Transnational mobility and transfers of Albanians in Greece and Italy:
A comparative approach
ITHACA Research Report N. 8/2015

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ITHACA PROJECT

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The ITHACA Research Project

ITHACA - Integration, Transnational Mobility and Human, Social and Economic Capital

ITHACA studies the links between migrants' integration and their transnational engagement. Migrants engage in transnational mobility for an array of economic reasons as well as emotional or political ties with their country of origin. They develop transnational business, trade, investments, or social and cultural programmes and circulate between their two countries. ITHACA explores the interconnections between the integration process and transnational mobility of migrants and aims to answer three key questions: To what extent, and in what ways, do integration conditions in the country of destination encourage transnational mobility? What are the conditions in the country of origin that may encourage transnational mobility? What type of transfers take place through the transnational mobility of migrants? ITHACA focuses on economic integration and mobility conditions as factors that encourage or prevent transnational mobility.

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Executive Summary

Albanian presence in Greece and Italy has signalled a change in the human geography of Albanian migration. The advent of the crisis in both countries has transformed economic, social and political circumstances, subduing both the integration trajectory and the transnational mobility that have come to characterize Albanian migration in both countries. The crisis has led to an increase in unemployment and a displacement of a great number of Albanians, those working in the construction sector in particular. It has become clearly evident that the current socio-economic situation in which Albanians in both countries find themselves has reversed the process of integration. Since their relations and residence must be re-evaluated, Albanian migrants are under pressure to re-establish or strengthen transnational ties to their networks in Albania or elsewhere, because of the need to face the crisis' consequences, whilst return increasingly prevails.

The ability of Albanians to participate in transnational practices has been triggered, generating severance and reconnection between migrants and their receiving and sending countries. Through the analysis of various first and second generation interviews with Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy, de-legalization and exclusion are pondered as an emerging phenomenon in transnationalism. In this sense, transnationalism serves more than just an integrative and reproductive tool because the process of social exclusion adds a new dimension to the transnational narrative in which ties are severed and belonging is negotiated. We consider exclusion to be another element integral to the concept of transnationalism and also to strengthen the explanatory typology of reactive transnationalism. In this context, within the Albanian migration to Italy and Greece, the interplay between integration, transnationalism and return unfolds regardless of the lack of targeted policies at a governmental level both in Albania and in Italy and Greece

Indeed, the impact of the economic recession in connection with the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian citizens to EU, has given a new dynamic to the transnational mobility of Albanian migration. Apart from high rates of unemployment and economic downturn, the recession has magnified the pre-existing challenges and structural problems which are mainly related to precarious legal status and Greece's rigid and restrictive integration policies. Under these circumstances, Albanian migrants have been coerced to reconsider their livelihoods in countries of residence (Greece and Italy) and that of origin (Albania) as a way out strategy from de-legalisation and socio-economic exclusion. This option reshapes transnational patterns and the types of transfers that take place through the transnational mobility of Albanians.

The study explores the dynamics of transnational mobility and transfers of Albanians in Greece and Italy from a comparative perspective. It seeks to understand the interconnections between integration and the

transnational engagement of Albanian migrants. Yet, it casts light on the individuals' dilemma of return and negotiations between transnational mobility and staying put, between different levels of belonging and their orientation to present and future.

The study adopts a holistic perspective on the analysis of the nexus of integration and transnational mobility, developed on three levels: micro, meso and macro. The methodological approach relies on the multifocal ethnographic fieldwork. The empirical part is based on 109 interviews conducted in two phases with Albanian transnational and circular migrants, and with returnees from Greece and Italy during the 2013-2014 period.

The empirical findings show that the transnational mobility patterns of Albanians in both countries have been shaped accordingly with the following factors:

a) geographic proximity and ease of entry,

b) geopolitical framework and historical/cultural ties of Greece-Albania and Italy-Albania,

c) the legal status and level of socio-economic integration,

d) the (loose and strict) integration policies,

e) the impact of the crisis on employment opportunities,

f) the level of influence and facilitation provided by migration networks,

g) the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian nationals entering EU.

Keywords

Albania, Greece, Italy, integration, transnationalism, mobility, return, Albanian immigrants.

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1. Introduction and Scope of the Report

Albanian migration represents the most spectacular case in the Western Balkans-EU migration system. Since the 1990s, Albania has witnessed one of the greatest and most dramatic migration flows of its history. The pictures of desperate Albanians "breaking the walls" of Western embassies or of the desperate Albanian refugees piled into crowded rusty ships to escape a country spiralling into political and economic chaos, became part of the iconography of global migration in the 1990s (King and Mai, 2008).

Over a million Albanians (about 27.5% of the total Albanian population and 35% of the active population) migrated abroad (RoA, 2010). The massive migration outflows that occurred over a short period of time as the country moved almost overnight from absolute isolation to large-scale migration, the ratio of the number of emigrants to the country's population and the typology of these moves, make Albania a significant and unique case (King and Vullnetari, 2009; Vullnetari and King, 2011).

Indeed, the 'uniqueness' of Albanian migration is further characterised by the fact that it has been directed almost exclusively towards two neighbouring countries: Italy and Greece (Labrianidis and Kazazi, 2006). In stressing that migration was, for most Albanians, the only possible way to survive an economic crisis that was integral to the wider post-communist political transformation of the country, Barjaba and Perrone (1996, p. 133) use the phrase "migration of economic refugees" to describe the initial Albanian migration to Italy and Greece, whilst Van Hear (1998) refers to a new migration order. King (2005) goes a step further by pointing out that emigration from Albania represents a unique laboratory for the study of migration and development.

The 'exceptionality' of Albanian migration includes its role in guaranteeing the economic survival of Albanian society, its overall magnitude in relation to the size of the Albanian population, its sudden and forceful emergence after fifty years of internal mobility restrictions and international isolation, its interconnections with internal migration and with the emergence of trafficking and organised crime (Mai, 2003, p. 940).

