# Visions worth striving for:

## *The sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees, former migrants in Norway*

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# Abstract

This thesis is an extensive analysis of the dynamic migratory process of Romania with a focus on return migration from Norway, and the sociocultural changes that it involves for Romanian migrants and their home societies. The literature review first presents a comprehensive analysis on return migration and development, followed by an outline of sociocultural change, the challenges that migrants face during emigration and return, the importance of social remittances, and the Romanian migration after state socialism. The methodology chapter discusses how the interviews were conducted in collecting primary data, and the use of secondary data based on the literature review of this qualitative research. The sociocultural effects of the Romanian migration are addressed in the findings chapter, and in the discussion and analysis chapter I discuss the insights into the social and cultural changes that emerge from the return of migrants to their home communities, aligning them with the literature.

My analysis has three key findings. The first key finding illustrates that through their migratory experience from Norway, Romanian returnees internalized social remittances, and changed their attitudes, behaviour, values and expectations before disseminating their knowledge in their family and social environment. The second key finding is that the prevalence of social remittances was dependent in part on the motivation of returnees to transfer their knowledge, ideas, and practices in the scope of contributing to sociocultural change, and in part on the way their societies of origin received the resources they attempted to transmit and culturally diffuse. The third key finding is that Romania, as an emigration society, has been slow to accept change, but repatriated Romanians maintain a confident attitude regarding the potential that their skills and know-how confer them in exerting their influence over certain cultural aspects in the spheres of work and social relationships.

**Keywords:** migration, development, return migration, sociocultural change, social remittances, transnationalism.

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This paper could not have been realised without the valuable inputs of all my 35 anonymous interviewees, whose knowledge and experiences made this research possible. The result is a thesis about the social remittances - understood to include ideas, values and social norms, emotions, and meanings attached to them - which migrants exchange with people in their countries of origin.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge the time and effort that the scholars cited in this paper have put into the collection of data and materials relevant to my research problem, from which students like me can benefit.

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# List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| CEE | Central and Eastern Europe |
| CPI | Corruption Perceptions Index |
| EU | The European Union |
| I.T. | Information Technology |
| NAV | The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration |
| NELM | The New Economics of Labour Migration |
| NSD | Norwegian Centre for Research Data |
| PDF | Portable Document Format |
| SUM | Centre for Development and the Environment |
| UiO | University of Oslo |
| UNA Norway | The United Nations Association of Norway |
| UNESCO | The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |

# List of Tables and Figures

# 1. Introductory Chapter

"Since social and cultural research tells a story, it can be regarded as a conversational intervention in a story-telling world" (Seale 2018a, 18). This quote by Seale serves as a constant reminder of the many exciting frontiers under social and cultural research. His statement implies that words, if used wisely, can address current problems of our generations with regard to a civilised world. I believe that we have a duty to strive for our visions of a social environment where cultural norms, values and differences are embraced and cherished, which makes this quote relevant to my project. This study explores the interplay of migration and development within Romania, and namely how Romania received social and cultural change through its migration to Norway following the country's accession to the European Union in 2007.

This research is based on the experience of Romanian nationals who migrated to Norway, and the development implications of their return processes to Romania. Among the phenomena studied in this thesis are the multiple reasons for return migration from Norway, the variety of post-return experiences, and the expectations of the Romanian migrants. Following primary and secondary data results, this paper analyses the potential of the returning migrants to be agents of change, as well as their intentions to make a difference in their home society. The results indicate that Romanians faced many obstacles and challenges in their migratory journey in Norway, but that for a source country like Romania, return migration could make a long-term positive contribution to its social and cultural development.

In this introductory chapter consisting of five subsections, I will expand on what the study entails, and will delineate the contributions of the subsequent chapters. My presentation of the background discusses existing data on the topic, and the rationale explains my interest in the topic, why research is needed, and the reasons I chose Romania and Norway as study sites. The third subsection establishes my research questions and what I set out to achieve. In the fourth subsection I describe the methods used, how I researched my questions, and how I analysed my data. I include a description of what is covered in each chapter in the structure subsection.

## 1.1 Background

People migrate within Europe constantly, and many of them settle and integrate into the social and cultural life of their host countries (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2017). Immigrants who establish such social relations are called "transmigrants", and they "develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political" (Schiller et al. 1992, 1) with their communities of origin. The emergence of this social process is called transnationalism, and the norms, values (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2017), practices (Levitt 2010), ideas, and knowledge that are being transferred from receiving countries to sending countries epitomise social remittances. This thesis studies the transnational mobility of Romanians with a focus on returnees, "Romanians who have lived abroad long term but who have returned to Romania (returned migrants)" (Bărbulescu et al. 2019, 196). This research project is based on the premise that returnees' visions and new ideologies can bring innovation. But do returnees manage to contribute to change in their home communities? That is precisely the knowledge gap and what the objectives of this project would entail: finding out if the sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees can lead to innovation and change back home.

In order to grasp the impact of returnees on home development, it is important to understand the three levels of interaction and impact. The micro-level focuses on migrants and their families back home, the meso-level involves places of origin and migrants abroad, and the macro-level analyses country-wide effects of mass migration. In order to comprehend social change, we must rely "on the mundane, meso-level processes that are related to migration and, in particular, to migrant's return" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 6), and their sociocultural practices and contribution. I have therefore researched phenomena with a focus on a variety of micro- and meso-level changes in local communities, by which I mean returnees and their diverse social groups, social networks, friends and families.

There has been little empirical study describing the role of transnational identity among returnees, even though it is important to comprehend the ways migrants adjust to their host country, but also to their home society upon return. In my thesis I analyse how they maintain social and cultural ties between their home -and host countries and not only, and I evaluate if the communities where my informants returned to benefited from the human capital, competences and experience gained abroad.

Romania is considered one of the most unequal societies in the EU (Horváth and Kiss 2016). Romanians have faced an eroded welfare system, with deteriorated living conditions and public services (Chirvasiu 2002; Vlase and Croitoru 2019). This fact is of paramount importance when we discuss Romanian migration and how it has been influenced by social conditions. As argued by Anghel et al. (2016, 0), "Romanian migration is today one of the biggest, complex, and dynamic migration to Western Europe". Romania used to be a country of outmigration for the past 25 years, but lately it has witnessed different mobility patterns and more complex migratory processes. Romanians increased their travelling to Western Europe after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the country becoming one of Europe's main sources for migration. Romanian migration changed after 2000, when Romania was invited to join the EU, and after Romanian authorities adopted a law which offered protection to Romanian migrants abroad. Between 2000 and 2002, Romanian migration was not that developed, but a mass migration to Western Europe followed 2002, when Romanians could travel without a visa and with less costs within the EU countries (Anghel and Cosciug 2018; Bărbulescu et al. 2019).

In 2007, Romania joined the EU and, as European citizens, Romanian migrants could acquire legal residency in the countries of Western Europe (Horváth and Kiss 2016). The adherence to the European Union brought freedom to travel, and Romanians became the most mobile migrants in 2008 (Andrén and Roman 2016). The 2008-economic crisis in Western Europe altered the patterns of Romanian migration again, which deviated towards Northern Europe. The uncertainties in Southern Europe constrained Romanian citizens to find alternative migration destinations, and Scandinavian countries including Norway started to receive more Romanians (Anghel et al. 2016). After years with an active emigration climate in Romania, the country experienced an increasing ongoing flow of returning migrants (Ambrosini et al. 2015; Vlase and Croitoru 2019). However, the increased migratory flows from the last 20 years, as well as their complexity and dynamism make it difficult to provide concrete data on the Romanian migration and return (Anghel and Cosciug 2018).

## 1.2 Rationale

My decision to undertake this project about the challenges and outcomes that migration and return involves for Romanian migrants was driven by the fact that the number of Romanian returnees is growing, and so is the need to understand their experiences, and their sociocultural views. My hypothesis is that returnees are relatively successful migrants who think of their return as an opportunity to contribute to the development of their local communities. This study illustrates new aspects of their reconstructed identities, their social networks and career prospects, and it documents their attempt to bring about change in their home societies. The originality of this thesis is twofold: firstly, it is given by the specifics of migrants being returnees and previously residents of Norway, and secondly, it offers a unique combination of social and cultural developmental factors involved in the repatriation of Romanian migrants, that have to date received comparatively less attention in most literature.

Romania is an interesting migration case. It has the second biggest population in Eastern Europe, it has migrants in several destination countries, and it has a significant rate of return migration (Ambrosini et al. 2015). It has been intriguing to research how increased mobility for the case of Romania resulted in return migration and "indirect effects from social and cultural change" (ibid., 756). Along Romania, Norway has been selected as a study site because it has received brain drain and labour migrants from Romania for the past years (Anghel et al. 2016). Norway as a migration destination has ranked "among the world's 20 least-corrupt countries throughout the 2000s, in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)" (Paasche 2017, 127), and is considered 'the world's best democracy', as one interviewee resident in Norway put it (ibid., 129), with a successful egalitarian values system (Aase 2021; Repstad 2021).

The topic of this thesis emerged out of interest in how Romanian migrants transmit what they learn about sociocultural diversity in their host communities, to their friends and families back home, after their return. My project brings a different perspective on the local community impact, and how intensely repatriates feel the development implications of their return process. This research provides grounded insights into the Romanian migration to Norway and develops new knowledge on the outcomes of Romanian return migration.

## 1.3 Research Questions and Research Aims

My research questions consist of a major question and two sub-questions, and are as follows:

*What development challenges does migration involve for Romanian migrants and their home country?*

❏ *What sorts of sociocultural changes have Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway undergone, and what are their experiences and reflections about how migration and passage of time change their cultural and social views?*

❏ *How do they disseminate their knowledge underpinning these changes within their home communities after their return?*

Moving to the social level, I narrowed down my topic to the case of Romanian migrants who returned from Norway. I intended to provide a sense of cultural and social reality lived by Romanian immigrants in Norway, and to analyse the social impact that the cultural differences between the two countries have had upon them. I investigated if these differences influenced the rationality of Romanians' decisions to repatriate with regard to the observed patterns among a selection of interviewees. In my research I set out to achieve reliable findings about how migration has changed the views and the aspirations of a meaningful life for Romanian returnees. This is crucial in evaluating how return leads to social change in collective identities.

The first aim of this study was to comprehend the roles of Romanian migrants in both Romanian and Norwegian societies and give us a better grasp of their needs and challenges. A second aim was to discover if Romania is a society receptive to innovation and change generated by social movements, and I refer to this concept using the term 'development'. Horváth and Kiss (2016, 92) noticeably placed the Romanian migration background into important theories regarding the links between migration and development: "The Romanian case study could be useful in highlighting the historical interrelation between socioeconomic change (development) and transnational migration". I believe that the returnees' role in producing social change and altering the culture of their home communities is meaningful yet understudied. Therefore, my third aim was to investigate the sociocultural changes that Romanian returnees underwent, and how they disseminate these changes from the individual level to the community level.

## 1.4 Research Design

My work is constructed using the key ideas and concepts of migration, development, return migration, sociocultural change, social remittances and transnationalism. I discuss my literature review with a social theory perspective, which my study aims to influence by providing novel ways of comprehending migration challenges. My research questions involve generalisation from a study setting to a wider population (What development challenges does migration involve for Romanian migrants and their home country?), association (What sorts of sociocultural changes have Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway undergone, and what are their experiences and reflections about how migration and passage of time change their cultural and social views?), but also understanding the meaning of behaviour (How do Romanian returnees disseminate their knowledge underpinning these changes within their home communities after their return?). Based on qualitative data from literature review and narrative interviews, I provide material to answer these three questions.

My unit of analysis is individuals and their local communities, and I investigate the observable characteristics of a sample containing 35 people. I focus on migrant returnees for the case of Romania, and I analyse the consequences of international mobility on its social and cultural levels. I identify the challenges they faced, and how they share their new beliefs with their social groups at home. I do this by characterizing the age, sex, education and profession of returnees to determine if their behaviour is pursuing development through migration. In order to measure accuracy, respondents have been asked to identify the 'most memorable' things about their experience abroad. The participants range in age from their early 20s to mid-50s and are made up of both males and females. Data collection took place in Oslo, Norway and online.

Vlase and Croitoru (2019) argue that the approach of the migration–development nexus in literature is likely to describe the diversified experiences of returnees in post-socialist Romania with an overemphasis on the benefits of return migration for origin countries. However, as they describe it (2019, 778), the tendentious focus on the migrants' build-up of human capital "has resulted in disregarding more influential biographical and cultural aspects". With this in mind, I want to emphasize that my research is based on people's reflections, on how they perceive their lived experiences and the meaning of life. Silverman names this model 'naturalism' (2018).

Although I researched repatriates for this project, I also included returnees who immigrated to Norway for shorter periods but migrated for longer in other countries and have a vast migration experience which they cannot delimit, and also migrants that returned to Romania but are in a continuous migration process, naming them 'active migrants'. Because as White puts it, "scholars in today's transnational world do not assume that return is 'for ever'" (2019, 145).

## 1.5 Structure

This thesis is structured in six main chapters. I review existing literature in Chapter 2, presenting scholars' claims on return migration and development. I outline the theoretical framework of this study by first defining return migration and development. Then I discuss the concept of social change, identifying cultural aspects to be considered. Next I analyse transnational identity, and I introduce key questions that link return migration and sociocultural change. This is followed by an interpretation of the challenges that migration involves for returnees. I attempt to outline social remittances with regards to earlier and current debates and theories of social change, and I discuss why Romania is an interesting case study in terms of local context and historical developments that led to the emigration of Romanians.

Chapter 3 describes the methods and strategies of data gathering and analysis, and methodological notes on the type of data collected. This chapter concludes with reflections regarding data collection, and main ethical principles. The thesis turns to the empirical part in Chapter 4, where I present the focal findings based on empirical evidence. I map the main return practices of Romanians, and explain how returned migrants mobilise social capital, and how local cultural understandings change following their return migration. In Chapter 5 I analyse the impact of Romanians' return, in order to unfold migration-driven changes brought by returning migrants. Henceforward, I discuss my findings, including my contribution to the discourse with a focus on how my findings confirm or challenge existing studies. In Chapter 6 I outline the thesis' conclusions and research considerations that may guide future work. The chapter also discusses research limitations, and the practical relevance of my findings. Supplementary material is listed in the appendices.

# 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

## 2.1 Orientation of the Research Questions

In this section I establish the relation of my research questions to relevant debates and literature in my discipline. The nature of return experience potentially transforms the perceptions of individuals, families, and communities about the role of migration in broader meso-level social change. Therefore, my focus is on the processes of change in local communities, social groups, and networks, which develop through returnees' transnational practices and resources. Fauser and Anghel (2019, 3) state that "theorising a link between transnational return and meso-level social change can help us better understand the dynamics on the ground and adds one more element in attempts to answer questions about whether and how migration changes society".

Human mobility is widely studied in the European migration context. The multi-layered character of migration (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018) makes it challenging to understand the experience of immigrants. Žmegač (2010, 230) argues that migration studies would benefit from viewing both immigration and return as parts "of an ongoing and reversible migration circuit", and Fedyuk and Zentai (2018, 186) stress the importance to "consider and incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives in migration research". Return migration became a topic of interest around 1960, but in the 1980s "the return phenomenon and its impact on origin countries" started to create intense debate among scholars (Cassarino 2004, 254). Return migration has been interpreted, defined and located in time and space with regard to international migration theories (Cassarino 2004) and findings showing that the returnees' interactions between the host- and home country increase the successful transfer of knowledge (Wang 2015), improving theoretical and conceptual frameworks in the field of migration (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007).

Many migrants leave their home country in order to secure a better future, and only some of them aim to improve social and cultural aspects of their home societies upon their return. Return migration is not seen by Van Houte and Davids (2014) as a movement back to normal, nor as a simple movement forward to change, as change can only be brought back home by voluntary returnees, and this "questions the adequacy of migration and development policies" (2014, 72).

Paasche (2017) draws attention to the concept of 'social remittances'. He argues that something 'remitted', corresponds to something being sent and received, and that points to the multiple outcomes of social exchanges. Besides the social change that social remittances bring in sending-country communities, they can impact their recipients in different ways, depending on the nature of social remittance, the message carrier-and receiver, cultural differences between home and host countries, the transnational space , and possible transferring hindrances (Levitt 1998, 937). Although the topic of social remittances grew interest within migration scholars, it has not been much discussed in the Romanian context (Anghel et al. 2016). Social research about return migration has a focus on Romanian returnees' non-economic transfers, which Meinhof and Triandafyllidou (2006) refer to as 'transcultural capital'. This is described by Kilinc and King (2019, 160) as consisting of "transnational and translocal social networks, know-how and skills (especially language skills), lifestyles, attitudes and values".

My research is based on the presumption that returnees are innovation seekers. Voluntary returnees use their intellectual skills, creativity, resilience and innovativeness, as Van Houte and Davids (2014) argues, but it is difficult to apply these aspects in bringing change "in a society that is suspicious of returnees and 'foreign' involvement" (2014, 80). A relevant knowledge gap is in the degree to which migrants intend and are capable of changing social and cultural structures in the country of origin (Van Houte and Davids 2014). Careja (2013) questions whether the Romanian state benefits from its emigrants. Romania is generally open only to certain aspects concerning sociocultural development, with Paasche (2017) arguing "that transformative social change has indeed occurred in Romania, but that non-migrants are selective in their adoption of ideas, norms and practices" (2017, 138).

Anghel (2019)'s case study shows that migration has improved Romanians' social status and enriched migrants' households and localities of origin. These views have been countered by other writers (e.g. White 2017; Vlase and Croitoru 2019), who conclude that Romania shows circumstantial evidence of social and cultural change: "interviewees appear convinced that Romania is unchanging" (White 2017, 58), and highlight instead that prominent life events and structural contexts are "shaping their life courses and orienting their pursuit of life goals" (Vlase and Croitoru 2019, 794). I therefore embark on this research agenda asking how migrants' return can produce social impact and attempt to trace manifestations of sociocultural change for Romania.

## 2.2 Empirical Literature on Return Migration and Development

Next, I discuss the context of the debate on the topic of return migration and sociocultural development. I evaluate the associations between different studies in relationship with my work and address them in the framing of my research. The theoretical framework built from my literature review highlights "migration, the nation, and culture" (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, 139). Faist (2008) notes that development theory indicates a two-way linkage between migration and development, and Castles (2010) states that the relation between migration and development has sourced theory formation in international migration studies. In this endeavour, I drive the analysis towards sociocultural changes in Romania, an imperative and rich avenue for exploration.

Modern society is in a continuous process of change. New social and economic structures reshape people's mentalities, hopes, beliefs, feelings, values, and eventually, their actions. These, in turn, determine motivations for social mobility and, consequently, migration phenomena (Chirvasiu 2002). Thus, it is imperative to research societies and understand the relationships between them, as Castles (2010) contends, since they are the arena where "migration and the other economic, social, political and cultural relationships" come together at specific times and places (Castles 2010, 1573).

I discuss in this section the reasons for which people migrate, how migration is perceived, and the impact that it has on modern society. Further, I explain the different forms of migration, I address the impact of return migration for the countries of origin, and how migrants benefit from their experience upon return. Then, I confer a theoretical understanding of return migration, explore different motivations and implications for return migration present in the literature, and the possibilities to impact sending countries. I also examine how return migration links the societies of emigration and immigration, as well as how returnees are seen through the lenses of different theories. I subsequently discuss what constitutes development from a sociocultural point of view and address the topic of development in relation to migration.

### 2.2.1 Migration in our Contemporary Society

People have always migrated between places for different reasons, such as family, studies, jobs, and better living conditions. More people than ever are practicing their freedom of movement in crossing national borders to fulfill their needs and dreams (Chirvasiu 2002). Migration is not only perceived as "one social trend intertwining with

others" (White 2017, 54), it is believed to have "touched the lives of everyone" (ibid., 53). Migration reflects an individual manifestation which communicates the wish of freedom and evolution, as immigrants believe the host country will allow them to be their true selves and "enhance their social capacities" (Lacroix 2017, 246). Migration is connected to the wish of providing an extra income for the family, but also one of generating community structures, since migrants are expected to bring about success, and show devotion to their home county (ibid.). Therefore, migration is best examined from an interdisciplinary approach, because it embodies "all dimensions of social existence" (Castles 2010, 1569).

Migration is a mechanism which people use to make their aspirations a reality (De Haas 2010). To succeed, migrants need financial support and network connections (Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002). Ambrosini et al. (2015) describes network ties as family members or friends living abroad, and says that having these types of connections increases the possibility for a person to migrate. A previous migration study (Martin and Radu 2012) on CEE shows that network ties and social relations are important push-factors in the decision to migrate, and are accountable for accumulations of migrants in certain regions of the home and host countries. Figure 2.1 provides a classification of migration. Two main drivers of migration are economic motives and reasons related to natural disaster or persecution. Each of these types of migration takes different forms.
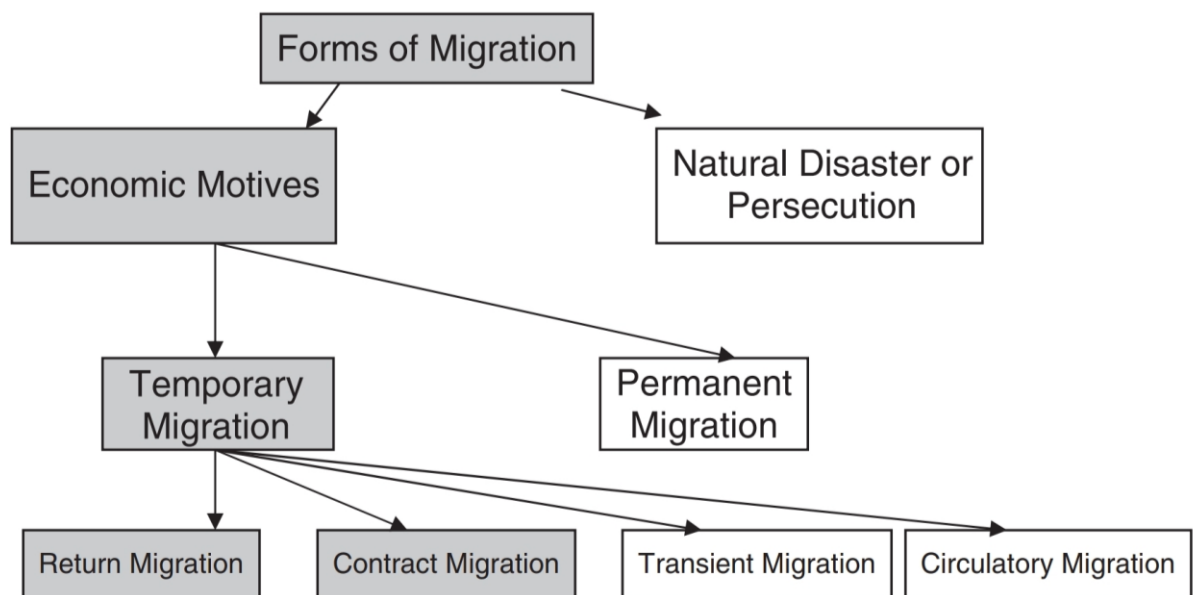


Figure 2.1 Forms of Migration (Dustmann and Weiss 2007, 238)

We can further distinguish between temporary migration and permanent migration as forms of migration based on economic motives. For the receiving country, temporary migrants are the ones that immigrate for a limited period of time. Under temporary migration there are subclasses, from which we can identify contract migration, which encapsulates migrants who use a residence permit or a working contract when abroad. Contract migrations are very common in oil-producing countries in Europe, such as Norway. We can further identify return migration, which "describes a situation where migrants return to their country of origin by their own choice, often after a significant period abroad" (Dustmann and Weiss 2007, 238). Return can take different forms, such as repatriation, seasonal migration, and circular or repeated migration, because migration implies more than a permanent change of location (Martin and Radu 2012). Many migrants prefer shorter stays abroad, after which they resettle in their home country. Scholars have acknowledged that these forms of temporary and return migration have a great impact for countries of origin, and many empirical studies conclude that migrants who have worked abroad benefit from their experience upon return (ibid.).

I will therefore focus on return as a type of temporary migration, because of the increased number of European migrants who fall into this category (Dustmann and Weiss 2007), but also because the issue of return has been comparatively under-studied in migration studies (Martin and Radu 2012). The traditional focus on migration studies has been on the host society and the ability of the immigrant to integrate, even though in the sphere of multiculturalism, the home country is the one carrying symbolic resources of migrants' identities (Žmegač 2010).

### 2.2.2 Return Migration

King (2017) said that although the first sentence from his comprehensive review of the literature on return migration (2000) described return as the unwritten chapter in migration scholarship, he believes that his statement is not as justified anymore, as new research on return migration has grown substantially. A return migration is a subprocess of international migration (Cassarino 2004), in which the new country of destination is the same as the country of origin. Anghel and Cosciug (2018) explain it as the process in which migrants go back to their country of origin, a process that includes preparation and application. The outcome could impact the home country from a cultural point of view, including in language, habits, styles, and attitudes. Return migration takes different forms, it can be intentional, spontaneous, or forced, and is characterised by different

patterns which make it permanent, long-term, or short-term. Short term remigration is mostly manifested in return visits (Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider 2016).

Different perspectives of understanding and explaining return migration indicate distinct means of research. Žmegač (2010, 227) interprets return as a myth, a natural homecoming, an illusion, or a dream, and explains it as cultural ideology: "return – as part of an ongoing and reversible migration process – might be studied as just another kind of *im*migration". Return is viewed as an act in itself in the migratory process (King 2017), a segment from a continuous journey rather than a permanent resettlement. As Cassarino (2004) suggests, return does not close the migration cycle, but represents one stage in the migration process, giving the migration story a continuation after repatriation: "Return migration is part and parcel of a circular system of social and economic relationships and exchanges facilitating the reintegration of migrants while conveying knowledge, information and membership" (Cassarino 2004, 262; also see Žmegač (2010), King (2017), and Fauser and Anghel (2019)).

Although return processes do not close the migration cycle, this view has been countered by other writers (e.g. Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider 2016; Lulle et al. 2019), who argue that return migration is indirectly correlated with permanent return and the end of the migration cycle. According to Cosciug (2019), return has to be renegotiated, since both migrants and their home countries have changed during the migration process. King (2017) praises Cassarino (2004) for his contribution to the theoretical understanding of return migration and says that the transnationalism perspective and especially the social network theory applied in his analysis have brought to the surface less theorised aspects of return migration. Hence, return has grown into a "multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon" (Cassarino 2004, 253), being more than just a movement back home to what one once knew or a movement forward to create change.

Scholars believe that return migration could in fact contribute to development in the countries of origin (De Haas 2010), but return migration's potential for knowledge-based regional development is dependent on local institutional laws, on underlying economic and social conditions (Kandilige and Adiku 2019), and on how much society accepts change (Martin and Radu 2012). Olivier-Mensah (2019) argues that the societal debate on return migration generalises return processes and focuses on explicit expert knowledge and its applicability on societal growth, instead of acknowledging that return is a personal experience with different accomplishments and forms of knowledge. Fauser

and Anghel (2019) suggest that return is now a growing field of research, and that the underlying aspects of return migration and the correlated social changes in countries of origin need better understanding, because "everyday processes and small-scale changes are as important as macro-transformations for understanding the societal impact of migration" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 1-2).

### 2.2.3 Returnees

King (2017) notes that Cassarino (2004)'s application of existing conceptual frameworks from international migration to different cases of return situations presents returnees in different lights. Social network theory implies that "returnees are social actors involved in multiple relational ramifications", while transnationalism sees returnees as "agents of transnational practices and bearers of transnational identities" (King 2017, 260). In addition, neoclassical economics implies that returnees are "labour migrants who miscalculated the costs of migration and who did not reap the benefits of higher earnings", but this view is countered by NELM which posit that return migration is the result of a "calculated strategy" and "successful achievement of goals or target" of returnees (Cassarino 2004, 255). Since the rate of return migration depends on age, migrants are often still young at the time of their return (Martin and Radu 2012).

In the 1950s and 1960s, returning migrants have been subject to various approaches of the development theory who considered them innovative agents who bring change and novelty. They were believed to be the new hope in terms of development and to participate actively in the process of modernization: "It was expected that migrants not only bring back money, but also new ideas, knowledge, and entrepreneurial attitudes" (De Haas 2010, 231). Presenting migration as a mechanism for development planning changed the public image of emigrants, presenting them as agents of development and modernity. This allowed migrants to use their migration experiences in the host countries as achievements, becoming "key players in redefining people's understanding of the world in a context of social transformation" (Lacroix 2017, 254).

From transnationalism and social network theory perspectives, Cassarino (2004) sees returnees as carriers of many kinds of resources. Returning migrants who profit from the skills accumulated abroad have higher incomes than non-migrants, and this can have positive impacts for the sending country. One result could be a higher number of people showing interest to gain expertise, which in turn would enhance the brain gain stimulus. Another result could be that returnees with more advanced knowledge would show more

interest in their work in order to earn more, and significantly raise the level of the living standards (Ambrosini et al. 2015). In practice, migration impacts are mainly associated with the different dimensions of development, which involve aspects such as income levels, social security, living standards, education, and cultural change (De Haas 2012).

Academics debated on the types of social changes that return migration can bring, based on the assumption that returnees could apply their acquired cultural and social capital in an attempt to influence the society in which they live (Anghel 2019). Returnees are expected to play a significant role in the development of the sending societies, but they encounter difficulties in exercising their innovative potential in their home communities (Anghel 2019): "When migrants return to their country of origin, they do not automatically contribute to development" (Van Houte and Davids 2014, 81).

