not articulate the dynamic nature of the context and the interaction between the social influence and individual decision-making process.

¹¹ ZORBAUGH 1929; GAMIO 1930.

¹² MACDONALD – MACDONALD 1964; GRAVES – GRAVES 1974; TILLY 1979.

¹³ BOYD 1989.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 639.

¹⁵ Ibid p. 642.

¹⁶ MASSEY 1990, p. 8.

¹⁷ MASSEY 1990, p. 17.

¹⁸ HAUG 2008.

Decision making in the complex domain

In their recent book *The Heretics Guide to Management*, Culmsee and Awati warn us that just as children cling to Teddy Bears to soothe their fears of the unknown, so can we all cling to various business models, and plans to solve all our fears if we are just faithful to them.¹⁹ Sometimes they are useful and give insight, but if we want to understand decision-making and sense-making in a complex context, we need to understand the nature of how they came about, what constraints are at play, and which areas of the decision-making process can be influenced. One of the issues that Valdis Krebs and Dave Snowden discuss at Cognitive Edge. Although they can identify the nature of the solution, they acknowledge that formal methods need to be further developed.²⁰

One of these frameworks is the Cynefin model that Dave Snowden developed in order to make a distinction between different contexts.²¹ The Cynefin framework encompasses five “domains” – Obvious, Complicated, Complex, Chaotic, and Disorder –, and illustrates the various differences in decision-making between each of these contexts (Figure 1).

In the *obvious domain*, our “standard operating procedures” or practices that have been proven before seem to work. Obvious can be applied in situations where the person has most of the information and thus follows the “sense-categorize-respond” sequence.

In the *complicated domain*, we encounter the “known unknowns”. This requires analysis or expertise on the side of the decision-maker to come up with the right answers. Complicated situations should be approached with a “sense-analyze-respond” decision-making framework.

The *complex domain* encourages experiments that are safe to fail. We believe that migration-related decisions mainly fall into this domain, where the “probe-sense-respond” decision-making framework is being used. In this context, the actions (experiments) taken by migrants and their personal opinions feed back into the decision-making loop. This dynamic interaction changes the situation in unpredictable ways.

In the *chaotic domain*, things are mostly unclear, and this is why action seems to be the first instinct. Action will initiate the “act-sense-respond” decision-making loop and focus people out of chaos, as they strive to find stability.

¹⁹ CLUMSEE – AWATI 2016.

²⁰ COGNITIVEEDGE 2010.

²¹ SNOWDEN 2007.

Finally, in *disorder*, there is very little clarity, and it is hard to see when it should be applied. Anything that falls into this domain should move toward the previous four domains to be categorized and acted upon.

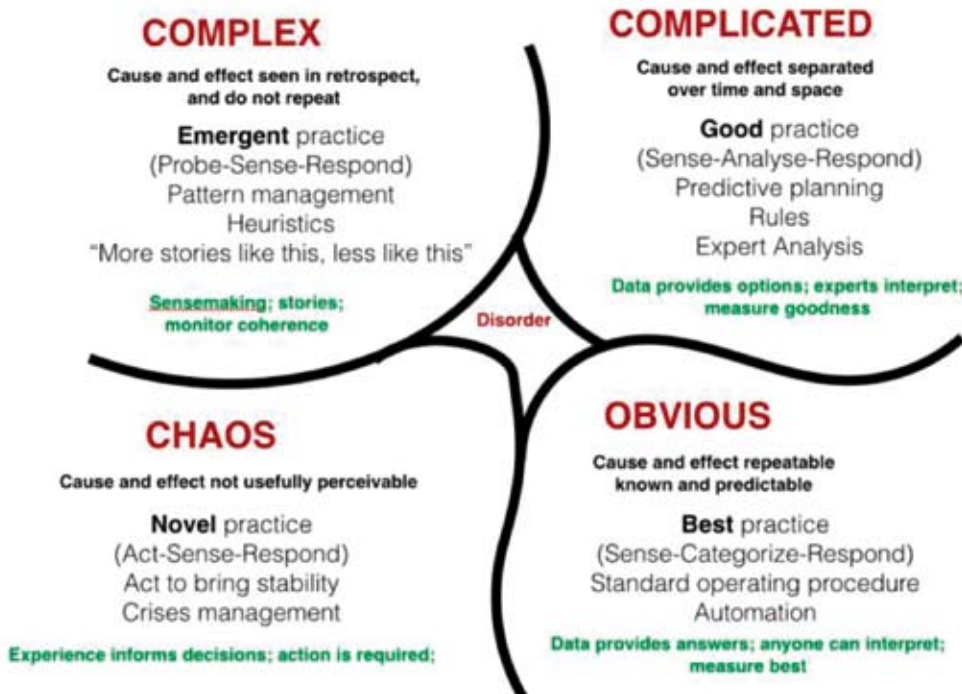


Figure 1 Cynefin framework²²

Why is this framework important for understanding migrant networks? Cynefin is a good framework to categorize various domains and understand the differences between each domain's decision-making loops. But in and of itself, it is not enough, we need another procedural method that categorizes actions over time, and digs deeper into the decision-making process of individuals and social groups. We need a framework to understand how people make decisions in dynamic contexts when the situation changes almost constantly.

This is where USAF Colonel John Boyd's model is really useful. Boyd came up with a framework which has become an important concept in military, legal, and business strategy.²³ The OODA loop (observe-orient-decide-act) is a decision-making process that emphasizes speed, and the dynamic nature of how an

²² Adapted from SNOWDEN 2007.

²³ BOYD 1976.

individual, or a group of individuals make decisions, as well as how it affects the context that they are operating in (Figure 2).

Boyd pointed out that whoever can run this cycle has the fastest response to unfolding events more effectively than an opponent. Thus, understanding the OODA loop can be useful not only to understand how migrants are making decisions in a complex domain, but it can also be a very effective tool, if we want to mitigate social influence or influential messaging.

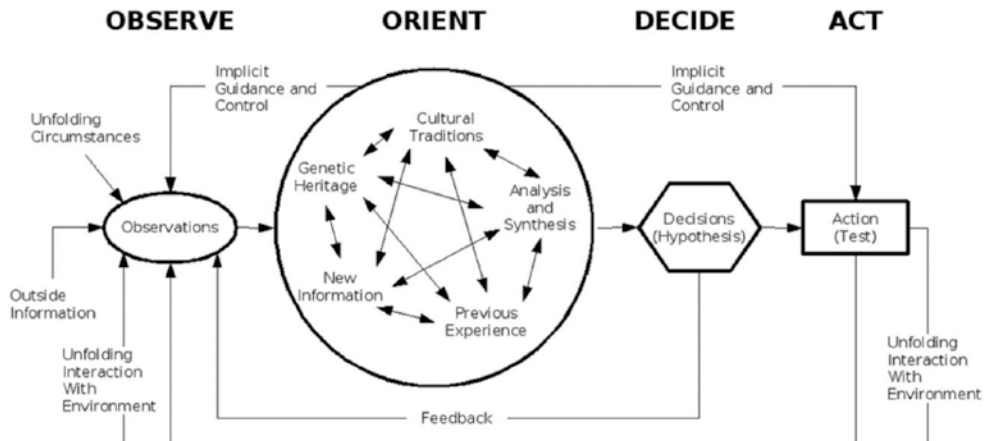


Figure 2 Boyd's OODA Loop framework²⁴

The OODA loop is a smart framework for anyone making decisions in a complex domain or in a crisis. The various steps of the process help us to conceptualize what happens in people's minds when they respond adaptively to manage a crisis. The first step, "observe," is aimed at assessing ourselves. Part of the problem of making decisions is that we are an irremovable part of the equation, so our own cognitive filters and biases must be factored into the equation. Our brain can process roughly 200 bits of information per second. It means that if we are having a conversation with someone that requires about 90 bits out of the total of 200. One can imagine that in a complex situation, when about 20 million bits of information can reach our senses per second, our brain is filtering based on our focus. Our focus is highly affected by our beliefs and biases. So, the basic assumptions we make are based on decisions on heavily filtered information.

Moreover, we need to understand that our emotional reaction to the crisis has a great influence on how we decide and act. According to Boyd, our goal is to

²⁴ BOYD 2018.

survive on our own terms and improve our capacity for independent action. In a context, where people are fighting for limited resources (a migration crisis), our biological imperative creates purposeful behavior, and many decisions are driven by our limbic system in the brain, which mainly focuses on our evolutionary coding (finding and defending resources from competitors).

So, in the first step, we observe changes in our environment, encounter a perceived (or real) threat, and based on this subjective reality; we are trying to make sense of the rapidly changing context. In this second phase, we orient, and try to assess the current situation. The ‘observe’ and ‘orient’ phases together provide what in the military we call situational awareness. This situational awareness is based on the perception of data and elements of the environment, the comprehension of the meaning and importance of events, and the mental projection of possible future states of ongoing events.

