

Albanian migration through the analysis of censuses from 1918 to 2011

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The issue of Albanian migration has been the subject of sustained interest from researchers following the mass exodus to Greece and Italy in the 1990s. But as some authors have noted, research on internal migration has remained in the background. This article aims to help fill this gap by describing a certain number of quantitative data that have been little used until now and by proposing approaches to exploit them with a view to improving knowledge of the movements of the Albanian population in the period from the 1918 census to that of 2011.

This work was deployed along three axes:

- a) Acquisition of available data down to fine geographical levels (around 3,000 villages and towns) for around fifteen censuses conducted during modern Albanian history
- b) Identification, location and mapping of all localities enumerated
- c) Documentation and mapping of relevant spatial groups (administrative divisions, cultural areas, etc.) and design of territorial typologies (definition of urban) to support the explanation of movements at different stages of the history and territorial development of Albania.

The contribution does not aim so much to hold a discourse on migration as to show the sources and their potential in the context of the designed heuristic framework. To this end, a series of historical examples of migratory movements of various kinds will be described on the basis of the interpretation of three types of data.

The first approach consists in describing and interpreting precisely localized intercensal changes in the population. Although it is most often not possible to distinguish on the basis of demographic data the respective contributions of migration and natural balance, the description of these intercensal changes throughout the century allows us to draw a fairly precise picture, in particular of the contrasting stages of Albanian urban development.

A second indicator of movements is the distribution by sex. At several points in Albanian history, there are significant disparities in the distribution of women and men in the territory, and rapid changes in spatial distributions, which indirectly reflect significant migratory episodes, particularly characteristic of the phases of industrialization and emigration.

Finally, for certain points in Albanian history, we have very precise spatial information on population movements through the recording by censuses of the place of residence at the time of the survey, to be compared with the place of residence at birth, during a previous census, or the year preceding the census. This type of information (places of origin and destination) exists, more or less completely, for the Austrian census of Albania in 1918, and for the censuses of the democratic era (we were able to work on the data from 2001 and 2011, those from 2023 will perhaps soon be made available). This information, even partial (it describes as a movement what can in fact be a succession of movements) is very rich, especially when the places of residence are recorded on both sides of a major historical event, as is the case of the 2001 census which gives information on the place of residence of each person in 1989 and 2001. The comparison with the place of residence at birth also allows us to make hypotheses, for older cohorts and by cross-referencing with other sources, on the structure of the movements that took place in the previous decades.

The paper will illustrate the contribution that these data can make to the understanding of different historical moments, it will show the continuity that exists from migration through the Albanian urban hierarchy up to emigration, and will illustrate the urban structure that results from the succession of migratory sequences.

In complementarity with approaches that describe in a precise qualitative manner the migratory path and experience of individuals or small groups, we deal here with statistical aggregates whose composition and individual characteristics are most often unknown. But the traditional homogeneity of social groups such as those present in villages makes it possible to link explanatory hypotheses of migration to properties of the village and/or its population taken as a whole: location characteristics (plain or mountain, central, close to communication routes, cities, or on the contrary peripheral), types of rural economy, culturally coherent regions (at different scales), religious affiliations etc.

These characterizations support the description of identified population movements in the first decades of the twentieth century, the period of the affirmation of the Albanian nation state. For the communist period, after an initial period marked by intense urbanization and migration from the southern regions of the partisans of the new regime, the cultural and political orientation of the explanatory hypotheses gradually gives way to the characterization of movements by the needs of workers for industry and large construction sites, and of labor for the large agricultural cooperatives of the plains, where understanding requires a good knowledge of the urban and industrial organization specific to the communist period. The mix of origins (places of birth) completes the definition of the urban based on administrative criteria (ratio of non-agricultural employment).

The very intense migration that took place after the fall of the regime in 1991 took various and fairly spatially structured forms, which were partly linked to the urban hierarchy (upward migration, to large cities whose population emigrated mainly abroad), but also with the perpetuation of a strong regional dimension, which saw certain rural regions gradually emptying towards nearby cities, others towards the centres of the metropolitan region that was beginning to shape between Tiranë and Durrës, others towards well-defined metropolitan suburbs, and others finally, on the Ionian coast, directly abroad. The analysis of the development of the metropolis is of particular interest: the succession of migratory sequences corresponds to characteristic urban developments, with a significant reversal which saw around the year 2000 the development of large complexes intended to rehouse a population driven out of the centre succeed a phase of wild suburbanisation resulting from migration from north-eastern Albania. The territorial typologies produced with the Albanian statistical Office (Instat) after 2001 and 2011 censuses, which characterize different types of urban, suburban, specific or rural economic structure municipalities, allow us to well understand and describe the logic of the flows.

These typologies, with others designed to describe older periods, allow us to characterize a form of urbanity gradient (from least to most urban) along which migrations can be qualified in terms of "histority" (intensity of social change, measured by the gap in urbanity between the place of departure and that of destination). We can observe the progressive decline of this history of migration during the communist period ("horizontalization" of internal migration), its very high intensity in the 1990s, then its decline again. We also observe a clear structure by gender: men are generally in the majority in the population that stays at the same home, women are overrepresented in "horizontal" movements, while men are increasingly present according to the growing history of flows, until they are in the majority in movements to large cities or abroad.

This article contributes to the special session on Albanian migration in several ways: 1) a broad vision of Albanian migration from an essentially quantitative and territorial perspective; 2) historical depth; 3) methodological contributions; 4) a good knowledge of Albanian statistics which could be useful for future research. Furthermore the contribution will be illustrated with numerous examples, maps in particular, which constitute a central tool in the work presented.