However, there is another important aspect that should be taken into consideration when analysing Albanian migration. The fundamental need to improve their economic well-being through migration cannot be separated from their aspiration to seek for a socio-political alternative to a fifty years authoritarian regime. In this respect, economic migration of Albanians to Greece and Italy became an intrinsically political act, as it implicitly challenged the model of personhood that was consistent with the principles of communist dictatorship (Mai, 2001).

Ever since the 1990' Albanians have been the largest migrant community in Greece and the second largest migrant group in Italy. Official data refers to 363,649 Albanians (out of 527,264 TCN, or 69% of the total

migrant population) staying legally in Greece (Greek Ministry of Interior, 2015) and 495,709 in Italy (Istat, 2014)[1] (out of 4,922,085 or 10% of the total migrant population). In the meantime, the phenomenon of voluntary return migration began to emerge, mainly due to the irregular or precarious socio-economic situation of migrants resulting from the economic crisis that broke out in both countries since 2009.

With regards to the broader picture, the present circumstances of the economic and political crisis in the two countries signify a historical shift in the trajectory (of approximately 25 years) of Albanian migration. The crisis has led to an increase in unemployment and a displacement of a great number of Albanians, those working in the construction sector in particular. Given the current situation in Greece and Italy, it is estimated that a significant number of Albanians have returned to their home country. The 2011 census in Albania showed that approximately 139,827 Albanians had returned between 2001 and 2011, the majority of which were men returning from Greece (INSTAT and IOM, 2014, p. 9). Moreover, the study carried out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Albania in 2013 recorded 133,544 returns in the 2009-2013 period alone. The majority of returns were voluntary and concerned Albanian migrants who were previously in Greece (70.8%) and Italy (23.7%) – though the difference in magnitude between the two is substantial. It is estimated that the tendency to return to Albania is primarily due to the impact of the economic crisis on the Greek job market (INSTAT and IOM, 2014, p. 9). It is also not a coincidence that for the first time in the history of Albanian migration, the percentage of Albanians residing outside Albania is greater in Italy than in Greece (43%) (INSTAT and IOM, 2014, p.11).

In fact, Albanian presence in Greece and Italy has signalled a change in the human geography of Albanian migration. The advent of the crisis has changed economic, social and political circumstances, subduing both the integration trajectory and the transnational mobility that have come to characterize Albanian migration in Greece and Italy. Evidence in Greece refer to the regular migrants losing the legal status and lapsing back into irregularity due to the high unemployment rates, which has been estimated to reach 36% for the third quarter of 2012 (Labour Force Survey, 2012). Journalist sources[2], citing data provided by the Greek Ministry of Interior, referred to about 130,000 to 140,000 Albanian migrant workers losing their stay permits because they were unable to secure the required number of social insurance stamps (IKA) in order to renew their documents (Gemi, 2013, p. 4). According to MIPEX's results (2015)[3] employment rates in Greece are actually the lowest in the EU (around 50%) with economic recession and austerity measures exacerbating the structural problems within Greece social and integration policies. As few immigrants had secured permanent

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[1] For details see: Triandafyllidou, Gropas and Bartolini (2015), Background report. Country: Italy.

[2] Daily newspaper Eleftherotypia. Available at: http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=117071.

[3] Form more details see: http://www.mipex.eu/greece

residence and equal rights under Greece's rigid and restrictive residence policies, many of them have lost their jobs, also lost their legal status and therefore their basic social entitlements. As a consequence, by the end of 2014, Greece ranked 27th out of the 38 MIPEX countries with the most problematic policy areas being residence status, citizenship and anti-discrimination policies for long-settled immigrant population. However, it should be pointed out that this is not the case for the Albanian citizens of Greek ethnicity who are not treated as immigrants or third country nationals as their legal status regulated by the Special Omogeneis Identity Card (EDTO) falls under a different legal provision, which allows them to enjoy almost the same rights with Greek citizens. Interestingly, from 2007 onward the EDTO identity card holders were strongly motivated to become Greek citizens, a process that gradually altered the number of EDTO issued so far (Triandafyllidou and Maroufof, 2012; Gemi, 2013, p. 14).

Italy, on the other hand, appears to perform better than Greece. MIPEX results (2015)[4] ranked it 13th out of the 38 countries, with country achieving high scores on legal immigration and equal rights, but lacking behind on achieving equal opportunities in practice. Characteristically, most immigrants in Italy have become long-term residents, but not full Italian citizens, due to its restrictive, discretionary and bureaucratic paths to citizenship.

At the same time, the impact of the economic recession in connection with the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian citizens to EU, has given a new dynamic to the transnational mobility of Albanian migration. The temporary circular movements for seasonal, often informal, employment in specific sectors of the economy (e.g., agriculture and tourism) are now the most frequent means by which the migration of Albanians to Greece and to a lesser extent in Italy, is reproduced (Gemi, 2013). Furthermore, evidence from IRMA fieldwork findings[5] (2015) has shown that a considerable number of Albanian migrants seem to reconsider their stay in both countries and many are heading back to Albania or moving towards other industrial countries of Western Europe with the aim of finding employment opportunities (Triandafyllidou, 2013b; Gemi, 2015).

The current transition in which Albanians find themselves has reversed the process of social integration. Since their socio-economic relations and residence must be re-evaluated, they are under pressure to re-establish or strengthen transnational ties to their networks in Albania or elsewhere, because of the need to face the crisis' consequences, whilst - as IRMA findings show - thoughts of return increasingly prevail (Gemi, 2015, p. 36).

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[4] For more details see: http://www.mipex.eu/italy

[5] www.irma.eliamep.gr

This study aims to explore the dynamics of transnational mobility and transfers of Albanians in Greece and Italy from a comparative perspective. Concretely, it seeks to understand the interconnections between integration and the transnational engagement of Albanian migrants. Yet, it casts light on the individuals' dilemma of return and negotiations between transnational mobility and staying put, between different levels of belonging and their orientation to present and future. Apart from high rates of unemployment and economic downturn, the recession did magnify the pre-existing challenges and structural problems mainly related to precarious legal status and Greece's rigid and restrictive integration policies. In these circumstances, Albanian migrants have been coerced to reconsider their livelihoods in both countries of residence (Greece and Italy) and that of origin (Albania) as a way out strategy from de-legalisation and socio-economic marginalisation. This option reshapes transnational patterns and types of transfers that take place through the transnational mobility of Albanians.