Various factors influence our situational awareness on an everyday basis. Uncertainty and unpredictability are degrading our mental states; in these situations, we strive for stability. But as Heisenberg and Bohr point out, there is no single observation that can completely describe the system. Moreover, when the rate of change of the observed approaches the precision of which the observer is capable, the result will be erratic and uncertain behavior, pushing the system toward the chaotic domain. The problem is that our human capacity is limited, and we can easily overload our biological decision-making systems, especially if we are unaware of our limitations.

It is because of this kind of permanent uncertainty the OODA loop can be a really useful tool for understanding the decision-making of social groups. We can inflict uncertainty, or, just the opposite, calm people down just by providing contextual information to their cognitive processes.

The third step in the loop is decision, which in an unpredictable environment almost immediately results in taking action. Boyd suggests that we should be looking at our decisions as assumptions and has to carefully observe our actions, as those are indicators to see if we made the right choices. Thus, we are back at the beginning of the loop (observation) again. The cyclical nature of this model is what makes it so useful and effective.

We build internal mental models, and continuously refine them as we take everyday actions. Our expectations shape our focus and orientation, since we always get more of what we focus on. In VUCA²⁵ situations, when something unexpected is

²⁵ Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous – The term has been originally developed by the US military, when the U.S. Army War College introduced the concept of VUCA to describe the more

happening, surprises will change our worldview, and our intention triggers. So, when we take action the next time, we hope that we will bring the external world more in line with our expectations.

This might be a huge mismatch in our case of a migrant crisis. The expectations are mainly based on myth and false propaganda, and when masses of people take action, they seem to get something very different than expected. This creates even more uncertainty and frustration and further distorts the decision-making and action-taking algorithms in human beings.

The other key factor in relation to the OODA loop, is speed, which can be best understood as the space between steps 3 and 4. This is where a strategy focusing on social aspects can win or lose. Inaction drains confidence fast. It makes us lose momentum. If we do not provide information and valid expectations to the migrant population, other perceptual biases will emerge, spread, and dominate their reality, and they might think decision-makers can't see the crisis, or worse, that they don't care. So, if we have clarified our intent to interfere with influential messaging and spread credible information throughout a network, we need to act.

The thing about a migrant crisis management is that we don't do it once. We go back to step one immediately and run the loop again and again until the crisis passes. Achieving the desired social response might be the only thing that will stop us from running the loop.

Learning about the possibilities offered by the OODA loop, and understanding its implications is really worthwhile. But the hard part is implementing it in real life situations, when we are dancing on the thin line between the complex and chaotic domains and mustering enough courage to make the necessary decisions and act when the pressure is on. In asymmetric conflicts, where there are a myriad of key stakeholders and a very dynamic environment, constant innovation of our methods is absolutely necessary. These systemic innovations can have a great influence on both governmental and non-governmental decision-makers.²⁶

To have a better pulse on making these very complex decisions, we dig deeper into social structure and social influence theory.

volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous multilateral world perceived as resulting from the end of the Cold War.

²⁶ PORKOLAB 2006; PORKOLAB 2014; PORKOLAB 2016; PORKOLAB 2017.

Social structure and social influence

According to the network approach, the social structure provides a contextual background for the decision to migrate. Social network theory holds that the behavior of individual actors is affected by the social networks in which they are embedded, and we cannot analyze their actions independently of the structure of those networks.

In a social network, actors are interdependent rather than independent, and their positions in the social structure determine their beliefs, norms, and behavior rather than pure rational choice.²⁷ “Even their identities are largely determined by their location in the social structure.”²⁸ Networks, in fact, are constituted by the stories (and the related symbols and norms) that they tell about themselves.²⁹ Culture and norms also play an important role by facilitating the contextual background for the symbols. Norms are the shared and accepted ideas that guide how actors interact with one another.

Sean Everton synthesized the underlying assumptions of social network theories as follows:

- Actors and their related actions are interdependent, rather than independent, with other actors.
- Ties between actors are conduits for the transfer or flow of various types of material and/or nonmaterial goods or resources (e.g., funds, supplies, information, trust, enmity).
- Social structures are seen in terms of enduring patterns of ties between actors (i.e., social networks).
- Repeated interactions between actors give rise to social formations that take on a life of their own, follow their own logic, and cannot be reduced to their constituent parts even though they remain dependent on those parts.
- An actor’s position in the social structure (i.e., its structural location) impacts its beliefs, norms, and observed behavior.
- Social networks are dynamic entities that change as actors, subgroups, and ties between actors enter, leave, or are removed from the network.³⁰

²⁷ EVERTON 2012, pp. 15–16.

²⁸ CUNNINGHAM ET AL 2016, p 15.

²⁹ WHITE 2008; PACHUCKI AND BREIGER 2010; FUHSE 2015.

³⁰ EVERTON 2012, p 15–16.

Milgram's Obedience to Authority experiments, Zimbardo's Stanford Prison experiment, and Sherif's Robbers' Cave experiment demonstrate the compelling power of accepted norms and the related group identity.³¹ Mark Granovetter also notes that the greater a network's density, the easier it is to enforce the norms of that network.³² Thus, with greater density and cohesion, the probability increases for effective information sharing, monitoring, and mobilizing.

For instance, the coercive power of social structure and norms in Nigerian mafia-type organizations is prevalent. Nigerian criminal groups like Black Ax, MAPHITE, and Vikings apply secret ritual affiliation ceremonies where candidates drink a drug-based beverage mixed with blood, while heavy beatings and other forms of violence are also integral parts of the ceremony.³³ The rituals emphasize values like obedience and loyalty and enhance the role of violence in the internal and external lives of the social network.

In some cases, illegal migrants also go through similar rituals, where they swear loyalty to the smuggling organization.³⁴ The oath, as they swear it in, is a behavioral compass, an unwritten code of conduct. It is highly monitored and enforced within dense and cohesive cells. These rituals have lasting socio-psychological effects that impact the perception of the affiliates and the victims due to their transformed pseudo-environment.

Several studies in neo-behaviorism suggest that changing small habits in small teams can have a long-lasting effect on the culture of the teams. The perceived social norms heavily influence the behavior of the actors and push people to act according to the interests of the group rather than acting out of pure self-interest. The social structure in which actors are embedded constrains and offers them opportunities as well as affects their behaviors more than pure rational choice models typically suggest.³⁵

Influence and diffusion in migration networks

Based on what we have assessed so far, influence and diffusion in social networks have multiple aspects. Out of these, we will be focusing on three main aspects,

³¹ MILGRAM 1963; SHERIF 1988; ZIMBARDO ET AL 1971.

³² GRANOVETTER 2005, p. 15.

³³ MINISTRO DELL'INTERNO [MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, ITALY] 2018.

³⁴ UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIMES 2015.

³⁵ GRANOVETTER 1973; CUNNINGHAM ET AL 2016, p. 15.

which have the greatest potential to create a perception change in a larger social group. These are social influence and contagion, diffusion, and perceptual biases.

In their article on social contagion theory, Christakis and Fowler argue that actors can spread ideas, norms, and emotions across the social network up to three degrees (e.g., a friend of a friend of a friend).³⁶ Even a complex phenomenon like obesity can travel across the social structure through various ties. An actor's beliefs concerning obesity can influence not just his friends, but his friends' friends, and the friends of his friends' friends. The authors referred to this phenomenon as the "three degrees of influence."³⁷ (Figure 3)

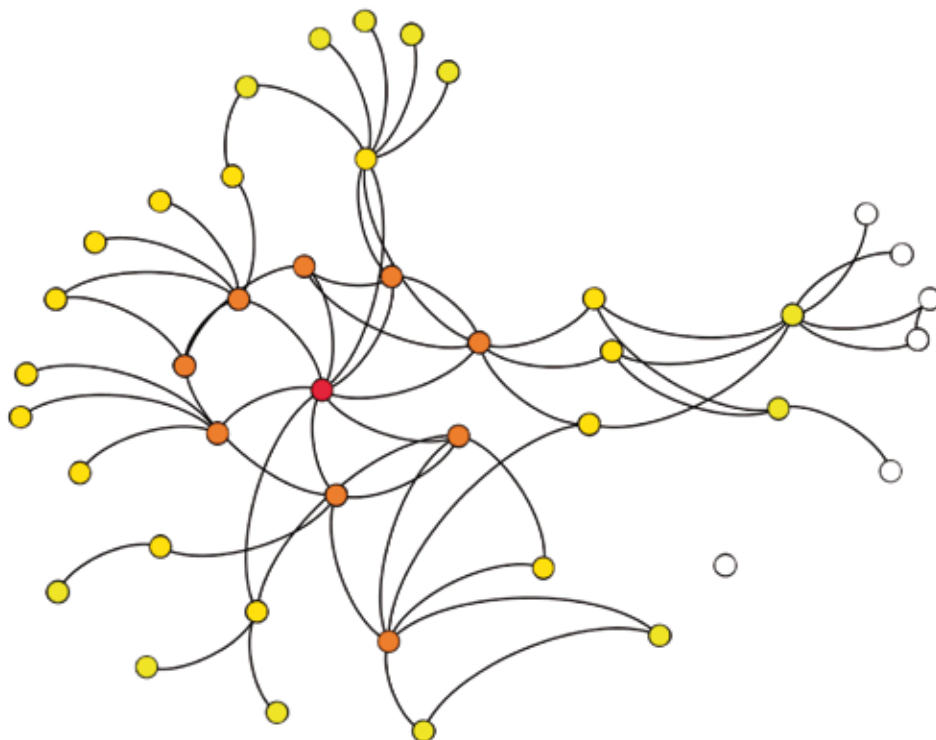


Figure 3 Spread of Ideas and Norms in a Social Network

Moreover, the actor is also influenced by every other actor within the social structure up to three degrees. Christakis and Fowler discovered that the strongest effect occurred through reciprocal ties where social distance is a major factor, more so than geographical distance. Nevertheless, crosscutting ties push and pull actors in different directions, and the net effect of these ties determines the actual behavior.³⁸

³⁶ CHRISTAKIS – FOWLER 2007.

