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THE RURAL
AS A RETURN MIGRATION DESTINATION

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Abstract: This paper investigates the phenomenon of return migration to rural areas through exploring how different conceptual approaches address issues of population return, and the significance of the rural as a return migration destination. Theories of migration have variously concentrated on economic, social, cultural and political understandings, with migration often thought of in terms of various forms of capital. Theories relating to the rural, in particular those that reflect the influence of globalizing processes, advocate a shift towards understanding it in relational, context-specific terms, implying that individual return migration experiences that are situated within a particular rural context will be complex and distinct. Using empirical evidence from the West of Ireland, this paper reviews some key conceptual approaches to understanding return migration on the one hand, and the impact of a rural context on the other. Drawing from a series of qualitative interviews conducted with return migrants, this paper reveals the complexity of contemporary return migration experiences in rural areas.

Keywords: Return migration, rural, rural development, West of Ireland, Globalisation.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of return migration to rural areas represents an evolving field of research which must be contextualised within wider processes of societal change. Fundamental influences include the increased mobility of populations, the shrinking of distance with improved transport and communications systems, and the creation of new social networks that increasingly overcome geographical boundaries. Such developmental progression and societal change can often be embedded in the process of globalisation. Globalisation in a migration context can be conceptualised as a discourse that presents the existence of a smaller world which can be connected and travelled in less time and with increasing frequency. Steger (2003) has suggested that globalisation 'involves the creation of new, and the multiplication of existing, social networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional, political, economic, cultural and geographical boundaries' (p.9). Woods (2011) proposes that globalization is a driver of change in rural areas encompassing a variety of contexts such as trade and economic production, tourism, migration, media representations and environmental regulations. This

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multiple characterisation of globalization corresponds with Steger's (2003) definition of globalisation as 'a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensity worldwide social (and economic) interdependency and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distance' (p. 13). One societal process increasingly reflective of patterns of globalisation is that of return migration. A complex and multilayered process, it has been the focus of academic deliberation since the 1960s; however, it was not until the 1980s that more wide-ranging debates on the issue started to take place among the academic community (Kubat, 1984). These debates resulted in the development of an extensive body of literature on the phenomenon of return migration, producing a range of theoretical approaches that attempted to better understand the significance of return migrants to origin countries (Cassarino, 2004). A further dimension to the question of return migration is the issue of situating 'returnees' in a rural context. Recent research, particularly in a European context, includes the work of Findlay et al. (2000), Stockdale et al. (2000); Wilborg (2004); Stockdale (2006) and Ní Laoire (2007) particularly as it relates to the European context. In the Irish context, Ní Laoire (2007) explores the complexities associated with Irish return migrants to rural areas since the mid 1990s, with elements of her work focusing on the narratives of return migrants in terms of discourses of rurality, notions of a rural idyll and 'insider-outsider' dualisms. Stockdale et al. (2000) investigate the impact of repopulation of rural Scotland in demographic and economic terms, with a significant proportion of inmigrants having had previous links to the rural communities in question. Stockdale (2006) further examines the importance of return migration in terms of the successful economic development of rural areas, particularly in relation to the application of endogenous models of rural development. Wilborg (2004) explores the nature of rural place identity in a context of increasing mobility. Focusing specifically on the experiences of student migration, she traces a changing, more negotiated and reflexive form of relationship between people and place that challenges conventional understandings of place meaning and place attachment in the rural.

Particular conceptualisations of the rural also have important implications for understanding the process of return migration and as such require exploration and analysis. This paper aims to contribute to this discussion by exploring some of the theoretical frameworks that draw together understandings of return migration in a rural context. As such it also sets out to reveal the complex experiences of return migration to rural areas. Drawing on empirical evidence from a County Roscommon case study region in the West of Ireland (as part of the 7th EU Framework project DERREG - Developing Europe's Rural Regions in the Era of Globalization) the article probes issues concerned with the re-insertion of return migrants into rural communities, the potential contribution of return migrants to the development of small rural communities and the pivotal role returnees can play in the economic, social and cultural vibrancy of these local rural communities. In this way, the paper aims to review and draw on conceptual approaches to understanding migration on the one hand, and the impact of a rural context on the other.