In the following section, we first discuss existing insights in the literature on the nexus between integration, transnational engagement, and mobility to frame our empirical evidence. The methodology section addresses the fieldwork parameters of qualitative research applied to this study. The third section provides an overview of the main characteristics of Albanian migration in Greece and Italy. The last section presents the empirical perspective on the forms of transnational engagement of Albanians in both countries.

Theoretical approaches: integration vis-a-vis transnationalism

It has been widely acknowledged that the theory of transnationalism has changed the understanding of migrants' cognitive geographies and their pathways of integration and patterns of mobility (Vathi, 2015, p. 117). Some scholars support the idea that integration and transnational behaviour can be complementary, in particular in the case of economic integration (Fokkema *et al*., 2012; Guarnizo *et al*., 2003; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002), while others question the assumed positive relation between migrants' integration and transnationalism (Faist, 2000; Portes, 1997).

In fact, various studies have shown that the process of integration in the host society is positively correlated with engagement in transnational mobility. Insofar, the discussion on transnational engagement is nowadays closely related to patterns and processes of integration in the host society (Vathi, 2015, p. 179). At this point, it's a question of how integration is defined. Furthermore, exploring integration's dimensions would help to understand its impact on transnational mobility and the sort of transfers that are pursued through it (Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2014, p. 10). Integration is a broader term that refers to a dynamic, continuous and multi-dimensional process, the success of which requires a two-way adaptation: from both immigrants and host society. Such an approach recognizes, however, the 'asymmetry' (Bauböck, 2005, p. 18) it implies, since the institutional opportunity structures and state's mechanisms play the decisive role in the outcome of

the process. In reality, however, policy discourses on migrant integration often perceive the majority culture as a bounded unit to which migrants as individuals have to integrate, or saying differently assimilate (Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2014, p. 10). Brubaker's more recent arguments on the 'return of assimilation' (Brubaker, 2011, p. 168) emphasise several new aspects which have informed the integration discourse and emphasis is now placed on the *process of becoming similar*, as opposed to a theoretical end-state of complete absorption. This abandonment of the idea of a 'core culture' requires the examination of discrete issues and processes.

In this context, integration is examined not as a general concept but in its different dimensions as they are defined by ITHACA concept paper and thus covering the four policy areas defined by Zaragoza declaration (2010) and which are: employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship[6]. Indeed, this seems to be an interesting approach as it goes beyond the discourse on immigrant integration in Europe, which for decades has focused on the emergence of differences between the classical models of integration that characterize a large number of countries. While emphasising that national differences will not disappear, Joppke (2007) argues that they will persist in two ways, first '*as sheer contingency and history, which will never be the same in any two places*' and second, in nation-state efforts '*to obstruct, but more often to accommodate and mould the new in the image of the past*' (Joppke, 2007, p. 272). In other words, Joppke suggests a distinction between political and apolitical integration. According to this view, political integration adopts the perspective of the host country's national identity and historically derived conceptions of social membership. Apolitical integration, on the other hand, is expressed by EU policy norms and directives that focus on the depoliticizing of integration. Nevertheless, the question of how the level of social integration within a given national context could impact the level and density of the transnational engagement still persists.

Although invoked with a variety of meanings, the term transnationalism provides an umbrella concept for understanding some of the most transformative processes and developments in contemporary migration studies. The meaning of transnationalism is used to delineate a kind of social formation spanning national borders, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organizations (Faist, 2010b, p. 9) which involve simultaneous overlapping affiliations of persons to geographically separate polities (Baubock, 2002, p. 5). It also refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec, 1999, p. 447). Another feature central to the analysis of transnational social formations are structures or systems of relationships best described as networks (Faist, 2010a, p. 89). Dense and highly

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[6] For more detail see Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2014, p. 11

active networks spanning vast spaces are transforming many kinds of familial, social, cultural, economic and political relationships, with new technologies being at the heart of today's transnational networks.

In more practical terms, transnationality is defined by cross-border social and symbolic bonds and practices maintained by individuals and households (Fauser *et al*., 2012, p. 4). In this context, transnationalism refers to migrants' multi-stranded relationships such as familial, economic, social, religious, and political, which span borders and link societies of origin and settlement (King, Frykman and Vullnetari, 2013, p. 127). As it is pointed out by ITHACA report (2014) and which come to characterize the Albanian migration to Italy and Greece, transnational mobility may be more trans-local than transnational (Gropas, Triandafyllidou and Bartolini, 2014, p. 15). In this perspective, trans-locality involves local-to-local connections across national boundaries that are created through everyday practices of transnational migrants (ibid).

To make possible the analysis of integration and pattern of transnational mobility, a number of researchers have identified various typologies and forms of transnationalism. Ambrosini (2013) has identified a scale of migrants' economic transnational involvement with that of circulatory transnationalism (i.e. entrepreneur travels back and forth) reaching the highest level. It then decreases towards other forms, such as connective transnationalism, commercial transnationalism and symbolic transnationalism (p. 5). Others suggest the transnational mobility of immigrants is clearly placed in the framework of the integration discourse, where national integration policies as well as citizenship regimes are considered as systemic opportunity structures that may encourage, discourage, or shape the degrees and types of immigrants' economic, political and social-cultural involvement in transnational activities. However, over time, as the process of social integration deepens, transnationalism decreases unless the presence of favourable conditions develops forms of advanced transnationalism (Ambrosini, 2013, p. 16). In contrast to this approach, the study of Cela *et al*., (2013) - which examine the relations of transnationalism with duration of residence and integration of Eastern European migrants in Italy - show a positive relationship between migrants' economic integration and transnationalism, suggesting that economic resources facilitate the maintenance and development of cross-border ties (2013, p. 195). Interestingly, Portes (1999, p. 472) emphasizes the positive role of transnational activities in facilitating successful adaptation to the first generation.