³⁷ CHRISTAKIS – FOWLER 2013.

³⁸ EVERTON – PFAFF 2021.

Social diffusion theory refers to the spreading of new ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and technologies throughout a social network. According to social scientists, social diffusion mostly happens when exogenous information and social reinforcement are at play together.³⁹ Another important characteristic is how new ideas and norms spread across the social structure. Everton and Pfaff define social diffusion as “the outward movement of an innovation (or cultural trait) from one source to another.”⁴⁰ The dynamics of spreading new norms or ideas are based on the notion that social actors assess their choices in light of the norms and attitudes of other actors.⁴¹ The pattern of adopting new ideas follows a normal (Gaussian) distribution when the number of adopters plotted over time results in a bell-shaped curve. (Figure 4)

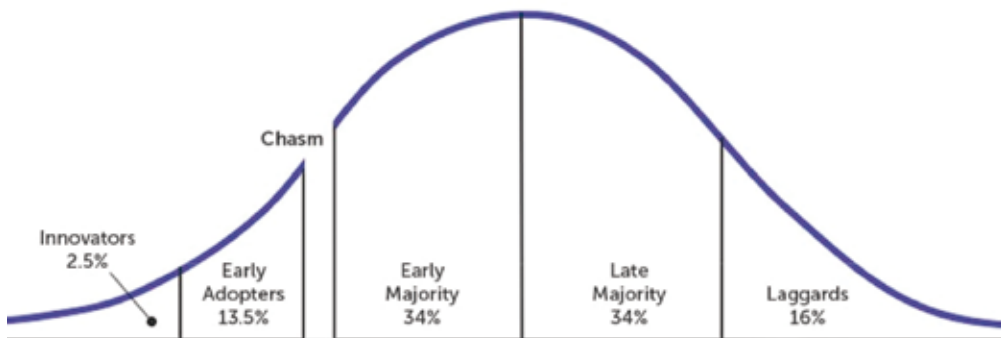


Figure 4 Number of adopters by time⁴²

Early scholars of social diffusion differentiated five categories referring to the adoption of an innovation: (1) innovators, (2) early adopters, (3) early majority, (4) late majority, and (5) laggards.⁴³ An interesting notion is that when the proportion of adopters reaches a critical mass somewhere between 10 and 20 percent, the diffusion turns into a self-reinforcing mechanism that is very difficult to reverse.⁴⁴ Another interesting aspect of this theory is that there is a huge gap between early adopters and the early majority. To prevent a wide-scale social movement and related humanitarian crises, we should interfere with the spread of influential messages before they reach critical mass. This can be seen as a reverse implementation of the marketing and sales theory referred to as “Crossing the Chasm” by Geoffrey

³⁹ GOULD 1991; HEDSTRÖM 1994; YOUNG 2009.

⁴⁰ EVERTON – PFAFF 2021, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid, 2.

⁴² Source: MOORE 1999.

⁴³ RYAN – GROSS 1950, p. 49.

⁴⁴ EVERTON – PFAFF 2021, p. 6.

A. Moore.⁴⁵ The theory argues that marketers should focus on one group of customers at a time and each group can be considered as a prerequisite to the next group. Moore claims that there is a gap (chasm) between early adopters and the early majority and crossing this gap is a crucial part of a successful marketing strategy. As a result, while migrant smugglers and the related organizations aim to spread their influential message to a critical mass in the shortest possible term, a preventive strategy should interfere with the smugglers' narratives before they "cross the chasm".

Finally, we must understand that humans are biologically, geographically, and temporally incapable of sensing the world in its entirety, due to its complex and erratic nature. As Lippmann explains, "whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself."⁴⁶ Our cognition is not capable of processing all the information, so we heavily filter and reconstruct the reality in our mental models. The dynamic model of situated cognition proposed by Shattuck and Miller argues that sensors (including human sensors) perceive only a portion of reality; moreover, the array of sensors and the related technological system transfer only a subset of all available data.⁴⁷ The result is our "situational awareness", which is always a simplified representation of the real environment (pseudo-environment).⁴⁸ This pseudo-environment is characterized by the state of mind, previous knowledge, and the sensory ways in which we receive environmental stimuli.

As a result, people may act in ways that do not "rationally" conform to what the situation logically would require. Moreover, if someone has no direct experience in a particular situation, his mind creates a mental image to generate feelings as the basis of the reaction.⁴⁹ Lippmann refers to this imperfect representation of the reality as the pseudo-environment, which is formed as an interaction between the human mind and the real environment.⁵⁰

In an uncertain environment, we tend to seek patterns based on previous experiences. The incoming data is propagated through different lenses (or filters) that may or may not change the processing of the information. The massive amount of data is mainly filtered by the array of sensors (either technical sensors or the focus of human cognition), the cultural and social factors, and the state of mind (emotions, psychological factors).

⁴⁵ MOORE 1999.

⁴⁶ LIPPMANN 1922, p. 1.

⁴⁷ SHATTUCK – MILLER 2006.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴⁹ LIPPMANN 1922, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Moreover, Tversky and Kahneman found that human cognition relies on heuristics when faced with complex and uncertain problems.⁵¹ While these heuristics are useful and necessary tools for rapid decision-making, they might serve as the basis for cognitive biases that lead to severe judgmental errors and poor decision making.

The overall result is that, in addition to the imperfect perception, our human cognition tends to fill in the blanks based on previously experienced patterns.⁵² Consequently, we process only a tiny portion of the already reduced and probably misrepresented dataset, and our biases further distort this information, as we try to make sense of our reality. In other words, humans act upon what they perceive to be true, even if there is a significant difference between the perceived image and the real environment.

Applying the theory and models

So far, we have introduced some models to understand various contexts and the decision-making process, and explored a wide array of theoretical backgrounds in order to better understand social influence in the context of illegal migration. In the next portion of this article, we will shift our focus to the Mediterranean region and specifically analyze the European Commission's Directorate of General Migration and Home Affairs' recent illustrative case study.

The study surveyed 686 migrants (including illegal migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees) who arrived in Italy in the second half of 2017. The majority of the respondents originated from Sub-Saharan Africa, north of the Equator. The gender ratio was 90% male and 10% female, while the vast majority (96%) of the respondents were between the ages of 16 and 34.

According to the study, we can claim that the migrants' knowledge of Europe is somewhat limited and distorted.⁵³ The authors highlight that 73% of the surveyed migrants had little if any, knowledge of any European country upon arrival. "In fact, even among those who were able to provide the name of a specific country, knowledge of its location and/or dynamics was scant."⁵⁴ It is worth noting that there were significant differences between nationalities in this regard. While

⁵¹ TVERSKY – KAHNEMAN 1974.

⁵² FREEMAN 1992.

⁵³ SANCHEZ ET AL 2018.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

approximately 70% of migrants from Mali, Senegal, and Nigeria could not name a specific destination country, only 23% of Tunisian migrants could not.⁵⁵ Also, migrants who had friendship or kinship ties to any EU member country were most likely to name a specific country of destination.⁵⁶

The lack of relevant information among the majority of migrants raises the question of what was the mental basis (mental model) of the decision-making process in this group. Furthermore, it is certainly a missed opportunity to prevent an evolving crisis if we do not consider how to influence smugglers' narratives and social influence by providing them reliable information through understanding their OODA loop.

We also know that once they make the decision to migrate, during and after the journey, they prefer to communicate with fellow migrants from the same ethnic group. The initial relocation decision is often a collective one, made by the family in which the individual is embedded. Immediate relatives often bear the financial burden of the journey; therefore, they are directly involved in the decision-making in these cases.