2. Theorizing International Return Migration

An extensive proportion of the theoretical and empirical literature on migration views the phenomenon as permanent. In contradicting this assumption Dustmann and Weiss (2007) argue that the majority of migrations are temporary rather than undeviating, and that the 'permanent' hypothesis is convenient as it facilitates analysis in many ways, such as immigrant behaviour and the impact of migration on residents' outcomes. Halfacree (2012) suggests that the permanent-temporary binary that ordered much of our understanding of migration is 'increasingly considered unhelpful' (p.5). Additionally, he advocates that because any migration is more often temporary in terms of the duration of a person's life, the very idea of permanent migration seems a 'product of an implicit assumption of normative sedentarist settlement' (ibid, p.5). Non-permanent migration or return migration therefore is commonplace but still a relatively new area of migration in the sense that does not have a standard meaning in national or international policy or law. For the purposes of the DERREG project research, a 'return migrant' is defined as one who has returned to his/her place of birth following a period of time in another country. Additional consideration is also given to internal migration, which is referred to as a change of residence within national boundaries, such as between states,

provinces, cities, or municipalities. As a significant entity of international migration, return migration has been explored since the 1960s, even though it was not until the 1980s that it became central to many international scholarly debates (Kubat 1984) resulting in various theoretical approaches being produced (Cassarino 2004). An exploration of the conceptual approach to return migrants is necessary to illustrate how return has been characterized and situated in time and space, and how returnees have been represented. This paper draws more specifically on Cassarino's (2004) approach to the conceptualisation of return migration. The neoclassical approach to international migration is based on the response of individuals to economic opportunities in other countries. Early users of this approach (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969) suggest that international migrants actively respond to wage differentials between receiving and sending countries, in addition to an expectation for a superior income in the host country. In support of the neoclassical approach, Hunter (2010) suggests that its 'theoretical neatness' and 'predictive potential' is relevant when considering the particular migrant and his/her incentive for migrating and/or returning. Nonetheless, he also argues that predictions do not always concur with the evidence base and more often than not migrants have miscalculated the cost of migration and are not in receipt of higher incomes. Cassarino (2004) suggests that in a typical neoclassical stance, return migration involves labour migrants who incorrectly judged the costs of migration and did not benefit from higher wages. Consequently, migrants return to their country of origin because of this failed experience and the fact that their human capital was not acknowledged in monetary terms. As such, their return was motivated by a sense of failure with their experience in the host country. In contrast to the neoclassical approach and its associated notion of failure, the new economics of labour migration (NELM) analyses return migration as the natural conclusion of a successful experience in a foreign country.

The NELM theory considers return migration as the logical outcome of a planned event defined at the level of the migrants' household and resulting from successfully achieving a comprehensive strategy, goal or target. Stark (1991) suggests that the NELM approach shifts the focus of migration theory away from 'individual independence to mutual interdependence' resting at the level of the family or household (p. 26). NELM views return migrants as having successfully returned to their country of origin after completing a period of migration, which resulted in a successful financial experience. Hunter (2010) argues that the NELM approach to migration considerably advances our understanding of return migration processes particularly within the sphere of remittances as household insurance. Nonetheless, Hunter (ibid) criticises the new economics literature in that it confines the migrants' social perspective to the immediate household disregarding broader social structures in the wider home community. This viewpoint was previously suggested by Cassarino (2004) in his argument regarding the shortcomings of both the neoclassical theory and the NELM approach. Cassarino (ibid) suggests that both theories place considerable emphasis on the financial aspects of a returnees decision to return and little consideration is given to social or cultural aspects. He furthermore argues that although the NELM approach considers remittances it fails to reflect on how remittances are utilised in home countries. No consideration is given to where migrants return, how returnees interact with families once they return and how they reintegrate into their home county and household. Although the neoclassical theory and the NELM approach provide valuable insight into migration patterns, the success/failure paradigm fails to explain the decisions and strategies of return migrants. In addressing this Cassarino presents the structural approach to return migration which suggests that return migration is not only a 'personal issue, but a social and contextual one, affected by situational and structural factors' (ibid., p. 257).

The structural approach to return migration is based not just on the migrant's financial calculations but also on social, institutional and contextual factors of the returnee's home country. Cerase (1974, p. 258) suggests that these factors can be summarised as 'vested interests and traditional ways of thinking', which although appropriate can appear limiting. In a highly acclaimed paper, 'Expectations and Reality', Cerase (ibid) put forward four motivations or types of return migrants: 'Return of Failure', which pertains to returnees who failed to integrate in the host country due to prejudices and stereotypes. 'Return of Conservation' relates to migrants who always intended to return and did so with enhanced financial resources (to be utilised for personal and family gain only and used to preserve the social context of the home county rather than change it). 'Return of Retirement' refers to migrants who return to their home

country to retire having amassed sufficient funds to purchase retirement accommodation while 'Return of Innovation', perceived by Cassarino (2004) as the most dramatic category, refers to returnees wishing to utilise not only their financial resources but also their acquired skills. These returnees view themselves as innovators and although they advocate 'change' it is unlikely to materialise due to the established power structures in place.

The structural approach focuses on the 'return' and the impact return migrants are likely to have on their origin societies. Hunter (2010) who argues that the structural approach focuses exclusively on the structural conditions of the home community and pays little attention to structural conditions in host countries analyzes this approach. A second critique directed at the structural approach focuses on Cassarino's (2004) concept of the duration/time migrants spend in the host country. Both Cassarino (2004) and Hunter (2010) suggest that difficulties encountered by returnees relate to an extended period spent in the host country outside of 'traditional ways of thinking' in their country of origin. Failure to maintain contact with family and friends results in unsuccessful attempts to pursue work and social interests on their return. This assumption is however, challenged by social network theorists and those promoting a transnational perspective.