Going a step further, Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo (2002) identify three forms of transnationalism. The linear form suggests that, as time passes, integration increases and transnationalism slowly decreases. Second, resource dependent transnationalism implies that time and financial resources are necessary to engage in cross-border practices, assuming thereby a positive relationship between integration and transnationalism. Third, reactive transnationalism results from discrimination or a negative experience of integration that migrants face in the host society. Therefore, a positive relationship between exclusion (negative integration) and transnationalism is also assumed.

Taking a broader contextual perspective, Glick Schiller *et al,*. (1995, p. 50) support that being transnational is related to three basic factors: the history of immigration and modes of reception in the host country, migrants' cultural resources and discrimination faced by an immigrant group. At the individual level, the forms and intensity of transnational engagement are assumed to be further conditioned by variables such as gender, social class, migration channel, legal status and economic means (Vathi, 2015, p. 119), which are simultaneously related to community structure and political circumstances in the country of origin (Vertovec, 2009).

It is acknowledged at the same time that the phenomenon of discrimination and socio-economic exclusion of migrants in country of settlement can also lead to the reproduction of transnational mobility (Faist, 2010a, p. 88). As such, migrants may face different opportunity structures in homeland and host country, and may move up or down the ladder in respect to one of the two, or experience downward or upward mobility in both of them (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007, p. 139). For instance, most well-educated Albanian migrants experience de-skilling and devaluation of their human capital because they are only able to access low-status jobs in destination countries, notably Greece and Italy (Vathi, 2015, p. 120).

In this context, transnationality may play a role in producing and reproducing social inequalities that are understood in terms of inequality of opportunities in various forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) rather than outcome (Faist, 2011). From this perspective, migrants' economic, political and socio-cultural engagement in transnational activities has been seen as an alternative strategy to cope with the risk of downward mobility (Fauser *et al*., 2012, p. 10), as well as an attempt to create a protective environment against discrimination and marginalization commonly found in the host society (Portes, 1999, p. 471). This latter option, termed as reactive transnationalism, implies that the greater the number of experiences of discrimination reported, the greater the participation in transnational activities (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2005, p. 904). On the other hand, it is assumed that the experience of downward mobility along with lower educational and occupational skills and limited networks in the country of origin may deepen social inequalities since other alternatives for upward mobility are not available. In particular, exclusion and disadvantage in time of deep crisis are thought to be related to transnational orientation, although it is acknowledged that different migrant groups may adopt diametrically opposed strategies. They may combine strategies of challenging their status, retreating to their transnational identities and even adopting the dominant society's negative stereotypes of themselves (Joppke and Morawska, 2003). Elements of this last strategy have been evident among Albanians in Greece and Italy (King and Mai, 2008, pp. 208- 209).

Following the above line of reasoning, this study suggests that maintaining transnational mobility is sometimes considered to reflect a deeper level of (legal and economic) integration, or conversely to be a reaction to experiences of exclusion (negative integration) and discrimination. In the first case, previous

studies[7] have shown a clear positive relationship between transnationalism and economic integration, whereas in the latter case, the reactive transnational mobility is seen as a reaction to experiences of legal and social exclusion (de-regularisation and unemployment) and discrimination in a time of deep crisis. If this is the case, then it might be assumed that even though transnational transfers in Albania or elsewhere may provide some scarce resources for a better and secure livelihood, it would be of little and only short-term benefit and can eventually contribute to further marginalization.

Sample and methodology

The present study adopts a holistic perspective on the analysis of the nexus of integration and transnational mobility, developed on three levels: micro, meso and macro. The micro-level approaches the migrant as an independent actor, as an agent within a constellation of increased cross-border flows not only of goods, but also of persons (Faist, 2010a, p. 82). The meso-level probes into the relational structures and networks (mainly family) that the individual migrant develops through their transnational patterns, whereas the macro-level analyses the broader national framework within which the dynamic of integration and transnational mobility develops.

The methodological approach recognizes the multi-generational population as the unit of study, rather than the individual: this is crucial, in that different age cohorts will integrate differently (e.g., the automatic host language acquisition of children, compared with the greater difficulty for adults). Analogously, we must also recognize the heterogeneity of migrant population under study, and that the shift will be to another form of heterogeneity within that population group. This is particularly likely to involve intergenerational differences – even if we focus mostly on first generation immigrants. Another approach is a shift from a transitive to an intransitive phenomenon: the former sees immigrants as the objects of a process or government policy, whereas the latter recognizes not only that immigrants have agency, but also that it is a social process that individuals are (usually unconsciously) part of. Lastly, a new aspect identified is of disaggregated approach with distinct processes occurring in different domains.

The methodology of the empirical part relies on the multifocal ethnographic fieldwork which is based on 109 interviews conducted in two phases with Albanian transnational and circular migrants, and with returnees from Greece and Italy during the 2013-2014 period. More specifically, during the first phase 70 interviews were carried out in Greece from August to December 2013. In order to achieve a greater demographic

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[7] It refers to the work of Faist (2000), notably the 'transnational circuits' and 'resource dependent' typology, and that of Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo (2002).

coverage and to take into account the socio-economic differences between different regions of Greece, interviews with Albanian migrants were conducted in five locations: Athens (46), Thessaloniki (7), Rodos (13), Alepochori (2) and Gythio (2). The main focus was on the first generation (57%), but we also interviewed young Albanians from the second generation (43%) in order to earn a dual insight into the issues under examination, by identifying the ways in which members of the two generations experience transnational mobility and integration during the economic crisis. As the literature on transnational families has shown, family structures are relevant to understanding transnational family behaviour. Sixty percent of our first generation interviewees had settled, married and made a family in Greece, while others had dependent relatives in Albania. A small number of individuals among our sample (8) were single and relatively young men with dependent relatives in Albania, who tended to follow a circular migration pattern for employment-related reasons. Sixty four per cent of our interviewees were underemployed, and 36 per cent were entirely unemployed. The majority of interviewees were living in Greece for more than 10 years with 63 per cent being at immediate risk of losing their legal status, 23 per cent being irregular and 14 holding a long-term stay permit. The second generation sample consists of young unmarried Albanians aged 18-28, with most studying in Greek universities or professional high schools and working part-time, mostly irregularly. They are born in Albania and moved to Greece with their parents as infants or young children. Interviewees were asked key questions concerning the main demographic data, their professional and work situation in Greece and their transnational patterns before and after the economic crisis.