### 2.2.4 Toward Development

What actually constitutes development? Many scholars note (e.g. Sen 1999; Faist 2008; De Haas 2012; Gardner and Lewis 2015) that development tends to be seen and defined in different ways by different social science disciplines. It is perceived as a "complex, multi-dimensional concept" (De Haas 2012, 15), "a series of events and actions, as well as a particular discourse and ideological construct" (Gardner and Lewis 2015b, 44-45). Development could mean a better infrastructure and a strong health and educational systems, favourable circumstances for investment, or knowledge allowing expert communities to bring about change (Faist 2008). Instead of defining what development entails, the literature mentioned herein reflects what development means for the purpose of this thesis, and indicates the connotations with which the concept will be used within this paper.

The concept of development is seen through the prism of the different types of transnational communities as hope of improvement and progression, an attribute which the term has carried since the late 1940s (Faist 2008). Gardner and Lewis (2015b, 44) use the term 'development' to particularly "refer to processes of social and economic change" at the level of social movements. Sen (1999) finds two general attitudes towards the process of development. Professional economic analysis, and public discussions and debates see development either as a powerful process, which requires knowledge, judgement and strength, or as a peaceful and amicable process exemplified by activities such as mutually beneficial transfers, creating of social safety nets or achieving social change (Sen 1999).

Twenty-five years ago, development as a term was under constant theoretical heat, as it seemed possible that in the following ten or twenty years, it could be replaced by new terms from the sphere of change and transformation. Gardner and Lewis (2015) believe that the term has been replaced by "new framings of progressive change", such as "change and transition" (2015a, 4), "positive change or progress" (2015b, 9), and "stage of growth or advancement" (Oxford Dictionary of Current English 1988, 200 - cited by Gardner and Lewis 2015b, 9). I emphasise the latter, reflecting Gardner and Lewis (2015b, 13)'s assessment that growth also involves "a range of social and cultural changes", which makes direct reference to the topic of this thesis.

### 2.2.5 Linking Migration to Development

Migration and development are interconnected, but scholars differ on the implications and gains from migration for development in sending societies. De Haas (2010; 2012) alleges that development in relation with migration has been deeply discussed in the social sciences for over fifty years: "The debate about migration and development has swung back and forth like a pendulum, from optimism in the postwar period to deep 'brain drain' pessimism since the 1970s towards neo-optimistic 'brain gain' since 2000" (De Haas 2012, 8). Yet the relationship between migration and development needs closer analysis due to its complexity (Van Houte and Davids 2014), and due to the increased interest that international organisations have today in this link (Cassarino 2004). This new interest rests on allegations which Faist (2008) summarises thus: "flows of money, knowledge and universal ideas – called remittances – can have a positive effect on what is called development in the countries of emigration" (Faist 2008, 21).

Historically, migration has always been part of social life and above all, of social change (Castles 2010). A number of scholars (e.g. Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002; De Haas 2010; Kandilige and Adiku 2019) believe that migration and development are connected through many aspects, such as the ways in which people support themselves, their families and their communities, as well as the entrepreneurial efforts of migrants, and their transnational networks (Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002). De Haas (2010) stresses the possibility of achieving development through migration, and underlines that the interplay between migration and development is heterogeneous and socially.

Nyberg-Sorensen et al. (2002) argues the reciprocity between migration and development, saying that the effects of development in causing migration are as varied as

are the effects of migration in supporting or impeding local development. This claim is also supported by De Haas (2010, 253): "Migration is not an independent variable ''causing'' development (or the reverse), but is an endogenous variable, an integral part of change itself and a factor that may enable further change". De Haas (2010) argues to discuss migration and development in the larger context of social and migration theory, because migration is considered "an integral part of broader social transformation" (Kandilige and Adiku 2019, 68).

I presented in this section that the interest in return migration and how it impacts development is reflected in the migration-development nexus literature, which argues that migration and development are linked through many aspects, and that migration has always been part of social and cultural change. I concluded from the literature that the agents to bring change and modernity in the societies of origin are considered by development theory to be returning migrants, and that return migration can bring regional development to the sending countries.

## 2.3 An Outline of Sociocultural Change

This section gives insight into the social and cultural changes that emerge from the return of migrants to their home communities. Fauser and Anghel (2019) highlighted the possibility that returnees bring sociocultural development in their home countries by the instrumentality of the skills and ideas gained abroad. But what does sociocultural development mean in the migration context? Development is explained as "processes of structural reform and social transformation" by De Haas (2012, 19), who argues that migration, as an essential factor of social change, is too low in its extent to generate development on its own. He notes that migration is dependent on favourable conditions in macro-level development processes, but at the micro- and meso-level, it can bring positive contributions in supporting and adding livelihood quality.

A society can change if its members are open to new ideas, and new ideas have more chances to be accepted if they align with local cultural concepts and perceptions (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2017). The duration of the emigration period is also a determining aspect for the innovative potential of return migrants to contribute to change, as their cultural experience must be rich enough to influence the home community, and their wish to disseminate their knowledge must be strong enough. When we analyse sociocultural change, we also have to consider the level of social trust (White 2017), as

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people from the post-communist countries have lower social trust compared to populations of Scandinavian countries.

In this complex and heterogeneous process of social change, the flows of remittances and ideas involved in the return process can in some cases bring positive changes in the countries of origin. Through social remittances, migrants communicate to their home communities the feelings and emotions caused by the changes they experienced in the host societies: "In doing so, migrants become themselves vectors of development" (Lacroix 2017, 251). Fauser and Anghel (2019), as well as Kandilige and Adiku (2019) expand knowledge on the link between broader social changes and migration, and conclude that through the reciprocal relationship between migration and social change, migration does bring general changes at the social level, but which are rarely felt at deeper levels, such as social structures of cultural value systems.

### 2.3.1 Transnational Identity

Recent scholarship studies have tried to shed light on complex aspects of mobility and migration, and look at these processes under a transnational lens (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 15). The concepts of migration and development also imply the idea of transnationalization, which denotes a range of cross-border practices in the familial, economical, and sociocultural spheres of social life that migrants and their social networks participate in (Faist 2008). This section studies the link between returnees' transnational identity and social changes taking place in local groups and communities. Current migrant population is characterised by lifestyles that include both the society of origin and the one of immigration, and networks that contribute to the formation of the social capital of migrants, allowing them to act collectively. Schiller et al. (1992, 1) argued that a new conceptualization to encompass the experience and knowledge of this new migrant population was required, and thus created the concept of transnationalism, defined as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement", and the new type of immigrants that build these social fields have been called 'transmigrants'.

Migrant transnationalism scholars put emphasis on migrants' identification with multiple nationalities and cultures, which they perceive as hybridised identities resulting from their cross-border mobility (Cassarino 2004; Faist 2008; Erdal 2020). Migrants forge transnational ties between their origin and destination countries, which they maintain by continuous remittances, marriages with people of different nationalities, and

their input in social and cultural activities in the communities of origin (Schiller et al. 1992; De Haas 2010; Oltean 2019). Migrants maintain strong transnational ties and relationships within different states with the help of transcultural capital (Meinhof and Triandafyllidou, 2006), which is the knowledge, skills and useful social networks that migrants create and sustain with their home country. To have transcultural capital means mastering different foreign languages, and having the competence to understand cultural differences and to communicate in the sphere of different cultures. Returnees can apply their multiple identities and transnational capital in the job market and in their interactions with the people and institutions from their sociocultural milieu.

Returnees decide to repatriate when they feel confident that their financial and informational resources, as well as the conditions at home assure them a successful readaptation. The decision to return is based on transnational factors such as longing for home and family, the desire to be with parents in old age, as well as attachment and nostalgia to one's nation of origin reflecting an identification with culture and traditions and psychological well-being (Fauser and Anghel 2019). But return also involves other factors, such as the spatial and temporal distance between migrants and the sending communities, the process of integration in the receiving communities, and the social changes that occur automatically in the communities of origin (Boccagni 2019).

Immigrants have the advantage to accumulate transcultural capital during the migration process, which they carry with them upon return and which they use to differentiate themselves from the natives (Cassarino 2004; Meinhof and Triandafyllidou 2006). The knowledge that migrants accumulate during processes of transnationalization is applied in the societies of origin upon return, and used as cultural potential, exploring emotions, feelings, and reactions (Olivier-Mensah 2019). At a community level, returnees have the capacity to exert an influence on certain aspects in the spheres of work and social relationships by maintaining a confident attitude regarding their skills and knowledge, and by trying to incorporate their cultural capital into local societies (Kilinc and King 2019). Not all migrants become transmigrants, but the experiences of those who do are highly influenced by cultural patterns and the processes of change underlying individual social relations (Schiller et al. 1992): "Only a person who changes according to the motto of Mahatma Gandhi 'be the change that you wish to see in the world' at the micro-level can produce societal changes at meso-level" (Olivier-Mensah 2019, 126).

## 2.3.2 Social Change

To ascertain the degree to which migration relates to social change, I first define social change. Social change is partly about the dynamic composition of a society and partly about the individuals who disseminate ideas and practices, through their abilities "to persuade others and lead by example" (White 2019, 149). For many years, the phenomenon of social change was expected to consist of radical and long-lasting transformations, and to influence cultural norms with deep roots in the society (Portes 2010). While social change has for the post-communist countries connotations of liberalisation processes (White 2017), it is perceived by some (Fauser and Anghel 2019; White 2019) as the ongoing result of social interactions.
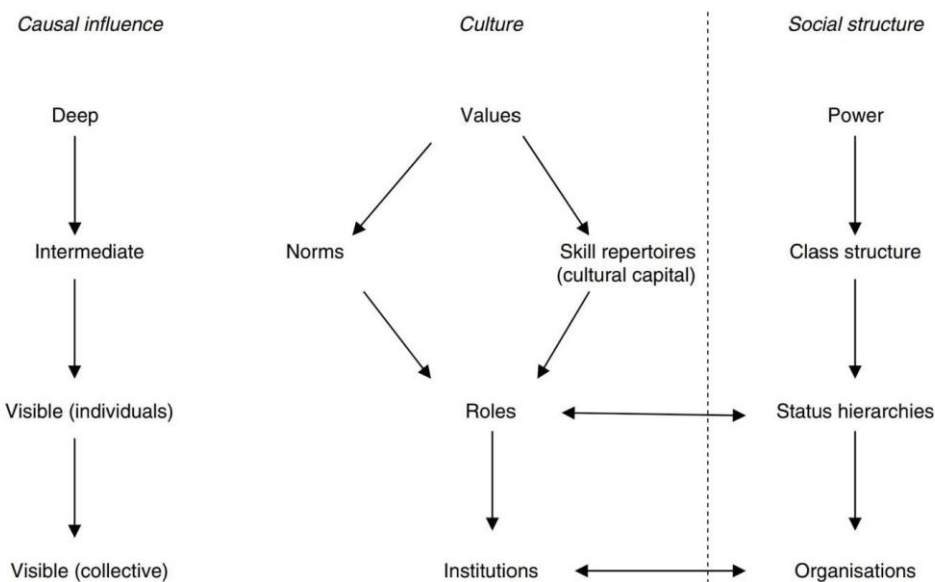


Figure 2.2 The elements of social life (Portes 2010, 1542)

We can see in the figure above the elements of social life, which are distinctive elements of culture and social structure, located at different levels of causal influence. In the sphere of migration, culture is "the realm of values, cognitive frameworks, and accumulated knowledge" (Portes 2010, 1540). In everyday life, people use values as deep principles of culture. Values determine norms, which are used to guide the conduct of individuals and are grouped in well-defined sets of roles. Alongside normative standards, roles also comprise skill repertoires, which are defined as cultural capital. Besides the constituent parts of culture, stand the elements of social structure, which are made up by the ability of individuals to persuade other social actors. Social structure is the real world, "the realm of interests, individual and collective" (ibid.), sustained by social power.

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Power is the main element of social structure, just like values are for culture, and both constitute strong elements of social life, which have greater implications in creating processes of change. Social change is possible when individuals are committed to their culture (Levitt 2010), and when the wish to socially remit is so strong that it enables "the influence of migrant communities to reach deeper into the culture and social structure of their own societies, producing changes beyond the surface level" (Portes 2010, 1555).

### 2.3.3 Culture

Migrants' actions and identities have cultural origins, and therefore research of social and cultural connotations should focus on aspects beyond social networks or activities. Mobility is empowered by the ideas and practices of migrants. By perceiving these ideas and practices as a migration of culture, we can connect culture to the migration debates, and see migration as a cultural act. For cultural change to take place, migrants have to use a wide range of cultural features, such as meanings, symbols and narratives (Levitt 2010). This emphasizes the importance of culture, which diffuses through "all aspects of the development enterprise - as a challenge and an opportunity" (Levitt 2010, 142). But what exactly do we mean by culture?

Culture is considered a priceless gift to be protected, or an obstacle to integration or development, yet it is mostly regarded as a product: "a material and concrete object, like a dance, a piece of music, folk art, or the tradition of storytelling that is transformed, reinvented, or threatened by migration" (Levitt 2010, 142). UNESCO (2001) "defines culture as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc10/BG-FCS-E.pdf 2010, 9). Due to the difficulty to measure values and beliefs, the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics defines culture by identifying and assessing the attitudes and actions reflecting the beliefs and values of a society or a social group. This definition expresses to a large extent the meaning with which the term is used herein, and is therefore used throughout the thesis as a hallmark of what culture represents for Romanian returnees.

In relation to migration, culture is viewed as a means of empowerment. Although challenging, migrant networks use culture to affirm themselves in a new society. Culture is transported together with its carriers, and is partially transformed regarding the circumstances upon migration. Besides being a product, culture is also a process which

allows migrant communities to define themselves, and to create a belonging space for their representatives. Thus, culture should be understood as an integral part of social relations, because it is "a dimension of all social relations and forms and, therefore, affects all aspects of immigrant incorporation and sending-community development" (Levitt 2010, 143).

International mobility gives migrants the opportunity to meet people from different cultures and to exchange "ideas, values and even identities" (Bărbulescu et al. 2019, 198) which can lead to continuing transformations. This turns migrants into creators of personal and social change, who become more open to the unknown, and are influenced by their host societies. Although returnees are often viewed as "agents of change" (Oltean 2019, 48) who bring significant transformations upon themselves, their relatives, and their home communities, the contribution of migrants to social change is considered somewhat ambiguous (Oltean 2019).

Migratory movements are considered to have evolved into processes of transnational migration which produce "social remittances and multilayered social transformations in migrants' home localities" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 17). Therefore, a successful return allows migrants to bring new ideas and cultural diversity. The transnational activity of migrants and the remittance of social and cultural capital can alter "social structures, identities, and local norms and knowledge back home" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 6), and as a result the social life perspectives of the local communities would also be transnationalized. Analysed from a cultural perspective, migration does cause change, which leads to increased value transformation in the home countries (Portes 2010).

Scholars have been concerned for a very long time about change in societies, described by Kandilige and Adiku (2019, 66) to correspond to "values, norms, behaviour, institutions, and structures". Portes (2010)'s findings show that the effects of the change processes attributed to migration vary, being observable in some organisations, role expectations, or norms of the society, and that these effects can greatly influence culture, altering the value system, or the social structure. Olivier-Mensah (2019) argues that change cannot be successfully measured in all areas, but that individuals go through a process of changing personally first, after which they inspire the people surrounding them to change as well.

Change can be assessed regarding its extent or depth and is determined by the magnitude of migratory flows, their duration, and their structures (Portes 2010).

Kandilige and Adiku (2019) argue that migration does affect social structure in origin countries, and note that migrants are known to influence their home societies, being motivated by the reasons that made them emigrate initially. But Portes (2010) disagrees that migration has been able to generate major social change, as this would involve radical changes in the value system or in the society's class structure. The state keeps migration-induced change under control, so that the main cultural and structural aspects of society remain unaltered (ibid.).

As discussed in this subsection, migration impacts both migrants and their sending societies. Return is closely linked to change prospects in the countries of origin, and is mainly concentrated in social and cultural areas, where the impact on home communities is considerable. So far, we have seen what the three levels of interaction and impact are, what cultural and social change refers to, and what these areas cover. In order to adapt to the home reality upon return, and to bring change in their societies, returnees go through change processes themselves. The next subsection will discuss the strategies that return migrants apply in order to handle and overcome the challenges of the new reality at home, and how return supports the evolving sociocultural identities of returnees.

## 2.4 Special Challenges in Bringing about Change

This section offers a sociological perspective on the cultural and social experiences of migrant returnees. During migration, people experience changes in mentality, developing "new skills, knowledge, changed behaviors, values, norms, belongings, and identities" (Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider 2016, 4). However, migrants are simultaneously marked by the complexities and challenges of their transnational identity, having to adapt to a new culture and to undertake transnational practices, such as social and cultural activities, while staying attached to tradition (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007).

Upon return, some migrants choose to move to their original hometowns, while others to places that offer them better opportunities (Fauser and Anghel 2019). They are viewed as social actors who make use of their social capital in ensuring initiatives following their return (Cassarino 2004). Returnees' social capital involves "the know-hows and cultural repertoires" they bring back home, but also the transnational networks they use to accomplish their goals (Boccagni 2019, 181). The returnees who are most suitable to recognize opportunities of knowledge transfer in their homelands are the

skilled ones, because of their integration and strong ties in both their home- and host countries, especially at their workplaces. Withal, being the only member of a workplace who has worked abroad increases the likelihood for a successful knowledge transfer (Wang 2015). Returning migrants step higher on the social ladder in their origin communities through the tangible resources they acquire during the migration process, and families with children reaffirm their social standing by choosing high quality or private schools for their children's education (Kandilige and Adiku 2019). Return has thus, strong spatial, social, and cultural connotations. To understand how sociocultural change materialises in societies which experience high emigration followed by return, I next analyse the challenges migrants face in the return process.

### 2.4.1 The Challenges of Return Migration

People emigrate seeking economic stability to provide a better life for themselves and their family, as their moral and cultural principles presuppose. Most emigrants succeed in adapting to the host society, but some do not. Unable to overcome feelings of loneliness and sadness, and the fear and inability to understand the new society, they consider returning home the solution to the challenges they face. Return can be generated when migrants have different expectations from the host society and do not accept the way they are perceived by it. They have greater aspirations and innovative ideas, which they can employ in their home societies, where they can better achieve the proposed objectives. They concentrate their new skills and the savings they gained abroad to bring innovation to their communities of origin, and to eventually become "carriers of change" (Cassarino 2004, 258).

Migrants take the decision to return home when the costs of living abroad become higher than the benefits (Dustmann and Weiss 2007), with a pervasive desire to help bring about changes that would improve their societies of origin (Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider 2016). However, although returnees have the intentions and the aptitudes to be actors of change, power relations and contextual factors such as local elites (Fauser and Anghel 2019) can keep them from putting their innovative ideas into practice. Also, migrants may encounter barriers in transferring knowledge if the locals have xenophobic attitudes and show a lack of interest in these new ideas (Wang 2015). In order to manifest and express themselves, and to enable innovation to find place in their new way of living, migrants detach themselves from the power and influence of their society (Van Houte and Davids 2014).

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One special challenge that migrant returnees face is when part of the family moves back home first to make the necessary arrangements for a safe and successful return of the whole family, and secure aspects such as a proper child education (Fauser and Anghel 2019) and steady jobs. Return and re-adaptation can be challenging for a migrant that has made considerable efforts to acquire certain values and patterns of behaviour in the host society. Some encounter difficulties in finding their place in the new society upon return, while other returnees are unsure about how to identify themselves with their new status. Also, individuals who lose their networks and social connections because they lived for too long abroad, understand upon return that they no longer fit into the traditionalist conceptions of their origin societies, which can discourage them from pursuing their objectives (Cassarino 2004). In addition, the high expectations that locals have from migrant returnees can also be challenging. They are considered "higher educated, wealthy, entrepreneurial and strongly networked elite" (Van Houte and Davids 2014, 75-76) for being privileged to have migrated to wealthy, developed countries. They are assumed to own an academic degree and to have professional work experience (Olivier-Mensah 2019).

### 2.4.2 Return Preparedness

The migration process implies a new beginning in a new environment, which can be demanding and challenging for the individual, whose identity, actions and attitudes are reshaped. When migrants decide to return home, they prepare for a conscious return, but often they are not aware that the social environment in the country of origin would confront their new ideals. The returnee's reintegration into their home society is supposed to be an easy and natural process, considering that individuals have a strong bond with their homeland and people (Žmegač 2010). It can be a challenge for returnees to gather the information they need for a safe return and to adjust their expectations to the changes that have taken place in their home countries. At the same time, returnees have to take advantage of the skills and professional advancement acquired abroad in facilitating the reintegration process (Cassarino 2004). These factors condition the returning process' level of success. Figure 2.3 illustrates the concepts associated with return preparedness, and their interplay.
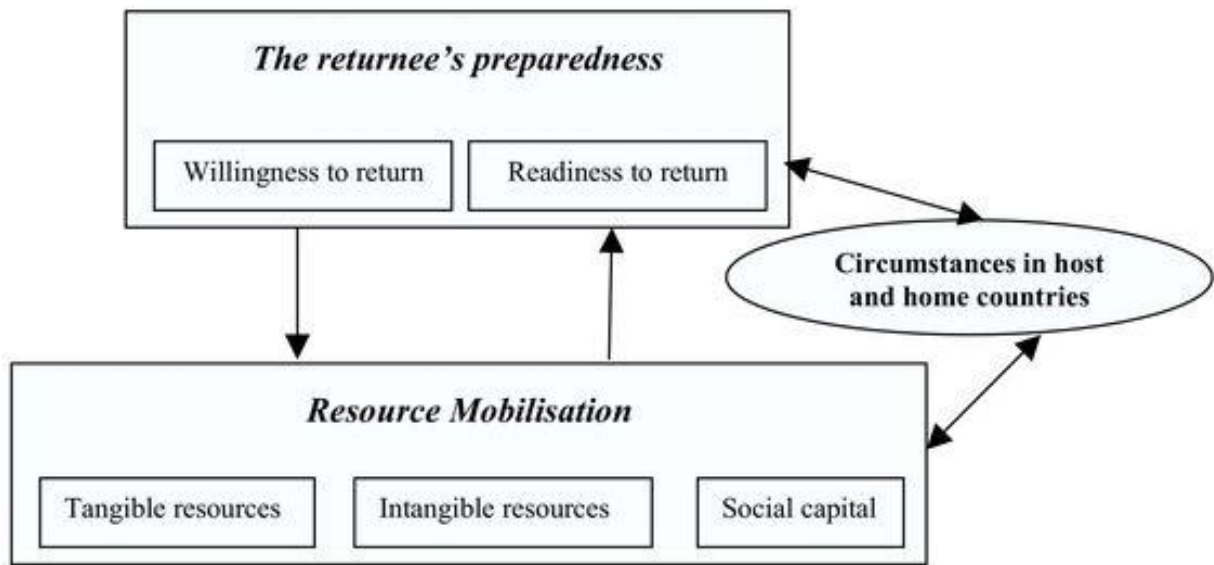
Figure 2.3 Return Preparation (Cassarino 2004, 271)

Cassarino (2004, 262) sees returnees as carriers of many kinds of resources who "prepare their reintegration at home through periodical and regular visits to their home countries". In his illustration, returnee's preparedness is reflected in how resources are mobilised and used after return, and in the returnees' impact on development at home. If returnees are poorly prepared, not only are they limited in influencing their origin societies, but they may consider remigration. But if the migration experience is long enough to stimulate resource mobilisation, this can generate development on various dimensions. Beyond the economic dimension, returnees make their mark on the human dimension through the skills they acquired, which is "the most important potential contribution to change" brought to their country of origin (Van Houte and Davids 2014, 80).

I have discussed in this section the degree to which returnees intend and are capable of bringing social and cultural changes in their country of origin, taking into consideration some of the special challenges they face. Social changes that occurred in origin societies, as well as the duration of the migration experience are reflected on how well returnees manage to reintegrate. Therefore, skills and financial capital are not sufficient to secure a successful return, because the cultural realm and local power relations can have a strong influence on returnee's attempts to bring change and innovation in their home countries.

## 2.5 The Importance of Social Remittances

The idea of social remittances was introduced by Peggy Levitt (1998), and used since by most scholars researching the effects of migration on sending societies and the potential of migrants to become agents of change (White 2019). Social remittances are a concept that reflects the ambitions that migrants shape abroad and use at home in inspiring non-migrants to change (White 2017), and are pictured as the social capital that flows from receiving- to sending-country communities, a "migration-driven form of cultural diffusion" (Levitt 1998, 926). Levitt (2010, 147) describes the concept thus: "Social remittances involve interpersonal exchanges of ideas, skills, and know-how. They are local-level instances of global cultural creation and dissemination". Social remittances generally entail the non-financial capital that migrants contribute with to the everyday life of home societies (White and Grabowska 2019). Non-financial capital involves "values, attitudes and practices" (Boccagni and Decimo 2013, 2), and "ideas, norms, identities and behaviours" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 8). It also involves the knowledge, qualifications, social skills, and contacts that form social capital (White and Grabowska 2019).

This concept represented a decisive change in migration scholarship, one in which scholars started to focus less on financial transfers, and more on the multitude of social and cultural elements being exchanged in transnational spaces (Lacroix et al. 2016). Therefore, immigrants remit "immaterial goods that distinctively impact on social and cultural discourses, meanings and practices" (Boccagni and Decimo 2013, 5), because "new ideas, a knowledge of languages, norms and other forms of cultural capital acquired abroad can often become valuable assets in the local context" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 9). Empowered by transnational migration processes, social remittances represent "an epitome of the myriad ways in which migrants affect their home societies" (Boccagni and Decimo 2013, 1). Considered a result of labour migration, social remittances are associated with broader phenomena of cultural change which take place in the spectrum of return migration (e.g. Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002; De Haas 2010; De Haas 2012). Even if cultural change is an integral part of every society (Aase 2021), Boccagni and Decimo (2013, 2) believe that researching the degree to which migrants can influence the norms, values and behaviour of a society and bring change through resources that circulate in transnational spaces, can be "quite a hazardous task".

The term itself has also received criticism. While both the social and cultural aspects can be included in social remittances (Levitt 2010), Nowicka and Šerbedžija

(2017) claim that culture is already included in the definition of social remittances in recognition of the cultural elements which are being remitted, and then established in the values and norms of a society. Social and cultural capital are components of social remittances which ease the flow of other types of capital across borders (Fauser and Anghel 2019). However, the elements of cultural capital that migrants acquire abroad have to be integrated in the lifestyles of returnees in order to be remitted and create change in the localities of return (Boccagni 2019). Remittances signify devotion to the place of origin, but also success and a knowledge of modern and cosmopolitan. Lacroix (2017, 245) believes that remittances are "communicative actions through which emigrants express who they think they are beyond the contradictory nature of their condition".

But how do social remittances form? Considering that emigrants are also immigrants, their remittances are formed by the circumstances in the origin country, and also by the conditions of the integration process in the host country (Lacroix 2017). When people migrate, they carry social and cultural resources, which facilitate the adaptation process. But migrants also engage socially with the local community, which has existing norms, customs, and conventions. Along the process of change that migrants go through, these resources are influenced by the local lifestyle, hybridised and transformed into social remittances. Migrants bring with them upon return to home societies a "suitcase of immaterial goods", whose elements are products of the migration process, and are related to evolving prospects that migrants adopt at individual, family or community level (Boccagni and Decimo 2013, 4). White (2019) adds that some of the elements that go into the suitcase come out changed when they are diffused in the communities of origin, especially the cultural contents which alter when they come into contact with the local traditions. In situations where returnees successfully transfer their knowledge and other forms of social remittances, changes at an individual level can cause changes at social-structural level, which in turn can produce "new standards and local-level impacts" (Olivier-Mensah 2019, 137).

The complexity of contemporary migration and return makes it important to emphasise the circulation of social remittances, given the amalgam of ideas which are being transferred between different states. This can be achieved by analysing cases of individual migrants and their transnational ties, suggesting that "individual small changes often travel in 'bundles': individual, selective changes in practice can indicate deeper insights and changes to values and attitudes" (White and Grabowska 2019, 46). Despite

the belief that social remittances are easier accepted in the cities, their impact in smaller localities is considered more powerful (White and Grabowska 2019; White 2019), due to the social capital and receptiveness of local networks of migrant returnees. The outcomes of remitting are seen as a gain from migration which can be applied in processes of social transformation and development (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2017; Lupoiu and Raceanu 2019).

Social institutions represent for social remittances "the social tool through which they converge to be adopted by a collective of people" (Lacroix 2017, 244-45). They are represented by families, businesses, and associations, and are of enormous significance in these transfer processes. Returnees cannot easily predict or control the way their societies of origin receive social remittances, yet through their presence, they can influence the locals to accept the resources they want to transmit and culturally diffuse (Boccagni 2019; Cosciug 2019). Also, cultural flows coming from powerful countries strengthen social remittances' acceptance, as their receivers have more respect for ideas and behaviour coming from wealthy and modern communities (Levitt 1998).

I have shown in this section what social remittances constitute, how they are regarded in the literature, and how important they are for migrants, the origin societies, and also for migration scholars in depicting the role of social remittances in generating sociocultural change. Even though the topic of sociocultural change has been discussed in the literature under different forms, such as knowledge transfer, social remittances, and cultural capital, a relevant knowledge gap addressed in the next section is the evidence covering returnees' potential of bringing about sociocultural change in the Romanian context. I will examine how Romanian migration changed after the country's accession to the European Union in 2007, how the effects of return migration on Romanian society are assessed, and how Romanian returnees become agents of change.