Migrant smugglers are also highly responsible for spreading disinformation through social networks. As they are running an extremely successful business model, they are highly motivated to shift people's perceptions and trigger a migratory movement.

Smugglers are usually paid for different segments of the journey as they are selling modular services for parts of the migratory routes. The subsequent payments are often paid by family members using money transfer services or middleman process called "hawala method." As a result, the collective decision-making process is prevalent not just in the initial relocation decision, but also for the subsequent phases of the journey:

*The decision to leave Libya was a collective process. Migrants reported talking with family members, employers and co-workers in Libya and in their countries of origin, mainly by phone, to consult them about leaving.*⁵⁷

Interestingly, conditions in Libya were frequently cited as the main factor in the decision to travel to Europe, while they were concise and obscure in articulating the incentives to leave their home country (the initial step to migrate).⁵⁸ This fact

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 15.

alone is a prevalent indicator of social influence and perception bias at play. The surveyed migrant population was not aware of the factors driving their decisions. Namely: the main reason for leaving their home country and entering into a much more dangerous territory with no effective governing authority or rules of law (e.g. Libya). Later on, their cognition picked up on the powerful effect of violence across Libya and this image (and experience) became the main symbol of their pseudo-environment.

According to the European Commission's survey, the main source of information for migrants is their kinship and friendship networks. While migrants prefer face-to-face communication before leaving their home country and during the journey, they also use social media and telephone communication to keep in contact with friends and relatives living in the diaspora.⁵⁹

Social media platforms are usually not a means of communicating about illegal migrant activity. Smugglers and illegal migrants often use encrypted communication platforms like Viber or Whatsapp to discuss the details of the illegal journey.⁶⁰ Interestingly, migrants do not see interactions with smugglers negatively. It seems that they are well aware of the dangers and the possible exploitation by smugglers; moreover, they mostly accept it as a necessary condition of the journey.⁶¹

The migrant smuggling network is not unified; it consists of competing groups who are not selling specific destinations, rather provide transportation generally to the territory of the EU. In several cases, the smuggling groups put high emphasis on their reputation and credibility to gain a competitive advantage.⁶² While they are not the primary source of information, they are definitely shaping the perception (pseudo-environment) of migrants by spreading their narratives through face-to-face communication. The reputation of smuggling groups and their contact information spread mainly through the social network in which both the migrants and the smugglers are embedded.

While family members and smuggling groups play a key role before leaving their home country, fellow migrants and eventually humanitarian workers become the most trusted sources of information during the journey (Figure 5). Thus, non-governmental agencies have a huge responsibility in shaping the perception of migrants, and influencing their decisions.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

⁶⁰ UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIMES 2015.

⁶¹ ELBAGIR 2018.

⁶² UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIMES 2015.

Migrants believed the initial messages that they would be welcomed by a country and people that respected human life, and where they would be unlikely to experience or witness the violence that they had seen in Libya or in their countries of origin. These notions were repeatedly communicated to migrants upon their rescue by ship crews, humanitarian and reception centre staff. Yet, as shown in the following section, everyday social interactions often proved difficult.⁶³

Upon arrival, migrants are confronted with a harsh reality that differs from their perception in almost every detail. This often causes confusion, fear, and anxiety. “During the first few weeks following their arrival, migrants start to realize that many of the initial messages about being welcomed in Italy are not necessarily reflective of the conditions that they face.”⁶⁴ Later on, migrants become highly anxious about their inability to work legally.⁶⁵ Even if they possess the documentation, they are faced with several structural difficulties to be integrated into the labor market.



Figure 5 The Most Trusted Sources of Information Among Surveyed Migrants⁶⁶

⁶³ SANCHEZ ET AL 2018, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

⁶⁶ SANCHEZ ET AL 2018.

CelsiusIt is no surprise, that the deprived social situation leads to an increased homophily among migrants from the same ethnic group, which might promote biased information and increase their vulnerabilities. Powerful incentives like providing for their families or paying migrant smugglers may trigger further desperate decisions that could drive migrants to the illegal labor market, forcing them into abusive employment situations.⁶⁷

Food for thought

A successful strategy to prevent future migrant crises requires understanding the nature of social influence and countering smugglers' narrative. Namely, the more illegal migrants reach EU countries, the larger the diaspora, and the more successful the smugglers' business models are. Smugglers, donor societies, and diaspora groups are just some actors (social groups) who might spread biased or distorted information. NGOs and humanitarian workers also have a great responsibility in sharing relevant and realistic information, as they are often the first credible source of information regarding the EU. If they provide one-sided information about the expectations and possibilities, it increases the probability for illegal migrants to get trapped in a deprived and desperate situation.

We can assume that there is a reinforcing loop in the cognitive domain of the migrant population that inherently affects the decision to migrate. Namely, the more illegal migrants reach EU countries, the larger the diaspora, and the more successful the smugglers' business models. Consequently, the larger social influence and influential messaging will trigger more people to migrate. This reinforcing loop can be altered by countering the smugglers' narratives and mitigating biased and distorted information about the journey and the destination. Moreover, effective crisis prevention requires countering disinformation and influential messaging before the diffusion reaches a critical mass.

We propose a new approach that considers not just the socio-economic or socio-political drivers but also the social influence and perceptual biases that inherently shape the dynamics of illegal mass migration in the Mediterranean. Based on our analysis, we still have very limited knowledge about the cognitive aspects of migrants' decision-making, our sources of information are not collected in one large database, and a unified understanding is still missing. We argue that these aspects should be fixed in order to create a common strategy to mitigate future migrant crises.

⁶⁷ SANCHEZ ET AL 2018.

For future analysis, we would suggest empirical studies that collect qualitative data about the perceptual bias in certain areas. Modelling the diffusion of biased information is available by the widely used Bass diffusion model; however, determining the infection rate requires empirical observations and systematic data collection.

This way, we would gain a massive amount of data and have a more nuanced situational awareness about social influence in migration networks. Exploring the social-psychological factors of the decision-making and using the models introduced above will lead to a better understanding of the underlying dynamics in international migration, and provide points of intervention for future crisis scenarios.

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Irregular Migration of Ethiopian Youths to Saudi Arabia: The Case of Atsibi Wonberta Woreda of Tigray Regional State

Getachew Zeru, Tewolde Tsehaye

Abstract

Irregular youth migration is one of the fastest-growing forms of migration in the Horn of Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. Different research outputs reveal that because of both push and pull factors regarding irregular migration; many migrants are vulnerable to various problems, including discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Such migrants are also in danger of being exploited by criminal institutions involved in human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Such crimes constitute a serious violation of the human rights of their victims.

Atsibi Wonberta is a woreda of Tigray Regional State. It has become a matter of serious concern and a priority area for research and action in this study due to the various challenges and impacts it has on migrants, sending, and transiting to the destination countries. In the study area, so far there is no well-integrated approach in dealing with the issue and addressing the root causes and enabling factors that result in irregular migration. This research project critically examines the root causes and drivers of irregular youth migration in Atsibi Wonberta Woreda. Moreover, it is intended to identify the factors that hinder efforts to mitigate irregular migration of youths in the study area. In doing so, the study relies on a qualitative research approach with an exploratory research design and a purposive sample selection technique. It also depends on primary and secondary data sources.

Keywords: irregular migration, youths, Atsbi Wonberta Woreda, Saudi Arabia, human trafficking

Introduction

Migration is a general term to describe the occurrence of the movement of individuals, groups or populations looking for relatively permanent changes of residence. The number of both legal and irregular international migrants has been growing dramatically over the past decades. The number of international migrants worldwide

was 173 million in 2000; 222 million in 2010; and 244 million in 2015.¹ Globally, there were 281 million international legal and irregular migrants in 2020, which equates to 3.6 percent of the global population.²

Recently, irregular migration has become a global concern due to the various challenges and impacts it has on migrants, sending, and transit as well as destination countries. Furthermore, migration in the general sense and irregular migration in particular has been increasing rapidly over the past decades and has become a matter of serious concern and a priority area for action. Therefore, practical measures aimed at addressing irregular migration need proper investigation of root causes, drivers and other related factors that influence individuals/groups to migrate irregularly by endangering their lives.³

Different scholars and institutions in Ethiopia have studied irregular migration. However, there are research gaps in addressing the root causes and drivers of the irregular migration of youths in the study area (Atsibi Wonberta Woreda of Tigray Regional State). Most of the academic and policy-oriented investigations conducted in the study area deals with the international migration of Ethiopians to the countries of the Middle East. These mainly focus on trafficking, specially on girls, women and children that are more vulnerable; as well as on abusive working conditions in the destination countries and the role of remittances in the Ethiopian economy. However, they only scantily examine why youths migrate irregularly to Saudi Arabia and the factors that challenge the mitigation of irregular migration in the study area.