The second phase of the study focused on the country of origin: Albania. In March 2014, 39 interviews were conducted with Albanian transnational/circular migrants and returnees from Italy (15 interviews) and Greece (24 interviews). Again, particular emphasis was placed on the diversity and geographical dispersion of the sample, with the intention of enriching it with a broad range of migrant biographies and paths and with persons of different gender, age and family background, different educational level and employment sector. So far, 18 interviews were carried out in the Albanian capital Tirana, 17 in the northern cities of Shkodra, Lezhe and Lac, two in the southern city of Saranda, one in Vlore and one in Durres.

In both phases, we have followed a snowball sampling technique as well as purposive sampling by visiting places frequented by Albanian migrants, like the offices of the Confederation of Albanian Associations, the Albanian Youth Association "Studenti", both located in the centre of Athens, or travel agencies and coffee shops in Albania.

The methodology that we applied to this study was slightly distinctive from the other ITHACA case studies as we focused mostly on the impact of the crisis on Albanian migrants' integration in Italy and Greece respectively and on their transnational mobility and transnational economic engagement. This approach gives us a strong vantage point as it allows us to map transnational patterns in the present crisis era, and the

factors that shape it. So far, the transnational mobility of the sample has been conceptualized as a cross-border physical movement for the purposes of economic activity in both Greece/Italy and Albania. The interview guide entailed questions about the impact of crisis on integration status, the motivations for becoming transnationally mobile, the factors that facilitated or impeded their transnational mobility either in Albania or in Greece and Italy and the type of transfers carried out.

2. Albanian migration in Greece and Italy: understanding the links between integration pattern and transnational mobility

Different policy frameworks and institutional arrangements have proved to be important factors affecting the integration and transnational mobility patterns of migrants in Greece and Italy. A comparative study between Italy and Greece in the field of integration and transnational mobility is not a new endeavour. A considerable number of literature (Veikou and Triandafyllidou, 2000; Mai and Schwandner-Siever, 2003; Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2011; Vathi, 2015) have highlighted their similarities and differences as regards the size and main features of their immigrant populations, their migration and integration policies during the last two decades, as well as the transnational patterns of first and second generations. Although Greece and Italy differ significantly in their size, political organization, economic structure and national identity definition, their migration policies during the last two decades have developed along similar directions. These similarities can largely be attributed to the geographical strategic position in Southern Europe, their lack of previous immigration experience, and their large informal economies that have provided for 'informal' employment opportunities for immigrants (Triandafyllidou, 2007). In both countries, immigration laws are characterized as reactive rather than proactive. Naturalization and integration policies are particularly stringent while long-term resident permits are hard to obtain. In fact, the cases of Italy and Greece represent the so-called model of "immigration turnaround" in Southern Europe (King and Black, 1997).

In both countries, the first arrivals of Albanians were met with a positive reception, presumably due to limited contacts with Albanian reality, in combination with a widespread 'nostalgia' for the communist regime expressed mostly by leftist forces in both countries. However, this trend was soon followed by a negative attitude, and in both countries a high degree of stigmatisation was further exacerbated by national media. It was no coincidence that Albanian immigration was granted a central focus in migration-related debates and policy-making in Greece and Italy, despite their rather successful integration in these host countries comparing to other migrant groups (Mai, 2003, p. 940; Gemi, 2015).

In Italy, Albanians are the second largest community of foreign residents (Instat, 2014)[8]. Actually, the largest group are Romanians (22% of foreign population) followed by Albanians (10%) and Moroccans (9.2%). Conversely, in Greece Albanians are by far the largest migrant community, making up 69% of the total migrant population legally residing in the country (Greek Ministry of Interior, 2015). The migration outflows from Albania to Greece and Italy were for a long time dominated by male temporary labour migration. Later on, mainly as a result of family reunification Albanian populations in Italy and Greece have attained a gender balance. Nowadays, for instance, the gender ration of Albanians in Italy is 118 males to 100 females (Cela, *et al.*, 2013, p. 196).

With reference to integration of Albanians both countries, Mai and Schwandner-Sievers (2003) characterized their socio-economic condition through the term *differential inclusion,* implying that migrants are integrated in some sections of society, mainly in the labour market, but denied access to others, like citizenship and political participation. In fact, in Greece, most of Albanians still continue to live in a status of partial integration (Gemi, 2015, p. 257), as a result of the model of *differential exclusion* and the non-interventionist integration policies implemented so far. Indeed, the stance of the Greek state over the past twenty years may be broadly summarized as one where the state officially rejected immigration through restrictions and closed-border policies, while unofficially acknowledging the market's demand for low-paid, cheap labour (Gemi, 2015, p. 258). At the same time, Gropas and Triandafyllidou (2014, p. 27) point out what they term the Italian *subordinate integration* approach towards migrants (viewing it as a part of Southern European immigration model).

With regard to transnational mobility of Albanians, Vullnetari (2009) maintains that being a male, having a lower education level, originating from a rural area and having positive short term migration experiences are all factors that indicated a propensity to be involved in temporary transnational cross border mobility. Indeed, the METOIKOS findings (see Triantafyllidou, 2011, p. 13) confirm that legal seasonal migration involves young and middle aged men who live in rural areas in Albania and go to Italy and Greece every year for a few months per year to work in agriculture in northern Greece and also in Italian regions with intensive agricultural production.

> *At first, we migrated all together as family, but given that we did not manage to find a permanent job and appropriate accommodation I had to bring my family back to Albania. Then, I found a seasonal job in Savigliano, picking apples in fall. (I., male, 43, Italy)*

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[8] For more details see: Triandafyllidou, Gropas and Bartolini (2015), Background report. Country: Italy.