## 2.6 Romanians Migrating Then and Now

In the opinion of Cartarescu (2005), there is something specific about Romania, something so deep in the nature of Romanians, that it would be daring to say that it is the very essence of Romanian national specificity:

> If you live only in Romania, you may not realise that there is something wrong with the world around you. You have the colour of the environment and you move with it. You are one with everyone else. But if you return, after a long time, in the country, it is impossible not to be struck by how abnormal humanity is here. How tortured people are and how bad they become because of it. You can't help but be

amazed at the fact that one of the most common survival strategies is aggressive mitochondria. In any civilised country, people try to save their nerves as much as possible. They are preventive of each other in forms taken almost to the caricature. They have developed social smiles and contact rituals that virtually eliminate the possibility of any conflict. When someone contradicts you, you smile at them and say, 'We agree to disagree'. When someone steps on your foot, you rush to apologise. A gentle and smiling hypocrisy greets you everywhere, like a balm that soothes all wounds and satisfies all susceptibilities. This hypocrisy is called politeness and is essential for the fluidization of social substance. Romanians are not like that because they cannot be, objectively, like that. Because in our country, if you're good, you're trampled on (...). And so, in all social strata and at all levels, Romanians are their own executioners and their own victims in a deeply psychically alienated society, a hysterical society. (Cartarescu, 2005)

It is essential to understand how Romanians behave and why they do so, in order to assess an accurate picture behind the attitude of Romanians toward the social remittances of returnees. I further analyse a series of more integrated aspects of Romanian migration with regard to the migrant's role in bringing changes to the local social and cultural life that have been discussed in the literature.

The exact number of Romanians living abroad is difficult to estimate, as many do not establish their legal domicile in the host country. A 2019 report from the ministry responsible for the Romanians living outside of Romania, gave a figure of 9.6 million Romanians abroad (http://www.mprp.gov.ro/web/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Raport-IULIE-2019_site.pdf 2019). Most of these are part of historical Romanian communities, but about 4-5 million Romanians left the country after 1990. Romania is a suitable country to study the impact of contemporary return migration, as the size of Romanian return migration indicates that it could have a strong influence on the country's economic, social, and cultural development. Romanian returnees amount to 4.5 % of the country's population, and migrants that are still abroad amount to an additional 4.6 % of Romanians. These figures are very close to the 5 percent of returnees found in the National Demographic Survey of Romania 2003 data, and in the Census of Romania from 2002 data (Ambrosini et al. 2015).

Romania is also a suitable case for assessing the effects of migration on a society in change. The country has been through profound change since the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, and is still changing fast since its EU accession in 2007. Change has occurred on all levels, from deep changes in values and power relations, to a variety of small changes in everyday behaviours. One essential change since 1989 has been the opportunity of Romanians to experience cultural differences by travelling and

living abroad. Romanian migration is characterised by considerable labour emigration, which has brought economic, demographic and social changes, and which is predicted to bring changes in the future (Nae 2013).

The history of Romanian migration has been highly influenced by social inequalities that affected several layers of society (Horváth and Kiss 2016). Life in post-socialist Romania meant high unemployment and insufficient state funds to support people and help households manage the changes that came with privatisation (Chirvasiu 2002; Vlase and Croitoru 2019). These changes and the need for survival made many Romanians consider emigration in order to deal with unemployment and poverty. As a consequence, the country registered the highest intra-European emigration rate in the past twenty years (Vlase and Croitoru 2019). The phenomenon of Romanian emigration is marked by young people leaving because of the difficulties and the high corruption they experience in Romanian society, which makes the country face a significant deficit of active intelligence and trained workforce (Chirvasiu 2002). These claims are strengthened by UNA Norway, which says that "Romania is one of Europe's poorest countries, and is struggling with high corruption and large social disparities. This has led to a constant power struggle within the government" (https://www.fn.no/Land/romania 2020).

Romania was mainly a sending country from 1950 to 2011 (Horváth and Kiss 2016). Ethnic migration was present during communism and continued and after (Anghel et al. 2016), while labour migration appeared after 1989 and manifested toward different countries from Europe and overseas (Ambrosini et al. 2015). New types of migration emerged four years after the fall of the socialist regime, such as brain drain, irregular migration, shuttle migration, and marriage migration (Anghel et al. 2016). Even with certain restrictions, in the period after 1990 Romanian migration had a moderate character until 2002, when hundreds of thousands of Romanians emigrated (Anghel et al. 2016; Horváth and Kiss 2016). The three main events since 1989, the collapse of the state socialist regime, the 2002 decision of exemption from visa requirements within the countries members of EU, and the 2007 adherence to EU brought significant changes for the migratory system of Romania (Horváth and Kiss 2016; Anghel and Cosciug 2018). Migration in Romania began to unfold at a much higher level (Cosciug 2019), developing into "one of the biggest population movements in Europe" (Anghel and Cosciug 2018, 323).

Romanians represented the largest group of intra-EU migrants (Bărbulescu et al. 2019), their number ranging between 2.2 and 3 million (Andrén and Roman 2016). In

2015 there were 3.4 million Romanian emigrants, as regards to data offered by the UN, which is a much higher number than the estimations of the Romanian authorities (Anghel et al. 2017). Another study (Bărbulescu et al. 2019) argues that they amounted to almost half of the 7 million migrants from CEE officially living in another country from the EU. However, Romanian migration has changed during the years, and Romanian migrants diversified their patterns and destinations. During the financial crisis from 2008, emigration towards Italy, Spain, and other countries in CEE did not bring for Romanian citizens as many benefits as before, which made them choose temporary migration in countries from North-Western Europe, in order to test the local living and working conditions (Horváth and Kiss 2016; Anghel and Cosciug 2018).

Studies made on Romanian migrants suggest that a quarter of the migrants registered in 2003 had completed tertiary education, and that the brain drain phenomenon involved students, IT specialists and medical doctors who emigrated in Western Europe with no intention to return (Anghel et al. 2016; Anghel and Cosciug 2018). Most Romanian migrants in Europe after 2007 were young, with higher education, and one in two were married (Andrén and Roman 2016; Bărbulescu et al. 2019). The average age of Romanian migrants registered in 2010 was 34.6 years (Anghel et al. 2016). In 2010, around 40 percent of the Romanian migrants in Europe were mainly living in Spain and Italy, as well as in Germany, the UK, Austria, France, Portugal, Greece and Belgium (Andrén and Roman 2016; Anghel and Cosciug 2018).

The profile of the Romanian migrant has changed during the past twenty years. The first Romanians who emigrated had high qualifications but were long-time unemployed after the deindustrialization process and the closure of big factories. Mass-migration has been characterised by Romanian emigrants who had only secondary education and were heading towards countries from Southern Europe, such as Italy, Spain and Greece. Romanians who migrate nowadays and opt for Northern countries such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Netherlands as migration destinations, have superior education and skills, as well as satisfactory jobs at home, yet they migrate in order to challenge themselves: "There has increased the migration of highly qualified people, highly educated, well-informed, highly likely to have a job in Romania before emigration" (Anghel et al. 2017, 139). This changes the roles of Romanian migrants and brings the Romanian migration phenomena to a different level, as it is believed that Romanians who emigrate towards Nordic countries are "more prone to acquire more

social remittances such as knowledge and skills, which can be potentially used by the countries of origin" (Anghel et al. 2016, 23).

The findings of Ambrosini et al. (2015) uncover the volume and the variety of the Romanian migration and return flows, as well as their significance. They indicate that about half of the emigrants return home within a decade. Even if large labour migrant outflows around the year 2000 have brought consequences upon demography and the labour market, these are compensated by return migration if returnees used the qualifications, skills, capital and innovative attitudes acquired abroad in contributing to local development. Against expectations, not many Romanian labour migrants have returned during the economic crisis, and the ones that did return were only temporary returnees (Andrén and Roman 2016). In 2016 estimations showed that Romanian returnees tended to be migrants over the age of 45 and with low qualifications, who were mainly returning for family reasons (Anghel et al. 2016).

Research on Romanian returnees is mostly interested in the economic aspects of their reintegration and contribution to development than on the sociocultural attributes (Vlase and Croitoru 2019). The positive and sustainable effects of migration on the social development of Romania are reflected in the decrease of the unemployment rate, the social remittances of the Romanian migrants, and the cultural influence they have on their compatriots, after they change their behaviours and attitudes abroad, and adjust their respect towards the law, order, and cleanness (Pociovalisteanu and Dobrescu 2014). An interesting aspect of social remittances is when returnees invest their social capital in businesses which involve trade, as for example imported second-hand cars. This is very common in Romania, where returnees take advantage of the social networks, foreign language and cultural skills acquired during migration, in actively promoting their businesses via frequent international visits and arranged exchange programmes (Anghel 2019; Cosciug 2019). In Romania, businesses including trades of second-hand cars could be small, informal partnerships, but also larger companies in which social capital is the basis of a successful enterprise (Cosciug 2019).

**ROMANIA - A COUNTRY PROFILE**

I looked into three notable dimensions of social life mentioned by Fauser and Anghel (2019), where change can be observed in Romania: social hierarchies, collective identities and cultural capital. Social hierarchies are well defined in Romania, with conspicuous social divisions. The dissemination of knowledge within returnees' home

societies unveils local distribution of resources, power and status. Collective identities refer to Romanians' degree of belonging to certain pre-existing social groups and communities when it comes to their contribution to social development. Cultural capital, manifested through knowledge of local customs and norms, represents the third important dimension of social change where transformations can be observed in the Romanian case. In order to understand the sociocultural changes of Romanian migrants after their unique Norwegian experiences, I ought to create a brief description that illustrates Romania as a state-country and land.

Romania is located in Central Europe, at its contact with Eastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula. Its surface area represents 4.8% of Europe's territory, the state bordering the Republic of Moldova in the northeast, Ukraine in the north, Hungary in the northwest, Serbia in the southwest and Bulgaria in the south. In the southeast, its sea coastline provides an important opening to the Black Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Because of high mortality, a low fertility rate after 1989, and tremendous emigration, Romania's population has declined from 23.2 million in 1990, to 21.8 million in 2002, to 20 million in 2012, to 19 million in 2021 (Andrén and Roman 2016). Romania is a medium-sized country, ranked 7th in the European Union and 58th in the world (according to Eurostat data). Because Romania has all the landforms, its characteristics are unique in Europe. The country enjoys the Carpathians, a centre of biodiversity in Europe, and the Danube Delta, a labyrinth of water and land, as well as valleys, plains and plateaus, filled with small natural and cultural treasures. One of the Romanian interviewees astutely reflects:

> I have been fascinated by the way they (Norwegians) respect their green sites and value them. We cannot do that. We have a country much more beautiful than Norway, but they have the fjords. We also have the Delta and the Carpathians. But there is no one to value and appreciate them at their true value. You go around the country and see places that actually take your breath away, abandoned. You see whole deforested mountain areas. In Norway they would have put you in jail if you cut down a tree. (23.08.2020, informant 8)

This thesis documents the results of research focused on Romanian emigration to Norway, and return to Romania. As seen in this section, the available articles offer scattered information about Romanian returnees, the assets and social capital that they use throughout their return process, and their contribution to local processes of social change. In this overall framework, the literature review presented in this chapter is functionally connected with the rest of the thesis, where I outline the sociocultural changes that Romanian returnees bring to their home societies.

# 3. Methodology and Methods

This chapter presents the methodologies and methods employed for this project. Subsequently, the findings chapter provides the empirical evidence, and the discussion and analysis chapter presents my interpretation of the results based on the qualitative interviews structured around the migration experiences of Romanian returnees, and their ability to socially remit. Ultimately, the conclusion discusses the summary and outcome of this research, larger implications of my research, and suggestions for further study.

**EXPLAINING MY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Although sociocultural changes occurring in the family space or local associations and communities are less prominent and do not draw as much attention as other transformations at a societal level, certain "meso-level changes may be equally important for understanding the impact of return and transnationalization and may concatenate into broader changes over time or become one aspect of pluralized societies" (Fauser and Anghel 2019, 18). In this methodology chapter I discuss aspects regarding the research techniques I applied for this thesis, their strengths and weaknesses, the way I gained access to my sample, and the theory and research methods I used to create data from my sampled data source. I subsequently mention the problems encountered in my research process, and the solutions found to overcome the obstacles. I explain how I analysed my data, and I discuss certain issues concerning validity, reliability, quality and reflexivity. The aspect of transparency is discussed in the Ethics section and reveals my equidistant and impartial attitude during the process of data collection and data analysis.

In order to ascertain the sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees, I have taken a combination of the inductive- and latent approach. My research has been exploratory in nature and qualitative, therefore I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with a selection of recent Romanian migrants and returnees on observable characteristics, in order to collect in-depth information in a systematic manner. In-depth interviews bring empirical and reliable evidence about social change, which are not always visible in public data. As White (2017) puts it, they are "illustrating how individuals reflect on difference, acquire cosmopolitan dispositions (or not), and view the potential for change locally" (White 2017, 67).

Below, I describe why this is a case for a qualitative research design in Section 3.1. In Section 3.2, I provide empirical evidence regarding the sampling process, while

the interviews with the returnees are described in Section 3.3. I discuss my secondary data in Section 3.4, and I present the practices of reflection and reflexivity used in my data analysis in Section 3.5, in order to understand how myself and the learnings of this research impact the broader context of this study. Ethics are considered in Section 3.6.

## 3.1 The Case for a Qualitative Research Design

I justify in this section the chosen research methods, as well as their strengths and weaknesses as concerns the research problem of this study. I argue that the chosen methods have been the most appropriate for obtaining the desired results, along with briefly addressing why other methods were dropped or were not considered suitable.

**JUSTIFYING THE CHOSEN RESEARCH METHODS**

The conceptual framework of this paper is intended to document the tensions and ambiguities experienced by Romanian returnees undertaking social and cultural changes in the pursuit of their life goals. In order to determine this, I have applied qualitative methodology, and the methods used to support my claims have been literature review, interviewing and audio recording as data gathering techniques, and data analysis of interview transcripts in generating data. The choice of the data collection methods that I employed has been made with regard to my overall research aims and objectives, as well as practicalities and resource constraints. Nygaard (2017), O'Leary (2017), and Seale (2018) have been sources of inspiration for research design. I collected primary data through in-depth interviews, and reviewed the literature with the purpose to construct a theoretical framework and to add secondary data to the thesis. My participants have been Romanian returnees living in different parts of Romania, and for that reason and other considerations discussed in this chapter, the interviews took place online via video- and audio calls, and via phone calls.

The best way of answering all of my research questions has been by dividing my data into different sets and comparing the answers of my interviewees. Because, as Silverman (2018, 40) says, "the comparative method is the basic scientific method". I divided the experiences of my selection of migrants into positive or negative, and in the analysis, I looked for both descriptions of feelings and concrete events, coding both for emotions and type of events. While each person's experience is unique and the triggering events were all different, the similarities of their emotional processes allowed me to group the feelings into different stages. I consider the chosen research design the best way

to approach answering my questions, given the qualitative character of my project and the hindrances in doing proper field work and observation.

**THE PROCESS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF MY METHODS**

The research process itself started with selecting the research area based on personal interests, and continued with formulating my research questions, aims and objectives. I explored issues that Romanians experienced both as migrants in Norway, and as agents of development in Romania. My objectives were first to explore texts to define and describe the concept of development, then to synthesise the literature which connected migration and development, and finally to decide if in the context of migration-development nexus, I should consider researching the development of the sending country, or also the development of the receiving country.

Then I decided to focus on Romanian returnees, and narrowed down my topic to a more specific type of development. I eventually discovered my research gap: 'What are the sociocultural changes that Romanian returnees are bringing to their home communities?'. I therefore decided to research social and cultural development, and more particularly, change, because I believe that this is the concept that best defines this type of development. The purpose of my research was to start with verifying theory without adding to it, and from there to build on my thesis. I planned on thinking actively about theory throughout the entire process of carrying out my research and writing my thesis. Nevertheless, I wanted to use theory in helping me understand and explain what I am seeing in my data, as Nygaard (2017) suggests. Literature review as a method has helped me develop ideas that strengthened the claims identified in the literature. I knew that my study can be both described numerically and by questioning ideas and experiences, but I wanted to develop a less mechanistic understanding of the migration topic. Hence, I decided to use qualitative methods to interpret patterns and meanings.

The reasons for which I was keen on qualitative methods were that they can be conducted with small samples, and they are flexible, thus I could adjust my methods as I went to develop new knowledge. I planned for my data to be mostly descriptive, and to allow me to describe my research subject without influencing it. I decided to use secondary data from literature to synthesise existing knowledge and identify patterns on a large scale, but I also wanted to collect original data myself through interviews. One of the pros in collecting primary data was having control over the sampling and measurement methods. I initially thought that I would need at least 20-25 people in my

sample to be able to make arguments. I considered eventually doing field work and interviewing 15 Romanian returnees and 15 members of their social network to establish the changes they underwent and how they disseminate their knowledge in their local communities, but after deciding to conduct the interviews online, I limited myself to returnees only. My choice of interviews as a data gathering technique for obtaining primary data has been made by weighing its advantages and disadvantages.

The advantages have been multiple, as they offered me the possibility to gather a large amount of qualitative data, extremely valuable and high-quality information, without worrying about a low response rate, especially after seeing the interest of the volunteers that offered to participate in the project. I also had the opportunity to explore various experiences of my participants, and to understand their views regarding the challenges of being a migrant, and of taking the brave decision to return to Romania. During the interviews, I was able to explain a question that has not been understood, and to address follow-up questions. The biggest advantage of the interviews has been for me the flexibility they offer, such as successfully conducting interviews from home, via video- and phone calls. There are also disadvantages of choosing interviews as a data gathering technique, such as the fact that they are time-consuming, especially when interviewing one person at a time. Interviews are also exposed to biases, and my interviewees were concerned about the anonymisation of their personal data. Also, accessibility to respondents was an issue, along with the possibility that my respondents would withdraw from participation in the project.

**APPROPRIATE CHOICE OF INTERVIEW METHODS**

For this project, I considered qualitative case study to be the most appropriate research method, where the 'case' is the Romanian migrant community that has returned from Norway to Romania. As a data gathering technique, I used the internet as a tool for interviewing. I considered interviews to be the most appropriate in collecting information on people's experiences, impressions, thoughts, and feelings, and returnees the best to be interviewed to gain insight about the topic of sociocultural change in Romania. The semi-structured approach of the interviews enabled the interviewees to speak freely, and allowed me to ensure that the main issues were covered. When conducting the interviews, I followed an interview guide to keep track of questions and answers. I took notes to ensure that a minimum of data would be saved in case of audio damage, and audio recorded all interviews. I endeavoured for the notetaking to not interfere with the flow of

the conversation, and I obtained permission before recording each interview. Conducting more interviews might not have added much data to the decent amount of evidence already generated.

My goal has been through the analysis of primary data to disentangle the development challenges and outcomes that migration involves for Romanian migrants, and to shield light on individual cultural and social rapport to the development of Romania. The interviews were transcribed and analysed to improve reliability, and the interview material was used as a resource for generating data. The findings were categorised in order to establish data for the written analysis. The process of data analysis involved identifying common patterns and themes within the answers received in the interviews, in order to deduce conclusions. Themes have been written up as trajectories, showing the progress returnees have made through the social settings of their local communities in Romania.

## ADDRESSING THE EXCLUSION OF OTHER METHODS

Regarding my choice of interviews, unstructured interviews would not have been a good option because I wanted to group and code my results based on answers to questions formulated similarly, and structured interviews may have been too stiff for the purpose of this study. I wanted my participants to be able to open up without feeling that questions would limit their possibility to add valuable information to the discussion. Online or physical surveys would not have offered me flexibility to adjust my questions, nor the possibility to discuss with the participants on a more personal level. Also, surveys would have been difficult to conduct, as it would have involved collecting information from a much larger group of people than the number of returnees that I would have been able to identify, and have therefore been rejected.

Observations, focus groups and group interviews would not have been a good option for the reason that my participants were geographically dispersed at the time of the interviews, and it would have been unlikely that I could have gathered them in one place and requested a group participation. Participant and non-participant observation as research methods necessitate field work and local involvement, while the design of this research project would have needed more extensive resources to make this possible. For this research, this type of data collection would have been a hindrance in obtaining the desired results, would have decreased the number of my participants and would have discouraged them to bring the same input to the study.

Questionnaires have not been chosen as a method because I wanted the information that I planned to obtain from my participants to be much more personalised. I also wanted to have the opportunity to ask extra questions and to confirm some of their statements. Also, a questionnaire might have given me a low response rate, as people tend to not answer all the questions, or answer them partially. Ultimately, involving experiments has not been the case, as I had no intention to measure performance or other abilities of my participants, nor was I interested in observing returnee's behaviour regarding their migration experiences.

The theory analysed in this project is about how people blend ideas and arguments together to change people, the way they think, and their sense of identity. I believe that my overall combination of an inductive and latent approach could make this research contribute with new knowledge on migration, and impact real change. These may be possible through the new perspective developed from the theories and methods used, which could bring new ideas about the world, people, their practices, values, and how these interconnect.

## 3.2 The Sampling Process

In this section I discuss the criteria I used to select my sample, meaning the group of individuals that participated in my research. Since Romania lacks a systematic account of all people that returned to the country, probability sampling has not been possible. I have applied non-probability sampling methods, such as consecutive sampling based on voluntary response and recommendations from non-returnees. I have also attempted snowball sampling. At the end of every interview, the last question was asking my participants if they could suggest other persons, but only one of the interviews led to a new participant.

I have done small-scale qualitative research, therefore my sample represents a limited population of participants. Although some of the interviewees belonged to the same network, their experiences were merely different. Non-probability sampling methods have been used with the members of nine Facebook groups, and the approach to ask for a volunteer sample has been successful. I have been able to reach my participants starting from several entry points which maximised diversity of ages, generations, and social-class backgrounds of the subjects selected. The advantages of using non-probability sampling have been the easy approach and low access costs, and as

disadvantages, that the conclusions I have drawn about returnees could be considered weaker and more limited than when applying probability sampling. While not a random sample, I have no reason to believe that the sample is significantly biased beyond being limited to those who agreed to be interviewed.

The size and nature of my sample depended partially on my criteria and resources, and partly on the accessibility to participants, as well as respondents' receptivity. However, the small sample size of these splits made it difficult to generalize about any particular sub-groups. The criteria that I used for my participants were that they had to be individuals that consider themselves Romanian, and returning migrants that have resided in Norway for at least six months. I restricted my sample to persons between the age of 18 and 60. These criteria guided my participant selection, and have been effectively applied for inclusion in my sampling process, and to exclusively examine individuals who met or did not meet the criteria. My sample took into consideration that true random sampling is difficult to achieve in any type of research. Moreover, "random sampling is a challenging task even for researchers working on a large scale, and often is not feasible for researchers involved in smaller studies" (Seale and Tonkiss 2018, 405).

### 3.2.1 My Overall Sampling Design

In my selection of individuals I applied three main steps that I describe below. After I read up on the information that I needed in order to conceptualise my research topic, I decided to move at the stage of 'field work' from home. I prepared for data collection with some idea of who I had to talk to, as a natural step in obtaining the necessary material to help me answer the research questions. Since social interaction was discouraged during my interviews because of the pandemic, I knew that the ways in which I could create an arena to exchange information and materialise ideas, knowledge and beliefs was by contacting people online.

At the outset of getting my sample, I started by approaching and inviting people to participate in the research. The first step I took was to place an announcement in nine different online groups of Romanians on Facebook. These groups are a positive sharing resource for anyone new to Oslo and Norway, with posts mostly in Romanian language, and sometimes in Norwegian. I tried to maximise the response rate of my sampling knowing that the higher the response rate, the more representative the sample would be of Romanian returnees. One of the issues considered has been the language of the posts, which had to be the language of the interviewees, namely Romanian. Then, the pages

where the posts were made had to be pages with Romanian members. I added an attractive picture of the Romanian seaside to the post, knowing that this would increase my chances for people to read the post, as images are more vivid than text. For more details on the Facebook post, see Appendix V.

The second step I took was to message people from my network that live or have lived in Norway, telling them that I was working on my master's thesis and looking for 35 participants to discuss about the cultural and social changes that Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway, have brought to their country of origin. I came with a follow-up message, asking if they had considered my previous message, and if they knew anyone. I received many positive answers with recommendations for possible participants. The posts also had a constructive effect, arousing many positive reactions, many of them from non-returnees recommending a repatriate they knew, and from other people offering their own participation.

The third step I took was to filter all the messages I received and make a list with prospective participants. Then I moved to scheduling data collection activities, and contacted my possible participants individually on messenger or email. Even if I had to conduct a big number of interviews in a little over a month, I did not want to postpone them and lose the opportunity to talk with my possible participants. In the follow-up messages I sent in connection with the interviews, I made sure to offer people flexibility and the possibility to reschedule if something intervened, providing my participants alternative dates and times. In developing a level of mutual trust with prospective informants, I mentioned that our interview would be confidential, and that their identity would not be disclosed. I ended by noting that I would try to answer any questions the participants had regarding the project.

Overall, this restricted sample included 35 return migrants, from which 20 have replied to one of the nine Facebook posts, or have contacted me through Messenger, thirteen have been recommended by non-returnees, and two have been persons from my social network. This has been an advantage for the project, because both volunteers and recommended people proved to be interested and agreed to participate in the project, but also because they had unique experiences to share, which added value to the thesis. A typical letter with a form of consent has been sent before each interview, which created an image of what the project was about. This informed my respondents that participation was voluntary, which they could withdraw, either at the outset or during the interview, if they changed their minds. For the full review on the information letter, see Appendix III.

### 3.2.2 The Interviewees

The purpose of my study has been to "gather information in order to generate new insights" (Seale 2018b, 172). My aim regarding interviewee recruitment has been a good coverage of participants in order to have enough findings to support my claims, and validate my arguments. My purposive sampling looked to acquire a gender balance, variety in educational- and professional background and civil status, and place of residence diversification. Returnee participants were made up of both males and females in order to gauge social change at the micro-level. My data sources consisted of 20 women and 15 men, with ages ranging from 21 to 55 at the time of the interview, who spent between 1 and 30 years in Norway. My Romanian interviewees are from all parts of Romania, but especially from the southeast of the country, where 22 out of 35 respondents come from. Apart from the information on the country of origin, the data set includes individual-level variables on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, the respondent's level of education, current profession, and marital status.

The age at migration was critical for drawing this sample, my participants being at migration between 18 and 48 years old. The importance of this criterion is based upon two interconnected concerns, the judgement of the participants in the decision to migrate, and their level of socialisation upon return (Vlase and Croitoru 2019), which is correlated to their power of influencing culturally and socially their local communities. I have not excluded any particular groups, as for example ethnic or religious. In the interviews, my participants were requested to describe their lived migration experiences, the knowledge they gained during their migration process, and other information leading to an understanding of the challenges and outcomes that migration involves for them. At the end of the interviews, the interviewees were asked if they had any questions about the research process, or if there were something they wanted to add that they have not been asked about. I also made sure to thank my participants in the end, as I wanted them to keep a positive memory about the experience, and to be open to follow-up if I had to approach them again for an extra question or request.

If I had more time or resources, and if COVID-19 restrictions would not have limited the possibility to interact with my participants, I might have started and done my research a bit differently. I would have followed my initial plan of doing field work in Romania, and would have located my respondents, would have met them in person, and would have done interviews face to face. Possibly I would have done observation as well,

and would have interviewed other Romanians with whom my informants interacted in their local communities, so that I could collect information on the spot about the impact that the repatriates had at home. In this dynamic context of what I could have done and what I actually did, a grasp of the development challenges and history underlying my participants' migration experiences provided me with the tools to guide the dissemination of knowledge underpinning the changes they underwent.

## 3.3 The Interview

Since qualitative research focuses on individuals, groups, and cultures, one way of measuring its data is through interviews. Interviews with returning migrants were designed to specifically describe the changes that migrants can bring to the sociocultural realm in their origin country, and to grasp their general reintegration back home. In these informal conversations with Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway, I investigated if migration and the cultural differences between their home country and their new country has changed their sociocultural views and their aspirations for a meaningful life, and to which degree they consider themselves agents of development in their local communities.

**DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES**

Before starting my proper interviews, I ran a few pilot interviews in July 2020. I piloted the interview guide with a small group of people who had similar backgrounds to the ones that were to be interviewed. I have tested during piloting whether some of the questions were irrelevant, repetitive or difficult to understand, and made the necessary adjustments, after receiving advice from my supervisor as well. At the end of the interviews I requested the three pilot participants to give feedback on the content of the interview guide. The advantages of performing pilot interviews have been the possibility to highlight the criteria for the selection of participants, and to revise the theme guide based on the feedback received.

The theme guide used during the interviews had different sections and a relatively open-end to ensure that all respondents provided information on the same topics. When creating the interview guide, I took into consideration the four aspects that Seale (2018d) discusses: relevance, comprehensiveness, feasibility and comprehensibility. I made sure that all the elements from the research questions were considered, and planned my interviews to last between 30 and 60 minutes. Along with the interview guide, I

developed a small introduction about the purpose of my research, and my role in relation to the project. The interviewees were informed about the discussion topics, and I recorded all interviews subject to the usual procedure of 'informed consent'. I simultaneously took notes to ensure that a minimum of data would be saved in case of audio damage. For the full review on the interview guide, see Appendix I.

The interview as a data gathering technique enabled my interviewees to constructively express their thoughts, emotions and experiences about their social and cultural journey, as Fedyuk and Zentai (2018, 174) also suggest: "The purpose of the interview in research design is to convey a lived experience and perspective". The interview had four parts, the first part was about personal information, the second was about returnees' relationship with Romania, the third part was about their relationship with Norway, and the fourth and last part was about the cultural and social changes brought to their home communities. The interview started with neutral questions, in order to create a relationship with the respondent before moving to more focused questions. The first questions were about attributes which confirmed the participant's gender, age, marital status and living area, as these gave the interviewees a certain degree of comfort. The questions about attitudes came in the last part of the interview for being the most personal ones, and for concerning with the respondent's feelings and beliefs.