Therefore, this study has been conducted to fill these research gaps and to explore the root causes and drivers of irregular migration of youths, as well as why irregular migration becomes a *culture* in the study area. In addition to these, the study has been conducted to identify the mitigating mechanisms of irregular migration and to investigate factors that challenge the mitigation of irregular migration in the study area. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative exploratory research design was employed by the researchers.

1. Related literature review

The intensity, diversity and overall complexity of international migration in general and the irregular migration of youths in particular are linked to human trafficking

¹ AHIUME 2015.

² ILO 2021.

³ DERYA 2012.

and human smuggling. They are also strongly associated with globalization, as rapid advances in transportation and communication technology have made it easier, cheaper and faster. Moreover, technological progress has facilitated migration by not only lowering resource constraints on mobility but also because it has become easier for migrants to stay in touch with their family and community members, to remit money and to travel back and forth between host and origin countries.⁴

Conflicts, poverty, income inequality, political intolerance, unemployment and/or underemployment, economic disparities and income differentials between the sending and destination countries are among the reasons that compel people to leave their homes in search of better futures for themselves and their families. Migration and human trafficking from developing countries, particularly from East Africa including Ethiopia, are expected to continue rising because of persisting economic and well-being gaps with developed countries.⁵

As legal pathways for migration have diminished, migrants are falling prey to smugglers and human traffickers. Cross-border “irregular migration” facilitated by human smugglers and traffickers is increasingly becoming a socio-economic and security problem for states. Various contributing factors have been suggested for this increasing crisis of irregular migration. For instance, Koser claims that “the reason that increasing numbers of migrants are moving in an irregular rather than a legal way is mainly because of increasing restrictions on legal movements, mostly in destination countries”.⁶ In fact, legal pathways are readily available to highly skilled people with recognized qualifications.⁷ Consequently, the lack of legal pathways for migration has contributed to the increase of irregular migration and record numbers of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, with more than 5,000 people losing their lives in 2016 alone.⁸ Similarly, significant numbers of deaths were also recorded in the Gulf of Aden. For example, in 2021, the IOM’s Missing Migrants Project recorded 109 migrant deaths and disappearances, mostly Ethiopian nationals who drowned while attempting to cross the Gulf of Aden. Many others also died in the Djiboutian desert from harsh environmental conditions resulting in dehydration and starvation.⁹

Similarly, irregular youth migration is one of the fastest-growing forms of migration in the Horn of Africa. Movement in the region is by nature mainly irregular,

⁴ CZAİKA – HAAS 2014.

⁵ AU 2018.

⁶ KOSE 2007, p. 54.

⁷ NEWLAND – RIESTER 2018.

⁸ ALJAZEERA 2016.

⁹ IOM 2022.

as there are very limited options for regular movements. In addition, the legal measurements implemented by several countries, such as bans on overseas labour migration in Ethiopia and Kenya, also increase irregular migration.¹⁰

Migration routes in Africa are constantly evolving and changing. In recent years, the eastern route (Gulf of Aden migration route) has witnessed increased numbers of migrants, particularly from the Horn of Africa, moving to the Gulf countries and beyond. Migrants are vulnerable to abuse by smugglers and traffickers. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, and other risks. According to ILO and UNIDO as well as RMMS Ethiopia is among the leading states both as a contributor to irregular migrants to the Middle East and Europe and as a receiver of mass migrants from neighbouring states, who can be treated as refugees.¹¹

To address the intense increment of irregular migration challenges, the Government of Ethiopia has adopted a series of development policies and program frameworks, particularly since the beginning of the millennium. The Governments' five-year Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP 2011–2015) and GTP II (2016–2020) aimed to accelerate sustainable development, which speeds up economic growth as a means of reducing poverty and creating jobs, as well as achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, there are increasing challenges in absorbing the huge number of youths joining the job-demanding category. With approximately three million young Ethiopians entering the labor force every year, ensuring productive employment opportunities for them is one of the challenges posed in both rural and urban areas.¹²

As a result, growing numbers of Ethiopians have been looking for job opportunities, either in other regions within the country or abroad, through regular and irregular channels. From 2009 to 2014, merely 459 810 legal migrants left Ethiopia.¹³ Tigray region is among the most vulnerable regions of Ethiopia, sending irregular migrants in which the Eastern Tigray zone takes the lead.¹⁴ According to the Mixed Migration Centre, annual emigration from Ethiopia is roughly half a million, and 60–70 percent of those emigrating are irregular migrants who use various land and sea routes and enlist the help of informal brokers and smugglers.¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ ILO & UNIDO 2017; RMMS 2014.

¹² WOLDEABRHA 2018.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ GIRMAY 2015; SARA 2010.

¹⁵ MIGRATION OUT OF POVERTY 2019.

The particular focus of this study is not on all aspects and types of international migration; instead, it only focuses on the causes and drivers of international irregular migration, which is described as “the movement of persons that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transiting and receiving countries”.¹⁶

2. Methodology

The researchers employed a qualitative research method with the belief that it provides the most appropriate way of investigating the what, why and how research questions using key informants’ interview, in-depth-interview of experts and leaders, focus group discussions and observations. It enables informants to express their ideas in their words freely. It also enables the researchers to have an in-depth understanding of the problem under study. Based on these justifications, an exploratory research design was employed in order to increase knowledge about why irregular out migration of youths is very high and why youths of the study area especially migrate irregularly to Saudi Arabia despite all the challenges facing them.

To conduct this study, a purposive sampling method was employed to select seven sample tabias/ kebele (small districts) of Atsibi Wonberta woreda of the Eastern Zone of Tigray Regional State (based on the number of irregular migrant size). The researchers employed purposive sampling because it enables them to select relevant, knowledgeable and experienced participants/informants.

For this research, both primary and secondary data sources were employed. To secure first-hand information, primary data has been collected using semi-structured and unstructured, closed, and open-ended interview questions. To this end, a combination of multiple data gathering instruments, such as face to face interviews with 28 key informants (14 returnees and 14 returnees’ families), 19 informed experts/and leaders of concerned institutions and 2 focus group discussions (FGD – leadership of civic associations, non-migrant youths, religion leaders, and influential community elders) and observations were used. While secondary data was collected from relevant literatures, including research publications, books, newspapers, journal articles, the internet, legal documents, policies, meetings, official reports, human rights conventions; and reports of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

¹⁶ ILO 2011, p. 11.

The researchers employed two FGDs in the belief that they could provide information about the practices, drivers and impacts of irregular migration and their concern about the irregular migration of youths in the woreda. The two group discussions helped the researchers to capture at the community level, perceptions about irregular migration in the study of the woreda. Moreover, the study employed a qualitative approach for data interpretation and analysis by applying narrative and content analysis.

3. Irregular youth migration from Atsibi Wonberta Woreda to Saudi Arabia

3.1 The underlying causes and drivers of Irregular Migration in Atsibi Wonberta

The root causes and drivers of migration in Atsibi Wonberta generally are grouped into “push factors” (that drive people away from their home country) and “pull factors” (that attract people to migrate to another place). There are also other factors, such as enabling and immediate factors, that drive and facilitate migration.

Push Factors

Push factors include economic, political, socio-cultural, environmental factors and administrative, legal policy issues pertaining to sending countries/countries of origin.

Economic and Environmental Factors

Economic and environmental factors such as poverty, unemployment, drought, soil degradation, poor living conditions, inadequate working conditions and low labour costs are the major factors for economic migration from Atsibi Wonberta. Moreover, small sized farmland, low fertility of soil, the inability to access agricultural inputs to increase productivity, and lack of a sufficient irrigation scheme are other push factors for economic migration. In line with this, one returnee who participated in the study in February 2020 claims that many youths lack access to their own agricultural land and a place to construct a home. He further stated that, “*agricultural inefficiency and rural underemployment are key driving forces for irregular migration of rural youths in the study area.*” She further

stated that absence of land reforms, inequalities in land ownership and other productive assets, landlessness, weather-related shocks, limited non-agricultural jobs in rural areas, ecological degradation, decline in soil fertility, high costs of agricultural inputs and lower incomes from the agricultural sector are among the major factors that pushed them out.

Participants in the focus group discussions and parents also indicated that the area is frequently affected by drought and this has exacerbated food insecurity in the woreda. In this regard, one youth returnee who participated in the study said *“besides poverty, a lack of job opportunity is another factor that youths are pushing for in the study area. Because they said that in our woreda there is a lack of investment, infrastructure, construction and service providers such as hotels and tourism that can create new job opportunities.”*

These facts have been further strengthened by another returnee who participated in the study, as follows:

“My interest was to improve the life of my parents, to make them very rich. Being the elder child for my mother, I decided to migrate irregularly since I have no parent to cover my expense in the regular [legal] way. I do not want my mother to be depressed, as I love her so much. What you earn there [Saudi Arabia] for a year is more than what you get in six or more years here. Therefore, in order to earn a better income and improve your life, you migrate. When I thought about my country, I have never seen any hope. You can gain nothing by working here. There are college and even university graduates with no employment. Moreover, even those employed did not improve their own and their family life. You cannot change and improve your life; you are always the same while being here.”