Despite their commonalities, there are significant differences between the Albanian migration patterns in the two countries (Vathi, 2015, p. 30). While migration to Greece and Italy has been mostly irregular (King, 2003), the different legislative and policy frameworks has affected migrants' regularization and, subsequently, their level of integration and development of transnational mobility patterns. The study of King and Mai (2004) on integration of Albanians in Lecce and Modena found that they are moving rapidly towards structural integration. This is corroborated by the results of MIPEX (2015), according to which Albanians in Italy display the best integration level (the overall integration index stands at 0.54) compared to other migrant groups, while displaying a high degree of cultural and economic integration (0.57 and 0.56 respectively). Conversely, in Greece, East Europeans are found to display a higher level of integration (0.56) in comparison to Albanians (0.54), who come second (Bellas, 2012; Gemi, 2015, p. 6).

At the same time, the study of Vathi (2015, p. 83) found that integration of Albanians in the labour market differs significantly between the two countries. Variations are mainly related to differences in accessibility to the educational system, the characteristics of the labour market and the nature of the opportunity structure. According to Vathi's findings, some of the migrants experienced de-skilling and expressed contempt at not being able to enter education to enhance qualifications earned in Albania in order to earn an office-based job. The education and training system in Greece is particularly inaccessible, whereas many highly educated migrants in Italy have successfully 'converted' their degrees.

Likewise, transnational mobility patterns differ across the two countries and between genders. The study of Vathi (2015) found cases when only the father continues visiting, reflecting the poor social integration of Albanian men compared to women. One factor that contributes to differences between sites is the situation with regard to regularization and residence permits. In Greece, difficulties with papers have obstructed transnational movements to Albania and other countries. Before the liberalisation of visa regime in 2010, from time to time, the Greek authorities had allowed Albanians to travel home only during holidays. Undoubtedly, such restrictions impact on transnational transfers and transnational family ties of Albanians in Greece (Vathi, 2015, p. 127). Nevertheless, after the introduction of the 6-month window of the seasonal invitation (*metaklisi*) system in 2001, more Albanians irregular migrants followed a more fixed pattern of transnational mobility for seasonal employment reasons (Triandafyllidou, 2011, p. 13). In Italy, the annual quota regime implemented by the Italian government after 1998, it was seen as an attempt to control immigration mobility according to labour market needs (Triantafyllidou, 2011, p. 11).

Referring to the rural economy, Papadopoulos (2011, p. 177) considers Albanian migration as an important case study that shows how the geographical and social mobility has transformed rural communities into translocal rural places in Greece. He goes a step further by viewing the mobility of Albanians as part of the new rurality that has been slowly but steadily developing in rural Greece (Papadopoulos, 2011, p. 181). On

the other hand, Michail (2013, p. 270) maintains that Albanian migration has been fundamentally transnational in character since it onset, mainly due to economic and political instability in Albania and the problematic migration policies in Greece (p. 266). In fact, the incomplete legislative framework and the persistent refusal to accept the transformation of the country into a pole of attraction for migrants that characterize the first phase of Albanian migration (1991-1998) led to the long-term irregular stay and employment of Albanians, whereby transnational and circular (irregular) movements became the norm. However, the recent political developments such as the liberalisation of entry visas for Albanian citizens entering the EU, the economic crisis and the strong tendency of de-regularisation that followed, as well as the uncertain status of the second generation, caused a cascade of events that are related to return, to the increase of transnational and circular mobility and the search for other migratory destinations. The result of these developments is the creation of a particular category of migrants that constantly move between two countries. As shown by a recent study (Gemi, 2015), the expanding possibility of legal entry into Greece has had the immediate consequence of enhancing the (irregular) transnational and circular mobility patterns for seasonal work. The increased transnational cross-border movements facilitates the mobility of the (by and large unskilled) Albanian labour force between the two countries, and its adaptation to new, even more flexible forms of labour relations because of the pressure exercised by the economic crisis in the labour market, both in Greece and Albania. Clearly, the reticence displayed by the Greek state in managing main integration issues and including them in the policy agenda has led to a prolonged delay in engaging with integration as a policy requiring long-term planning. And, while this arrangement gradually began to give way to a more rational evaluation of the phenomenon, it was interrupted by the recession in 2009. If anything, the recession made it clear that it was the market and not the state that allowed for some form of integration, for it was with the collapse of market mechanisms that trends of integration were reversed, through the de-regularisation of a considerable number of immigrants. Furthermore, the limited range of the state's institutional intervention appears to allow for only local and individual micro-level strategies in shaping socio-economic integration.

Indeed, as many studies have revealed, there is a dynamic transnational social space between Albania and Greece, and also between Albania and Italy (King and Vullnetari, 2010, p. 26; Chiodi and Devole, 2005; Maroukis, 2005). In this context, the immigrant's legal and socio-economic status has played a crucial role in determining transnational mobility in both countries, as it allows them to be highly (or not) mobile not only geographically, but also occupationally and socially.

All in all, the transnational mobility patterns of Albanians in both countries seem to have been shaped accordingly with the following factors:

a) geographic proximity and ease of entry

b) geopolitical framework and historical/cultural ties of Greece-Albania and Italy-Albania

c) the legal status and level of socio-economic integration,

d) the (loose and strict) integration policies,

e) the impact of the crisis on employment opportunities,

f) the level of influence and facilitation provided by migration networks,

g) the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian nationals entering EU (implemented in December 2010),

h) the bilateral relations between Albanian and Greece and between Albania and Italy, and

i) the unstable political and socio-economic situation in Albania.