The interview guide contained mainly semi-structured questions, such as "How would you define your migrant status?", which often had a follow-up question, such as "Are you considering yourself repatriated, or still an active migrant, or maybe in between two worlds?". I consider this to have been an advantage, as I could "ask for further elaboration of replies" (Seale 2018c, 180). However, some questions such as "How would you describe your experience in Norway, as a positive or a negative one?" had established options for answers. They were intended for the interviewees to choose one of the options, which had an easier form of analysis for me. The semi-structured method gave me the opportunity to obtain valuable information in the areas where I sensed that the participant had more to offer. The open-ended questions and their formulation with the "How" word offered the respondent the flexibility to share their feelings and "views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions" (Byrne 2018, 220). I tried to keep the participants on topic, but at the same time gave them the freedom to express their beliefs during the interview, "thus making it more exploratory in nature and cooperative in terms of knowledge production" (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018, 173).

**INTERVIEW DYNAMICS**

The interview is considerably valuable in migration research because it allows migrants to weigh the challenges and the gains of their migration experiences and to look upon future opportunities of connecting them with social and cultural changes that can benefit them and their home societies (Vlase and Croitoru 2019). As a data collection procedure, I used interviews in online face-to-face, audio -and telephone chat settings. The online and telephonic interviews were conducted from 11 August to 2 November 2020, between my home office in Oslo, Norway, and Romanian returnees from different rural and urban settings in Romania. The interviews lasted 19 minutes the shortest, and one hour and 46 minutes the longest. I interviewed my participants for a total of 33 hours and 21 minutes, with an average duration of one interview being 57 minutes. The interviews have been recorded with my mobile telephone, while the interviews were conducted with my laptop or with a different telephone. The audio files were subsequently transferred into my personal laptop and analysed from there.

Instead of using pseudonyms for my participants, I named them after the number of their interviews, in the order I conducted them. From the total of 35 semi-open audio-recorded interviews, 34 have been conducted in Romanian language, as I believe that people are willing to share more if they feel comfortable with the settings of the interview, such as language. Only one interview has been conducted in English, as the interviewee is an ethnic Hungarian. Although she considers herself a Romanian citizen and holds Romanian citizenship, she felt more comfortable speaking in English. One interview was conducted in three parts, and four interviews were conducted in two parts each, due to different hindrances, such as the fact that the children of the interviewees needed attention and we had to interrupt, or that they had to change location and needed to end the conversation, or because the internet connection got lost. Some interviews continued in the same day, and others in the next day or days apart.

### 3.3.1 Transcription and Translation

This subsection gives an overview of my methods of data processing. I discuss the series of actions I have taken to verify, organise, transform, integrate and extract my data for later analysis, and what I did to ensure their usefulness and integrity. I first decided that Edited transcription was the method I wanted to use, and further transcribed the interviews, in order to achieve reliable findings. Qualitative data transcription provided a good first step in arranging my data systematically and made it easier for me to analyse

and share the information. The interviews were transcribed without a transcription software, as most software convert English speech to text. To improve readability, I adjusted incomplete sentences, long paragraphs, and grammar mistakes. In situations when the audio quality was bad or the words were indecipherable and needed clarification, I added clarifying comments in the transcript. I subsequently proofread all interviews.

Manual transcription encouraged me to become more immersed into the data I collected, and to do a more thorough analysis of my interview audios. It has also allowed me to find easier patterns, and has, by all means, secured the accuracy and integrity of the data. The interviews conducted in Romanian have not been translated into English, but have been analysed in Romanian instead, and only certain quotes have been translated and reproduced herein. I have done integration and extraction of data to bring together the insights of different perspectives on the impact that migration and return had on the cultural and social views of my participants.

### 3.3.2 Coding

In the previous section I argued my methods of data processing, while this section provides an overview of my methods of data analysis. After data transcription conducted in electronic form and printed on paper, my data analysis began with thoroughly reading and annotating the transcriptions. I conceptualised and organised the data by conducting two analysis techniques, content analysis and thematic analysis. The research method of content analysis has been applied to closely examine and identify patterns in my transcripts, in order to categorise and discuss the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. The first thing I did was to decide the texts that would be analysed. All of my texts met my criteria, therefore I analysed them all. Next step was to determine the units and categories of analysis to be coded, such as the characteristics of people who appeared in the texts, as well as the presence of recurring ideas and concepts. My units of analysis were decided based on my research questions, and have thus been returnees, as well as the words used to describe them. The set of categories that I used for coding has been objective characteristics, such as 'location in Romania', or 'marital status', but also more conceptual characteristics, such as 'family oriented', or 'with higher education'.

I have subsequently organised the data to be analysed into the defined categories to ensure that all texts are coded consistently and that my method was transparent and reliable. Once coding was complete, I connected the answers of different respondents to

find patterns and draw conclusions in response to my research questions. Applying content analysis to my texts has been important for the validity of my results and for understanding the intentions of returnees as individuals and groups. Content analysis has been a very helpful method, as I could analyse communication and social interaction without the direct involvement of my participants. It has also offered me flexibility, as I have been able to conduct it at a convenient time and location, and with minimum cost. However, the weakness of using this method was that it has been very time-consuming to manually code all of my texts.

The method of thematic analysis has been used to derive variables with multiple categories, and identify common topics, issues, and ideas in order to generate themes. Given that my theoretical framework did not give me a strong idea of what themes I should expect to find in my data, I considered using an inductive approach, and allowed the interviews data to determine the themes. I have also used a latent approach, to underlie meanings and reasons for semantic content. This approach involved more than analysing the explicit content of the data, it included an element of interpretation, implying that meanings have also been theorised. Throughout the coding process, I highlighted sentences or phrases of my text and used labels to describe their content. Table 3.1 shows below an example of an interview section in which various phrases are marked with different colours corresponding to different codes.

| Interview extract | Codes |
| --- | --- |
| Cultural and social changes that I have brought to Romania would be an activity that did not exist in Romania, that is developing, that in Romania has a certain direction. In Norway the concept of caravan is completely different then in Romania, where it was understood as going out on the green grass, to barbeque and play music. I am working on a lake project with someone from Timisoara for a western model campsite, on attracting foreign tourists, on greening for reducing carbon dioxide through solar energy. We have received European funding to reduce our carbon footprint. In this field the world has great curiosity and interest. Since coronavirus, many caravans have been sold, therefore the standard of living has increased if people can afford to buy. A good caravan reaches 4-5000 euros. Before, not everyone could afford, but now they can also access credits to buy caravans. (24.08.2020, informant 9) | <ul><li>Sociocultural differences</li><li>Certainty for sociocultural change</li><li>Acknowledgement of climate change</li><li>Expert knowledge in the field</li></ul> |

Table 3.1 An example of applied thematic analysis

The data has been collected into groups identified by codes, which describe the ideas or feelings expressed in certain parts of the texts. Next, I identified patterns among the created codes in order to develop themes. Subsequently, the themes have been reviewed, named and defined, and each theme has been examined to gain new insights into participants' perceptions and motivations. Thematic analysis has offered me flexibility in interpreting my data, and has been a good approach to gaining new knowledge about the experiences, views, opinions, and values of Romanian returnees. The analysis of my qualitative interviews has been complex, but through textual analysis, I have been able to describe, interpret and understand the information from my transcriptions, and to reveal its contextual value.

## 3.4 Secondary Data

This section provides a brief summary of how I collected and analysed secondary data. First, I analysed secondary sources on themes including topics such as 'development', 'migration', 'return migration', 'society', and 'culture', in order to build a theoretical framework and to reveal findings about sociocultural changes in Romania. The secondary sources used in this paper have been searched on Google Scholar and the University of Oslo's online Library. The advantages of using secondary data has been ease of access, low costs, time-efficiency, opportunity to produce new understandings, possibility to compare data over time, and rich availability of data in a wide variety of sources and topics. To avoid biases of secondary data, I researched a large amount of data in order to build strong arguments. I have also used data from case studies about specific groups of people, places, or phenomena for comparing, evaluating and understanding different aspects of my research topic. In my qualitative analysis of secondary data, I took account of the conditions in which those data had been produced, and kept focus on the context in which collection of my primary data took place. Drawing on my depiction of the research process, secondary analysis has been the most demanding, messy, and time-consuming step in the development of my thesis. However, the fact that I collected primary data before collecting my secondary data, as well as the experience from first-hand data collection, conferred me a degree of foresight in considering the reliability and applicability of the sources included in this paper.

## 3.5 Reflection and Reflexivity

This section considers my positioning in this research, my reasoning regarding how I ensured the quality of my findings, and the concepts of reliability and validity. As Rivas (2018) says, the social, linguistic and rhetorical structures of research and writing in social science are contested to affect the reliability and validity of written papers. In social research it is difficult for a study to be one hundred percent bias free. Possibly the one most controversial bias that I have been concerned about bringing to this research has been my relevant experience of being a migrant myself. This bias may have affected the content of the data I gathered and the way I interpreted it. However, I have maintained a great interest in the topic and in all the steps of the research process, including the values of my findings.

When deciding what data to collect and what data to exclude, I acknowledged every participant's story, but have been aware that many of the interviewees would move away from the subject wanting to tell their story. My role has been to give them freedom to express themselves, as the questions were open-ended, but to maintain the conversation on topic. To avoid agreeing with the participants in a biased way, I replaced the questions implying a certain answer with questions that focused on the actual perspective of my participants. I gathered and analysed a variety of data variables, and this has brought reflections on how accurate my voice was when speaking the words of others. Although challenging, the opportunity to work with a wide range of variables, such as ages from 19 to 55, or different levels of professional ranks, as well as my attempt to be as unbiased as possible in my interpretations and conclusions, have only enriched my analysis.

In order to ensure validity and reliability in my research, I aimed to create a strong research design, and to conduct the research with meticulousness and consistency. There are certain factors that have possibly intervened in the research process with consequences on the research results. An actual factor has been the research method of content analysis, that might involve some level of subjective interpretation, and could be considered to have influenced the reliability and validity of my findings. But Seale and Tonkiss (2018, 404) claim that the method "potentially has a high degree of validity and reliability", presenting "clear empirical evidence for research findings", and that it "can be seen as one of the most objective methods for the study of texts and images". Another factor could have been the consecutive sampling as a non-probability sampling method, which might have excluded important voices in the research. However, I aimed for the

sample to be so varied as to represent the targeted population, and for the results of the research to be used in generalisations pertaining Romanian returnees.

Voluntary response sampling and sampling based on recommendations from non-returnees has enabled me to cover participants with different experiences, contrary to the sceptical attributes of the methods, that bringing to the research participants with similar backgrounds or belonging to the same network has a higher risk of sampling bias. Another factor that has possibly intervened in the research process with consequences on the research results is the decision for the interviews to take place online and by phone. This type of interviewing has been less time-consuming, but it requested maintaining the interest and seriousness for participation from the participant's side. I maintained a good and friendly telephone manner to ensure the completion of the interviews at the expected level. Although it might be "harder to develop a co-operative relationship with a respondent over the phone" (Seale 2018c, 181), I trusted my informants' sayings and relied on their reports.

In using interviews as a method of primary data collection, I made sure that participants received the same information, that questions were phrased the same way each time, and that they generated answers under the same circumstances. With the exceptions of two persons that have not been able to answer one question each out of 25 questions, my interviewees answered all the questions, which increased the reliability of my methods. I ensured the quality of my findings by providing supporting evidence and examples, yet I am aware that along the way, my values and preconceptions may have unconsciously influenced the development of this study.

### 3.5.1 Reflections on the Initial Contacts and their Implications

This subsection considers my relationship with my participants, before and after the interviews. In order to increase my chances of receiving positive reactions, I used in my contact initiatives the term 'discuss' instead of 'interview', so that people would think of less than an interview, and more of a friendly discussion. Although many people showed interest, some of the possible participants felt unsure if their contribution would bring any value to the project, but I assured them that it was particularly their input that would help me understand and document the outcomes that migration involves for Romanian returnees. By sharing their unique experiences, my participants contributed to generating knowledge about sociocultural change in the sphere of Romanian return migration. Some of the people I reached out to were friends, and two persons became

participants. In order to avoid any bias toward them, I maintained the same attitude as with the other 33 interviewees. With some of the other participants we maintained a friendly relationship also after the interviews, for sharing the same cultural values and beliefs, while with some others I maintained a cordial relationship on social media.

### 3.5.2 The Role of the Interviewer in the Conversation

This entry discusses the relationship between me as an interviewer and my interviewees. The qualitative interviews in this study paint a picture of the complex decision-making process undertaken by Romanians upon returning to their home country after having migrated to Norway. Soon after I engaged myself in this thesis project, I realised that I have a moral duty towards the participants in my research to be impartial in collecting information during the interviews, but even more importantly, when analysing and presenting this information from my own perspective. For this reason I considered the concept of objectivity, namely that my individual perspective would not influence the interpretation of my findings. Objectivity has been of great importance to me and to the purpose of this research, and I tried to be uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices with respect to my sources. My sampling design framework served as the basis for the selection of individuals I interviewed, and determined the questions I asked the interviewees. It has also influenced some aspects of the interviews, such as the interaction between me and my respondents, or the atmosphere during the interviews.

The researcher's role is highly debated in qualitative research, since being personally involved in every step taken, might bring certain weaknesses. One weakness is the likelihood that the interviewer would subconsciously influence the interviewees to give answers that they think the interviewer needs or wants to hear. I even received replies from my participants wondering if the answer they gave was the one I was expecting or hoping to hear. My reply has been that I did not expect a certain answer, and that all answers were well received. Even more, what I hoped for was a diversity in answers, and unexpected answers have been a benefit for my research. However, a researcher needs time to gain confidence in interviewing, and the possibility that my lack of experience has been felt in the interviews may have also been a weakness. The first two or three interviewees might have felt my nervousness and even if I do not believe that this has had any potential reflexive consequences on the persons being interviewed, I do think that instead of striving for more complex answers, I have been more concerned of going through all the questions, or too conscious of the factors that influenced the

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interviews. Such occurrences have been part of the reality of my research process, but I believe that these arise even when a researcher has gained substantial experience with doing interviews.

My role in collecting the data has been to make sure that the questions were thoughtfully asked and conveyed in a way that allowed respondents to share their real feelings. I took a position of passive observer in moderating my interviews, so as to not allow my identity, views and values influence my data collection. With regard to the interviewer-interviewee relationship, I tried to minimise a relativism bias by allowing respondents to project their feelings onto their own beliefs and still provide honest, representative answers. I had personal similarities with my respondents, such as gender, age, ethnicity, but even if I identified myself with them in many of their described situations, I strived to maintain a neutral position in my conversations with them. Therefore, in the context of the interviews, I have tried to minimise the impact that I, as an interviewer, had on the communication with my interviewees, in order to obtain results as real as possible. I have nevertheless made adjustments during the interviews, depending on the reactions and understandings of the interviewees. No matter how equidistant my positionality as a researcher has been, I believe that this study has somehow touched the lives of the people involved, which is one of the biggest rewards of doing research in social sciences.

## 3.6 Ethics

The main purpose of this section is to provide insight into my research ethics, how I protected research participants through informed consent, and how my research proposal has been submitted to an ethical review process. While conducting my research, I kept a high interest in the values determining the outcome of my project, I tried to avoid making assumptions, and aimed to meet the requirements of accuracy, integrity, confidentiality, and security when processing personal data. I have been aware of the ethical implications of the decisions taken during the process, and tried to anticipate possible ethical problems in my research. Data analysis implied challenging decision making, such as which examples to include in the findings, and which data to be put aside either for being irrelevant, or for ethical considerations. However, certain issues needed to be heard and have not been excluded from research on ethical grounds, despite the sensitivities around them. As challenging as they were, the decisions as to what to

consider irrelevant and what to consider unethical have strengthened my abilities to do research.

I would like to discuss the aspect of transparency, and my initiative to increase the quality and efficiency of my research through open and transparent research practices. My approach aimed to promote trust among my participants, by having an open attitude towards them, and by willing to respond to their concerns regarding ethics, but at the same time maintaining transparency as a central component of my research. The ethical guidance of the project has been to keep a consistent and impartial attitude during the process of data collection and data analysis. In the context of sample selection, transparency has been key in finding and approaching my potential participants. My principle has been that if my respondents know what the objectives of my research study are, and that the practices ensuring that the study is conducted ethically are in place, they would be more willing to contribute to the project, and to trust me and the results of this project.

Research participants have been approached with a message in which I presented myself, I said a few words about the study, what their participation in the study involved, and how the study could benefit them. They have been given the opportunity to ask questions. A consent form and a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality have been provided in an information letter through a PDF. The participants have been explained the reason for the study and their rights through the informed consent, but also verbally in the beginning of the interviews. They have been informed about ethical considerations such as the fact that the information was audio recorded, that participation in the project was voluntary, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. As long as my participants could be identified in the collected data, they have the right to access the processed personal data, ask to receive a copy of their personal data, ask for their personal data to be deleted, request for incorrect personal data to be rectified, and to contact the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of their personal data.

Because field work was not possible and interviews were made online and by telephone, I asked for consent to audio record at the beginning of each interview. Only one returnee changed her mind about participating in the project. I have used my respondent's personal data solely for the purposes specified in the information letter, and processed their personal data confidentially. The participants have also been informed

that their name and occupation would not be promulgated in publications, and that the personal data, including any digital recordings, would be safely stored.

The project has also been assessed by NSD, and it has been certified that the processing of personal data in this project complies with data protection legislation, so long as it has been carried out in accordance with what has been documented in the Notification Form and attachments. I have been guided, before receiving approval, how I could collect, store and share, both safely and legally, data about people and society. The project has been approved to process special categories of personal data and general categories of personal data. NSD found that the planned processing of personal data would be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding lawfulness, fairness and transparency (in that data subjects would receive sufficient information about the processing and would give their consent), and storage limitation (in that personal data would not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose). NSD has followed up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded, and has approved an extension of the period for processing personal data.

Ethics have been applied on all stages of this research project, such as planning, conducting and evaluating. During the study design, I have considered the potential costs and benefits of the research. No rewards have been offered for participation in this study, therefore my respondents did not rely on any compensation, and their participation was based on genuine interest in the topic, and on their wish to contribute to existing information or to developing new knowledge on the topic. This project has been conducted with minimum costs, and the benefits have been enormous in matters of experience, impact on its participants and possibly on the readers of this written dissertation. I have built this project with a fundamental belief that treating "people's knowledge, values and experiences as meaningful and worthy of exploration" (Byrne 2018, 220), valuable things can be discovered and achieved.

The next chapter includes primary data which complements the literature review and theoretical framework from chapter two. Besides elaborating on and validating the findings of this study, I further present the intentions of returnees as individuals and groups, as well as the perceptions and motivations of their migrational actions, and their intentions of becoming agents of development. The following three sections present detailed results of the in-depth interviews, and outline the information that is analysed in the Discussion and Analysis chapter.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 Norwegian Experience

**SAMPLE BACKGROUND**

My participants are Romanian citizens, with the exception of one returnee that is a Norwegian citizen, one with Italian citizenship, one with dual citizenship (Romanian and Iranian), two that are citizens of Moldova, and one with dual Moldavian and Romanian citizenship, but who are all very much attached to the identity of being Romanians, and consider Romania to be their country. They have therefore been included in the research and considered Romanians. In terms of marital status, ten participants were unmarried, 14 were married, one was divorced, one was widowed, and two were in a relationship. The ages of Romanians registered in 2020 for this research was at emigration between 18 and 48 years old, and their age at the time of the interview ranged from 21 to 55 years old. The time span that the interviewed Romanians spent in Norway varied between 1 and 30 years. The average time spent in Norway until the return to Romania is 6 years. In 2020, six of my 35 participants were returnees for less than a year, six for one year, five for over a year, six for two years, five for three years, four for four years, and three for 5 years.

From 35 participants, 22 have higher education, 13 have school education before higher education, and nine participants continue to study. Besides educational training, they have extensive experience working and interacting with people in one or more career fields: one informant in supply chain management, one in the field of financial and trading stocks, one in construction, one in public administration, one in business administration, two in finance and administration, two in I.T., two in the healthcare and beauty industry, two in transport, two in the electric field, two in the engineering field, two as entrepreneurs, two in cleaning, four informants in health and medicine, four in the service industry, and seven in the education field. Some returnees never practiced in Norway what they studied, and declared that working in the field in which they have educational training remained an ideal. They said that once they entered the migration country, their struggle for existence begun, meaning the search for a job, and for a decent home: "We all know, those who lived in Norway, how hard it is to find a house or find a job, whatever job it may be" (02.11.2020, informant 35).

**MIGRATION STATUS**

After being migrants and repatriates, four of my 35 informants did not know how to define their migration status, while five were between two worlds, temporarily repatriated, or did not consider themselves 100% repatriated: "I consider myself in a form of transit" (21.08.2020, informant 4). The reasons are varied, such as the fact that their return has been spontaneous, that they want to re-emigrate, or because they do not have a well-defined place in Romania. Furthermore, one participant is a Norwegian citizen and considered herself a migrant in Romania, four others were active migrants although returned to Romania, while 20 participants considered themselves repatriated. However, some saw their return as a temporary solution. One returnee felt like a foreigner investor in Romania because he was still very connected with Norway through his business.

Out of 35 participants, 17 would emigrate again in the future, because they love to change the environment, to learn new things, new languages, and to return home to apply them, and improve themselves and their local communities. Fourteen returnees would emigrate to Norway again, temporarily or permanently: "If I were to leave Romania again, I would leave for Norway, without a question" (26.08.2020, informant 19). Their possible return to Norway depended on professional and educational factors. However, fourteen other returnees did not intend to emigrate again, some missed Norway, but wanted to stay in Romania for the time being. They were fulfilled, satisfied and happier at home than in Norway, professionally and economically: "Many Romanians from abroad think I'm starving in Romania, but that's not true. In Romania too one lives well" (22.08.2020, informant 6). One person had feelings of indifference, and said that his nine-year experience in Norway was not something that would attract him to go back: "Norway is simply a country to make money at the moment. (...) I finally got home" (27.08.2020, informant 26).

Five of 35 participants would not return to Norway, because of the climate, certain things in the system which they did not like, such as the inaccessibility to continue studies, too much emphasis on child upbringing from the child welfare service, and the way Romanians are being perceived by public relations officials. When asked for financial support, one interviewee mentioned that she was being part of an injustice: "I am a Romanian citizen, I come from the EU, and I do not benefit from any help, from any advice, from anything that is encouraging when I ask to get a job, I ask to go to classes, I ask them to help me be an active citizen, to pay taxes, to fit in there and to live decently" (02.11.2020, informant 35). As an answer to the way she had been treated, she

volunteered as an interpreter and translator at a lawyer office, in order to help people with similar problems. Four participants who were neither for nor against emigration were open to new opportunities. They admitted that Norway remained in their hearts, and that they would consider a return: "I want to believe that I will not stay in Romania. Probably in the near future I will move from Romania either to Norway, to Oslo, or to another warmer country. The work factor matters a lot" (25.08.2020, informant 14). Romanian returnees make plans, like everyone else who has ideals, but life has taught them that one cannot control everything: "I am open to adapting to circumstances, whatever they are" (11.08.2020, informant 2).

**REASONS FOR MIGRATION**

My 35 participants emigrated to Norway in different places. From 35 participants, 22 lived in Oslo, one in Kongsvinger, one in Lillestrøm, one in Drammen, one in Arendal, two in Kristiansand, one in Flekkefjord, one in Stavanger, one in Nesodden, four in Bergen, one in Føerde, two in Ålesund, one in Mardal, one in Mo i Rana, one in Bodø, one in Narvik, one in Myre, three in Tromsø and one in Skjervøy. Some participants lived in more than one of the above-mentioned places.

My findings show that Romanians' mobility is motivated especially by work-related reasons. Twenty of 35 informants migrated to Norway for a job opportunity, four of them in order to work and pay financial debts in Romania, while other participants migrated in order to challenge themselves in having a job and succeeding in Norway. Other reasons for migration were higher education, relationships with Norwegian partners, and the beautiful Norwegian landscapes, which has also been mentioned to have been a pulling factor. Two participants went and remained in Norway for a better future for the family, and two returnees had spontaneously migrated to Norway, with an unhindered continuity in staying there. Two participants emigrated following a trend created around the year 2005 by the desire and hope for better: "Everyone wanted to leave, everyone dreamed of settling in foreign countries, my partner's co-workers at that time dreamed of marrying Norwegian women, of staying there. A trend had been created in which we also jumped" (27.08.2020, informant 23). An interesting case is one returnee who commuted solely during the weekend from her town in Romania to Oslo for 6 months, in order to challenge herself. She was leaving Romania on Friday and returning on Sunday evening, and was doing two jobs without speaking English or Norwegian: "I was very brave and all my acquaintances there asked me where I got so much energy

from. Norwegians were also amazed; Norway was a very pleasant experience for me. Let's say I did it to see if I can handle a country where I don't know anyone" (23.08.2020, informant 8).

**OVERALL EXPERIENCE IN NORWAY**

Overall, 29 of 35 participants had a positive experience in Norway: "In my opinion, not the United States, but Norway is the country of all possibilities. Norway is, at least in Europe, the country that still receives Europeans from all countries and offers easy integration conditions" (24.08.2020, informant 10). Romanian migrants thrived in Norway and said that they reached a high degree of inner wealth by learning from Norwegians every day, from their mentality, the way they dress, how they behave, how they approach people, how they know how to be silent, the way they counterargue, the way they eat, absolutely everything: "Every Romanian can learn from them, at any moment. I came home spiritually and intellectually enriched. I consider that I received a 7-year course in good manners. I would recommend this to the whole of Romania! A cure of Norway!" (02.11.2020, informant 35). These participants affirmed that their overall experience in Norway increased their happiness, reduced their stress, and improved their self-confidence and self-worth. One interviewee said that even today he has a Norwegian flag in his house, he keeps it as a symbol of pride for living in a country where he learned so much, and where he got on his feet.

Two returnees had a difficult time in Norway, but they try to think positively about their experience now, while another returnee said that although positive, the experience in Norway was expensive, but it was an investment she hopes to enjoy in the future. The financial aspect was a positive one for several Romanians: "I can say that in three years while I was there, I realised what I could not do in 15 years here (in Romania)" (26.08.2020, informant 19). However, the Scandinavian story gave a bitter taste to some participants: "I had heard about Scandinavian correctness, but I gradually realised that it was not true, I was used. You believe in friendship, but it's a relationship where they need you as long as you are good, after that, not anymore" (24.08.2020, informant 9).

**MIGRANTS IN NORWAY, NOW RETURNEES IN ROMANIA**

Romanians returned for various reasons. From a total of 35 participants, thirteen of them left Norway for family reasons. Three people left Norway to continue with higher education in Romania, or to study for costs eight times lower than in Norway. Five

participants returned for a good job offer in Romania or to develop professionally, while five others chose to return due to their emotional state in Norway. One participant returned because of too much work and for being physically and mentally tired. She declared to have worked in Norway the most 404 hours in a month. Two participants returned due to longing for their country and feeling that living abroad alienated them: "I love my country, my culture, everything that Romania means. That's why I didn't want to get another citizenship, I'm a patriot" (22.08.2020, informant 6). One participant returned for disapproving of the Norwegian system and culture, and one because he felt his rights had not been respected by NAV.

Three participants returned to Romania with their children driven by the fear of losing them in Norway to Child protection (Barnevernet), while four returnees had to leave Norway for economic reasons. Two participants returned for friends and network, one for buying her own house and starting a new life, five because of job loss, and three returned temporarily but repatriated eventually. One Romanian decided to return after reaching her economic goal, while five others had a hard time adapting in Norway from a sociocultural point of view, or to the climate: "Here if you are not careful, you miss the summer (laughs)" (27.08.2020, informant 20). Two participants returned home because they wanted a change or to try a new environment, while one wanted to become a partner in a new business in Romania. Some of the participants said that although they had to return, Norway "has been a dream and will stay that way" (26.08.2020, informant 19). Some of my respondents had more than one of the above-mentioned reasons for return.

**UNCERTAINTY OF WANTING TO LIVE IN ROMANIA**

Provided that the local environment would reject change, Romanian returnees take into consideration the option to leave Romania again. This would partially be the reason to re-emigrate, as one third of the sample group still have a mobile lifestyle after their return to Romania, travelling and working short-term in different countries. Other participants experienced major life events such as marriage, transition to parenthood, or divorce, that changed their initial plans in pursuing certain goals and made them reconsider their migrational decisions and the true meaning of their achievements. Some returnees declared regretting sometimes to have returned home, because in order to survive and socially succeed in Romania, they have to be aggressive and be set on the same principles with their conationals. People with pretensions, with an education, a

status, people who succeeded in Romania, did not want to comply with the Romanian social model.

A few participants felt upon return that they did not belong to Romania anymore: "It is quite difficult to reintegrate because you are in a state of anxiety" (11.08.2020, informant 3). They could not identify with Romanian culture because of the corruption which is so grounded in the Romanian mentality: "I am sure that the doctors and nurses in Romania are corrupt up to the neck. They don't work without paying them illegally, and that's a big problem" (04.09.2020, informant 33). Other returnees mentioned that Romania is for them the country where they can come back anytime to stay, to find themself, to spend time with their families, to remember that they are Romanians, and to see how beautiful the country is. They identify with everything related to their soul, their blood, their origin, which will never stop calling them home, but it is not where they want to live forever: "Romania is my country, I can come on vacation, but I would not see myself in Romania in the future, to be honest" (21.08.2020, informant 5).

## 4.2 Norwegian Culture

**CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION**

The process of sociocultural change of Romanians is perceived as one that takes place locally, but which is shaped by larger processes of cultural borrowing in which they integrated into the Norwegian society, learned the language, and appropriated the local culture. Romanians applied different strategies in order to escape the unfair system from home, and migrated abroad where they created new spaces, transnational ones, in order to gain more knowledge, develop personally, and increase their quality of life.

