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**S54 Reactivating the Debate on Contemporary Albanian Migrations: an Updated State-of-the-art**

## **Contemporary Albanian migrations towards Greece: an updated state-of-the-art based on the last two censuses in Albania and Greece**

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### **Extended abstract**

Albanian migration has been a mainstream phenomenon in the last three decades, so that the country has been characterized as 'a laboratory for the study of migration' (King, 2005). Albania is among the twenty major export-countries in the world with respect to its population (World Bank, 2016). In 2020, the Albanian emigration rate worldwide passed over 30 percent (1.25 million people), with most of Albanians abroad concentrated in Italy (43%) and Greece (35%) (OECD, 2022). Greece, that has been a major destination for Albanian emigrants since the 1990s, still captures an important part of this out-migration. In 1991, Albanian citizens formed 12% of the whole migrant stock in Greece, in 2001 surpassed 57%, and in 2011 formed approximately 53% of the total foreign population. In the last Greek Census (2021), Albanians are still the major migrant group, reaching 49% of foreigners. In Albania, the current size of the resident population stock at the national level, compared to 1990, decreased by approximately 12%

due to emigration, followed by a decrease in the birth rate of about 65%, together with an increase in the death rate (of about 20%), (Kokkali & Rembeci, 2024).

The proposed paper seeks to provide an updated state-of-the-art on contemporary Albanian migration towards Greece, relying upon census data from both countries over the past thirty years, with a particular focus on the post-2010 era. We conduct a spatio-temporal analysis to explore the directionality of Albanian international migration, with a specific focus on the Albania-Greece axis. By examining migration patterns from the 1990s to the present, we analyze the areas in Albania that “expel” migrants and those in Greece that “absorb” them. We assess whether migration trends from the 1990s-2000s share similarities with earlier and more recent movements; and we also seek to evaluate the impact of Albania's urban and territorial reorganization before and after 1990 on these dynamics. A key aspect of our investigation focuses on place-based characteristics and their potential in shaping the degree of migrant integration at the local level in host communities. Finally, we investigate the linkages between the regions, districts, and places of departure in Albania and the corresponding arrival points in Greece, identifying commonalities that influence settlement patterns.

Methodologically, we seek to build upon the seminal doctoral research of Alain Jarne (2020), who has carried out the extremely tedious work of the reconstruction of the entire Albanian territory, through the harmonization of Albanian censuses from the Ottoman era (around 1881) until 2001. Our particular focus on the post-2010 period aspires, therefore, to complete and continue – at least partly – the work of Jarne on the geo-history of mobilities in Albania.

When considering a territorial whole (country, region) as a complex system of interacting elements, it is necessary both to identify the changes of the various temporalities in the different parts, but also the changes made in the whole; to do so we need to multiply our approaches in different zonings that coexist, which – following Fernand Braudel – would be, for instance the mountains and the plains, the North and the South of Albania, its interior lands and its borderlands. This ordering of the territory corresponds to a complex order of time. According to Jarne (2020), multiple zonings coexist, but they correspond to different periodicities. These changing connections of multiple zonings are the keystone of the device that allows the interpretation of demographic dynamics – in particular migrations – which vary in space and time.

Following this reasoning, Jarne (2020) has identified at least four Albanias: 1) the capital region; 2) the coastal zone; 3) the North (which is dependent on the social support systems, i.e. social aid and benefits); 4) the South (with its large population of pensioners). The difference between the North and the South of Albania is above all demographic: the massive decline in fertility has arrived much later in the North; on the other hand, the proportion of elderly people often exceeds 30% in a South emptied of its working population, due to diachronic emigration. Despite these differences, Jarne perceives a form of continuity in the population history of modern Albania: the movement of the demographic center of gravity towards the northeast, as well as the constant decrease in the average altitude of residence of the population (descending the mountains to establish to the valleys). This is an innovative ‘reading’ of the territorial evolution of Albania, and we aspire to associate it with the directionality of out-migration of Albanians towards Greece: what are the spatial features of the newcomers’ places of establishment?

This approach on the population movements from Albania to Greece, is turned towards social evolution, prone, therefore, to interpretations regarding mainly social values and representations: mobilities viewed as crossings linked essentially to social change (Jarne, 2020). Indeed, as an integral part of social transformation, migration shapes lifestyles and aspirations, independent of sole economic reasons, such as ameliorating living standards, accumulating wealth, or escaping poverty, which is a mainstream approach to Albanian migrations as solely livelihood strategies (Kokkali, 2024: 296).

Even more importantly, this line of reasoning takes us further than to describe – as it is normally the case – the period of the democratic transition of Albania as a monolithic emigration and a “rural exodus”; rather, as Jarne (2020) stresses, is a desire for urbanity and connectedness, which is displayed at all levels between the rural and the urban, as traditionally defined. Therefore, one of the very innovative aspects of his endeavour is the introduction of the logic of the “gradients of urbanity”, within which is possible to integrate the various ‘rural’ types of the Albanian territory in a continuum that goes from the very rural/agricultural to the higher degrees of urbanity. This approach could be implemented in other contexts as well, and we aspire to attempt this in the case of Albanian migrations towards Greece: what kind of places in Greece ‘absorb’ Albanian migrants? What is their positioning in the continuum of the gradients of urbanity?

## References

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