3. Forms of transnational engagement of Albanians in Greece and Italy

The dynamics of transnational mobility and transfers creates multiple relationships connecting places of origin and destination in a variety of ways. In the Albanian case several forms of transnational patterns and communities of people expanding beyond national borders have been observed (Lymberaki and Lambrianidis, 2004, p. 13). A study conducted by King and Vullnetari (2009) indicated that the transnational practices of Albanian households in Greece are increasing and there is an emergent transnational social space. At the same time, in research carried out by Michail (2009) it was pointed out that proximity with Albania facilitated migrants' transnational investment practices while keeping quite strong their connections with family members and places of origin. Also, it has been further argued that increasingly transnational activities of Albanians denote a strategy of integration as an alternative answer to the both economic and political instability in Albania and problematic migration environment in Greece (Michail 2013, p. 266).

However, the fundamental elements of Albanian migrants' membership in both countries have been contested due to repercussions of the economic crisis in relation to their legal and socio-economic status. With a series of negative ramifications for Albanians the legitimacy of membership in both countries is compromised because the main denominator (employment) has changed drastically from circumstances when they first moved to Greece and Italy (Gemi, 2014).

In the meantime, Albanian migrants and their families in Greece and Italy are going through a new transnational rupture as they are neither able to sustain a decent standard of living there nor to create a new and viable livelihood back in Albania, which remains poor and disorganized (King, Frykman and Vullnetari, 2013, p. 137). Therefore, transnational patterns and connections to each country are changing, memberships

are being challenged, and transnational practices are being modified. Some practices cannot be performed to the extent to which they once were, while some cannot be performed at all (e.g. remittances and frequency/amount).

At the same time, there are those who will or have already returned to Albania, as well as those who have settled permanently in Greece and Italy, or have considered moving somewhere else. But, nevertheless, for an Albanian who had lived for many years in Greece and Italy, who knows the language, who maintains relationships with Greeks and Italians (employer or/and other local networks) and friends and relatives who are still there, it is not really difficult to move 'back and forth' which is facilitated by the geographic proximity. In the case of young men of second generation who as result of their precarious legal status are 'forced' to be transnationally mobile, this is even more relevant.

> *I have been coming to Albania and back again in Italy for the last 5-6 years… I decided this way just because after finishing my school there, I did not manage to find a job as an electrician, for which I had already studied in Italy. Before coming here (Albania) we (with his family) thought move to any other area within the Italian territory or go to any other country…We made efforts but the point is that I have to renovate my legal documents every year and I am not allowed to move anywhere else. I even consulted a lawyer who told me that the only way was to have an indefinite contract (indeterminata). But in the given circumstances it was difficult even to find a job and let alone to find a person who could provide for me an indefinite contract… I returned back to Italy since there in summer started the working season. The salary of a month here (in Albania) I could ensure for 2 days work back in Italy. So my interest was to work back in Italy… The second time I worked here in Albania to a "Call centre" (T., male, 26, Italy)*

Given the liberalisation of visa regime along with the establishment of long-term resident status in both countries, a new dynamic of transnational space has emerged with transnational movements becoming easier. In this sense, transnational practices and norms followed by Albanian migrants situate them within this realm of transnationalism, by holding connections to their host country and origin country that legitimize membership to each. This legitimization is a major part of their integration, as being a part of and maintaining each connection - still to Greece/Italy and Albania - both physically and psychologically. As indeed Glick-Schiller *et al*., (1992, p. 5) have suggested "constant back and forth flows of people could not be captured by categories of 'permanent migrants', 'return migrants', 'sojourners' or 'second generation. Instead, other forms of social networks and economic activities link people who live in different places and, as the study of Lyberaki and Lambrianidi (2004) has confirmed, such links continue to exist after migrants' return. Moreover, they consider the role of cross-border and domestic social capital in the smooth integration

of returning migrants as one of the positive aspects of Albanian migration to Greece and Italy that may explain its transnational mobility (Lyberaki and Lambrianidi, 2004, p. 13).

> *My son lives now here (Albania) but currently he has gone to Italy because given that it is the opening of the working season and as he works in a group of waiters, they travel and work all over Italy whenever they find a job. But they do not pay as they did before… Usually it covers the June, July and August just like weddings, parties, etc. (M., female, 52, Italy)*

The question raised here is how Albanian migrants resume to transnational patterns and transfers and how are they constructing new transnational bridges between countries as the crisis has really created a new different sent of transnational engagements. With an aim to explore the interconnections between integration and the transnational engagement, on the one hand, and the insecurity and contingency established by the crisis and transnational rupture it has caused, on the other, we'll analyse the empirical findings which are structured around three dimensions.

Economic transnational mobility

Albania relied to a great degree on remittances from immigrants, most of them settled in Greece and Italy. Remittances were viewed as the most important financial contribution of migrants both to the development of Albanian economy (micro level) and to their families in Albania (micro level). Furthermore, they have been crucial vis-à-vis the economic survival and poverty alleviation of migrant's families back in Albania (King and Vullnetari, 2009). As Mai and Schwandner-Sievers (2003) have pointed out "an Albanian with a good job outside the country can support at least five people in Albania" (p. 941). Vullnetari and King (2011) refer to migrants performing the least qualified jobs and facing social exclusion while abroad in order to retain or gain higher social status in origin communities (p. 127).

The most commonly known scheme of economic transnational patterns of Albanian migrants included: earn money in Greece and Italy and send home to family, build home in Albania to take care of family, build prestige/status, facilitates flow of goods between the two countries, and business investments in Greece/Italy, in Albania and between the two. Given low domestic income levels, estimates in 1990' had suggested that an Albanian with a good job abroad can support at least five people in Albania (Hall, 1996, p. 186), whilst others supported the remittances sent by one migrant to be 2.5 times the sum of the average Albanian wages of all of the members of a family (Misja and Misja, 1995, p. 228). Nowadays, however, this sort of relationships and strategy of investment has broken down because of the crisis in Greece and Italy.

Indeed, Albania benefited from the Greek and Italian economy and labour sector that allowed higher living standards to evolve through remittances. However, it did not prepare for the dependency developed by

family members receiving remittances. Thus when the crisis hit, harsh consequences ensued. Interestingly, as Brettell (2008) has pointed out transnational transfers often result in "migration-dependent communities and the generation of further migration through the diffusion of consumerism" (2008, p. 119). However, transformation was not a choice, and adaptation became an embedded feature to be learned. Through negotiations of adaptation, transnational activities were altered to be suited to the migrants' milieu, which includes that in Greece and Italy, and in Albania.