Returnees who had Romanian friends already living in Norway said that they managed to create a social network quickly, through which they met people of other nationalities, and developed close friendships with colleagues in the office. Those who were sociable by nature easily made a circle of friends, and didn't have problems integrating. Romanians who already had family in Norway interacted with many Romanians and had a positive migrational experience. Some participants joined the Romanian Church from Oslo to be among other conationals and followed both the Romanian and Norwegian traditions in parallel. In terms of how warm of a welcome have Romanians received in Norway, five of 35 participants did not feel welcome in Norway, while eleven said they felt relatively welcome, due to the social circle. Nineteen

participants felt very welcome and warmly received by Norwegians: "I didn't expect warm people in a cold country" (27.08.2020, informant 20). In the context of work and school, they declared to have felt much better received in Norway than they felt many times in Romania in different circumstances. Along the way, Romanians integrated easily, they socialised a lot with Norwegians and felt love from their side: "I found coffee, cake and letters at the door, and one old dear thanked me for bringing her the newspaper on time. So I did not encounter any communication problems with Norwegians. And I didn't know the language, so I spoke to them in English. I made mistakes as well, but they left me notes with 'tusen takk'" (23.08.2020, informant 8).

Young Romanians thought that age played a positive role in the adaptation process and in a quick assimilation by the Norwegian culture. Migrants who had emigrated before adapted immediately to their local community in Norway due to their migrational experience. The level of education of Norwegians contributed as well to an easy and fast integration of Romanians into Norwegian society. Migrants with a genuine interest to adapt had no problems integrating socially or culturally in Norway: "I liked learning something from a totally different culture than ours" (03.09.2020, informant 32). They noted that they liked certain things so much that they kept them after they returned home as well, even though they have different cultural principles. They made friends in their local communities in Norway and loved the Norwegian nature: "They have a beautiful country from a geographical point of view, and with beautiful relief. I really liked the fjords, I will miss them a lot" (26.08.2020, informant 19).

Other Romanians had a difficult time adapting to Norway, for reasons such as big differences of culture and mentality and other axes of social difference between Romanians and Norwegians, including intellectual, in terms of interests, access to activities, to information resources, and access to jobs. Finding a job in Norway was a challenge for those who did not have a social network, while for those not knowing Norwegian and speaking only English, it had been the most difficult task: "I received answers such as 'Learn Norwegian first and then come back to us'" (22.08.2020, informant 6). Language was an impediment for several Romanians who had to make big efforts in order to adapt: "Language was a difficult barrier to overcome at first" (04.09.2020, informant 33). Although the transition period was not easy, the ambition to learn the language facilitated integration for Romanians. Speaking fluently Norwegian brought new opportunities and hope for inclusion for some of these migrants.

For other returnees integration has been difficult because they migrated alone. The first year seemed to be the most difficult, because Norwegians did not talk much to them as immigrants. Thirty years ago people in Norway were quite positive toward those who came from other places, as one interviewee confessed: "It was not this negative attitude, this hatred that I feel now in 2020" (04.09.2020, informant 33). Some had to change as individuals in order to adapt to the Norwegian culture. Fifteen years ago one informant had several attempts to become employed in Norway, without any luck, even if she was very qualified, because she did not know the Norwegian language. She opened a private art school in Norway, with the congratulations of the Norwegian embassy for being the first Romanian to obtain the right to open a company in Norway at that time. However, it took several years to adapt: "It was hard for me to accept many things from their system, the educational system was different, the pedagogical style, the methods were different" (27.08.2020, informant 23).

Romanians who emigrated to Norway over a decade ago noticed differences in the level of perception of foreigners from the society. Institutionally, one informant said that she was not pleasantly surprised by the treatment Norwegians had towards Romanians. However, Romanians have been appreciated for the responsibility with which they treat a problem, but have also been overestimated: "We Romanians are people who never say no, we can do more than the world expects, the workload is not a problem" (03.09.2020, informant 32). A few returnees believed that the system in Norway was difficult and harsh for an immigrant attempting to integrate, especially for someone without relatives or any other help. In terms of adapting to the housing system and high living costs, Norway was an expensive host country, but some Romanians said that they chose to live decently, as they would have lived at home.

A few returnees said that they had problems adapting to the Norwegian weather. Winters were very heavy, and the sudden change of climate and seasons bothered them. Some Romanians felt alienated, they did not feel that they belonged in Norway, and that they had to make great efforts to adapt to the local culture and lifestyle. The reason for which social and cultural adaptation in Norway was difficult for them, was because Romanians and Norwegians have very different values, in Romanians' opinion. However, a certain system of interpersonal interactions between Romanians and people from other cultures made their integration easier: "There were neither Norwegian nor Romanian rules, and that helped my integration a lot" (21.08.2020, informant 4).

In the spectrum of work, one returnee felt that Romanians were being excluded, from the perspective of their potential: "It's hard to get into their seemingly non-existent hierarchy, because your stranger status limits you. It's about their mentality" (27.08.2020, informant 21). Some other Romanians who have done intellectual work, felt that the better and more involved they were, the more they were appreciated: "I felt a great confidence from those with whom I collaborated, towards us, we were not refused if we asked for a day off or a vacation in a busy period, solutions were found every time, we were treated humanely, the rights of employment contracts were equal" (03.09.2020, informant 32). My informants added that Romanians have an image of hard workers in Norway: "We have created a good image, almost everyone knows that Romanians are good workers and serious" (26.08.2020, informant 19). Yet, for those who came from the kind of jobs and fields they were exposed to in Romania, it seemed much more difficult to find a job in some parts of Norway:

> That seemed incomprehensible to me. At the moment I am quite disappointed with what I lived there in terms of looking for a job, the fact that I was being told 'Yes, it's a wonderful resume', and after that they turned their back on me. It is a non-acceptance of foreigners with what they are, with different experience, culture, mentality. This was confirmed to me by the Norwegians that it is difficult as a foreigner, someone has to open the door for you in Norway. And unfortunately the jobs I had were only due to the fact that I had my husband, and they knew him. That was always a shock to me. (27.08.2020, informant 21)

For the Romanians coming from a fairly homogeneous environment it was a new concept to interact with other ethnic groups in Norway. It was a cultural shock to see so many foreigners, so many religions in the same place, and that homosexuals did not hide themselves as they do in Romania. Some of the participants said that although they integrated in Norway, they did not make many Norwegian friends. One returnee said the opposite, and even had Norwegians as guests to his wedding in Romania. While social adaptation was easy for some participants, they weren't all interested in Norwegian culture. Most of my participants said that they did not encounter any obstacles to integrate, as Norway offered them all the support. They liked the security in the country and the fact that the level of criminality was low. Romanians declared that coming across a very good system in Norway made integration seem easier: "I felt protected by the Norwegian state, although I was not an expert, I was a simple Romanian who left home in his desperation to succeed at least a little in life. I appreciate this thing and I hope to see the same attitude in Romania one day" (24.08.2020, informant 11).

## RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

As immigrants in Norway, Romanians have been seen in a bad light and encountered issues of racism and discrimination, for being associated with the gypsies begging on the streets, and the prostitutes on Karl Johan Street in Oslo:

> Ordinary people believe that we are all gypsies, that we live in tents. When I got to work at the hospital in Oslo, everyone was educated there, everyone knew about history, they knew about Ceausescu, about Transylvania. I didn't feel discriminated against there, but otherwise, wherever I went to look for a job or a rent, and I said I was Romanian, I felt like all doors were closing for me. (22.08.2020, informant 6)

Romanians felt marginalised when they tried to find a place to rent and settle in: "They (Norwegians) were kind, but when they were asking me about my nationality, they became reluctant, an obvious and radical change from one second to the next" (02.11.2020, informant 35). However, some Romanian migrants wanted to make a difference by explaining to Norwegians that they are not all the same, and that in the end it is a negligence and an ignorance of all those who change their attitude towards a Romanian, because they have to orient themselves and to make the difference between what gypsies mean, what is their origin since history, what is the difference between them and the person in front of them, as between different ethnicities within a nation. The racism that Romanians noticed while in Norway is described by some respondents as the hardest thing they had to deal with during their migration experience: "I never saw a black man working for the telecommunications company I worked for" (29.08.2020, informant 30). One returnee felt that she was labelled by Norwegians before they got to know her because they heard that she was Romanian. Also, because she did not learn the Norwegian language and spoke only English, she was sometimes seen differently from a professional point of view. Two people felt rejected in their job-seeking process when they said they were from Romania.

Some participants experienced discrimination by feeling unwelcome in Norway: "On the wall in front of the boat where I was staying, which was pulled ashore, it appeared nicely written 'Rumenere, gå hjem!' (Romanians, go home!)" (21.08.2020, informant 4). In terms of institutions, not all Romanians felt that they received help in Norway. One participant used to hear a lot of 'jævla jævla utlending' (you damn foreigner), and thought that Romanians as immigrants stand no chance of integrating in Norway: "it doesn't matter how long you'll stay, you'll still be an 'utlending' (foreigner) to them, although they do not say it in your face. At the after party when leaving after

being the only 'utlending' there, when you went out the door, they would only talk about you. However, this does not happen with a Norwegian, I have seen it more than once" (23.08.2020, informant 7). One participant felt discriminated against by public relations officials: "I had to find a job for myself, to find information on how to integrate in Norway, and I was being told as a reply 'you can find all the websites on nav.no'" (02.11.2020, informant 35). Several participants struggled for a job in Norway, and one returnee sent over 10.000 job applications, without being accepted for any of them, or receiving any feedback for most of them. After being advised by a Norwegian friend to remove her nationality from her CV and did so, she experienced that answers started to arrive.

Two other people felt discriminated against in finding a job because the person they were dialogating with lost interest when they said where they were coming from: "Then everything was changing, 365 degrees. That's why it was hard for me to find a job, because I was saying that I come from Romania" (15.10.2020, informant 34). Three returnees said that they felt marginalised, or that they didn't have the same benefits as a native, but did not feel discouraged because of it, nor in disadvantage for being Romanians: "This is probably related to people's education, all in all I don't consider that I was at a disadvantage in any way that I come from Romania. I had interactions with people who said 'oh, your cousins play the accordion', and I also had interactions with people who said, 'how cool it is, I was in Transylvania too, and I walked, and I saw, and I liked it'" (25.08.2020, informant 14).

**HELP RECEIVED**

Four of 35 participants said that they did not receive help in Norway, nine declared to have received sufficient help in order to manage in Norway, or little help from the very close ones, while 19 participants acknowledged to have received a lot of help from the authorities, institutions, professors, doctors, employers, work colleagues, compatriots, family members, friends or good neighbours, and to have felt respected by those: "I could say that I was supported by the educational system there (in Norway), and institutionally, everything related to the medical system, I had pleasant experiences every time I needed help. For the most part, and from the interaction with people, I could say that yes, I had the help of friends, family" (27.08.2020, informant 25). Some didn't have family in Norway at the time, but said that they never felt left out or neglected, while some did not receive much help from the Norwegian state, but did receive it from

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individuals. One returnee helped at least 10 people to get a job in Norway after receiving help herself from institutions and conationals.

Romanians received help and felt trust from other nationalities, and got Norwegian language courses paid by their employer. Some returnees said that they received much more help in Norway than they have ever received in Romania, and that nationality didn't matter in Norway: "I felt respected as a student and a citizen, no matter what nationality I was" (26-27.08.2020, informant 18). My participants valued the public goods that their taxes financed when they used their rights for sick leave and received support from NAV. However, one of my informants felt that a NAV employee made no effort to help in a certain situation, while another participant felt used by Norwegians: "When you're a foreigner you are being used, as you don't know the rules. (...) I've been used all the time, you come to Norway, and you think they help, but in fact they use you, nobody did anything for me that wasn't in their favour" (24.08.2020, informant 9).

**CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES**

Romanian returnees noticed many aspects which indicate remarkable differences between Norway and Romania. For example, Romanians experienced julebord (the Christmas dinner), got familiar with the bunnad (Norwegian National costume), and enjoyed the 17th of May National parade. They understood that on National day they should dress nicely and sing and dance, instead of watching on December 1st, the Romanian National day a ceremony where officials take out the tanks. By getting acquainted with these practices and many more, my participants declared to have maintained several identities that linked them simultaneously to both Romania and Norway.

From 35 interviewees, 34 said that Romanian culture is very different from the Norwegian one. One returnee that studied in Norway and compared the level of education, the quality and the access to material realised how different the Norwegian educational system was from the Romanian one: "The differences in Norway are so powerful, even compared to other East-European countries, that it leaves a mark even when living there for a short time" (11.08.2020, informant 2). The positivism specific to Norwegians has influenced the living standard of Romanian migrants, who disagree with the Romanian tradition of meditating too much on a problem, as this brings no good outcome: "It's good not to harbour resentment, to be positive, to learn from others, not to comment too much, to have ideas and to work in a team, that's what I learned from them

(Norwegians). That's part of their culture, and no one will ever be able to take that away from them" (03.09.2020, informant 32).

The most beneficial thing to be brought from Norway to Romania was considered to be the respect for others. In Romania people's attitude is different, as returnees say, and especially people from public services are impolite and unhelpful: "it shocked me how far behind we are from them and clearly, we will never reach them (Norwegians) from this point of view. I was shocked by their attitude towards people and the respect they have for each other" (26.08.2020, informant 19). From a social point of view, several returnees felt accepted and respected from day one in Norway, and experienced that there was equality and respect for the individual, and that there was no emphasis on hierarchy and the perception of positioning, compared to Romania, where there is no equality between social classes.

The culinary culture seemed very poor in Norway, but Romanians borrowed the tradition of eating fish more often, because of its health benefits, although in Romania fish is harder to procure. Even if most returnees said that Norwegian culture is very different from the Romanian one, three participants noted that it seemed different to them until a point where they were very similar: "For example, also here (in Romania) you can go out for beer after work, here you can as well be called before you're invited, and you don't just see someone knocking on your door, here you can as well go to a stand-up comedy on a weekend with the work colleagues, as in Norway. I realised that in Romania I can have the same activities that I had in Norway, with the same type of people, open, friendly, but also distant when it has to be so" (24.08.2020, informant 11).

**PROBLEMS AT WORKPLACE**

Romanians were shocked when they repatriated and lived the working conditions from Romania, with the scandalous work schedule, difficult tasks, and long hours reported to the low salaries: "When I saw how much work I put in, and the little amount of money I received, I said that it didn't work out that way, I resigned immediately" (23.08.2020, informant 7).

Romanians also noticed that as employees in Norway, they could say their opinion, while in Romania it was not taken into account: "(In Norway) there were meetings at work where they asked you different things, what you would like to change, what would help you. Here (in Romania) (...) my husband even had to resign at some point because he was told that he had different opinions from theirs, because he expressed

his point of view. As an employee, you have to execute. If you have something to say, you resign or you are fired" (11.08.2020, informant 3). Romanian returnees said that compared to Norway, where even people with high positions respect all kinds of workers, in Romania there are bosses, not leaders. Two returnees have been very disappointed with the disrespectful attitude they received at their workplace in Romania: "People insult each other" (24.08.2020, informant 10). Romanian non-migrants do not easily see how they could benefit from returnees' migration experience, as their vision is blinded by envy and misjudgement: "It is very difficult to change anything, because Romanians became meaner" (23.08.2020, informant 8).

## INDIVIDUAL- AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

What did Romanians actually look for when they migrated? My participants said that they seeked for a country in which to be respected, in which to have less stress for tomorrow's day, and where to find things that they lacked in their country. The beauty of Norwegian fjords, the peace that Norwegian nature offers, cleanliness, stability, and well-being is something returnees could not find in Romania. Upon migration though, they had to respect Norwegian laws and to integrate into Norwegian society. Most of them succeeded in doing so, while those who tried to bring Romania to Norway failed: "It depends on the person, if you don't want to change, you take advantage of Norway financially and that's it, you don't enrich yourself with anything" (26.08.2020, informant 19).

Romanians believe that they have been positively influenced by Norwegians, in the sense that as individuals they became better persons who don't judge people anymore. In their local community, they want to keep their neighbourhood clean and help others when they can. Other returnees were grateful that the Norwegian experience made them more open-minded, more autonomous and more frugal, and that they gained a different perspective that allowed them to be more mature, more respectful and tolerant of others: "It made me see a way of looking at the hierarchy that doesn't start from the principle that I'm above and the others are below" (21.08.2020, informant 4). They learned to trust more those around them, to be more empathetic, and to have less inhibitions or preconceptions. They also took from Norwegians the quality of being human, the wish to smile more and to be more kind:

> That helps me integrate in Romania, you don't necessarily have to enter into a dialogue with people to show them that you are benevolent, but with a smile and a simple greeting. I still tell Romanians how when I got to Lillestrøm in 2015, I was

jogging in a park and the people who were running towards me looked into my eyes, smiled at me and said 'hello'. And some of them can't believe it, and say 'I heard Norwegians are cold'. They are not cold. (15.10.2020, informant 34)

Romanian returnees learned in Norway to follow rules more, to be effective, responsible, and respectful. It was a confirmation that it was how a society in which the standard of living was high should work, meaning a developed education, mutual respect, positive attitude, and responsibility. Most of my participants would relive the experiences from Norway. Bureaucratically, administratively, and institutionally, Romanians saw a big difference between how simple things were solved in Norway, compared to the money and nerves one has to spend in Romania to achieve something. Norway has taught returnees to expect more from the Romanian state, and that they can do also in Romania everything they did online while in Norway. Other returnees learned to appreciate their job and to genuinely do their best at work without expecting any gain, and to stop complaining.

The experience in Norway encouraged Romanian returnees to develop personally, to learn a new language, and to take on new elements belonging to Norwegian culture. Being very religious, Romanians changed their visions during their time in Norway, and replaced their Sunday custom of going to Church with learning and enjoying skiing. They realised that people in Norway live happily and are honest and fair, and eat healthy without strong beliefs in religion. They follow the indications of their doctor and stay faithful to their culture. Some of my participants mentioned that upon return from Norway they changed their lifestyles and cooked more seafood recipes, they ate healthier foods, and tried to be as eco-friendly as possible. They also dressed more simplistically, and designed their house in a minimalist and functional style, which they associated with their Norwegian experience.

Norway shaped most Romanian returnees as individuals, it made them more independent and helped them grow a lot, personally and professionally. The migration experience in Norway gave several returnees confidence in themselves, because they trusted and valued themselves differently, and as a result they respected themselves and their time more. Two returnees said that they appreciated their free time more and demanded free weekends from work: "The house may be important to have a place to live, but other things are more important, (cherishing) moments, travelling, seeing new things, investing in yourself as a person, in things that matter to you" (11.08.2020, informant 3). One participant enrolled in the public administration faculty hoping to get a

job and to bring a plus in the regulation of Romania through the administration-citizen relationship: "I want to treat the future citizens that will need the services of the society in which I will probably work at one point, the way Norwegians treated me. And I think that it will definitely happen" (24.08.2020, informant 11).

Several returnees believed that they became calmer and more patient while they were in Norway, both as a driving style and as a lifestyle, and that they learned to enjoy the little things in life. After living in Norway, one returnee wanted to be financially independent, and tried to influence the female figures in her life to do the same. One participant maintained a friendly relationship with her ex-husband, an aspect which she holded that she took from the Norwegian culture. Another returnee said that he would never work illegally again after his experience in Norway. An interesting feature of the Norwegian culture that Romanians liked and adopted in their lives upon return was that of not being interested anymore in people's private lives as they used to do before migrating.

Another participant noticed that although he didn't like it, he believed that his migration experience in Norway changed him into a cold and careless person. However, most of my participants said that seeing a well-developed system in Norway changed them for the better, in terms of mentality, and education. They considered themselves much more determined in their decisions, and once returned to Romania, they tried not to follow the Romanian principles, but instead to keep the correctness and respect that they grew in Norway. Last but not least, Romanians wanted to remain natural: "In Romania we tend to perfect ourselves to be 'I don't know-who' and 'I don't know-how', very official, very sumptuous, that's how we see ourselves reaching a high level, while in Norway it's not like that. We must not forget that we can become whoever we want, and remain humans" (26-27.08.2020, informant 18).

Friendships with people of other nationalities changed Romanians' visions in terms of multiculturalism, as they look at things using both Romanian and Nordic heritage: "I always have a subject in my pocket, when I'm in a circle with new people, and we talk, I somehow feel that I've had some experiences in life to tell others about, and people really listen to me because they find it interesting - it's a plus to my biography" (25.08.2020, informant 15). The fact that Romanians interacted with other civilizations made them admire and borrow their customs. Over time several returnees managed to adapt, and to feel equal to everyone around them. They changed their mentality after their migration experience in Norway, especially in terms of racism.

**BUSINESS IN ROMANIA**

Two returnees opened their own business during their return process to Romania, or upon repatriation. One returnee started his caravan business when he sold his own caravan in Romania and came back to Norway for legal reasons. In 2012 he sold between 40 and 60 caravans, and reached 400 caravans in 2018. In the same year he answered to a Facebook advertisement from the diaspora start-up page about a project funded by the EU, for Romanians who would receive 40,000 euros if they wanted to return home and implement an innovative project related to what they did in the host country. He therefore set the basis of a sales and service caravan company, which did not exist in Romania, and ended up staying longer in Romania than in Norway.

The second returnee took the opportunity and opened the company Glo marine together with 3 other friends and associates after one of the leading offshore industries in which he was active in Norway was quite hit by the oil crisis. He believes that if he hadn't migrated and wouldn't have experienced things differently than in Romania, he wouldn't have had the knowledge and the will to develop a business with a modern and international policy: "I probably wouldn't have had the company if I hadn't left Romania" (25.08.2020, informant 14). In terms of sociocultural changes brought to their home communities upon return, Romanians declared that in the businesses they opened in Romania they applied a calmer way of dialogue, a policy without hierarchies, and better work conditions for their employees. Glo marine organised an international contest with the Faculty of Naval Architecture, and initiated Romanian students to cooperate with students from Norway: "We wanted to get involved in local life to give something back to the faculty that brought us here" (25.08.2020, informant 14). As a company, they benefited from the competition by recruiting workforce from the students who excelled.

**GAINS FOR ROMANIAN RETURNEES**

Romanians felt gratitude for countless things that they achieved from their migrational experience in Norway. As returnees, they found themselves having gained considerable knowledge which they try to disseminate through different forms of social change in their country of origin. Returnees feel more confident and competent on the strength of the experience they have from two different states: "At a professional level I had a great ascendancy in Norway, because I knew a previous educational system where I

added the new one, and I have a baggage of knowledge in the pedagogical-cultural-artistic field that no one can match, without being snobbish" (27.08.2020, informant 23). The transcultural capital that they possess consists in their languages skillset, but also their knowledge of Norwegian and Romanian cultures, lifestyles, value-system and habits, which positively impacted their professional life upon.

Romanians who speak Norwegian have greater job possibilities upon repatriation. One returnee works with Norwegian language as a team coordinator in a multinational, and one other works with Norwegians in his job at a marketing company in Romania. Three participants declared to have gained professionalism in terms of career, and that the job they took in Norway helped them greatly in their development: "My experience in Norway has defined me professionally and personally, the fact that I lived for 5 years in Norway has contributed a lot to my growth. And the job I had contributed enormously, I am quite indebted to Norway (for that)" (25.08.2020, informant 14). Obtaining a job for a Norwegian company in the same field where Romanians worked in Norway suggests that there are certain benefits in following the experiences gained there:

> I could say that I managed to understand better the economy management during the time spent there (in Norway), in time I learned to approach things with a much greater impartiality than I did before, to apply objectivism in many situations where I probably would not have done it before gaining this experience. I can say that it had a strong impact on me over the years. I managed to adapt to different types of people, I overcame certain prejudices regarding other nationalities, or anything else. (27.08.2020, informant 25)

Others noticed that employers in Romania are more keen in hiring those who have worked abroad, because they know that they are more dedicated, and perceive them as more serious candidates: "In Norway this becomes an instinct, you dedicate yourself to that job. This is different in Romania, people don't give much interest, if I hadn't left, I wouldn't have developed my desire to be dedicated to the job" (27.08.2020, informant 22). Romanian returnees mentioned that, as former migrants in Norway, they started from scratch and succeeded through work and ambition, but most importantly that they were given the chance to succeed in Norway, a chance that they believe they would not have been given in Romania.

Those who learned the Norwegian language considered it an absolute gain added to their portfolio. Language is very important for returnees who read daily Norwegian, think in Norwegian sometimes, keep contact with their Norwegian friends, and use Norwegian culture as a gateway to understand more about society. By seeing and experiencing a different culture and society, Romanians declared to have emancipated

and educated themselves in such a way that they developed personally. They believe that they became more patient, more conscious, more cautious, qualities that will help them personally, but also professionally. At the same time, they hope to motivate those around them to be better and take example.

Among the most important gains from the Norwegian experience of Romanian returnees are the good life they lived in Norway, the trips that they could not make with a salary from Romania, the relationships they established there, the friends they made that belong to other cultures, their mindset, their unique job experiences, and the nature of Norway. Having a strong attachment to the Norwegian landscape was an absolute gain: "the fjords, the water, the air and the rocks…you just carry it" (11.08.2020, informant 2). Three returnees became much more positive in Norway, they changed their perspective regarding certain aspects of life, and addressed new curiosities. For six returnees the economic gain has been the most substantial one. For several others, a stable and quiet life in Norway, and their mental peace was the most important intake: "it counts more than all the money I raised, honestly. The security I had, without worrying about tomorrow, without any stress" (27.08.2020, informant 20). One returnee said it was important to understand that professional experience is more important than a piece of paper, and intends to implement new ideas at home and fight the lack of creativity. For one returnee the biggest gain is her student experience in Norway, where she discovered another culture and a different pedagogical method, with less theory and more practice: "that's the only way you can understand your culture, by comparison" (26-27.08.2020, informant 18).

One returnee said that Norway has given her prospects: "I believe that I gained the future, because only in Norway I can make myself a future, only in Norway I can migrate in the future, because it is a country that accepts me, that offers me, that does not leave me" (21.08.2020, informant 5). My participants declared that their overall experience, their courage to embark on their Norwegian adventure, and the curiosity that Norway aroused, were all gains.

## LIMITED CHANGE IN ROMANIA

Five participants said that they couldn't bring many changes in Romania, and thought that in Romania one can't change anyone and anything: "It is very difficult to change anything, because Romanians have become meaner" (23.08.2020, informant 8). They tried to bring change in people's mentality, but they realised that they struggled in

vain, because people were not willing to change: "You can't change one's mindset. If a Romanian tries to persuade others to live as Norwegians do, it will bring an explosion in society, and they wouldn't fit in. Like when Romanians apply a Romanian way of thinking when they are in Norway, and it is not accepted" (04.09.2020, informant 33). Returnees noted that in Romania it is very difficult to make oneself understood, and that it is difficult to influence non-migrants: "You can take a lot from a foreign country to Romania, but in vain. If you sit at the table with someone who has been out of the country for 10-15 years, yes, you can get along with them, their mentality has changed over time, but with our natives, no, it is difficult to change their mentality at the moment" (27.08.2020, informant 26). Four other participants did not bring any change to their local community from Romania, because they did not have the purpose or the disposition to create change, because they followed the Norwegian philosophy that it was not their place to give opinions or advice, but also because Romania was not ready to change: "I don't know if you can bring something to Romania. In traffic, no, when you get to Romania, you have to drive the way they drive, otherwise you can't get home. I don't know if you can implement something from abroad to Romanians, but 99% I think it's impossible" (27.08.2020, informant 26).

Other returnees felt that in the family environment their views were better understood than in their circles of friends. One returnee said that she brought to Romania potential for change, but not visible changes. She didn't think that she influenced a community, but more individuals. In the small rural farming community where she lives in Romania, she did not blend in, and it was therefore difficult to start change, but she was sure that if she were in a big city, she would have tried to make a difference with her relevant experience. Some participants said that once they returned to Romania, they felt forced by the circumstances to return to the habits they had before leaving: "You may take a person out of Romania, but you cannot take Romania out of a person. (...) That's because you're pushed, in vain you try to change something, especially in Bucharest, it's chaos" (25.08.2020, informant 14). In terms of sustainable and modern thinking, one returnee felt hopeless regarding certain practices that he, as a parent, was used to in Norway but could not apply in Romania: "You can't walk on the sidewalk, as sidewalks are our parking lots. You have to go with the stroller on the street, but theoretically you are not allowed on the road, as it is possible to get a fine. It took me a long time to readjust, they (Norwegians) are on another level, and I miss that. What is normal for them, for us is a minus everywhere" (26.08.2020, informant 19).

One participant was misjudged for being too positive when she returned home with a changed mentality and innovative ideas, and tried to implement them in her local community. Family and people around her did not agree with the way her new perspective influenced her way of raising her child. She thought that the problem was the older generations with an outdated mentality: "Someone asked me which sect I belong to, just because it seemed like I was thinking too differently, and it wasn't well received" (11.08.2020, informant 3). The reason Romanians are difficult to influence is because they are not interested in laws: "I believe that the less trust the population has in politicians and the state, the more the rules are broken. Norwegians trust the country's leadership; they still get into conflict, but they do as they say" (04.09.2020, informant 33). The system in Romania is rotten, as one participant indicates, and returnees' attempts to change or to be correct will be in vain if people around them will not evolve.

Returnees that did not actively try to inspire their friends and family with their new mentality after their migration experience in Norway, thought that if they changed anything, it was just by their existing, relating and talking to them: "People would react if you would like to change them deliberately, this would not always be welcomed" (11.08.2020, informant 2). In situations where returnees could not transfer their new value systems and beliefs to their compatriots, they found personal ways to enable their knowledge and experience and to contribute to social change in their families and local communities. Nevertheless, returnees have tried to lead by example. One returnee said that although she couldn't make a difference in the community, her children and those around her changed their way of perceiving life by seeing her so active after her return from Norway.