Furthermore, returnee’ family who participated in the study area said:

“Listen to me; do you think, a person leaving his village and his family, make him happy. No. My daughter was married and the mother of three children. Life was hard to her, she was unhappy with her marriage, and she left her three of her children to me and irregularly migrated to Saudi Arabia twice. First, she returned home empty handed and her husband abandoned her. Life became heavy like a rock to her and she lost taste of life. I have no means to help her, and when she has lost everything, she [has] been forced to flee to Saudi Arabia irregularly for the second time.”

Thus, the responses of the participants about the economic push factors are consistent with the empirical evidence of economic disparities, poverty, income differentials and food insecurity. Hence, poverty, unemployment, a lack of farmland, a lack of good governance, the hope to find a better job in the destination country, poor living conditions, inadequate working conditions and losing hope in future job opportunities in the home country pushed them to migrate irregularly. The returnees further said that even the few employment opportunities in the informal sectors, such as construction and house cleaning could not support and improve their lives.

Socio- cultural factors and practice of irregular migration in Atsibi Wonberta

According to the views of the regional experts and leaders, who participated in the study area, the Tigray Regional State (particularly the Eastern and Southern Zones) is more affected than other parts of the country and irregular youth migration is growing in number and spreading to new areas such as the central and southeast zones of the region. One of the regional experts said

“Migration started in this woreda since the 1970s and has a long history. At that time, many youths were moving via Eritrea, mainly to Yemen and Saudi Arabia, because of the war in Northern Ethiopia, the recurrent droughts, the settlement program, and due to national military service campaign. However, the recent irregular migration of young people is so high that the underlying causes are economic and the high ambition of the youth to change and improve their lives. We are constantly losing our working force. Death is knocking on every door. The local youth is convinced that irregular migration is the only way to change and improve their lives. Everybody is ready to go to Saudi Arabia. There is high competition among the youths in the study area. Because of this misconception, many young people are going through irregular migration as if it was a “silver box” or “coffin.”

Moreover, one expert of the woreda indicated that

“The one who migrates irregularly [is] considered as a hero in our area. The challenges of irregular migration could not stop them. Everybody is ready to go. It is like a competition. I am not lesser than the other. This is what the youth of the woreda think. This thinking has become dominant. Irregular migration is negatively affecting the community. On the contrary, no one condemns the problem rather it is much more encouraged by parents and the community and it

is becoming a major area of life for the local youth. The youth is highly influenced by the erroneous thinking that “a coffin or a coffin is dead”.

During the focus group discussion, local leaders clearly show that irregular migration became common practices in the area since the 1970s and has now reached a point where death has become unbearable. They believe that irregular migration is becoming a “culture” and a common practice in the community of the study area. Some families did not condemn their children for thinking about migrating irregularly; rather, they encouraged and facilitated it by giving moral and financial support.

The empirical information from the respondents and the literature reviewed confirm the existence of social and cultural factors that contributed to the expansion and continuation of “circuit migration” such as the existence of a large number of illegal local brokers with networks extending to countries of destination; misinformation and false promises by brokers; and success stories of those who already migrated. Other factors, such as the influence of parents or friends who are in exile by facilitating irregular migration and providing information about salary, facilities, and job opportunities in the destination countries; family and peer pressure; and the involvement of returnees in recruiting potential migrants, especially girls, were also causing factors for cross-border outmigration. Correspondingly, many local youths consider outmigration as the only way to achieve a better standard of living. Hence, both in groups or by individual decision, youths often cross the land and sea to Saudi Arabia through Djibouti and Somalia.

The response of most informants about the role of diaspora social networks in the destination country (Saudi Arabia) in maintaining and facilitating migration outflows is consistent with the social network and migration theories. Since diasporas or networks within the place of destination (in this case, Saudi Arabia) play a key role in maintaining and facilitating migration flows instead of initiating the method.¹⁷ As the size of the network (relatives, friends), potential migrants are more likely to receive better information and assistance in their job and house searches.¹⁸ And this is actually happening in the study area because there are thousands of migrants in Saudi Arabia and this idea is compliment with the idea of migration causes migration. Nowadays migration is associated with moral, social status and financial success and encouraged by the community in the study area.

¹⁷ MASSEY. 1993.

¹⁸ VERTOVEC 2002.

Most of the youths in the study area do not have a spirit of hope and have a tendency to work at home. Some experts/leaders, religious leaders and influential residents who participated in the focus group discussions said that currently, most of the local youth, instead of trying to change and improve their lives by working at home, are inspired to migrate and they see Saudi Arabia as an “Earthly Paradise”.

The desire to go away and be rich in the short term is very high in the study woreda. There is competition among youths and everybody is ready to go. This becomes dominant thinking in the Atsibi Wonberta Woreda. Due to the hopelessness of finding jobs at home, youths choose to migrate irregularly and consider it as the only means to change and improve their lives.

Administrative and policy factors in Atsibi Wonberta

In Atsibi Wonberta, the bureaucratic system of government failed to provide efficient and effective services to citizens in general and youths in particular. It is believed that, apart from a lack of good governance at all administrative levels, there is a lack of enough financial institutions that support the youth by providing loan/credit and work opportunities. In this regard, many returnees claim that the government in the study area is not supporting the young people. For instance, one young returnee said:

“There are not enough rural and urban financial institutions to support youth; the leadership and the professionals do not support the youth well enough. Apart from lack of governance, such as discrimination, youths are not receiving enough loans to start a job. If you do not have a home map or a car ownership document, you will not receive a loan. Moreover, the interest rate for a loan is high for a young person who is a beginner. It is difficult to find a place to work in Atsibi Wonberta. Thus, these and other administrative factors discourage and drive local youths to migrate irregularly.”

The country lacks a comprehensive immigration policy, in particular a separate irregular migration policy. Criminalization and detention of illegal brokers and human traffickers have neither stopped brokerage nor effectively addressed the challenge of irregular migration.

Rather, human trafficking and/irregular migration have continued in Ethiopia and the study area. Since brokerage is demand-driven, aspiring migrants look for brokers and ask them to facilitate their migration. In other words, as long as young

people are willing to migrate, and families and communities are ready to support their intention to leave, there will be a continuous demand for informal brokers.

The president of the court of the study woreda who participated in the research indicated the gaps in the adoption and enforcement of law regarding irregular migration as follows:

“The currently amended Proclamation No. 909/2015 was insufficient to adequately defend and deter irregular migration. For example, a broker who has been caught trafficking is allowed to be released on bail. Not only under this limitation, but according to this proclamation, a police officer cannot ask for more time to search and organize evidence if the investigation is not completed within 4 months. Furthermore, a vehicle caught in trafficking is not criminalized according to this proclamation. It means that the illegal brokers /traffickers would be released without the punishment they deserved. This means that human traffickers will continue to reinforce trafficking. Given the legal gaps, there is still a wide gap in the level of implementation. In addition to this, parents and society either hide or negotiate with illegal brokers rather than expose them. These all are aggravating irregular migrations from time to time.”

Atsibi Womberta woreda’s police chief confirmed that many parents negotiate with illegal brokers practically. He further said that many parents came to the police office to get their money back and asked the police department to help him. But, many of them did not have the exact names and addresses of the brokers.

Pull Factors

Pulling factors such as stable employment prospects, better living conditions, higher employment opportunities and high salary/income attract young people for irregular migration. A young returnee who participated in the study responded to the question of what attracts her to migrate irregularly to Saudi Arabia as follows:

“I was looking for a better income and a better life. Because in Saudi Arabia there are better living conditions, more job opportunities and higher income than in my woreda. For example, in Saudi Arabia, I earn more than ten times what I do here. Here, a laborer earns up to 150 birr per day, while a professional earns up to 500 birr per day. However, in Saudi Arabia a laborer earns about 1500 birr a day, while a professional earns up to 2000 birr a day. You can

imagine the income difference between here and Saudi Arabia; here, a laborer earns 2,600-3,900 birr in a month, while in Saudi Arabia earns up to 39,000 birr per month, the difference being more than 36,000 birr in a month. While a professional here, for example, a carpenter earns between 13,000 and 15,000 birr a month, while one in Saudi Arabia earns between 52,000 and 60,000 birr a month. So, the difference is visible; it is between 39,000 and 45,000 birr per month”.

This response is consistent with the idea of economic disparities and income differences between the study area and the receiving country, i.e. Saudi Arabia, acting as one of the pull factors for irregular migration. Economic disparities between the sending areas (for example, the study area) and the receiving areas (for example Saudi Arabia) include differences in earnings, livelihoods and living standards. This empirical evidence is consistent with the responses of returnees, returnees’ parents and some experts about the economic causes of irregular youth migration in the study area. Because, there is a general agreement that economic factors are paramount in inducing people to migrate irregularly.