In analyzing the structuralist approach, Cassarino (2004) argues that it fails to emphasize consistent associations between sending and receiving countries. Transnationalism, on the other hand, endeavours to create a theoretical framework based on a solid connection between migrants' host and origin countries. Transnational activities are realized as a direct result of regular and persistent social contacts by migrants across national borders (Portes, 1999). Retaining these strong links and making regular contact with the home country is a method of preparation for the returnee's reintegration once they return. Transnationalists suggest that this 'cycle of contact' remains even when migrants return to their country of origin. This conceptual framework, according to Cassarino (2004), is based on two interrelated fields of investigation: transnational identities and transnational mobility. Transnational mobility is illustrated though the 'back and forth' movement initiated by migrants in an effort to maintain contact with family and friends in their country of origin. Transnational identities are a consequence of migrants retaining their original identity and at the same time adopting the identity of the host country. This 'double identity' concept (Cassarino, ibid) suggests that migrants have the aptitude to negotiate their place in society irrespective of whether they reside in the host country or in their country of origin. They can adapt to situations and circumstances they face on their return home as they did on their arrival in the host country without losing their original identity. This ability, in addition to the 'cycle of contact', ensures that the returnees are better prepared for their return and face fewer difficulties reintegrating in their home country.

An additional characteristic of transnational migrants, according to Al-Ali and Koser (2002), is that they create and maintain economic, social and politic networks that extent throughout numerous social orders. Accepted membership of these societies is based on a common country of origin, common ethnicity and kingship linkages (diaspora). Cassarino (2004, p. 265) criticises this transnationalists perspective which 'encapsulates (migrants) initiatives and projects in the home country in a fundamental set of mutual obligations, opportunities and expectations stemming from common ethnicity (i.e. diaspora) and kinship (i.e. the family, the household)'. Hunter (2010) reiterates this claim, additionally suggesting that, the transnational literature is 'conceptually fuzzy'. By contrast, Hunter (ibid) argues that a flourishing approach in migration studies advocates a theory of society in which pre-ascribed membership in kinship and ethnic groups has no place.

Social network theory, the final theoretical approach discussed here, contributes to a better understanding of return migration (Cassarino, 2004). Unlike transnationalism, social network theory views returnees as actors who draw together tangible and intangible resources to return to their country of origin. This is achieved by mobilising resources 'stemming from commonality of interests and availability at the level of social and economic cross-border networks' (ibid, p.265). In similar fashion to transnationalists, social network theorists analyse returnees as migrants who preserve persistent links with their host countries. Unlike transnationalists however, they are not dependent on diasporas, instead social network theorists believe that the process of migration itself has provided the returnee with significant additional abilities that

can be utilised once return has taken place. Social structures ensure that returnees have sufficient resources and information that assist in the reintegration process. Although remittances and savings are important to the returnee, they constitute just one type of resource, which may be invested in productive projects aimed at securing return (Cassarino, 2004). Social network theorists view the returnee as a social actor who has his/her own perception of the home country. These ideas are developed over time because of accumulated information regarding context and opportunities in origin countries. The returnee mobilises resources prior to return and belongs to a cross-border network involving migrants and non-migrants. In addition to financial capital, social network theorists suggest that human capital in the form of skills acquired abroad as well as knowledge, experiences, acquaintances and values all contribute to the successful return of the migrants (ibid).

Taking all five theoretical frameworks into consideration it becomes obvious that return migrants differ considerably in terms of the reasons or motivations for returning. As such, various aspects of all of the above outlined perspectives can be taken into consideration when analysing the data accumulated as part of the DERREG return migrant study. Of particular relevance to this discussion, however, are theories of transnationalism and social network theory in that they allow the significance of social networking, human capital, transnational mobility and identities to be probed. Discourses of rurality as part of the exploration of patterns and dynamics of rural return migration are outlined in the following section.

2.1 Discourses and Patterns of Rural Return Migration

From a globalization perspective, conceptual approaches to the rural call for an appreciation of the increasing complexity and diversity of rural space and place (Murdoch 2006). There is a new emphasis on mobilities and fluidities of rural life. From an economic standpoint, the global in the rural represents both threats and opportunities as a migration destination (Woods 2007). The rural is now an arena populated by many diverse groups with different sets of rural identities, interests and priorities (Cloke 2006; Panelli 2006; Woods 2003). What emerges is a countryside that is increasingly 'differentiated' in social, economic, political, cultural and spatial terms (Marsden et al. 1993). These shifts in thinking about the rural are arguably representative of a move away from traditional perceptions of the rural which emphasise the more positive, quality of life dimensions associated with a natural setting, and a sense of strong community support and cohesion. Ní Laoire (2007), explores narratives of return on the part of inmigrants to the rural as discourses of belonging and not belonging. She refers to the need to understand certain types of migration in terms of 'temporary relocations' for those intending to return home in the future. Milbourne (2007) has outlined the need for a more nuanced understanding of the increasingly complex nature of rural populations. He cautions against any tendency to apply a metanarrative of rural population change that promotes narrow conceptualisations of rural migration associated with age, class and lifestyle choice. Mahon (2007) establishes a significant economic imperative underlying migration decisions to rural fringe locations in the Irish context. This is connected to the availability of cheaper housing as opposed to any other wish to migrate to the rural. This form of migration is often reflected in very weak social ties to the location in question, with relative disinterest in forming place attachment.