One returnee tried to open a business in Romania based on his experience from Norway, in the form of educational meetings for drivers, but companies were not willing to spend money on his business proposal. He also tried to make an airport transfer company with Norwegian entrepreneurship ideas, but there were many authorizations that Romanian authorities were not willing to give him. He came up against many obstacles that impeded any progress in terms of not necessarily the development of transport, but human interaction. He eventually gave up trying to do something different with ideas brought from abroad, and got a job as a driver instead: "I came from Norway with the wish to do something, but no, you need too much money to do something in Romania and no one guarantees you anything, it's too risky" (02.09.2020, informant 31).

Regardless of whether they stay in Romania or not, some of my participants thought it was impossible to make changes in Romania, because even people who succeeded in Romania have been making big compromises in order to do so. Those who come to Romania and want to make a difference are being precluded from doing so by colleagues, supervisors, and the interests of others: "Basically, if you want to make a difference in Romania, you have to build something of your own and come up with investments so big that you can go clean from head to toe, making absolutely no compromise. You are bound by state institutions, and in state institutions are the most corrupt people" (02,11.2020, informant 35).

**FAMILY AND CHILD WELFARE**

Upon return Romanians experienced various challenges, and in a few cases families that had children returned at different time periods because of certain aspects that did not allow them to move home all together. Their subjective experiences and attempts to readapt to their home communities included the wish to ensure a smooth return for all family members. Families with children reaffirmed their social standing by opting for private schools. Parents choose a private education for their children in Romania because they relate it with education from the Norwegian public system. Romanians said that child's education is very different in Norway because children are being raised independently from a young age. One returnee thought that anthropologically speaking, it is very strange for an Eastern European to understand Norwegian society and their family system.

In Romania the culture is different, and so is the child's education. Many do not know how to set limits in the help they give to their children, and feel obliged to help them until late in their adult lives. In the opinion of Romanian returnees, this prevents the child's development and independence, and has repercussions later on, when parents encounter difficulties in imposing themselves. Returnees also remarked that in the Romanian culture of bringing up a child it is normal that parents scold children when they think it is necessary, while Norwegian law does not allow parents to do so. The participants who are also parents said that they bring up their children based on the Norwegian mindset, fact which is shocking and eye-opening for non-migrants:

> These new generations, these tiny, tiny people that are raised in a way which is the same unhealthy and unthinkable as our generation, is one of the biggest problems in Romania. I am breaking the cycle here (in Romania) very consciously, very strongly, very determined, but this is just one child and one family and most of the

other families in Romania are going down the same path. This society is going to be perpetuated again and again. But we know that we bring something better to Romania from Norway, so it is very tricky, we come home to a place where child raising is not as good as there. (11.08.2020, informant 2)

Romanians noticed that Norway offered better conditions for parents than Romania, regarding the medical system and public transportation. However, several returnees mentioned that Child protection is a bit different in the Norwegian culture. They believe that Norway sees children as state property, and said that they felt threatened by losing their children: "'Barnevernet' is a big minus in their system. Foreigners are targeted because the internal government has no knowledge of cultural, educational and mental differences. A big minus is that they consider that only in their own way and that only as they know it must be done, from what I read. They know better than everyone else, they don't listen to others, and they don't want to know what it is like elsewhere" (27.08.2020, informant 21).

Another participant said that before deciding to return, he also considered reuniting his family in Norway, but that was during the period with Botnariu family, which had their children taken away by the Norwegian Child protection, and their case discouraged him to make long term plans for him and his family to live in Norway. Two more participants left Norway from the same fear of losing their child, after understanding that all the speculations on the topic were true. Although the child welfare service did nothing to them, they became anxious about continuing to live in Norway after hearing many negative things from friends, such as being under close observation for a year because they shook the child. One participant said that not knowing the Norwegian laws and not knowing what to do in her relationship with her child, were also reasons that weighed her decision to return with the child to Romania.

These participants said that they were afraid of unforeseen situations, as sometimes children misunderstand and tell stories at kindergarten or school: "I alone could not live with this, that abuse is made on the basis of a misunderstanding, especially as my children say crazy things. I couldn't come to terms with this, to live with the stress that if something were to happen, I could lose my children" (26.08.2020, informant 19). One of the three participants that returned home because of Norwegian Child protection, also mentioned disagreeing with the Norwegian mentality of raising children. A few others brought up the Norwegian Child protection in the interviews, but not particularly as their main reason for return. One other participant thought that too much emphasis was being put on child protection, when there are other vices that might affect children as

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well: "Alcoholism wreaks havoc and is not given as much emphasis as not giving the child a slap" (27.08.2020, informant 21).

The influence of Norwegian children on the Romanian ones has also been a familial reason for deciding to return home. One returnee said that his child started to become depressed in Norway, after having problems integrating. Two other participants noticed that their children changed completely after returning to Romania, that they were much more relaxed and much happier because they saw their family every day. Another participant was concerned with the education that his children would have received in Norway: "It didn't have to be like in our country, where it is stricter, but somehow they need a balance too, because they seem to be allowed too much, and I was shocked by their freedom, sexuality and drugs" (26.08.2020, informant 19).

## IDEAS BORROWED FROM NORWEGIAN CHILD EDUCATION

In Norway children learn at a more independent pace, and for this reason one participant believed that parents who have the opportunity to stay in Norway and have their children go to school there, are offering their children the support to be educated differently in a system that can help them achieve more in life. The Norwegian mentality gives children freedom of choice and treats them as adults: "In Norway, children are autonomous, they are young adults, they are raised differently" (11.08.2020, informant 1). Some of my participants remarked that there is not so much discrepancy between pupils or students and teachers or professors in the Norwegian educational model, which does not imply punishment or a low grade if children or students have a bad day at school. Romanians noted that the educational system in Norway is much simpler than in Romania, where the curriculum is much richer. However, if a line were to be drawn, Romanian children are not more or better educated than Norwegian children. One of the problems in Romanian education is that it introduces subjects that children read only in order to receive grades, and not based on their interests: "Because we learn many things by force, we never like them, and we are left with absolutely nothing" (03.09.2020, informant 32).

Several parents who returned to Romania inspired co-workers, friends, neighbours and other persons from their local community regarding child upbringing. One informant said that she managed to bring to Romania the teaching methodology from Norway, where she applies a method, follows the results, and then gives feedback, but with solutions. However, the informant believed that this change cannot be brought by a single

person. As a change brought in her community, one of the returnees went against the Romanian custom of keeping her children in the house during bad weather in order to prevent them from getting sick. She has been criticised for being too indulgent in these aspects of raising children, but has tried to transfer these ideas inspired from the Norwegian mindset to her friends as well, and influence Romanian culture.

Nine returnees believed that their experience from Norway as parents made a difference at home. They believed that there is potential, because they changed the open-minded people and influenced the attitude towards children: "I might not go back (to Norway) ever, but the language will not fade and the experiences and the landscape will not, so I am keeping Norway alive in this small family by raising my child in a way I have seen and experienced there and ultimately this, what I carry within is going to inevitably change people around me" (11.08.2020, informant 2). However, they noticed that especially in their immediate surroundings, this seemed strange. Although some of these participants have been told that they were too patient or too indulgent with their children, they stand for their own culture when it comes to pedagogy and early child development. One of these nine participants had been a member of FAU (The Parents' Council's working committee), and three had been working in kindergarten and school in Norway, thus have seen a different educational model which they apply in the first years of child upbringing: "We don't just hit or discard them (children), that is the most obvious to me. My child and my friends' children grow up differently because of this" (11.08.2020, informant 2).

One participant was able to focus on important aspects of children's education development while working at a Romanian institution that verifies the compliance with the operating standards of the Romanian education system. She tried through various initiatives to transfer what she considered to be positive from Norwegian education, and that could influence the local community: "It is not the paper that is the basis, but what is applied to classes or how it is applied. This is what I wanted to convey, the fact that we need to put more emphasis on certain aspects that are directly related to children or people, and less related to bureaucracy, which in Norway is brief" (03.09.2020, informant 32). She believed that by knowing exactly where to put more or less emphasis, and by applying the methodology she experienced in the Norwegian school system, one with fewer procedures, her input brought development among the people that she worked with: "Maybe there are people who copy positive things, and I hope I managed to do this in a

positive way, not only for children but also among friends and colleagues" (03.09.2020, informant 32).

One returnee brought a changing note to the organisational topics discussed at the kindergarten meetings, by introducing topics related to education and counselling with the parents. Another participant expressed her point of view in her local community when she had been criticised for returning to work when her child was seven months old. Because in Romania a mother stays at home with the child for two years, her actions have not been well received. She said that returning to work and socialising helped her a lot, and that her local community needed to hear more about a different perspective, a Norwegian one: "I can be a mother, but I can also be a woman first and foremost" (11.08.2020, informant 3).

Another returnee, also a mother, experienced that, while in Norway her child integrated well and interacted with many Norwegians, after returning to Romania she had to change three kindergartens and two schools for her daughter to adapt. Because Norwegian education and child upbringing had positively impacted her child, she continued to let her explore, experiment, discover, and be herself. As a result, children surrounded her daughter and wanted to spend time with her, and this eventually created change around her: "She was raised differently and I believe that the experience in Norway helped her a lot, but also me as a mother. I raise and educate my child differently from the Romanians and I think that Romanians like the Norwegian style of educating a child, but they are reserved" (11.08.2020, informant 1). The fact that her child did not adapt to kindergarten and school motivated her to study and pursue a job in the private education system since she returned to Romania. She considers that she applied in her method of teaching what she saw and learned in Norway. Although returnees who were also mothers borrowed many ideas from the Norwegian mentality of parenting and attempted to bring an alternative educational model to Romania, they were not interested in coming back to Norway.

**SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGES**

Romanian returnees have brought changes to their home societies in a myriad of ways. They borrowed from the attitude of Norwegians what they thought could be included in the civic spirit of Romanians and applied it in their local community by the power of example. The way Romanians were greeted at work in Norway helped them maintain a positive attitude and be appreciated in their daily working life upon return.

Romanian migrants noticed a change in the interactions they had since they returned to Romania, compared to 10-15 years ago. Not in all areas, not with all people and in all departments of public administration, but they saw an overall change for the better. However, they still experience inappropriate attitude from public relations workers, and some returnees try to make a change by calmly explaining that it is their job to be polite and helpful: "Each of us can bring our contribution by personal example to the community we are in, we may not be able to change the world on our own, but if each of us brings something good and manifests it, it will help us to be better" (24-25.08.2020, informant 12).

Most returnees tried to bring change by giving examples to their compatriots from how the administration works in Norway, and how digitised the country is. One informant said that in Romania there are many people who unfortunately seem to be 'brainwashed' by some politicians, with whom they keep voting, and he tried to change their political views for the better. Only by showing them examples, bringing up his experiences, by exposing his point of view, and without necessarily wanting to, he also succeeded in making a change in his parents' perception, which he once considered outdated or wrong. He enjoys seeing that also his friends have slightly changed, that they are more open: "I think that little by little, if everyone from diaspora, at least when we come to the country, we would try to be more open with our closed ones, I think in time we would bring change" (24.08.2020, informant 11).

Romanian returnees help their community with recycling, a process which has been adopted by Romanian culture, and teach their children to keep the community clean: "Because I saw how it was there (in Norway) and I liked it. And why not do it here as well? If the world is the way it is, you have to be different, to lead by example" (26.08.2020, informant 19). Romanian migrants have seen a different way of thinking, a different social order, and try to bring change through the stories they share about Norway in their local communities upon return. One person is called 'the Norwegian' in the company where he works, because of his background: "My friends are amazed and like what I tell them about my experience in Norway, and maybe they come up with ideas about what they can do in their career, somehow innovative" (26-27.08.2020, informant 18).

Returnees apply in their personal life many things they learned from Norway, the work environment, and in the social context. One participant mentioned that he encourages the limitation of his own consumption of any kind, the idea of communication

in the professional area, and of exchanging feedback. He strongly promotes the openness to try new things, and that people should not generalise things, related to certain circumstances, groups of people. He has brought into discussion many times the way people approach things in Romania, as Romanians tend to generalise, to highlight the negative parts, and to complain or be slightly negative in certain situations. He also believes that trust must be granted to some extent even in Romania, where people have a prominent lack of trust.

As a development brought to the working environment of Romania, one participant managed to bring to the University of Galați a naval analysis software from the company he worked for in Norway at a very low price with a one-year license, which had not been done for some time at university. He further became a mentor for inexperienced people, such as undergraduates and masterants. In the company he opened after his return from Norway, he adopted a flat policy of no hierarchy, aiming to do something different than the rest of the companies in Romania:

> Basically I offered subscriptions to the gym, I left the schedule flexible, you don't have to be at the office at 7 o'clock, you don't have to leave at 5 o'clock, you can take your lunch break when you want, not when I tell you, there are many benefits of flexibility that not many companies or corporations in Romania have. Only recently or just hit by the pandemic have many companies implemented work-from-home systems. We've had this thing since November 2017. We gave them money to buy their bikes if they came to the office by bike, so they wouldn't come by car. I paid for their public transportation if they subscribed, so they wouldn't come by car, to contribute to saving the planet. (25.08.2020, informant 14)

In his profession in education, another returnee started a few programs that equipped four countryside schools with computers and tablets. When he started teaching, he also tried to apply things that he learned in Norway, such as using less ranks and a flat educational strategy. His classes were very open, allowing his students' parents to assist his classes. With the help of the members of the Reunion of Romanians in Norway, he managed to raise funds and bought tablets, received phones, donations of laptops from Belgium, from friends and colleagues, and he also funded and equipped with the necessary appliances a school for Roma pupils where he was a professor.

My participants said that they employ in Romania certain values that they acquired in Norway, such as punctuality, team spirit, maintaining a high degree of quality in completing a task, being sociable, curiosity to share knowledge with other people, humanity, patience, perseverance, education, and respect for norms and laws. Some of the sociocultural characteristics that Romanians brought from Norway was to set aside the

common feeling of fear from Romania, the fear of failing, the fear of saying something and then of being judged. Their openness to situations, to people, and the attribute of being honest after being a migrant in Norway, has brought overall change to society: "Given that I have the courage to be a direct diplomat, I think it helps people to feel more comfortable with themselves" (27.08.2020, informant 23).

Returnees that have been discriminated against in Norway don't treat things with a typical Romanian mentality anymore. They said that they could not discriminate in the future, they empathise, and drive more prudently and civilly. Most returnees hoped they inspired Romanians to be calmer and a few said that they tried to take from Norwegian culture and bring home the openness to embrace multiethnicity and multiculturalism. My participants became more tolerant after spending time in Norway with people who belonged to different minorities, to different environments and adaptation strategies, and set out to be different after their return to Romania. That was to help people, to be less arrogant, to have more humility, to seek a permanent state of well-being.

Two returnees became more eager to get involved in the community and get things done themselves, and learned to value education more. They continued their studies upon return because they needed the intellectual stimuli that Norway offered them. One returnee teaches Norwegian language as a change, and lectures also a course in culture and civilization about Norway. She introduces Romanian students to Norwegian culture and society, by offering them information which is not easy to find: "Many students ask me about administrative matters, about school, and I tell them, I help them with information or advice, or I tell them where to go, I tell them what possibilities they have. Following the course, many students decide to go to Norway to study or at least to study Norwegian language in Cluj, which they make use of" (26-27.08.2020, informant 18). After learning Norwegian language, another participant wants to fulfil her dream of becoming a legalised interpreter of Norwegian: "I still want a connection with Norway in some form. If my children want to go to Norway, I encourage them. I really want to teach people in my local community, to show my colleagues things from there (Norway) that we can change" (27.08.2020, informant 24).

One more returnee said that he would try not to prohibit his children from travelling, as he liked about Norwegians that they are encouraged to travel when they are young, to see other cultures and other civilizations before they get married and start a family. Some interviewers were members of certain social, cultural or national organisations or associations, wishing to continuously develop themselves, maintain

transnational relationships, and take part in a change. One returnee joined a political party in Romania that resembles the way politics are done in Norway. One department of the party involves the diaspora, where my participant would volunteer and keep in touch with other Romanians from the same party, in order to guide, help, and advise them in their possible desire to repatriate: "There are quite a few Romanians who are slightly undecided, or who are probably afraid of the shock of returning home, and through the experience that I and others who have repatriated and managed to reintegrate into Romania accumulated, we can guide other Romanians who want to repatriate as well" (24.08.2020, informant 11).

In terms of sociocultural development, two returnees evolved and changed the way they saw interpersonal relationships, and one informant declared to have brought innovation and modernization in the way one presents and promotes himself in the art field:

> I opened an art centre here, and doing previous research, I saw the level of promotion of kindergartens, schools, after schools and I did an upgrade. Everything I do as promotional and presentation materials is at a professional level. And I see now and I'm glad about it, that they all shook a little and started to plagiarise a little, but that doesn't bother me because it's a source of inspiration, I know that I inspire people, and I am not afraid of competition. I took this from Norway as well, there's room under the sun for everyone. (27.08.2020, informant 23)

I explored herein the transnational mobility of Romanian migrants with a focus on the events that motivated them to leave the country and live abroad for longer or shorter periods of time. The analysis is based on the premise that upon return, Romanian migrants become agents of change who engage with their localities of origin, and contribute to locally unfolding processes of social change.

In the next chapter the analysis begins by outlining my key findings, and subsequently, a discussion is provided, in which I interpret and explain my results. This is followed by an outline of my results with reference to existing debates on the topic. I discuss how my arguments address the knowledge gaps in the literature and how they contribute to the larger discourse. I have organised my empirical discussion based on a thorough distinction between the changes that have taken place for returnees as individuals, and their power to effect real change in society. This analysis unveils the motivations, challenges and outcomes that migration involves for Romanians, and the degree to which returnees transfer their knowledge, ideas, and practices in the scope of contributing to sociocultural change.

# 5. Discussion and Analysis

## 5.1 Main Argument

Migration has had an adverse social and cultural impact on Romanian migrants, and return has been their opportunity to apply the changes that they consider significative in their home country and more specifically, in their home communities. By analysing the circumstances that triggered these changes, this study has identified the cause and the impact of their migration and return processes, and looked at what sociocultural development means for Romanians. In the presentation of my results I have considered the data that worked best to illustrate my arguments, such as opposite opinions and negative instances, as well as extreme viewpoints. The findings of this study reveal to what extent Romanian returnees have reintegrated back home, and grasp the changes that they brought to the sociocultural realm in their origin societies. My analysis determines three major findings, which are being discussed in turn.

The first key finding is that the most significant impacts were felt on a personal level by Romanian returnees, through the changes that occurred during their experience in Norway. When moving to Norway, Romanians tried to adapt to their host society, by learning the Norwegian language, and by respecting the local customs. This migrational experience has had positive effects for Romanian migrants, through the improvement that the knowledge gained abroad has brought to their lives, and through the high level of trust they have gained over their community, or the society as a whole. During their migratory journey in Norway, Romanians experienced change in mentality, perceptions, and identities. Their positive Norwegian experience encouraged them to change by introducing them to a pattern of life whose aspects they admired. For many of the interviewed Romanian returnees, the time spent in Norway represented a developmental period for their educational knowledge, and also for their cultural and social perspectives. Social remittances have had a strong influence in the life of Romanian migrants, and the changes can be seen in their lifestyles, the actions they take, the decisions they make, and the identities they develop.

My findings illustrate that social remittances are not superficial, and that through their lived experiences, Romanian returnees internalized them first before disseminating them to their family and in their social environments. Romanians changed their attitudes, behaviour, values and expectations, and underwent changes which reflected their

lifestyles and their new visions of what development entailed. They matured and learned how to work transnationally, and following that, they brought change initiatives at a local level, as their transnational identities have strong spatial, social, and cultural connotations. They mentioned that they have created social relations with Norwegians and with other people from all over the world that they met in Norway, with whom they maintain strong transnational links even after returning to Romania. The effects of their transnational identities are often noticed when returnees begin disseminating all the knowledge they have to share in their family and in their social environment. As a result, Romanian returnees have the power to culturally transform their local societies by the instrumentality of their changed cognitive frameworks and values.

The second key finding is that the prevalence of social remittances is dependent partially on the motivation of returnees to transfer their knowledge, ideas, and practices with the purpose of contributing to local social and cultural development, and in part on how their societies of origin receive the resources they attempt to transmit and culturally diffuse. My results shed light on how Romanian returnees saw their host society, how they perceived Norwegians as individuals, and which aspects of their culture they attempted to integrate into the Romanian mentality in order to bring change in their home societies. Norway changed Romanian migrants for the better, and most of them would like to bring change to their cities, hometowns and country if they could. Romanians praised the calm and civilised lifestyle of Norwegians, and overcame the preconceptions they had about them. They embraced the approach of Norwegians toward religion even if it did not align with Romanians beliefs, and learned from them to accept other nationalities, ethnies and sexual orientations.

The agents to bring change and modernity in the societies of origin are considered by the development theory to be returning migrants, but who unfortunately encounter difficulties in exercising their innovative potential in Romanian local societies, when local conditions present hindrances in the transfer of social remittances because of certain social interests. Accordingly, while analysing the changes that migrants bring to their home communities after their return, it emerged that their ability to remit is limited in scope, and that migrants' transnational nature is misunderstood in their social environment, and particularly at their working places. Other reasons for which Romanian returnees encounter barriers in transferring knowledge is because locals from their social environments have in general different value systems than theirs, and they view these new perspectives and drive for creating change as elements that would alienate their

culture. Non-migrants seem to resist the norms and practices that returning migrants try to disseminate because they are often set in their ways, but also because the ideas and practices which are to be adopted are considered too innovative. The contextual factors such as local elites, bureaucracy and laws, as well as the interplay of structures and agency reflecting different interpretations of a meaningful life have also been a hindrance in changing long-established values and views.

The third key finding is that Romania, as an emigration society, is traditional, and has been slow to accept change, but that repatriated Romanians maintain a confident attitude regarding the potential that their skills and knowledge confer them in exerting their influence over certain cultural aspects in the spheres of work and social relationships. My findings show that return migration could actually bring regional development for the local societies of Romania, but its potential depends on local conditions and the predilection of local society to accept change. Although returnees are innovation seekers, we have seen that they fail in bringing about innovation when their new ideas clash with the locals' traditional ways of thinking. Most returnees do not feel that their views align with the local culture anymore and that Romania, as an emigration society, has traditionally been slow in accepting change. Romanian returnees knew what returning to Romania involved, that there were differences between how they got accustomed to living in Norway, how they redefined themselves as individuals, and what it meant to live again in Romania. But thinking about it was different than putting it into action and having to accept these differences every day. My participants described that coming back from a different culture and imagining they would change something was like a water drop falling on a rock. One single person can only bring partial change in a community, and although it would take a very long time, water would eventually alter the rock, because water is more powerful than rock, but it has to keep dripping. So it would take a lot of time and a lot of dripping before one could change things substantially.

Nevertheless, an insight of my findings is that returnees understood change, and it is important to acknowledge those who did not consciously enact change, but would change many aspects of their home communities in a more receptive Romanian society. When the locals are reserved in accepting the innovative ideas brought by returnees, these ideas and prospects of influencing local behaviour are instead preserved as individual resources with the intention to be put into application later in time. I argue that these returnees also constitute huge potential for future development in Romania. In terms of mentality, the changes that migration brought for some of my participants, such as

wanting to invest in themself, using their free time more consciously, or emphasising certain aspects that mattered to them, have not been seen in a positive way, precisely because Romanians are more traditional. However, most of my participants returned to communities that are less traditional than they used to be, which could mean higher chances to implement change among locals. Romanian returnees experienced that they re-adopted deep-rooted dispositions that they were accustomed to in the Romanian society prior to their migration, and that only some of them were able to generate major changes. However, through the prism of their transnational identities, my participants highly value certain aspects of life and society in both Romania and Norway, and overcome pre-existing boundaries and established preconceptions in society. Even if only a small part of the locals embraces the ideas and the cultural values that migrants bring home, the changes taking place locally signify important change overall.

My research findings prove that Romanian society can change if its members are open to new ideas, and if returnees' wish to disseminate their knowledge is strong enough. In a broader spectrum of ideas, returnees have contributed to very diversified and individualised sociocultural changes in their local societies, such as improvements of various service standards, better education, more openness in the working environment, as well as specific practices related to more individual freedom, more cultural diversity and more respect for the law. The fact that my research project was based on participants who have returned both in small localities and in big cities, offered a great insight into understanding how migration-driven social change occurs both in places which have lower levels of migration, and in bigger cities which are exposed to other influential factors. All returnees that participated in this thesis acknowledged that their migrational experience has increased their cultural and social capital, and thereby their potential to become agents of local change. Therefore, returnees make their mark on the human dimension through the abilities and skills they acquire as individuals, which they consider to be the most valuable contribution to change brought to their country of origin.

My findings show overall that Romanian returnees contribute more to development than the research believes they can, but that it is to a small extent that migrants introduce their new ideas and broader experience into their home communities after their return. My data proves nonetheless that returnees remain positive that their changed identities would eventually produce change also in the ideas, customs and social behaviour of their home communities. Social interactions of their daily life are the perfect conjuncture for migrants to share aspects of their experiences abroad which can influence

or change, over time, the interests, values, ideas, and mentalities of their home societies. Albeit at a slow pace, Romanian returnees can positively influence the occurrence of growth and social change in their local communities, supporting the development and dissemination of positive social remittances through their relationships with non-migrants.

## 5.2 Discussion of the Findings

### 5.2.1 Norwegian Experience is Unique for Romanian Migrants

**SAMPLE BACKGROUND**

Andrén and Roman (2016) and Anghel et al. (2016) discussed how most Romanian migrants in Europe after 2007 were young, that one in two was married, and that the average age of Romanian migrants registered in 2010 was 34.6 years. In 2016, Anghel et al. estimated that returnees tended to be migrants over the age of 45. The results based on my sample show that the average age of Romanians at emigration was 28.1 years, which makes the average age of the participants registered for this research to be 34.1 years. Their average age in 2020, after being returned to Romania for an average of 2.1 years, was 36 years. These findings prove that Romanians emigrate nowadays at a younger age than before. In terms of marital status, from 35 people, 14 were married, rates which are close with the dates from previous research.

Studies previously made on Romanian migrants suggest that they are educated people, based on data showing that a quarter of the migrants registered in 2003 had completed tertiary education, as Anghel et al. (2016), Anghel and Cosciug (2018), and Bărbulescu et al. (2019) asserted, and that two out of three Romanian migrants in Europe after 2007 had lower secondary education, as Andrén and Roman (2016) affirmed. My results indicate that more than half of the participants in this research project have higher education, and that one third of my participants continued their studies after returning. These new insights indicate that the new return migration wave presents for Romania higher educated returnees. For many of the interviewed Romanian returnees, the time spent in Norway represented a developmental period for their educational knowledge and also for their life experiences and changes at the individual level. Nevertheless, life took some of these participants on other paths, and they have not been given the chance to develop an activity in the field in which they obtained education.

**MIGRATION STATUS**

Migration influences and changes people's visions in many ways, but half of the participants in this project were not sceptical about emigrating again, as they believed that from a journey one can always learn. Most of the Romanians that travelled abroad chose to be in Romania because they wanted to, and did not necessarily plan to leave Romania. They did not want to make plans for the future anymore, they either wanted to live the moment instead, to focus on discovering themselves and develop at a personal level, or they prioritised their family. However, a large number of returnees left room to migrate again. Some would re-emigrate for a secure job that would allow them to take their family with them, or to support themselves financially, in Norway, or in another country. Other participants felt that their heart would always belong to Romania, but showed a strong wish of living in Norway. Most of my participants did not plan to move back to Norway, and portrayed themselves as permanent returnees.

**REASONS FOR MIGRATION**

The assumption of Ambrosini et al. (2015) that having network connections significantly increases the possibility that Romanians would migrate has been confirmed by my participants. Some informants said that they never emigrated with the idea of settling in the host country, but more with the idea of being professional emigrants. Even though a part of the interviewed returnees didn't want to leave their country, and went to Norway out of the necessity to stabilise themselves economically, once they got there, they were pleasantly surprised with the Norwegian society and culture, and felt that they have been given a chance to change certain aspects. I have mentioned in my findings the locations in Norway where my participants lived for the purpose of better understanding why Romanian migrants cluster in certain areas, and to see how many of them gathered in the same settlements and how many lived scattered in certain places.

**OVERALL EXPERIENCE IN NORWAY**

Once they returned to Romania, my participants saw things more clearly, they saw that Romania was the same, that few things changed for the better, many for the worse, they noticed that people are in a total alert, running for their existence, for material well-being. Norway changed Romanian migrants a great deal, and maybe because they liked it so much, it was so difficult for them to accept the Romanian mentality upon return. Some made some money in Norway, some met people they stayed friends with, while some others learned one or more foreign languages. A few interviewees had a negative overall

experience, but the majority declared that their positive Norwegian experience enriched their lives and encouraged them to change, by offering them a model of life whose aspects they admired.

## MIGRANTS IN NORWAY, NOW RETURNEES IN ROMANIA

Migrants who intended to emigrate temporarily set certain targets, economically, educationally, or professionally, and returned happily home after reaching them, while those who intended to emigrate permanently but decided to return home, have either been forced by certain circumstances, or have not adapted to the lifestyle of Norway. Examples of forcing circumstances have been family reasons, limited access to studies, or the impossibility to support oneself financially longer in the host country. Participants who returned due to climate mostly lived in the arctic or most-northern part of Norway, and in the end the darkness became too challenging for them. Participants who gave education as a return reason, returned to Romania either to continue with a doctorate or because they wanted to progress in terms of education, or personal development in that regard. Some participants visited family in Romania, and caught at home during the pandemic, decided to repatriate.