Income differentials between the origin and potential destination and income variability play important roles in driving migration.¹⁹ A global analysis of the determinants of international migration flow between 1995 and 2015 suggests that a rise of 10 percent within the income differential between two countries increases the number of migrants between the two by 3.1 percent, on average.²⁰ This idea compliments the responses of most respondents. For instance, the returnees said that the income/salary they earn in Saudi Arabia is ten times greater than that in their home country.

The high demand for cheap unskilled labour in Middle Eastern countries (particularly in Saudi Arabia) is among the most important pull factors for migration. According to a study conducted by the IOM, for instance only Saudi Arabia demanded 750,000 –1.5 million domestic workers from 2010-2012.²¹ Concerning irregular migrants the number of Ethiopian migrants who arrived in Yemen with their intended destination mostly Saudi Arabia was 43,000, 75,000 and 84,500 in 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively.²² The responses of most of the returnees strengthen the above-mentioned data.

¹⁹ LILEOR 2011.

²⁰ OECD 2016.

²¹ IOM 2014.

²² Ibid.

Expectations of migrants before migration

The expectations of migrant youths before they leave their home country are quite different regarding job opportunities and life abroad, and the hardships of crossing the desert route and the journey in the sea. One returnee who participated in the study gave the following opinion about his expectations and his experience in the destination country:

“I had been to Saudi Arabia irregularly three times. However, I have not made any progress or change in my life. I had high hopes before I went into exile. First, brokers told me that Saudi Arabia had better wages and a better standard of living. Due to this, I had arrived in Saudi Arabia irregularly, but the promise that I had been given and my desire to create wealth were beyond my reach.”

Even though he believes that irregular migration is like gambling with one’s own life, he is still interested in going to Saudi Arabia for the fourth time. His reason was that *“life does not make sense to me here, I will try it for the fourth time, but I may die on the journey or in the destination country.”*

Hence, according to the responses of the returnees, youths move with high expectations of income, job opportunities and better life in the destination country. Due to their high expectations, most migrants are ready to face all challenges and hardships throughout their entire journey and destination country. They only think about how to escape poverty and unemployment so, as to improve their lives in a short time. Most irregular migrants want to engage in irregular migration, is a desire they want to have a better life. This is consistent with the causation and perpetuation theory²³ that emphasizes the high desire to create wealth overnight as the cause of migration. In relation to this, many irregular migrants believe that if they go irregularly, they can work illegal business/contraband activities and can create wealth within a short period of time and change their lives. This idea was strengthened by one returnee who said:

“If you go legally, you are like a prisoner, you are like a modern slave; or, you cannot work for whatever you want. However, if you enter irregularly, you can work whatever you want and you can change and improve the lives of your family and yourself within a short period of time. Once you enter Saudi Arabia irregularly, you import from Yemen addictive substances such as hashish and alcohol such as whiskey and sell them in Saudi Arabia. You can also produce and

²³ HAGEN – ZANKER 2008.

sell homemade alcohol. But the risk is serious: it is like gambling with your life. If you get caught by the police or border keepers, you may face prison, gunshots or even death. That means death is always in your hands.”

According to an expert in the Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, who has similar view with another expert working in the Federal General Attorney and participated in the study said that youths migrate irregularly because the regular way of migration requires fulfilling various criteria, such as the completion of grade 8, learning the Arabic language, passing a medical exam and getting a COC assessment pass. So, young people do not want to go through this, as they have difficulty meeting these criteria.

3.2 Effects of irregular migration in Atsibi Wonberta woreda

Migrants, particularly women and girls, are vulnerable to abuse by smugglers and traffickers. The vulnerability related to the risks of irregular migration, including but not limited to death, slavery, torture, forced labour, sex- and gender-based violence against women and girls, financial exploitation and so on, is increasingly becoming a crucial problem for Ethiopian migrants in general and the study area in particular.

Migrants are aware of the risks associated, but are willing to take them, indicating that they have nothing to lose. These empirical evidences were consistent with the responses of returnees who participated in the study. One returnee who participated in the study described the challenges faced and negative effects of irregular migration in his journey and in the destination country as follows:

“Before we completed our journey, the smugglers/traffickers demanded us at least twice as much extra payment as we had agreed. If we failed to pay the required amount, they forced us to ask our families in Ethiopia to transfer them the required money. We were also victims of torture and harassment. They checked our pockets and took our money and mobile phones. On the journey, we suffered from thirst and hunger; some died in a crowded car or boat due to suffocation. When we sailed, they dropped some of us into the sea in order to lose weight on the boat, women/girls being raped and exposed to unwanted pregnancy and disease. After we arrived in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, women/girls were exposed to sexual exploitation; also they asked us to give them more money. Those who failed to pay the required amount of money were taken to an unknown place and subjected to

labour exploitation and xenophobia. They also handed us over to another person as a slave. Some migrants died from gunshots by security forces.”

During the researchers’ observation, they have seen one returnee who faced gunshot in Saudi Arabia on his head and became paralyzed and his hands and legs are no longer functional. Moreover, one returnee’ parent who participated in the study described the effects of irregular migration as follows:

“Illegal brokers and traffickers are harming our children. They often ask for additional money out of agreement for the trip. They call and threaten us. If we do not send them money, they will tell us that they will kill them. We are being forced to raise our grandchildren and this is causing economic pressure on us”. For example, one returnee’s mother said: “My daughter has three children and I have been forced to raise my three grandchildren. She returned empty-handed and because of this, it has been three years since her husband abandoned her. At this time, we parents are receiving many corpses, not a lot of money. We receive corpses without liver, kidney, or heart. We bought a deceased corpse for 400,000 birr because they will not give us the carcass if we do not pay the money.”

Thus, irregular migration is a crime that is causing a variety of economic, social, cultural, political and psychological challenges and negative effects on victims, parents and the society at large. The primary challenge for most migrants is leaving their family, friends and community to an unknown community and the victims face injuries, torture, gunshots, death, disability, labour and economic exploitation, sexual abuse, health problems, or abduction of children and xenophobia. Other negative effects are the loss of productive manpower, various social crises such as marital break-up, childless parenting, and psychological trauma and the defamation of the national image.

3.3 Efforts and challenges to mitigate irregular migration in Atsibi Wonberta woreda

Ethiopia has ratified major international laws and policies, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where the right to freedom of movement is enshrined, the UN Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Exploitation of Prostitution of Others. But, this is not practical on the ground because of multiple factors, such as national security problems. The Ethiopian government also cooperates with several international organizations to tackle

irregular migration, such as IOM, UNHCR, ILO, UNODC,²⁴ and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

Furthermore, some efforts have been made to create job opportunities for urban youths, including returnees. The government and other relevant non-governmental organizations are also trying to facilitate credit for the youth and they are involved in raising awareness about the severity of irregular migration. Anti-human smuggling and anti-trafficking task forces and sub-committees are also organized and established to prevent irregular migration from the woreda to the federal level. This task force is responsible for dealing with illegal brokers and traffickers. However, many returnees claim that the government of Ethiopia in general and the local government in particular are not providing coordinated support to youths including returnees. The leadership and experts' support is not sustainable, as they are not paying attention to the youth, and they lack commitment to mitigate the problem. It is also hard to start one's own business as there is a lack of start-up capital.

Moreover, many respondents believe that lack of leadership commitment, absence of an independent comprehensive migration policy and failure to coordinate the Task Force established to prevent irregular migration at all levels are major hindrances in preventing irregular migration. Moreover, the urban economy is unable to create sufficiently productive employment opportunities because of low-level private sector investment in the productive sectors of the economy, particularly in manufacturing and services for an increasingly educated urban youth.²⁵

4. Conclusion

Migration is always the result of complex and often-interrelated macro-, meso-, and micro-factors acting at the society and individual levels with intermediate enabling factors. The study revealed that the causes and drivers of irregular migration are complex and interrelated in terms of push, pull and enabling factors. The push factors are a mix of economic, social, cultural and environmental changes, administrative and individual values (such as desires and attitudinal enslavement). Poverty, lack of reliable and sustainable employment, poor living conditions, a lack of additional sources of income other than agriculture, low labour costs, drought, land degradation, a lack of farmland for youths, losing hope in future

²⁴ UNODC 2011.

²⁵ UNDP 2015.

job opportunities in the home country and food insecurity are some of the main economic and environmental push factors.

Some of the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the expansion and generating of “chain irregular migration” in the study area include: long history of migration, common practices and “culture” of migration in the community, experiences, false promises of illegal brokers and human traffickers. Besides, the influence of social networks, returnees’ peer and family pressure, and high competition among youths become dominant, thinking of the local youth “coffin or coffin is dead”. Moreover, a lack of good governance at all administrative levels, a lack of enough financial institutions that support the youth, and a high interest rate on loans, lead the young people to frustration and hopelessness and thinking about irregular migration.