The counterurbanisation literature in particular has sought to capture the perspective of migration to the rural as a form of anti-urban reaction and the search for a perceived superior quality of life associated with rurality (Boyle and Halfacree 1998; Champion 1998). This concept has been subject to recent critical analysis, with a view to embracing more diverse perceptions of rural immigration and the motivations behind these. Of significance in the context of understanding migration decisions is the contention by Halfacree (2001, 2008, 2011) that counterurbanisation as a concept could be applied in a far more reflexive way which would shift the emphasis from a stereotypical view of the rural as idyll to reveal the complex nature of migration both into and out of rural areas. He refers to the examples of a number of distinct groups, ranging from 'alternative' rural settlers to international agricultural labour migrants, whose migration motivations differ across groups, as well as being unreflective of traditional counterurban sentiments. Halfacree (1993) and Bunce (2003) argue that the rural idyll as a normative concept, can be either representative of popular culture or nostalgic memories of

individuals who once resided in a rural region. As such, it is too limited to interpret the range of dimensions pertaining to more contemporary population change in the rural.

Many migrants returning to rural areas are emphatic that their decision to return is strongly related to family reasons in one way or another. Return, according to Ní Laoire (2007), is often triggered by a desire to live near parents, extended family and friends, which in turn is often a part of a broader desire based on community and kinship. This quest for anchorage (Corcoran 2002) is reflective of a global mythical construction of Ireland as a pre-modern world where the ills of modernity can be eliminated. Ní Laoire (2007) acknowledges this notion as a myth, but recognizes how it appeals to migrants who are positioned between two places and endeavouring to make a decision on which one to choose in their plight for permanent residency. Choosing to return to Ireland for many returnees in the late 1990s and early 2000s was associated with the unprecedented growth in the Irish economy. An economically viable Ireland promised employment, social and cultural advantages, in addition to community and kinship. Conlon (2009) suggested that folded into social spaces of Celtic Tiger Ireland were ideas of 'innovation, confidence and cosmopolitanism' which 'guaranteed success in the globalised landscape of contemporary Irish society' (p. 114). Embedded in such conceptualisations of return is an expectation of inclusion, which may not be experienced by all return migrants. Ralph (2009) reiterates this point when he draws on the concept of 'home' in his exploration of Irish-born migrants returning from the United States. He suggests that 'home' is not simply a site of 'domestic bliss and security but can become a space of fear, insecurity and estrangement' (p. 195).

3. Methodology

3.1 Characterisation of the Sample

The interviewees chosen for this research were located in the West of Ireland. Fifteen interviews were carried out in total with nineteen return migrants. Five male, six female and four couples were interviewed with all but three residing in County Roscommon. In relation to the four couples interviewed, six of the eight individuals were Irish return migrants, while two of the eight interviewees were English and came to live in Ireland with their partners. The interviews sought to ascertain why return migrants left the West of Ireland; their length of stay abroad; motivation for returning (retirement, problems of integration abroad, language problems, quality of life, economic statue, and personal reasons) and their experiences as return migrants. Data was collected on return migrants from international destinations such as Britain (London), Canada, Holland, USA (Boston and New York) and Scotland. The time line for the research was returning to the West of Ireland from 1994-2009.

3.2 Selection of the Sample:

Qualitative (semi-structured) interviews were carried out with all the respondents residing in the County of Roscommon. The goal of the sampling process for this particular qualitative study was not that the sample was statistically representative of return migrants, but that the sample was representative in terms of content. The objective was to reach 'theoretical saturation', and as such, all relevant aspects of the research issue were included in the sample and addressed in the interviews. On completion of the interviews the research team had acquired all relevant information pertaining to return migrants experiences and motivations. The research methodology used a selection of cases by selective sampling - a sampling method linked to theoretical sampling. Selective sampling is a qualitative selection method based on predetermined criteria. For instance, in the case of return migrants, the individuals selected for interviews returned to Ireland voluntarily without compulsion at their own cost. Interview partners were identified not by random selection but by a conscious selection of cases. Selective sampling was used to assure that all relevant aspects were included in the sample, particularly as the total number of interviews was small. The sample reflected the relevant variation of the underlying population with regard to the criteria (variables).