Job loss has been connected for some of the returnees with no job stability due to seasonal work, or with the 2014 crisis in the oil industry. Those who had to leave Norway for economic reasons said that the financial situation and expensive rent and life in general made them give up living in Norway. Some returnees chose to repatriate in their original hometowns, while others decided to move to other cities which offered them higher perspectives. Returnees declared that they realised that in order to bring about change in their home societies, they have either to agree and ally with local power groups or to try implementing their new objectives in a different and bigger city. Most informants did not leave Norway out of necessity, nor with regret, nor with great joy. Returning has been a transition, a change, with a little insecurity about the decision they made. Despite the Romanian prejudices that their conationals returned home because they failed in Norway, my results indicate that for most of my participants, returning has been a very conscious and deliberate choice.

## UNCERTAINTY OF WANTING TO LIVE IN ROMANIA

In line with previous literature (Kilinc and King 2019), my analysis shows that return is not a finished project, but an ongoing process with multiple trajectories. Returning home after an extended period in Norway has been a brave decision for

Romanians, but my findings reveal that if the new skills and ideas that they acquired abroad are not appreciated in their home societies, Romanian returnees are willing to emigrate again. My results show a high uncertainty of wanting to live in Romania among returnees, after they came to understand that their local society is slow in accepting change. Some of them intended to stay in Romania, but changed their mind gradually, either because they felt unsuccessfully reintegrated at home, because they have not managed to create a socially acceptable livelihood for themselves upon return due to the clashes between Romanian mentality and their new and changed transnational identities, or because they had no intention to bring change to the places where they live in Romania, and would emigrate again for personal reasons. My results indicate that the less influential Romanian returnees are in their local society, the more likely they are to plan a re-emigration.

### 5.2.2 Norwegian Culture is Present in Romanian Society

## CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION

The findings of this research show that Romanians who migrated to Norway are of several categories. Firstly, there is the category of people who found a better environment in which to live, but unfortunately, they live with the same Romanian culture, an aspect that revolves around the level of education, but also openness to change. Secondly, there are immigrants interested in change, but uninterested in making friendships with Norwegians, neither doing social activities only to be accepted in a community. As a result, these returnees believed that they had zero adaptation to Norwegian society and culture. Furthermore, there are informants who mentioned that they did not integrate in any way, they followed a certain economic purpose, worked a lot, did not socialise much, but liked it in Norway. Lastly, there is also the category of migrants that did not feel at all like immigrants in Norway and adapted very well to their host society.

Overall, Romanians experienced warmth from individual people while in Norway, but not in the society. As a cultural dimension, they did not feel directly offended or aggressed in any way, but returnees said that state institutions in Norway can be aggressive to a certain degree with foreigners:

> They really did the calculation for me, and before I started to sign, a lady who was taking care of my case, called me in the office and said to me 'sign this paper and you can go to Romania and stay at home for 12 months and learn Norwegian

online and take classes and have absolutely no problem'. And I was delighted with that, but it seemed a little strange that I had to leave the great hall and go into the office and receive a paper under the table, given that I did not understand Norwegian, I had one year there. And I said, 'I want to take this paper and go with it to a lawyer'. She didn't want to give me the paper, and she tore it. From here you can conclude what kind of paper that was and what I was going to sign. In Norway, in 2014. (02.11.2020, informant 35)

The impact was great for many Romanians when they came to Norway, where they found more civilised people and a simpler bureaucracy. Cultural and social adaptation in Norway has been difficult for the participants who did not speak English nor Norwegian. Some participants were afraid that they would not be able to learn the language, but after taking classes, they learned Norwegian very quickly. Romanians embraced the Norwegian language and practices, and declared that understanding and speaking Norwegian facilitated the process of adapting to and integrating into Norwegian society. Several returnees felt that adapting socially and culturally to Norway was a steep learning curve, a good one, and although it was very difficult, it was very formative and it changed them for the better: "It was a hard process which left its marks whatever, you never change back, you always stay who you have become" (11.08.2020, informant 2).

## RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Romanian returnees didn't like that Norwegians were associating them with gipsies in a negative way, and some felt that they had to explain to Norwegians the difference between Romanians and gipsies just to elucidate the confusion. This confusion brought sadness among Romanians, for being a common example of a stereotype linked to the nature of the word 'gipsy'. Gipsies are also called Romanies, a reason for which people may confuse Romanians and Romanies. Romanian returnees also considered that a big mistake of Norwegians who criticised them was an unfounded generalisation that made them reluctant to a large majority of Romanians. Although they respected Norwegian's decision to withdraw, they believed that they should think that many Romanians are people with high qualities, who work honestly, are worthy of all admiration, and do not deserve being discriminated against.

## HELP RECEIVED

Most Romanian returnees said that they met closed doors as migrants in Norway, but the collective warmth that they felt helped them overcome certain negativism around them or certain inappropriate comments. These people did not feel demoralised, they kept developing themselves, as they believed that by closing one door, they entered another.

Returnees have been particularly impressed by the quality of the Norwegian medical system and the help they have received in terms of health services. Most participants received consultancy regarding papers and assistance from their Norwegian work colleagues, and created ties with Romanians in transnational spaces. However, a few returnees mentioned to have received little help and moral support from Norwegian friends, and that their achievements resulted from hard individual work.

## CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

Migrant transnationalism scholars such as Schiller et al. (1992) and Cassarino (2004) emphasised migrants' identification with multiple nationalities and cultures, which they perceive as hybridised identities resulting from migrants' cross-border mobility. The first distinction that my findings show is that returnees are in point of fact caught between two worlds, as many of them added. My results also confirm that Romanians are transnational migrants who participated in various activities in Norway, migrants that changed their national identities and created new ones. The second distinction I analyse is the attitude of Romanians towards culture, and what tradition means. On the valuable side that still exists in a smaller niche, Romanians appreciate their heritage, but do not value it and do not strive to take it further, in comparison with people in Norway who are proud to wear the national costume and to be Norwegian. Some are no longer proud to be Romanians.

Racism is less prominent in Norway than in Romania, because Norwegians have respect for others, they do not differentiate people regarding their skin colour, and they accept minorities. Romanians saw in Norway that people don't judge each other, as Romanians do. They liked this aspect and learned to be more reserved. Besides, Romanians have a way of seeing interhuman relations as two-dimensional, while in Norway, because the relations are much more superficial between people, they keep everything at a much more polite and decent level. These findings confirm Aase (2021)'s statement that Norway as a migration destination, is considered to have a successful egalitarian value system.

## PROBLEMS AT WORKPLACE

Romanian returnees are striving for a work environment that supports their ambitions, and helps them to bring behavioural change, and to transform cultural norms and values. However, they are considered a problem because they want to introduce new ideas, thus change and transition represent complication. Returnees have to impose the

innovative ideas that they bring forward to share against the strict structures predominant in their working environment. My respondents said that their knowledge of multiple languages, cultures and lifestyles gave them an advantage upon return in Romania, and used this for improving their lives, and for contributing to the development of the local social environment. However, a great number of migrants felt that their transnational nature was misunderstood in their social environment, and particularly at their working places. My respondents sensed reactions of envy and judgement from their co-workers, and considered it difficult to change people with opposite views' way of thinking. These results build on existing evidence that Kilinc and King (2019) have highlighted in their research. Romanians have also felt forced to resign when they experienced that they were morally discriminated against, and that their rights were not being respected at work, but also as a reaction to the ongoing unfavourable working conditions from home, attempting in this way to raise awareness and maintain a strong individual profile.

## INDIVIDUAL- AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

My results shed light on how Romanian returnees saw their host society, how they perceived Norwegians as individuals, and which aspects of their culture they attempted to integrate into the Romanian mentality in order to bring change in their home societies. Some of my participants have been simple observers who did not explore Norwegian society, but instead adopted ideas and practices the way the others described it, and acquired only the necessary skills in order to deal with the challenges of their migratory journey. Several of my participants, however, have been active participants who fully interacted with people from Norway, and who have been conscious innovators intentionally searching for new things, because they wanted to advance as individuals and as society members. They combined the ideas and practices carried from home with the values and norms they saw and accepted in the host society, enriching their social and cultural portfolio.

Romanians praised the calm and civilized lifestyle of Norwegians, and overcame the preconceptions they had about them. They consider themselves lucky to have had the chance to live in such a civilised country, to benefit from a well-developed system, and see that their rights could be respected. Romanians who had a positive experience in Norway also said that the society of their host country inspired them to change the way they perceive, value, and administer time. This resulted in having a calmer temperament, and in setting less targets ahead of the day, as Boccagni and Decimo (2013) affirmed.

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### 5.2.3 Norwegian Mindset can Create Change in Romania

**BUSINESS IN ROMANIA**

  The two returnees exemplified in my findings were running businesses involved with diaspora and in close relationship with the Romanian Naval Architects Association. Romanian returnees invested their social capital in businesses which involve trade, such as imported second-hand cars, but also design of specialised vessels in a company operating in the maritime and offshore oil and gas field. This is an interesting aspect of social remittances that Anghel (2019) and Cosciug (2019) highlighted and my findings confirm, that returnees took advantage of the social networks, foreign language and cultural skills acquired abroad in actively promoting their businesses via frequent international visits and arranged exchange programmes with different groups of people they have met through their migration experiences. These cultural transfers introduced changes in the way returnees run businesses and organisations. The findings herein provide a new insight into the contribution of these returnees to the sociocultural transformations of local societies through the companies they administrate.

**GAINS FOR ROMANIAN RETURNEES**

  Once in Norway, new horizons opened up for some of my participants, more possibilities from a professional and personal point of view. As returnees, they were able to benefit from the skills they acquired in Norway, by being hired by multinational companies, and by making use of their language skills and cultural knowledge in their professional lives in Romania. In other narratives it has also been found that instead of investing in material things, my participants invested in themselves, in knowledge that they could apply in creating change with a different mindset. Norwegian mindset. Returnees attempt to apply and transmit to the social environment in Romania the knowledge which they acquired during their migration to Norway, as well as individual changes in behaviour, and cultural values and norms. Most returnees took from their migrational journey life experience and the fact that they learned to respect and treat people around them equally, regardless of their social position, level of education, background, or skin colour. They managed to take with them new cultural aspects that are related to one's vision of life, people, and a healthier way of thinking. They have also learned to appreciate their country more and their Romanian heritage after seeing how nationalists Norwegians are, and to see more clearly certain values that Romanians have.

Many of the interviewees became more empathetic and more understanding towards society, and have brought out the best version of themselves once they returned to Romania. Romanians learned to spend less time on material issues, more time on themselves, and gained confidence in what they could achieve. In addition to the experience of working with many different cultures, for Romanians it was also interesting to have the chance to travel all over Norway and see its beauty. My findings and the data presented herein contribute to a clearer understanding of how Romanian returnees acknowledged their gains as social capital that they culturally diffuse in their local communities through social exchanges with non-migrants.

## LIMITED CHANGE IN ROMANIA

The reasons that made Romanians emigrate in the first place have been the incentives that motivated them to contribute to improving the quality of life in their home societies upon return. This aspect has been highlighted by De Haas (2012) and Kandilige and Adiku (2019), and confirmed by my participants. Although many returnees have the motivation and the potential to bring change, they do not particularly do so because of the conservative society they return to. Romanian returnees found that they cannot push on local people their ideas, or the experiences gained abroad in order to gain acceptance at home. Returnees with low or no expectations of sociocultural changes limited themselves to accepting their social environment, and to creating a social surrounding which would suit their personal needs.

Other returnees acknowledged the roles of structure and agency, and said that migrants have limited capacity to overcome hindrances and potentially change a community. My participants said that if unless Romanian returnees have a high position, or work in politics, they could bring change to the local society using the mentality and their experience from Norway, and only by changing people one by one. These findings strengthen the assertion of Portes (2010), who believes that it is unlikely that the changes brought by migration have been able to generate major social change, as this would involve radical changes in the value system or in the society's class structure. Life in Romania is a continuous fight, and one needs a lot of time to make changes there. People react badly when someone is different, reproaching 'you are changed' 'you want too much', or 'nothing suits you': "I have the impression that the normal has become abnormal, that true values are no longer a virtue, that a person who has principles is no longer in high demand. Non-values lead now" (02.11.2020, informant 35).

**FAMILY AND CHILD WELFARE**

Romanian returnees have experienced in Norway a different mentality and culture in terms of family and child upbringing. In that regard, my findings contribute new insights into the experiences and reflections of my participants about how being parents of small children during their stay in Norway changed their cultural and social views. However, some of my informants thought that Norway has a too strict system regarding children, who are being regarded as state property. This aspect is seen as a minus by some Romanians, as they felt that it was easy to lose their children to the Norwegian Child Protection system, and that the fear of losing them drove them back home. Yet, other returnees viewed these differences as constructive and valuable guidance in creating a proactive parenting that helped them support their children in making the most of their potential, but also gave them independence.

**IDEAS BORROWED FROM NORWEGIAN EDUCATION**

Many of the returnee mothers reject the type of education practiced in Romania, and prefer the model of the Norwegian education, which focuses on the needs of children by placing decision-making processes and the discovery of individual learning requirements at the core of the carried-out activities. Due to the fact that the conventional social environment in the educational institutions from Romania does not offer these mothers the opportunity to transfer their pedagogical principles to their children, they search for a special context that would permit them to materialise their objectives. Along this vein, Romanian returnees make use of Norwegian teaching methods, exposing Romanian pupils to different ways of learning. Returning migrants have created a demand in Romania for non-traditional teaching methods, and seeked for teaching institutions that would match their new vision of education and learning for their children.

A few returnees decided to take additional education, and to enroll themselves in the teaching field. Returning migrants have also organised institutional and school exchanges between Romania and Norway, and started and ran a few programs in educational institutions, such as equipping schools with computers and tablets. Informants mentioned that the pedagogical methods in Romania are very rigid, and that the Romanian educational system indoctrinates children with unnecessary information. For these reasons, Romanian returnees applied positive aspects of the Norwegian educational system, which have been appreciated, and which led, respectively, to an increased value transformation in communities from Romania where migrants return.

**SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGES**

Migration has had an adverse social and cultural impact on Romanian migrants, and return has been their opportunity to apply the changes that they consider semnificative in their home country and more specifically, in their home communities. Non-migrants who are doing well in Romania look at returnees with admiration and are always curious to find out as much as possible about life in Norway. Several Romanians have brought change in mentality through the stories and the positive aspects of Norwegian society that they shared with conationals from their working environments. My findings align with Boccagni and Decimo (2013) and Lacroix (2017)'s affirmations that social interactions of returnees' daily life are the perfect conjuncture for them to share aspects of their experiences abroad, which can influence over time the interests, ideas, and values of their home societies. At a community level, the biggest sphere of influence is considered by my participants to be family, work environment, and friends. This goes in line with White and Grabowska (2019), who noted that social remittances are mostly transferred in the working- and family environments, although families are more predisposed to resist social remittances related to norms, beliefs and values when they feel pressure of acceptance.

At a more mundane level, the sociocultural changes brought to Romania belong to a pragmatic world, rather than to a utopian one. Returning from a country where the term 'bribe' does not exist, Romanians stopped paying money for services they have the right to receive. They intervene in society by helping people in need, and by highlighting when employees are not professional in their jobs, or when they are doing injustice and abuse of power. Romanian returnees are more attentive to the cleanliness of the surroundings because they liked it in Norway, they give more priority in traffic, drive more prudently, no longer judge people, and have higher expectations from Romanians and from people from their local communities to be more receptive in society. My participants have also acquired respect for nature, and are transmitting to their conationals the care for resources. Their experience in Norway has been helpful upon return, they gained knowledge on practical things, but also on cultural aspects, which they transmitted and applied at home, and which had an impact on other people. Although they had to start all over again when they returned to Romania, they felt that they have a lot of potential and an enriched résumé, with knowledge and a thirst to achieve things, at home, in the working environment, and in society as a whole.

## 5.3 Statement of Contribution to Knowledge

This study has provided details on the type of returnees, the reasons behind their actions, and how motivated they are to bring about change upon return, since "some returnees appear as actors of change, in specific social and institutional circumstances at home, whereas others do not" (Cassarino 2004, 254). With a focus on their reflections about how migration and passage of time changes their cultural and social views, I draw conclusions on how the concept of social change can be used in relation to patterns of local hierarchies, cultural differentiation, and broader processes of change experienced in a transition society such as Romania. By delving into the diverse experiences of 35 migrant returnees, the present thesis brings evidence that adds to the body of literature on migration, and contributes with new aspects on the cultural and social approach of development. This section creates an overview of these results, and how they confirm or challenge existing studies and research, as presented in the literature review.

My findings show that Romanians emigrate nowadays at a younger age than before, and that they are highly educated. However, these results challenge Anghel et al. (2016)'s estimations that Romanian returnees tended to be migrants with low qualifications, as besides educational training, my sample has extensive experience working in one or more career fields that require advanced skills. My findings confirm De Haas (2010) and Lacroix (2017)'s assertions that Romanian's reasons to migrate have been driven by the wish to make their aspirations reality, to evolve, to develop their social capacities, but also to sustain economically their families or to achieve certain personal economic goals. However, the results do not fit with Lacroix (2017)'s theory that people migrate to bring about success, money and show devotion to their home county. Romanian migrants who possessed certain qualifications migrated to Norway because their skills were better paid than at home, results which agree with the research of Ambrosini et al. (2015). While previous research has focused on the personal development of migrants, my results demonstrate that Romanians migrated especially for work-related reasons. They either went to Norway with pre-arranged job positions and contracts, either worked there to create a better financial situation for their families, or challenged themselves in finding a suitable job in Norway.

Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), as well as Lacroix (2017) discussed how the roles that migrants play in different societies may clash with each other, bringing contradictory expectations and situations difficult to handle. My results bring to the surface the

challenges that Romanian immigrants in Norway faced, and how the complexities of their transnational identities marked their migrational journey. They had to adapt to a new culture and to engage in transnational practices, such as social and cultural activities, while staying attached to Romanian tradition. Schiller et al. (1992) argued that transnational existence has been constructed by migrants coming from industrialised nations with increased labour migration, who felt vulnerable in the host societies and had difficulties in securing an economic, social and cultural foundation within their new settings. My findings support this affirmation, as my participants carried the print of Romanian history and culture while attempting to adapt to the Norwegian society.

Romanian returnees benefited as transmigrants from their transcultural capital, as the multiple identities that they developed by belonging to at least two societies have eased their integration and adaptation to the Norwegian environment. This has been mentioned by Schiller et al. (1992) and by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) in their papers. Migrants who emigrated previously, embraced without any hesitation everything they met, and managed to find a way to treat with ease or positivity everything that seemed an obstacle. However, my findings show that Romanians see differences in Norwegians' level of perceiving foreigners from 30 years ago and now, which has increased negatively over the years, with a higher degree of detachment from Norwegians' side, which appears to be both positive and negative.

The returning process of Romanians has indeed been "long-lasting, complex, and multifaceted", as Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider (2016, 6) argued, but my research has shown that while some migrants took important decisions and made proper arrangements before returning, for some others return has been spontaneous and did not require special preparations. This finding expands knowledge on Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider (2016)'s theory. My findings agree with Fauser and Anghel (2019)'s reports asserting that the main reasons for return migration are non-economic factors, such as nostalgia and devotion to their home country, longing for family and friends, and the desire to be with parents in old age, reflecting an identification with culture and traditions, as well as psychological well-being. Anghel et al. (2016) also estimated that Romanian migrants were mainly returning for family reasons. For my participants, some familial reasons for returning pertained to family back home, while other familial reasons reflected family that didn't adjust in Norway, loss of the Norwegian family, or marriage with a Norwegian partner which did not work out. Another reason equally important was for those who had children that they wanted them to be embedded in a larger family.

Nevertheless, return is a much more complex process which involves other factors identified in this research, such as intersecting life trajectories, the social changes that occur automatically in the communities of origin, the language barrier from the host country, cultural differences, or homesickness. My participants felt indeed motivated by their collective identities and the sense of social belongings when they decided to return to Romania, and this relates to what Fauser and Anghel (2019) affirmed in their paper. Transnationalists such as Cassarino (2004) believe that migrants' identities of origin have cultural and social significance and a strong influence on their decision to return and on their process of reintegration, and my findings align with his assertion. Several returnees didn't feel fully integrated in Norway, and felt that Romania called them back. They decided to return in order to discover their roots, or simply to contribute to various changes taking place in Romania, as Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider (2016) asserted. These results also build on existing evidence of the nexus between migration and social change from White (2017)'s paper.

The host country played an important role in the return intentions of Romanians, a fact that has been asserted by Andrén and Roman (2016), and confirmed by my findings. A number of returnees mentioned that various factors in Norway influenced their decision to return home, as for instance the process of integration in the receiving communities, which has not been a homely experience for some Romanian migrants, or the attitude of Norwegians toward Romanians who showed distrust, discrimination, or dislike that migrants threatened their identity. The image that Norwegian Child protection system has created among immigrants discouraged Romanians to make long term plans for living in Norway, and weighed a great deal in their decision to return home. These assertions are discussed also by White (2017).

My results agree with the previous research of Fauser and Anghel (2019) reviewing special challenges that migrant returnees face during return, and I discuss the circumstances when part of the family moves back home first, to make the necessary arrangements for a safe and successful return of the whole family, and secures aspects such as a proper steady jobs or child education. According to Kandilige and Adiku (2019), returning migrants step higher on the social ladder in their origin communities through the capital they acquire during the migration process. My results show that returnees choose to educate their children in the private system, because they want to maintain the educational standard with which they became familiar in Norway, and consider that the public education in Romania could not equate these standards.

During migration, my participants experienced change in mentality, feelings, behaviors, values, and identities. They consequently transferred their knowledge from the individual level to the society level, and used it as cultural potential, exploring the emotions, feelings, and reactions of the locals. My results verify Olivier-Mensah (2019)'s claims that change cannot be successfully measured in all areas, but that individuals go through a process of changing personally first, after which they inspire the people surrounding them to change as well. Therefore, in situations where returnees successfully transferred their knowledge and other forms of social remittances, the changes that took place at a personal level brought changes at a local level upon return. Returnees affirmed that they bring new ideas and cultural diversity in the regions where they return, finding which confirms the theory of Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider (2016), but these affirmations have been made particularly by participants who viewed their return as successful.

My findings show that Romanians that went to Norway as labour migrants have acquired experience, skills and knowledge before returning, assets which returnees use as social capital to contribute to the development of their home countries. This finding supports similar results that De Haas (2012) discusses in his research. Temporary migration has indeed had positive effects for my participants, through the experiences they lived, and the knowledge they gained abroad, which improved their lives, as Lupoiu and Raceanu (2019) affirmed, but also related to aspects of their migrational experiences which shaped the profile of the new persons they became after living in Norway, such as the level of trust, or the feelings of safety and security regarding the community or the society as a whole. The experiences returnees lived while being abroad are strongly linked to the connectivity and solidarity they share through social remittances among groups upon return in their home societies. This has been asserted by White (2017) and confirmed by my informants.

The multicultural perspective that the migration experience in Norway formed for my participants has changed their values and cognitive frameworks, allowing them to culturally transform their local societies through the businesses that they opened. In line with the hypothesis that sociocultural change takes place via migration and return, this analysis supports the theory that Lulle et al. (2019) presented in their paper, and which suggests that returnees' initiatives to innovate, and their capacities to open and maintain a business will further produce social change. Based on my findings and the similar study of White and Grabowska (2019), the hypothesis that social remittances are omnipresent

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among the activities carried out by returnees is confirmed. Social remittances help us understand Romanian society and how migrants' acquiring of new ideas and practices abroad convey sufficient cultural diversity to change their local societies. The way my participants viewed their contribution confirms Van Houte and Davids (2014)'s affirmations that returnees make their mark on the human dimension through the abilities and skills they acquire as individuals, which Romanians considered to be the most valuable contribution to change brought to their country of origin.

Academics have adverse opinions on whether return migration can bring social changes. My results support Gmelch (1980)'s research interpretation, that a society can change if its members are open to new ideas and if returnees' wish to disseminate their knowledge is strong enough. Norway changed Romanian migrants for the better, and most of them would like to bring change to their cities, hometowns and country if they could. Yet, my participants described that coming back from a different culture and imagining they would change something was like a water drop falling on a rock. Although it may take a very long time, water would eventually alter it, because it is more powerful than rock, but it has to keep dripping. So it would take a lot of time and a lot of dripping before one could change things substantially. But an insight of my findings is that returnees understood change, and it is important to acknowledge those who did not consciously enact change, but would change many aspects of their home societies if they could. I argue that they too constitute huge potential for future development in Romania.

Boccagni (2019) said that returnees cannot easily predict or control the way their societies of origin receive the resources they want to transmit and culturally diffuse, and my findings show that Romanians are embracing many of the practices and innovative ideas that returnees attempt to diffuse, but that Romanian society has proven to be quite conservative, and that social driving forces precluded lifestyle changes. My participants declared that local communities are reserved in embracing their innovative ideas and suggestions, just as the findings of Anghel (2019) show that returnees encounter difficulties of readaptation to the social and cultural conditions from their home communities and in exercising their innovative potential. The reasons for which returnees found that their chances to successfully bring about change in their local societies were limited, are multiple and adverse. My interviewees experienced upon return that non-migrants were often set in their ways and seemed to resist the norms and practices that returnees try to disseminate. This idea has been previously illustrated by Wang (2015), who suggested that people show xenophobic attitudes and a lack of interest in the new

ideas of returnees, and by Paasche (2017), who addressed in his paper that returnees who planned to go back to Europe found that non-migrants do not easily accept other people's views and ideas.

Return migration could actually bring regional development for the sending societies, but its potential depends on local conditions and the predilection of local society to accept change. The agents to bring change and modernity in the societies of origin are considered by the development theory to be returning migrants, who unfortunately encounter difficulties in exercising their innovative potential at home. Romanian returnees knew what returning to Romania involved, that there were differences between how they got accustomed to living in Norway, how they redefined themselves as individuals and what it meant to live again in Romania. But thinking about it was different than putting it into action and having to accept these differences daily. In terms of mentality, the changes that migration brought for some of my participants, such as wanting to invest in themself, how they use their free time, or emphasising certain things that mattered to them, have not been seen in a positive way, precisely because Romanians are more traditional.

White and Grabowska (2019) believe that non-migrants can be hesitant in accepting the knowledge transferred by migrant returnees if the ideas and practices which are to be adopted are considered too innovative, and this assumption is confirmed by my results. One example has been the experience of one participant who tried to implement an innovative idea of upgrading the customer service of the transport companies in Romania, but whose efforts have not been appreciated nor accepted. Local companies were happy with having their businesses work, and did not understand the need for assistance in bettering the quality of the services provided by their drivers. In these cases Romanians said that they have to adapt the knowledge acquired abroad to the people they interact with in the social environment. This makes the process of social change to stagnate, temporarily or permanently, if the acquired knowledge is not applied or transmitted in good time.

Romanian repatriates said that another reason for which they came across barriers in transferring knowledge has been because locals from their social environments have in general different value systems than theirs, and that in most cases they perceive their new mentality and drive for creating change as elements that would alienate their culture. Olivier-Mensah (2019) has also discussed this aspect, and my findings show that non-migrants are not able to see returnees' new experience as a good influence. Fauser and

Anghel (2019) asserted that as migration experts tend to believe, migrants encountered difficulties in exercising their power to impact their home communities also because of the contextual factors such as local elites. In line with their affirmation, my findings reveal that Romanians encountered barriers in pursuing a new business idea because of bureaucracy and laws. They also noticed that people distrust politicians, a fact which makes them obey the laws, and that is a hindrance in convincing locals to follow their ideas.

Also, Cassarino (2004) noted that individuals who lose their networks and social connections because they lived for too long abroad understand upon return that they no longer fit into the traditionalist conceptions of their origin societies, which as a consequence discourages them in pursuing change. In line with these statements, my participants declared that they did not feel that they belonged to the local culture and that they ceased trying to create change because they understood that their efforts were in vain. However, through their translocal identities, my participants highly value certain aspects of life and culture in both Romania and Norway, and overcome pre-existing boundaries and established preconceptions in society. My findings support Portes (2010) and Fauser and Anghel (2019)'s assertions, that even if the locals do not embrace the ideas and the cultural values that migrants bring home, the socio-cultural changes that have taken place on a personal level for returnees still have a certain impact, which on a larger scale determines change. Romanian returnees have the power to exert an influence on certain aspects in the spheres of work and social relationships by maintaining a confident attitude regarding their skills and knowledge. These findings build on the previous research of Kilinc and King (2019), and go in line with Cassarino (2004) and Martin and Radu (2012).

Several Romanians applied their transcultural capital in their attempt to bring an alternative educational model to the classical authoritarian one that Romania has known for decades. My results build on the discussion that Kilinc and King (2019) have in their book about returnees' continued transnational practices which have become increasingly visible, and about their input on the educational system in their country of origin. My findings align with the results of Fauser and Anghel (2019), and show that the changes that these returnees bring in terms of education have a great impact. They introduce new quality standards, and new forms of educational practices based on their prior professional experience in Norway, by disseminating the knowledge and certain habits

acquired abroad, not just among families or small groups, but also within the institutions they are working with.

Boccagni and Decimo (2013) believe that researching the degree to which migrants can influence the norms, values and behaviour of a society, and bring change through resources that circulate in transnational spaces, can be a difficult task. Nevertheless, I show how Romanian returnees used the implicit and explicit knowledge they acquired in Norway in their readaptation to Romania. Studies on the link between return migration and sociocultural change have already indicated that migrants remit upon return their capital consisting of language and professional skills, as well as a work ethic and new attitudes and ideas, as Fauser and Anghel (2019) argue. My results support their affirmations, but also shed light on new aspects of the sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees discussed herein. Change is possible, but it is conditioned by various aspects, such as local institutional laws, or the acceptance level of a society in regard to change. My results agree with De Haas (2012)'s research, who argues that although migration is dependent on favourable conditions in order to generate macro-level development processes, at the micro- and meso-level, it can bring positive contributions in supporting and adding quality to the livelihoods of the families and communities involved.