In addition, lack of comprehensive migration policy and inadequate legislation, weak law enforcement, a lack of effective judiciary on the informal sector and high desire of youths to make wealth overnight are considered to be among the political, administrative and individual values push factors aggravating irregular migration of youths in the study area. Economic disparities and income differences between the sending and the destination countries, such as stable and higher employment opportunities, better living conditions, a high salary in the destination country are acting as pull factors, and the influence of social networks/diaspora found in the destination country, act as common pull factors for irregular migration of youths in the study area.

The ratio of irregular migrants is also increasing as a spillover effect from those who are already irregularly migrated, as many as could communicate many from exile to home youths to be candidate for irregular migration. Here, the idea that migration causes migration is confirmed in the study area and more migrants create more links with relatives and friends in Saudi Arabia, making them candidates for migration, thereby generating “a chain of migration” and increasing the stock of irregular migration in the study area. Besides, economic motivation, especially a high desire to create wealth overnight and improve their lives by involving themselves in illegal activities i.e. contraband; limited access for legal migration; a high cost of fees charged by agencies; the involvement of smugglers or agents in the process; misconceptions and imagery of other migrants/returnees and a lack of competent organization to respond to the problem.

The primary challenges of irregular migration on victims are injuries, torture, gunshots, death, labour and economic exploitation, sexual abuse, health problems,

or abduction of children. It can be noted that psychological trauma is affecting victims in both travel and destination countries. Irregular migration is also a crime that causes the country to lose productive work forces, including deterioration of the values of education, social security and cohesion.

5. Recommendations

In the study, it has been identified that poverty, backwardness and lack of job opportunities, economic disparities and income differences between the sending and receiving countries are among the root causes and drivers of irregular migration. Therefore, work that can reduce poverty, backwardness and lack of sustainable job opportunities and narrowing income differences between the sending and receiving countries should be timely and properly addressed.

To this end, the government and stakeholders should focus on activities that expand meaningful and sustainable job opportunities for the community, especially for the youth. To achieve this, paramount attention should be given to attract domestic and foreign investors. It is indispensable to expand and strengthen youth focused rural and urban savings and credit institutions, revise the existing upper limit of credit based on the current trends and reduce interest rates, especially for business-starting youths. Works should be done to save the culture of the community in general and youth in particular. Addressing the problems of good governance and service delivery at all administrative levels should not take a long time. The researchers believe that it is only when the leadership is firmly committed to the public that the prevention of irregular migration can be achieved and the leadership can actively engage the youth.

Policy makers need to develop and implement a comprehensive policy and strategy on irregular migration. This will help in addressing all the essential aspects of international migration within an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary response mechanism that enables coordinated efforts to mitigate the root causes and drivers of irregular migration.

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Book recommendation by Klaudia Tóth

Frank Furedi: *Why Borders Matter? Why Humanity Must Relearn the Art of Drawing Boundaries*. Routledge, 2020.

Frank Furedi, Hungarian-born sociologist, analyst, writer and professor emeritus at the Department of Sociology at the University of Kent, emphasises the paramount importance of rediscovering borders in his most recent book. He argues that western societies have become increasingly alienated from the social and physical boundaries, which were in place as key cornerstones for centuries to protect community values, culture, and served as a well-defined identity-shaping factor.

Speaking about the removal of borders is fashionable and popular today, as multiculturalism, globalisation and digitalisation have erased traditional borders. It is interesting to see how borders, as physical barriers that separate nations, trigger ambivalent feelings in people coming from or socialised in various value environments. Those standing outside the borders see them as a kind of discriminatory, distinctive barricade that generates problems, whereas those living inside the borders rather see them as the guarantee of preserving sovereignty, territorial integrity and identity.

According to Furedi, borders ensure a framework for a given community not only territorially, but also morally. Borders enclose a common place where citizens live their everyday lives, where a given political milieu governs, and where a specific legal system is applicable and enforced. He adds that democracy can function healthily only in well-defined territories, since citizens can exercise their rights to their fullest extent within their communities. Moreover, he stresses that individuals can fully experience and interpret the national culture, traditions and identity characteristics that developed organically over history only within their own community. According to the writer, removing definitive borders from a nation's life would make democracy disappear as well.

In conducting the research that served as the basis for his book, Furedi was surprised to see how citizenship is increasingly becoming a negative concept, both legally and politically, and a factor that unjustifiably hinders people, just as borders do. Indeed, an emerging narrative argues that citizenship serves only to separate people from one another, and it creates discrimination against non-citizens by reinforcing differences and building obstacles in specific cases.

Füredi also emphasises that fetishizing openness brings about effects that are much more adverse than we would think. The concept of open borders and societies simply erodes the lives of individuals, because it exerts severe pressure on the environment and requires an extremely high level of fusion which cannot be interpreted in the national community and private spheres. The author argues that the supporters of openness and of removing borders maintain their view only as long as they realise how important it is to belong to somewhere and to have ties to a specific place that they can call their own.

Voices favouring migration often argue that immigration should be supported, since the homogeneity of a given nation needs to be eased, as homogeneity is bad, while diversity is a value, a virtue. According to Füredi, this ideological approach is wrong and harmful, since this kind of thinking means inviting people to specific nation states, who then mostly refuse to assimilate. In the long run, this leads to the emergence of parallel societies and alternative communities, which are not able to assimilate into the society of the receiving state due to their cultural and traditional roots. As a result, a social structure organised along the pool of common interests and values is made impossible. Instead, in the lack of integration, we see the further deepening of cleavages between local residents and immigrants. As a prominent example, Füredi mentions the so-called “no-go zones” that typically developed in western countries, defining them as districts where even local police forces are afraid to enter, in many cases.

Overall, sociologist Frank Füredi believes that the barriers and limits present in people’s everyday lives are just as natural as the borders separating nation-states. In his most recent book, he argues that the national, social achievements which organically developed over history are incomprehensible without borders, and thus the concept of openness and a “borderless” world is doomed to fail. This failure is explained by two factors. First, individuals can truly experience their basic cultural needs and views within their communities. Second, many of those coming from a different social and religious environment are not able to assimilate.

The Hijacking of Asylum: Responses in the U.S. and Europe

Kristóf György Veres

On March 7, the Center for Immigration Studies and the Budapest-based Migration Research Institute (MRI) organized a panel discussion titled “*The Hijacking of Asylum: Responses in the U.S. and Europe.*” Experts from both sides of the Atlantic examined international asylum law and its impact on national sovereignty. Viktor Marsai, Research Director (MRI) explained how the Mediterranean neighbors of the EU have been trying to instrumentalize migratory flows reaching the southern member-states of the EU. “The irregular migrants arriving on the shores of Greece, Italy and Spain pass through third countries (Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco) that are willing to act as gatekeepers to ‘Fortress Europe.’ However their cooperation comes at an increasingly high price.

Todd Bensman, Senior National Security Fellow (CIS), described the ties between asylum and terrorist attacks in Europe. The European asylum system gives the benefit of the doubt to border-crossing strangers instead of identifying those who could mean harm to destination countries. The present system can be easily gamed by terrorist infiltrators posing as asylum-seekers.

Szabolcs Janik, Operations Director (MRI) highlighted how the 2021–2022 Belarus–European Union Border Crisis represented a new chapter in the instrumentalization of migration. During the summer of 2021, Belarus started using migrants as weapons in hybrid warfare to blackmail the EU, by flying them in from the Middle East and then directing them towards the Lithuanian and the Polish borders. The ensuing border crisis was the first time irregular migration was not just tapped into, but a flow was artificially created to be then used as a hybrid weapon.

Kristof Gyorgy Veres, Andrassy National Security Fellow (MRI–CIS) explained the responses of member states and the EU to the instrumentalization of migration. During the 2015 Syrian migration crisis, the Union initially was pushing for management and burden sharing, while at the same time refused to fund the border fence constructed by Hungary. The only effective tool that member states were able to agree on was massive bribes to gatekeeper countries. The situation only changed drastically in 2021. Facing a crisis artificially generated by Belarus, the EU finally seems willing to shift towards a security-first approach. During the

Ukrainian refugee-crisis, the EU acted decisively and swiftly granting temporary protected status to refugees fleeing the Russian invasion.

Andrew Arthur, Resident Fellow in Law and Policy (CIS) mapped out the Biden administration's attempts to expand asylum. It seems that the administration is pursuing a two-step approach to expand asylum eligibility. First, they are trying to remove the safeguards in the current system that would make it possible for DHS to release illegal migrants on parole. The second step would be the watering down of asylum standards by expanding the definition of "membership in a particular social group." These two steps would enable the Biden administration to allow an unlimited number of aliens to enter the U.S. with a clear path to citizenship.

Mark Krikorian, Executive Director (CIS) pointed out that asylum is an idea whose time has passed. Since the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the world has changed tremendously. Asylum was originally just a minor instrument benefitting political defectors from the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, but now it is used as a vehicle for massive immigration.

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