The criteria taken into consideration when choosing the required sample of interviewees included: candidates were of Irish origin; were professional or non-professional; both male and

female candidates were selected in the sample (nine male and 10 female); both individuals and couples were selected and their duration of stay abroad was both long-term and short-term. All types of return migrants were included in the study; highly skilled migrants, skilled workers (e.g. craftsmen) as well as non-skilled workers. The level of education although important was not paramount, but what was required was current employment. What was also important was information regarding shift in work practices once return migrants were employed in the West of Ireland (County Roscommon). Family status played an important role in this subtask. Couples with children were interviewed as they may have had different motivations and perceptions about returning to Roscommon as opposed to single return migrants. Important also was the family connections in the country of origin and how this motivated migrants to return to their birth country.

For return migrants the length of time spent living and working in another country was important to the study. Depending on the period of stay in other countries we differentiated between a short-term stay (a period of a least 1 month but less than a year) and long-term stay (a period at least 12 months). It was important to regard return migrants who left the West of Ireland for a short-term and for a long-term. The initial step of the study was to carry out a pre-test to check the correctness and practicability of the guideline. This was achieved successfully and some questions were altered slightly as their clarity appeared problematic. Audio recordings of all interviews were made and were then transcribed in full. The transcripts were later used for quotations of distinctive statements which added to the quality of the research.

3.3 Case Study Region: County Roscommon, West of Ireland

The trend of return migration in Ireland was documented as long ago as the 1970s, but gathered pace in the 1990s with the Celtic Tiger boom. Between 1996 and 2006 return migrants made up between 23% and 50% of net inward migration flows to the Republic of Ireland (Ní Laoire 2008 and Conlon 2009). Similar to the national scenario international in-migrants to the West of Ireland generally fall into one of two groups. The first group is return migrants: individuals who had emigrated from Ireland returning home later in life, or decedents of emigrants returning to their 'home' country. Between 1991 and 1996, around 19.1 return migrants arrived in County Roscommon per 1,000 population, around 22.2 per thousand population in Mayo, and around 23.8 per thousand population in Galway (Central Statistics Office 2006). Many return migrants come from the UK, with others from further afield, notably North America. In the year prior to the 2006 census, 12% of in-migrants to the West Region had previously lived in England and Wales, and 3.8% in the United States. British citizens comprise the largest group of foreign nationals resident in the West Region at 34.5% (45.2% in County Roscommon) (Central Statistics Office, 2002). Rural Ireland, therefore, embodies a history of emigration and return migration that can be drawn upon as an example for many countries currently witnessing migration patterns. Consequently, rural Ireland was an appropriate case study location. Following DERREG project guidelines the study focuses on the West of Ireland and in particular the county of Roscommon.

The West Region, a NUTS II designation and part of the BMW Regional remit (Figure 1.1), comprises of three counties, Galway, Mayo and Roscommon plus the city of Galway. The population of the region in the 2006 Census was 414,277 (9.77% of the national population) with population density of 29 persons per sq. km, the lowest of any region in Ireland. The region is mainly rural in character, with only 30% of the population living in urban areas. County Roscommon, a largely rural county without a major urban centre, covers an area of 254,819 hectares with a population of 58,768 (CSO 2006). The main town in this County is Roscommon, with a population of just over 5,000 in 2006. Population growth in County Roscommon, at 13.2%, is well below the regional and national average (20.7% and 20.3% respectively) and this growth has been concentrated on the outskirts of the largest towns, albeit some electoral areas continue to experience population decline. The proportion of the population in the professional classes is 32.5% (the national average is 32.9%), while in the lower-skilled professions it is 17.9% (national average of 18.6%) (CSO 2006).
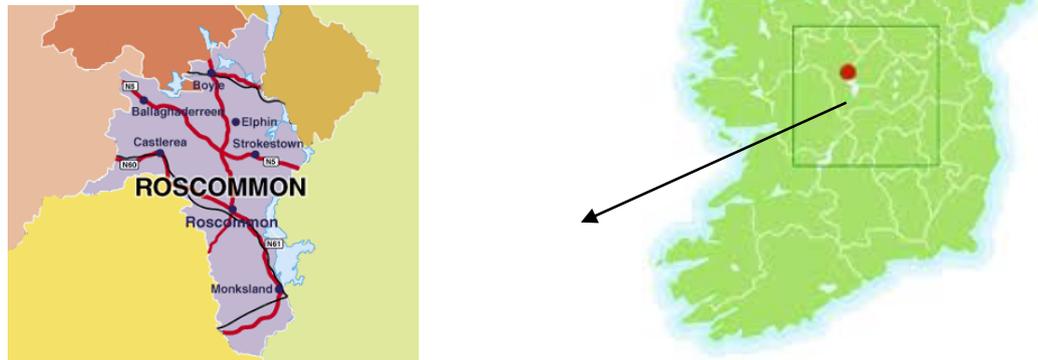
Fig 1. Map of Ireland showing County Roscommon. Source: Western Development Commission (2011) Map of Roscommon Available at http://www.wdc.ie/county-profiles/roscommon/. (Accessed 8th November 2011).