Besides the social change that social remittances bring in local communities, cultural flows coming from powerful countries strengthen social remittances' acceptance, in Levitt (1998)'s opinion. My findings show that Romanians are indeed interested in Norwegian culture and civilisation, and have more respect for ideas coming from wealthy and modern communities. Due to the social capital and local networks of migrant returnees, White and Grabowska (2019) and White (2019) considered the impact of social remittances in smaller localities to be more powerful. My findings challenge the literature by showing that based on my participants' affirmations, social remittances were easier accepted in the cities, and that returnees' potential to start change was limited. Some of my participants believed they did not belong in the small communities where they lived in Romania, and they were sure that if they were in a big city, they would have had more opportunities to make a difference with their relevant experience. Other participants especially chose to return to a larger city because they wanted the social environment to allow them to behave in the same way as they were accustomed to in Norway. This analysis supports Oltean (2019)'s affirmation that migrants bring significant transformations upon themselves and respectively their relatives and friends, but that their contribution to social change is difficult to assert.

Skilled returnees recognize opportunities of knowledge transfer at their workplaces, and that being the only member of a workplace who has labour experience from abroad increases the likelihood for a successful knowledge transfer. These results strengthen Wang (2015)'s affirmations in this matter, and confirm his theory highlighting that returnees' professional skills can enhance knowledge transfer success if they have been acquired in the same industry abroad. My data confirm White (2019)'s statement that notwithstanding the natural instinct of returnees to distribute their resources, a successful transfer of social remittances depends on the determination of individual returnees to influence people even in less favourable situations.

My findings align with the suggestions of Cassarino (2004), Žmegač (2010), King (2017), and Fauser and Anghel (2019), namely that return did not close the migration cycle for my participants, but that it represents one stage in their migration process where they are disseminating knowledge, information and practices, and leave space for their migration story to continue after repatriation, meaning a possible remigration. My informants showed in the interviews that the nature of their migration experience abroad has determined the possibility of further travelling or a re-evaluation of their places of origin in Romania, as Bărbulescu et al. (2019) asserted. However, for some of my participants, returning was permanent and the end of the migration cycle, as Lulle et al. (2019) suggested. Most of the participants that showed no desire to emigrate again were following transnational patterns, reflecting individual, as well as familiar returning decisions, as Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider (2016) indicated. In line with Bărbulescu et al. (2019)'s affirmation that returnees keep an ongoing relationship with the international social networks from the professional sphere after their return, my results show that several Romanians maintain indeed close ties with ex-colleagues and friends from Norway, in the possibility of advancing professionally or collaborating with these persons in the future.

My aim has been to ascertain the social and cultural changes that returnees brought to their communities of origin by using the theoretical perspectives of migration and development. The conceptual framework of this paper has also intended to document the tensions and ambiguities experienced by Romanian returnees undertaking social and cultural changes in the pursuit of their life goals. Interviews with migrant returnees provided me with valuable material on their views and understandings of the effects that migration has had upon them. It has been rewarding for me to work collaboratively and to unfold successful stories of my respondents, who, despite the difficulties encountered

along the way, took the best out of their migration experiences and turned it into real projects back home which make a difference and bring change and small victories every day. I believe that other scholars using the same research design with the one used herein, would be able to have similar findings, and that the results from my sample group can be associated to a good extent to a larger population.

Returnees attempt to apply and transmit to the social environment in Romania the knowledge acquired during their migration to Norway, as well as changes in behaviour, cultural values and norms. However, many returnees focused on securing the necessary conditions for a family environment, and on balancing their economic situation with a prosperous life, to the detriment of possible transfers of social remittances to their co-nationals. Development has been possible on certain levels, returnees acknowledge their power to generate change, but most Romanians felt disappointed by the attitude of locals in connection with their efforts to socially remit, and only a few have effectuated visible changes. I believe that the confirmations and challenges between my findings and existing studies shows deep similarities between the theories and hypotheses presented by other scholars, but also the existence of new knowledge following the change in the mentality of Romanian migrants, and the strong desire for cultural development. Returnees remain positive that change can be achieved through personal involvement, and by applying the innovative ideas, know-how, and the work- and meritocracy-oriented mentality they bring home.

This project has been realised in response to the increased flow of Romanians repatriating from Norway, and exploring this topic has been relevant to covering returnees' potential of sociocultural change in the Romanian context. I believe that my research has developed new knowledge on many important issues regarding Romanian migration and return in recent years. More specifically, it has provided grounded insights into the Romanian migration to Norway, and the outcomes of the return process of Romanian immigrants. This could be beneficial to developing a more responsive and effective public policy. My research could also have a positive impact on the individuals directly involved, as the participants would experience a different and better understanding of the changes brought to their local communities. Romanians' opinions revealed truths of paramount importance for the purposes of this research, which would hopefully demonstrate contribution to knowledge, science and our society. Hopefully, my research will make a difference in the real world and create "an openness to new ideas that is often a hallmark of research studies" (Seale 2018e, 283).

# 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This concluding chapter summarises the main arguments that have been presented and substantiated throughout the thesis. Based on complex thinking, and a systematic approach, this research project has brought about new data and findings that have answered the research questions and created new scholarly and empirical understandings. I further draw conclusions about the local-level migration-driven changes derived from the particular views of Romanian returnees about the social and cultural nature of their return processes.

## 6.1 Research Limitations

Considering the complexity and active character of the sociocultural transformations that migration brings, it is important to acknowledge the limitations in establishing the real changes that Romanian returnees brought to their home societies. In carrying out this research project, I carefully selected my respondents and ensured a certain diversity of migrant experiences, but I am aware that important voices in the research might have been excluded, thus creating a possible limitation in the results obtained. I do believe though that the values of my research participants have covered for the most part the values necessary to consider the sample representative of Romanian returnees, and for my research to describe as accurately as possible the development challenges and outcomes that migration involves for Romanian migrants and their home country.

One limitation consideration is the fact that the data in this study relies on the ability of my informants to remember their practices and behaviours related to social activities abroad. Their understanding and subsequent recall of stories or events might be underestimating the range of activities in which they participated while living and working in Norway. Another possible limitation is that returnees that participated in this project were identified only during the first semester of the writing process. It is therefore not possible to analyse the readaptation of returnees to their home societies over a longer time span. Also, my sample has been decided being bounded by limitations such as time, money and workforce, but, given the relatively large sample size, I view the data as highly suitable for analysing the sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees. One other research limitation relates to the lack of previous studies in the research area. Literature review has been an important part of my research, and I have reviewed an extensive

literature on the theories of migration and development. However, there has been little prior research specifically on the topic of sociocultural change and on return migration in Romania, particularly when compared to the entire corpus of migration studies.

One further limitation has been the changes made with regard to doing field work. After initially considering interviewing 15 Romanian returnees and 15 members of their respective social networks from Romania in order to establish the sociocultural changes that Romanian migrants underwent and how they disseminate their knowledge in their local communities, I have decided to conduct the interviews online and by phone instead, and to limit my sample to returnees only. The reasons behind these changes have been social, because of the corona pandemic, economical, because my budget was quite limited to cover the costs of the necessary trips, and also personal, as my physical condition at that time confined me from travelling in so many different parts of Romania. But, notwithstanding my decision to replace field work with online data collection, I aimed for a relatively large number of interviews in order to confer a degree of generalizability to this endeavour, and to reduce the impact of such limitations.

Furthermore, my findings might have been limited by poor answers during the interviews, either because the interviewee did not completely understand the question neither the first time nor after rephrasing it, or because the interviewee felt that the experience of being home was too short to give a concrete answer. These cases, nonetheless, have been very few. Finally, a key limitation of my analysis is that although I investigated returnees who had foreign experience in other countries in addition to Norway, the framework of this project did not allow me to gather data regarding their experiences from the other countries. While these insights might have unveiled relevant information for the topic of this research, the limitation to the Norwegian study case brought valuable, accurate and deep understandings of Romanian immigration. I believe that these results are a starting point for broader comparative studies on migration and sociocultural change in contexts of return migration.

## 6.2 Implications for Practice

All research, including qualitative, is part of the social world that, when studied from a sociological perspective, can provide crucial and meaningful results on return migration and its implications. The analysis of this study provides new knowledge in terms of how people perceive their migrational process, but also on the degree to which

returnees identify themselves as agents of development. Social sciences are firmly established in interpersonal and social relationships, thus it would only be natural for this thesis to include considerations of the significance and implications of its findings for our society and for related policy. I have synthesised herein relevant knowledge in order to outline the real challenges that migration and return involve for Romanian migrants, and their home society. Sociocultural change is difficult to be accurately measured, but I can say that my research produced results that correspond to real people, with real characteristics and real experiences, therefore my findings might have several implications for research and practice.

I believe that this project will enact a better understanding of many important issues regarding Romanian migration. Corresponding measures are essential to be taken, both for building up on the existing theory of migration and development, and for practical research on repatriation. This could be beneficial to the knowledge base in this area of pedagogy, but also to developing a more responsive and effective public policy. Precise measures are required, in order to determine the amounts of migrants that return to their home country, and respectively those who leave the host country. Developing and validating an instrument for assessing the flows of returnees is a critical element for advancing research in this arena, but it is equally important for practice. More specifically, I believe that a good administration of the return migration flows would improve the society welfare, in part because the sending country would have a better control over the population that decides to return, and in part because it would develop proper reintegration policies for returnees, by increasing the means and resources necessary to assure their assimilation in the work realm, and it would benefit from the skills they acquired abroad.

Furthermore, the concept of social remittances discussed in this paper has important practical implications for employers interested in potential change within the organisations they run. This can be beneficial in promoting better work conditions for the skilled returnees as a means to bring about greater employee commitment and higher interest from employees with innovative ideas. In addition, the results of this research have implications for individuals interested in enacting change in their local societies. Every individual participates to some extent in shaping societal behaviour, and can intervene at different levels by maintaining a high level of expectation and by implementing progressive practices and norms to improve the living standard at the local level.

## 6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

I propose that an important addition to the migration and development theory would be to look at return in the context of the larger society. Return migration calls for more extensive research that requires perhaps the attention of other fields besides migration studies. In order to understand the dynamics of return-driven social change, it is necessary to study the change processes by using many levels of analysis. Researchers with an interest in ascertaining the value of sociocultural change need to look at it from a multidimensional perspective and to promote strategies for validating the transformations taking place in the local societies of the sending countries. Scholars that are coming closest to these points are Cassarino (2004), Castles (2010), and De Haas (2010). Similarly, studying return relies on extended participant observation as data gathering technique in addition to in-depth interviews. Furthermore, a greater importance should be paid to the role of returnees and other individuals involved in social change in the communities of origin. Scholars whose design could be used as a model are Dustmann and Weiss (2007), Martin and Radu (2012), and Ambrosini et al. (2015).

An aspect of greater relevance to social change is the cultural experience that returnees bring along from one or several host countries. Future researchers could study how the cultural background of migrants can lead to different knowledge transfer outcomes. In addition, one issue that needs to be considered in further research is how can the sending country maximise the innovative potential of returnees and benefit from the ideas and skills that migrant returnees possess. Likewise, the role of the state could also be clarified in the regulation of transnational migration. Future research could determine under what conditions states regulate development processes directly or indirectly through migration control in transnational social spaces. Scholars that are coming closest to these points are Faist (2008), Careja (2013), and Van Houte and Davids (2014). Also, one concept which should be studied as part of sociocultural development is the return of the 'brain drain' migrants, as an increasingly large number of highly educated people decide to repatriate and use their professional skills in large companies in their societies of origin.

Furthermore, more scholarly attention needs to be paid to the role of migrants who decided to return and invest in the local economy by opening businesses in their home country. The innovative ideas and resources that these migrants bring to their local societies through their enterprises are valuable social capital and support for their

community that surely deserve further attention. The knowledge gained from working abroad and the multilingual skills are embodied in the cultural capital that individuals use as means of integrating into the local society upon return. Scholars whose design could be used as a model are Portes (2010), Horváth and Kiss (2016), and Anghel et al. (2017). The acclimatisation of returnees and the conditions that returnees face in the process of transmitting social remittances to origin communities are aspects that deserve more attention from researchers. So far, there is little substantial research on the effects of the visits that family and acquaintances pay to migrants while they are abroad. This aspect could be further investigated in the context of the sociocultural influences that the host country has on migrants' conationals.

Although the topics addressed so far have been previously discussed, they all deserve more diverse research, and can be used constructively to expand the theory that has been addressed in this research, or for the emergence of a new theory. I have researched migration-driven social change with a focus on the Romanian case study, but I propose that future studies address the same research problem in a different context, setting, or culture, in order to be able to assert the degree to which return migration influences social change. Finally, it is important to address which other sources besides return migration generate social change in local communities, therefore sociocultural change deserves investigation beyond the scope of this thesis.

## 6.4 Concluding Remarks and the Wider Context

This research has shown a fascinating phenomenon and little discussed so far: the repatriation of Romanians from Norway. I have analysed the changes that Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway underwent, their reflections about how their migrational experiences and passage of time changed their cultural and social views, and their perspectives on their aspirations and abilities to socioculturally remit in their home societies. Although I undertook this project for the requirements present within my degree, I have seen this thesis as an exciting opportunity to make a real contribution to a body of knowledge, which may impact real change. I systematically gathered information from 35 different people, coming from different environments, with different educational backgrounds, and different professional experiences, in order to make the outcome ample, mixed, and rich. Each return migrant has been viewed as a special subject with unique experiences.

Romanians interviewed after their return to Romania affirmed their desire to transmit their ideas, know-hows and practices to non-migrants. In this regard, most interviewees stressed limited possibilities in bringing major changes in the societies they returned, resulting from a lack of interest from their compatriots in the knowledge that they intended to disseminate, as well as unfavourable local conditions for development in Romania. In the light of the skills and social capital that Romanian returnees employ in their life projects, this paper has outlined the patterns identified among the increasing effects of day-to-day interactions between returnees and their conationals, and has argued that the innovative practices which modify local social relations and hierarchies, and the structural and cultural elements that returnees are able to diffuse, considerably contribute to social change.

Overall, I have determined that the relation between return migration and social change in Romania is reciprocal. Establishing migration-induced changes at a meso-level has been a complex and multidimensional process, and the sociocultural development of Romanian can be defined as limited in scope and space. The most unexpected finding of this challenging discussion on the topic of return migration and sociocultural change has been the fact that Romanian returnees are highly educated and skilled people, who capitalised on their education during migration, have migrated for higher education, and continued their studies upon return because they needed the intellectual stimuli that Norway offered them. If returnees have great potential to mobilise their resources towards meaningful changes in the lives of their local communities, then educated returnees have even greater potential.

I conclude by saying that little victories are best kept in little boxes, and that the individual development of returnees is the most precious possession that Romanian society has in terms of sociocultural change. Returnees contribute to the country's development by maintaining a position of active agents and remitting their social capital and transcultural knowledge, hoping in this line to create a shift in the traditional Romanian mindset. By agreeing to participate in this research project and to share their unique experiences, Romanian respondents helped generate greater awareness about the challenges associated with migration. My qualitative results would hopefully enable a greater acknowledgement of the complexities and uncertainties through which migration is experienced, and highlight the ways in which the social environment shapes the nature of the changes occurring in the sphere of migration.

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# Appendices

**TOPIC GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

I am thrilled that you took the time to have this discussion with me. This interview is part of a 33-interviews series with Romanian returnees, previously migrants to Norway. It is the basic data gathering technique in the Research project called "Visions worth striving for: The sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway", which might bring a different perspective about how intensely you feel the development implications of your return process to Romania, what is the local community impact, and document your attempt to bring change back home.

The interview has 4 parts, and will last about 30 minutes total. The first part is about personal information, the second one is about your relationship to Romania, the third part is about your relationship to Norway and the fourth and last part is about the cultural and social changes brought to Romania. This is a semi-structured interview, therefore please feel free about these questions and your answers can be open-ended.

Do you agree to record our conversation? You can at any moment request to stop the recording, skip a question or to end our conversation, if you feel uncomfortable with it.

1. Personal information:

- Gender
- Age
- Age at emigration
- How would you define your migrant status?
- Level of education
- Current Profession
- Civil status

2. Relationship to Romania:

- In which city / part of Romania do you live in?

- How would you describe your neighbourhood from the ethnic diversity and multiculturalism perspective?

- Are you a member of any social, cultural or national organisation or association? (It could also be groups on social media).

- Why did you return to Romania, and when?

3. Relationship to Norway:

- Where in Norway have you emigrated, and for how long?

- Did you have several attempts to establish yourself there?

- How was it to adapt culturally and socially to Norway?

- How welcome did you feel in Norway?

- How did you receive help in Norway when you needed it?

- How much are you considering moving in the future to go to another city or country or to migrate back to Norway?

4. Cultural and social changes brought to Romania:

- How different is Romanian culture from the Norwegian one, in your opinion?

- How would you describe your experience in Norway, as a positive or negative one?

- How would you say that your migration experience in Norway changed you as a person?

- In which way did you bring with you these changes to Romania?

- How do you inspire your friends and family with your new mentality after your experience as a migrant in Norway?

- What is the most important and precious gain you have as a previous migrant in Norway?

- If you were to give me a top 5 cultural and social changes that you brought to Romania, what would that be?

Is there anything you want to add or to ask me?

I am still looking for participants for the interviews, do you happen to know someone?

**GHID TEMATIC PENTRU INTERVIURI SEMISTRUCTURATE**

Sunt încântată și recunoscătoare că ai găsit timpul să ai această discuție cu mine. Acest interviu face parte dintr-o serie de 30 de interviuri cu repatriați români, anterior migranți în Norvegia. Este principala tehnică de colectare a datelor în proiectul de cercetare numit "Viziuni pentru care merită să ne străduim: schimbările socioculturale ale repatriaților români, anterior migranți în Norvegia", care ar putea aduce o perspectivă diferită despre impactul asupra comunităților locale, cât de intens simt repatriatii implicațiile de dezvoltare ale procesului lor de întoarcere în România și documentarea încercării lor de a aduce schimbarea acasă.

Interviul are 4 părți și va dura aproximativ 30 de minute în total. Prima parte este despre informații personale, a doua este despre relația ta cu România, a treia parte este despre relația ta cu Norvegia, iar a patra și ultima parte este despre schimbările culturale și sociale aduse în România. Acesta este un interviu semi-structurat, prin urmare, răspunsurile tale pot fi cat de ample dorești.

Ești de acord să înregistrez conversația noastră? Poți solicita în orice moment să oprim înregistrarea, să sărim peste o întrebare sau să încheiem conversația, dacă te simți inconfortabil.

1. Informații personale:

- Sex
- Vârstă
- Vârsta la emigrare
- Cum ti-ai defini statutul de migrant?
- Nivel de educatie
- Profesia curentă
- Starea civila

2. Relația cu România:

- În ce oraș / parte a României locuiești?
- Cum ai descrie cartierul tău din perspectiva diversității etnice și a multiculturalismului?
- Ești membru al vreunei organizații sau asociații sociale, culturale sau naționale? (Pot fi, de asemenea, grupuri pe rețelele de socializare).
- De ce te-ai întors în România și când?

3. Relația cu Norvegia:

- Unde ai emigrat în Norvegia și pentru cat timp?
- Ai avut mai multe încercări de a te stabili acolo?
- Cum a fost adaptarea culturală și socială în Norvegia?
- Cat de bine primit te-ai simțit în Norvegia?
- Cat de mult ajutor ai primit în Norvegia atunci cand ai avut nevoie?
- Ce intenții ai de a te muta în viitor pentru a merge într-un alt oraș sau țară sau pentru a migra înapoi în Norvegia?

4. Schimbări culturale și sociale aduse în comunitatea locală din România:

- Cât de diferită este cultura română de cea norvegiană, în opinia ta?
- Cum ai descrie experiența ta în Norvegia, ca fiind una pozitivă sau negativă?
- Cum crezi că experiența ta de migrare în Norvegia te-a schimbat ca persoană?
- În ce mod ai adus cu tine aceste schimbări în comunitatea locală din România?
- Cum iti inspiri prietenii și familia cu noua ta mentalitate după experiența de migrant în Norvegia?
- Care este câștigul cel mai important și prețios pe care îl ai ca migrant anterior în Norvegia?
- Dacă ar fi să-mi spui 5 schimbări culturale și sociale pe care le-ai adus în comunitatea locală din România, care ar fi acestea?

Ar fi ceva ce ai dori sa adaugi sau sa mă întrebi?

Încă caut participanți la interviuri, se întâmplă să cunoști pe cineva?

**INFORMED CONSENT WHEN PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA USED FOR INTERVIEWS AND SOUND RECORDINGS IN RESEARCH PROJECTS**

Are you interested in taking part in the research project "Visions worth striving for: The sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees, former migrants in Norway"? In this letter you receive information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve. This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore the interplay of migration and development within Romania and Norway and namely how did Romania receive social and cultural change through its migration to Norway following its accession to the European Union in 2007, which could add to existing information or develop new knowledge on this topic.

In this master's thesis, the research questions will be: What development challenges and outcomes does migration involve for Romanian migrants and their home country? What sorts of sociocultural changes have Romanian returnees, previously migrants in Norway undergone, and what are their experiences and reflections about how migration and passage of time change their cultural and social views? How do they disseminate their knowledge underpinning these changes within their home communities after their return?

Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) from the University of Oslo (UiO) is the institution responsible for the project. The methods used are literature review and a qualitative case study, which employs interviews for data collection. There are 30-35 participants needed, and the information will be recorded on sound recording. Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw. I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially, if you wish so, and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Your name and occupation will not be published in publications. The master thesis project is scheduled to end in July 2022. At the end of the project, the personal data, including any digital recordings, will be kept in a personal archive. As long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have

the right to: access the personal data that is being processed about you; request that your personal data is deleted; request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified; receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data.

I will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with SUM, NSD - Norwegian Data Research Center AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation. If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

• SUM via Jason Miklian, Postdoctoral Fellow and supervisor/the person responsible for the project, at (47) 22858911 // 46894451, jason.miklian@sum.uio.no, or Florina Baru, student and Master's Candidate, at (47) 45225518 // florinabaru.fb@gmail.com .

• UiO has a Data Protection Officer who you can contact by sending an email to personvernombudet@uio.no . We also have a UiO web site where you can read more about privacy at UiO. NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has a Data Protection Officer who you can contact by sending an email to personverntjenester@nsd.no or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Florina Baru                                                                        11th August 2020

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I have received and understood information about the project ”Visions worth striving for: The sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees, former migrants in Norway” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent to participate in an interview, and for information about me/myself to be used in the MA thesis in a way that I can be recognised (by information offered in the interview), but my personal data will not be published. I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project, 31 July 2022.

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By answering “Yes, I consent”, you consent to having read this information form about the research. You consent to verbally agree at the beginning of the interview that it can be audio recorded. You consent to have your personal data anonymized, and information about your age, and language background (this involves information about your native language and any other second languages you may speak) to be written about and published in the master thesis related to conducted research.

**FORMULAR DE CONSIMȚĂMÂNT ÎN CAZUL PROCESĂRII DATELOR PERSONALE UTILIZATE PENTRU INTERVIURI ȘI ÎNREGISTRĂRI SONORE ÎN PROIECTE DE CERCETARE**

Sunteți interesat să participați la proiectul de cercetare "Viziuni pentru care merită să ne străduim: schimbările socioculturale ale repatriaților români, anterior migranți în Norvegia"? În această scrisoare primiți informații despre scopul proiectului și despre ce va implica participarea dvs. Aceasta este o scrisoare informativă despre participarea la un proiect de cercetare în care scopul principal este de a explora interacțiunea migrației și dezvoltării în România și Norvegia, și anume cum a primit România schimbări sociale și culturale prin migrarea Românilor în Norvegia în urma aderării la Uniunea Europeană în 2007, care ar putea adăuga la informațiile existente sau dezvolta noi cunoștințe pe acest subiect.

În această teză de master, întrebările de cercetare vor fi: Ce provocări și rezultate de dezvoltare implică migrația pentru migranții români și țara lor de origine? Prin ce fel de schimbări socioculturale au trecut românii repatriați, anterior migranți în Norvegia, și care sunt experiențele și reflecțiile lor despre modul în care migrația și trecerea timpului le schimbă opiniile culturale și sociale? Cum diseminează aceștia cunoștințele care stau la baza acestor schimbări în comunitățile lor de origine după întoarcerea lor?

Centrul pentru Dezvoltare și Mediu (SUM) de la Universitatea din Oslo (UiO) este instituția responsabilă de proiect. Metodele utilizate sunt revizuirea literaturii și interviuri, și sunt necesari 30 de participanți. Informațiile vor fi înregistrate prin înregistrare audio. Participarea la proiect este voluntară. Dacă alegeți să participați, vă puteți retrage consimțământul în orice moment fără a da un motiv. Toate informațiile despre dvs. vor fi făcute anonime. Nu vor fi consecințe negative pentru dvs. dacă alegeți să nu participați sau decideți mai târziu să vă retrageți. Vom folosi datele dvs. personale numai în scopul (scopurile) specificate în această scrisoare informativă. Vom prelucra datele dumneavoastră cu caracter confidențial, dacă doriți acest lucru, și în conformitate cu legislația privind protecția datelor (Regulamentul general privind protecția datelor și Legea privind datele cu caracter personal). Numele și ocupația dvs. nu vor fi publicate în publicații. Proiectul de teză de master este programat să se încheie în Iulie 2022. La sfârșitul proiectului, datele personale, inclusiv orice înregistrări digitale, vor fi păstrate în

arhiva personală. Atâta timp cât veți putea fi identificat în datele colectate, aveți dreptul să: accesați datele personale care sunt procesate despre dvs.; solicitați ștergerea datelor dvs. personale; solicitați ca datele personale incorecte despre dvs. să fie corectate / rectificate; primiți o copie a datelor dvs. personale (portabilitate a datelor), și sa trimiteți o reclamație către responsabilul cu protecția datelor sau Autoritatea norvegiană pentru protecția datelor privind prelucrarea datelor dvs. cu caracter personal.

Voi prelucra datele personale pe baza consimțământului dumneavoastră. Pe baza unui acord cu SUM, NSD - Centrul Norvegian de Cercetare a Datelor AS a evaluat că prelucrarea datelor cu caracter personal din acest proiect este în conformitate cu legislația privind protecția datelor. Dacă aveți întrebări cu privire la proiect sau doriți să vă exercitați drepturile, contactați:

• SUM prin Jason Miklian, cercetător postdoctoral și îndrumător/ persoana responsabilă de proiect, la (47) 22858911 // 46894451, jason.miklian@sum.uio.no, sau Florina Baru, studentă și candidată la master, la (47) 45225518 // florinabaru.fb@gmail.com .

• UiO are un responsabil cu protecția datelor pe care îl puteți contacta trimițând un e-mail la personvernombudet@uio.no . De asemenea, avem un site UiO unde puteți citi mai multe despre confidențialitate la UiO. NSD - Centrul Norvegian de Cercetare a Datelor AS are un agent de protecție a datelor pe care îl puteți contacta trimițând un email la personverntjenester@nsd.no sau prin telefon: +47 55 58 21 17.

Cu stimă,

Florina Baru                                                                                          11 august 2020

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Am primit și înțeles informații despre proiectul "Viziuni pentru care merită să ne străduim: schimbările socioculturale ale repatriaților români, anterior migranți în Norvegia" și mi s-a oferit posibilitatea de a pune întrebări. Dau consimțământul pentru a participa la un interviu și pentru ca informațiile despre mine să fie utilizate în teza de masterat într-un mod în care pot fi recunoscute (prin informațiile oferite în interviu), dar nu sunt publicate. Dau consimțământul ca datele mele personale să fie prelucrate până la data încheierii proiectului, 31 Iulie 2022.

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Răspunzând „Da, sunt de acord", sunteți de acord să citiți acest formular de informații despre cercetare. Sunteți de acord să fiți de acord verbal la începutul interviului că acesta poate fi înregistrat audio. Sunteți de acord ca datele dumneavoastră cu caracter personal să fie anonimizate, precum și informații despre vârsta dumneavoastră și antecedentele lingvistice (acest lucru implică informații despre limba dumneavoastră maternă și orice alte limbi secundare pe care le puteți vorbi) să fie scrise și publicate în lucrarea de master legată de cercetarea efectuată.

## Appendix V The Facebook Post (English)

**AUGUST 20, 2020**

Hello, are you a Romanian who lived in Norway and have returned to Romania, or do you know one? I am working on my master's thesis at the University of Oslo with the topic "Visions worth striving for: The sociocultural changes of Romanian returnees, former migrants in Norway". I am seeking to interview 30 former migrants to Norway to hear their experiences (positive or negative) in Norway and after their return to Romania. The interviews will be over phone/ on skype/ messenger and will last 30-45 minutes. Your input will help me understand and document how repatriates feel the impact of their experiences when returning home. I aim for the research to help repatriated migrants understand their roles in both societies, and give us a better understanding of their needs and challenges. I look forward to your private messages.

## Appendix VI The Facebook Post (Romanian)

**20 AUGUST 2020**

Bună, ești un român care a locuit în Norvegia și s-a întors în România, sau cunoști pe cineva care s-a repatriat? Lucrez la teza de masterat la Universitatea din Oslo cu subiectul "Viziuni pentru care merită sa ne străduim: schimbările socioculturale ale repatriaților români, foști migranți în Norvegia". Doresc să intervievez 30 de foști migranți în Norvegia pentru a discuta despre experiențele lor (pozitive sau negative) în Norvegia și după întoarcerea lor în România. Interviurile vor fi telefonice/ pe skype/ messenger, și vor dura 30-45 de minute. Aportul tău mă va ajuta să înțeleg și să documentez modul în care repatriații simt impactul experiențelor lor când merg acasă. Îmi propun ca cercetarea să ajute migranții repatriați să înțeleagă rolurile lor în ambele societăți și să ne ofere o mai bună înțelegere a nevoilor și provocărilor lor. Astept cu nerabdare mesajele tale private.