4. Results: Experiences of Irish Rural Return Migrants

The remainder of the paper will focus on the results of interviews carried out with return migrants in County Roscommon. The purpose, in the context of the theories already discussed, was to gain insight into the movement patterns and the motivations behind returnee's decision to return to rural Ireland and how this might reinforce the significance of the relational aspect of return migration and the importance of such concepts as the rural idyll in influencing movement patterns.

4.1 Movement Patterns and Experiences of Return

Thirteen of the nineteen return migrants interviewed for this research left Ireland in the 1980s as a result of a national recession. Such results mirror previous findings from Courtney (2000), Jones (2003) and Ní Laoire (2007), which show that in the mid 1980s, 30% of Ireland's population were registered as unemployed. Emigration from Ireland was concentrated at two ends of the class/education/wealth spectrum and unskilled and skilled males and females were leaving Ireland in significant numbers. A quarter of all emigrants to England in the 1980s were labourers, but by 1990 almost 30% of college graduates were emigrating to source further employment, training and experience abroad, a situation reflected in the findings whereby all but one interviewee had completed secondary level education prior to emigration and nine of the seventeen completed a third level qualification to Diploma or Degree level prior to leaving Ireland. Individuals and couples interviewed primarily emigrated to the United Kingdom the United States, Europe and Canada where most were motivated not only by the economic recession of the time, but also by family and friends living abroad, higher incomes and better working conditions. One individual stated that: *"I was an engineer and there were no jobs so I decided to go for eighteen months. I couldn't believe that there were lots of jobs over there at the time. I stayed for 13 years"* (Interviewee no.: 2), while a second suggested that: *"I left to go to London in 1987as there were no jobs in Ireland, but also because all my friends in England kept telling me how brilliant it was there"* (Interviewee no.: 5). Such comments suggest that both 'push and pull' factors were involved in emigrants leaving rural Ireland. Push factors referring to the economic circumstances of migrants while pull factors involved the need for young Irish emigrants to explore different cultures and experience new ways of living and working.

Despite the traditional tendency to consider migration as permanent (Dustmann and Weiss 2007) many of the interviewees stated that they always intended to return to Ireland. It would appear from the interviews that nine out of the eleven individuals and one of the couples needed little or no stimulus to return to Ireland as they always intended to do so. In eight of the interviews, it was suggested that issues of return came to the fore once children were born: *"I knew once I had children whenever it would happen I would come home. I suppose it was*

*always at the back of my mind. I knew I would not stay there forever" (*Interview no.: 12). Such motivations for return are highlighted in a simple spatial model of return presented by Jones (2003) in which he suggests that the attractions of home and family often persuade emigrants to reconsider a permanent residency abroad. Such motivations for return are also strongly connected to the new economics of labour migration theory, which suggest a strong attachment to home, household and nostalgia. Similarly, transnationalism is strongly associated with family ties, as is a strong attachment to home crucial in the decision to return (Cassarino 2004).

Three other interviewees also returned home for family reasons; however their experiences were somewhat negative in that, in all three cases, a parent had become ill and interviewees felt compelled to return. One couple felt they were forced to return due to the family situation and appeared to resent it, even after ten years home: *"My father became ill in 1997 and as I had been left the farm it was expected that I return to take care of him even though we never wanted to leave Boston"* (Interview no.: 13). These families reported considerable adjustment problems, ranging from Ní Laoire's (2007) insider-outsider dualism to feelings of not belonging, loneliness and isolation. Return migrants are expected to feel a sense of belonging and homecoming, and according to Ní Laoire (2008, p.40) issues of loneliness and adjustment are 'either not acknowledged or are unexpected'. Narratives of loneliness and poor adjustment were evident within this research, in particular amongst families who were uncertain about their return or those who felt their return was forced upon them.

4.2 Return to Rural Ireland

All returnees, except one female, loved returning to rural Ireland and most felt it presented little or no barriers to their lifestyle. Even though most interviewees felt that rural areas present challenges in relation to rural transport, services and facilities they are still content to attempt to overcome such challenges rather than move to an urban setting. One interviewee stated that: *"I wanted to feel part of the rural community again – so I joined local clubs and organisations. Rural Ireland feels a safer environment for my children" (Interviewee no.: 6).* Another interviewee was of the opinion that: *"Setting up my business in a town or city would have made good business sense, but I always wanted to return to rural Ireland – this is where I feel at home amongst my family and friends" (Interviewee no.: 5).* Similar comments were provided by a separated mother of three children when she suggested that: *"The quality of life here is so different than in the US – I can interact with family here yet I don't feel smothered either. My children have so much more freedom here – of course there are things about the US that I miss, but I feel that I gained more by coming home and being with family and friends" (Interviewee no.: 12).* These comments mirror key findings of Ní Laoire (2007) in that they are embedded in an idyllised construction of rural Ireland with notions of safety, community and family. Concept of peace and tranquillity dominated returnee's motivation to return as did their longing to return to friends and family. The dream of return for many migrants is powerful, but what appears as strong if not more so, is a longing to return to the rural region where they originated.

Nonetheless, there were several aspects of returning to rural Ireland that perturbed interviewees. A distinct lack of services, information regarding services and the level of professionalism within available services was a preoccupation with many interviewees (3 males, 4 females and 3 couples). In particular, the availability of rural transport was an issue, with many deeming it impossible to carry on any 'normal' existence in rural Ireland without owning one if not two cars. Although all interviewees were amazed at the transformation of Ireland during the 'Celtic Tiger' era they still felt the service industry lacked the professionalism they witnessed abroad. Some also expressed the opinion that Ireland's brief encounter with wealth and prosperity replaced feelings of community pride and localism with materialism and self-centredness. One woman suggested that: *"People just don't seem to have any time - they have become selfish they want everything but won't help change things themselves. They just don't seem to think, it's selfish really; they think someone else will do the work. When I came home I couldn't believe all the BMW s, Merc's and big houses - when I left you would not see them in Roscommon" (*Interview no.: 7). On the other hand, one man disliked the fact that people in his area changed very little. Having worked in an urban setting where instantaneous results were common place he found the 'laissez-faire' attitude in rural Ireland difficult to deal with. He

commented that: *"There is a laissez-faire attitude about services, involvement in leisure activities and even work – even in meetings outside of work – people get jobs to do but they don't have them done by the time the next meeting comes around service industries"* (Interview no.: 3). The availability of broadband was a problem for most returnees. Although most interviewees had broadband, several had considerable difficulty accessing it. In a social network theory context individuals who maintained contact with family and friends in their country of origin were aware and prepared for the difficulties that lay ahead in rural Ireland thereby making their transition somewhat easier. In fact similar to the transnational approach to return migration, social network theory views returnees as migrants who maintain strong linkages with their former residence whereby such contact can in turn provide valid information and resources for the returnee and where such linkages and networks become a resource for returnees as they attempt to source/secure employment in their native areas. For example one interviewee suggested that: "I maintained constant contact with friends and family while away, so once I returned it was easy for them to tell me what to do and what not to do, where to look for work and where to find reasonable accommodation" (Interview no.: 5).

4.3 Professional Experiences of Rural Return Migrants

Two of the nineteen interviewees are currently unemployed, but prior to leaving Ireland, all but four interviewees were unemployed while all were employed once they settled abroad. Of the seventeen returnees currently employed in Ireland, eight are self-employed in areas such as photography, recording studio, mechanic, turf cutting, restaurant, farmer/plumber and painter. All interviewees felt that the experience, skills and abilities they obtained abroad were invaluable once they returned to Ireland. One interviewee, currently self-employed, suggested that: *"You learned to toughen up because in another country you learn to do things for yourself there is no one there to do it for you. You do learn to toughen up and be a bit more thick skinned and not let things get to you" (*Interview no.: 6). Self-employed individuals felt that their experiences abroad were central to establishing their own business once they returned. All interviewees suggested that working in different work environments while away provided them with an opportunity to experience different work cultures and practices, which enhanced their employment opportunities once they returned. Most interviewees (14) were satisfied with their current employment situation except one female who was recently given redundancy notice. All self-employed individuals were anxious about their businesses due to the current recession and some (5) felt they might have a better chance at 'growing' their business if they resided in an urban area, albeit none were willing to trade the benefits of rural life for their businesses. All interviewees felt they gained skills and abilities abroad that assisted them in their current occupation. Eight of the seventeen interviewees obtained further education while abroad including; obtaining a Haulage Licence, Human Resources Degree, Photography Degree, Plumbing Degree, I.T. and Hotel and Catering qualifications. Others suggested that they gained substantial experience, strength of character and ability to deal with diverse populations and situations (Figure 4.4). One interviewee suggested that: *"I feel stronger as a result of being abroad and I've gained a broader understanding of people and how to deal with them while running a business"* (Interview no.: 6).

To this end a recognized advantage of mobility is the acquisition of forms of capital gained while abroad. Social network theorists view the returnee as a social actor who has values; projects and his/her own perception of the return environment. These ideas are developed over time because of accumulated information regarding situations and prospects in origin countries. The returnee mobilises resources prior to return and belongs to a cross-border network involving migrants and non-migrants. In addition to financial capital, social network theorists suggest that human capital in the form of skills acquired abroad as well as knowledge, experiences, acquaintances and values all contribute to the successful return of migrants (Cassarino 2004). Dustmann and Weiss (2007) suggest that the source country can gain immensely from opportunities and experiences its citizens had to acquire abroad, resulting in a 'brain gain' for the source country rather than a 'brain drain'. Migrants returning to rural Roscommon brought with them financial, social, human and cultural capital, which in turn are enormously beneficial to the sustainability and long term development of small rural areas. Those who established small rural businesses reflect the migration-development debate (Black

et al. 2003) which increasingly promotes the small business sector as an engine of growth for the economy as a whole and for rural areas in particular. Although a somewhat contentious matter (ibid.), the small business sector is increasingly relevant within the Irish situation where the economic crisis of recent years continues. The entrepreneurial and innovative ability of some of the returnees within this particular study was clearly evident. What materializes however is a lack of assistance, financial support and business direction and guidance, particularly for those in rural areas. Seven individuals sought assistance from government agencies (LEADER in Roscommon, Roscommon County Enterprise, IDA and Roscommon Enterprise Board). One individual setting up a recording studio in Roscommon received monetary and 'start-up' business assistance, but the others failed to receive any form of assistance. One individual suggested that: *"We did go to the IDA but we didn't get a lot of help. I think if we were setting up a bigger business they would have been more interested"* (Interviewee no.: 12). Therefore, although individuals within this study were successful in developing and sustaining their businesses, new returnees in the current economic climate may not be as fortunate without considerable support and guidance.

5. Conclusion

This paper has sought to add to the discussion on migration into rural areas through a specific focus on return migration. It has placed the interpretation of migration rather than the rural to the forefront, in this sense opening up the analysis to a range of other explanatory factors around return migration to the rural. A number of main issues have been identified. The first relates to the potential for return migration to be seen as a failed attempt by the individual to improve his or her status. This has not been borne out by the results of this research, suggesting therefore that dominant discourses associating return migration with some kind of 'failure', usually economic, may be overstated, particularly under more contemporary migration circumstances and conditions. A second issue relates to the idea of return migration as a disruptive phenomenon for rural place in terms of breaking up social connectivity. Again, this has not been evident in this research; rather, it reveals more about how migration binds places rather than separates them, in other words, migration as connective rather than disruptive. Drawing from the series of qualitative interviews conducted with return migrants in the West of Ireland, this paper explored the possibility of aligning their migrant experience to the five theoretical approaches of return migration, as outlined by Cassarino (2004). The approaches explored focused on the economic aspects of return migration (neoclassical economics and NELM) and the macro and micro extent of return migration (structuralism, transnationalism and social network theory). Because of new emerging theories (transnationalism and social network theory), return migration, according to Cassarino (2004), is no longer viewed as the conclusion of the migration cycle, instead it represents a process that can be analysed in stages.

An exploration of the current employment situation and professional experiences of returnees draws on social network theory. Migrants are viewed as social actors who have values; projects and their own perception of the return environment. One distinct advantage of the returnee's mobility practices was the acquisition of various forms of capital. Migrants returned to rural Ireland with financial, social, cultural and human capital making them both employable and capable of employing others within a self-employed capacity. Drawing once more on social network theory returnees showed an ability to network both in preparation for their return and once they returned. Such networks contributed to the successful reintegration of migrants, particularly within a rural setting. As such, the return migration process, particularly for rural areas resulted in a 'brain gain' situation rather than the original 'brain drain'. The entrepreneurial and innovative ability of some of the returnees draws again on notions of social network theory, in addition to the theory of transnationalism, in that return only constituted the first step towards the completion of the migration project. Where the migration project displayed negative connotations however, was the lack of support and direction from local agencies. Local agencies failed to provide additional advice and support, particularly for innovative individuals who wanted to start their own business. Within the realm of this research most returnees were successful in their ventures without additional support however this may not be the case for future returnees, particularly in light of the ongoing economic downturn. As such, it is imperative that returnees are supported and guided, not only in the everyday process of return, but also if

they show initiative to start a business that will eventually contribute to the sustainability of rural areas.

Finally, what was also apparent within this research was the impact of the rural on the decisions being made by migrants. In the first instance, the particular conditions and lack of opportunities within rural areas was a determining factor in forcing emigration. In more recent times, the perception of the rural and its placing within the consciousness of the idyll has seen a notable return migrant experience. This is clearly evident in many of the discussions with those who took part in the research and in particular the perception of the rural as 'safe', as 'close-knit', as 'community', as 'a good place to raise a family', were frequently referred to by many of the respondents. It is therefore clear that the phenomenon of return migration to rural areas is a more complex entity than perhaps first realised. The new emphasis on mobilities and fluidities of rural life adds to this complexity presenting us with a more challenging understanding of what or whom the rural represents or what or who impacts on the changing nature of the rural. One of the key issues emerging from this research is the apparent correlations between employment and innovation, and human capital and social networks. It is not possible within the remit of this paper to explore this strand in sufficient detail; however, it will form the basis of a separate research paper. It is evident from this research that return migrants are very much part of the diverse groups and myriad identities present in rural space and consequently are a group worthy of further investigation, particularly in the context of ongoing changes to rural populations and places under processes of globalisation.

Acknowledgements

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