On the other hand, as the stability of remittance flows is dependent on the migrants' legal status and position in the labour market, the impacts of financial crisis in Greece and Italy along with the decrease in remittance flows qualify as the main transmission channel of a domino effect vis-à-vis the economy of Albania. Many interviewees reported Albania being in a politically and economically worse state than Greece or Italy, a common deterrent of return to Albania.

It is surely no coincidence that the findings of a survey (April 2012) conducted by the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) show that 61% of the Albanian citizens expressed their strong desire to leave the country if they could. In fact, the main driver behind migration trends continues to be the lack of employment opportunities, poverty, and the political instability in the country.

An additional push factor is the lack of demand for labour force, particularly in the formal sector and the unregulated agriculture sector which has led people, even those returned from Greece and Italy to start their own independent economic activities (Gemi, 2013, p. 8). In this sense, transnational mobility takes the form of transnational initiatives inspired by a more entrepreneurial and proactive attitude cultivated during the stay in the host country (Vathi 2015, p. 130). However, our empirical findings revealed a rupture (caused by crisis) in transnational patterns both in countries of settlement and that of origin, compromising the capacity for development and business activity and therefore from furthering goals of upward socioeconomic mobility.

> *I returned here and started to work in this mini-market that you see. My mother opened it years ago with a table outside as a kiosk. So I made it bigger, bought the shelves and started to fill them (…). We (and his family) stayed a few months and went back to Greece because children could not adapt to Albanian reality. As I and my wife could not find a job there, we returned to Albania again and keep this minimarket (L., male, 47, Greece).*

Migrants are stripped of choice, lacking the resources and help to use efficient decision making in a time when there are not many visible or viable options. In addition, entrepreneurship initiatives are often obstructed by instability, lack of infrastructures and re-integration policies for returnees in Albania.

After returning to Albania, my husband started working as a self-employed van driver on the line to Italy (in collaboration with an Italian partner) but Albanian state didn't allow him to work since my husband's duty is to bring here previously used goods while the state has imposed double taxes, so it's not worth it (M., female, 52, Italy)

Back in the host countries, many feel the need to overcome a marginalized socio-economic status caused by the crisis and the insecure legal and social status and therefore encounter greater difficulty trying to fulfill goals, such as maintaining affordable and quality education for their children. Attempts to do so have led Albanian families to send a part of their family to Albania. The idea behind this strategy is to reduce as much as possible daily expenditures and increase quality of living standards.

I'm a university student living in Athens with mom and my brother. Last year my father and youngest brother returned to Albania. In period 2008-2009 when the crisis broke my father was found unemployed for the first time after so many years living in Greece. As my father was left without any money and activity he decided to return to the family apartment in Albania. At the same time, my mother continues to work as a house cleaner in Athens putting efforts to help me and my brother to move forward with our studies (L, female, 23, Athens).

With regard to remittances, a study of Gedeshi and De Zwager (2012) has found that 61 percent of Albanian remittance-sending migrant households reported remitting less in 2009 compared with 2008. In 2009 this drop was significantly large among Albanian migrants in Greece where 54 percent have sent fewer remittances back in Albania (250). In fact, in 2007, remittances from Albanians totalled to 951.7 million Euros, or 14 percent of Albania's gross domestic product (GDP), before decreasing rapidly to $543.7 million in 2014, or 5.4% of GDP (Kushi and Kushi, 2015).

The economic crisis has made cross-border investments and remittances non-feasible, while the flow of money and capital has stopped or decreased (Michail, 2013). An interviewee refers on how the lack of remittances has had an impact on his family living conditions back in Albania.

I used to send money on a monthly basis. With that money my parents built the house outside Korca and bought an arable land […]. I'm waiting for months now to get paid for my last job. My inability to remit as I used to, has forced my father together with my sister to start working as vendors of agricultural products at the local open market in order to make ends meet (D.,male, 26, Greece).

Strengthening contact with family networks in Albania initiates a new and unfamiliar dependency for Albanian immigrants in particular in Greece. In some cases, they appear dependent upon family members in

Albania to send remittances to them in Greece – the so called 'reversed remittances' - as shown in the following interview.

> *Those who live there (in Albania) were till recently depended on our remittances. We used to send them 100-200 euros on monthly basis. The situation now is different; we're now waiting them to send us money to make our living in Greece in particular if there are children who study (P. male, 52, Greece)*

Unemployed Albanian migrants, men and women, are not able to purchase the social security stamps necessary to maintain either their welfare status or/and resident permit for themselves and their families. The latter is rather characteristic for Greece where in conditions of high unemployment and a dramatic drop in income in combination with the inelastic and bureaucratic spirit of the legal framework, an important section of the Albanian population has been led to irregularity or, in the best of cases, to a semi-legal status.

> *I lost stay permit last year. I was missing two work stamps and they wouldn't do them for me. I have three small children born in Greece. I'd submitted the application in October and 11 months later, September this year, they told me that my papers couldn't be renewed because I was missing two work stamps. I called a lawyer and I went to court and they gave me a special confirmation until the trial was held (S., male, 40, Greece).*

In Italy, however, Albanians appear to strive to secure access to welfare services rather than to legal status as this is the case of Greece.

> *In Italy, when you are unemployed, you are entitled to renovate the documents for one year. We also requested to stay in a community house (casa popolare) since it was hard for us to pay the rent, but this request was turned down. They told us that it was hard even for the Italians to accept this request; therefore it was almost impossible for this request to be accepted for the immigrants (A., male, 42, Italy)*

Finding a stable job is difficult. Almost every sector in which large numbers of Albanian migrants work has seen a significant rise in unemployment (Gedeshi and De Zwager, 2012, p. 242). Thus, several migrants have no other choice but to utilize networks back in Italy and Greece as a survival strategy plan to find employment. Below is an example of an Albanian man who is transnationally mobile for employment purpose.

> *I was paid 1200 Euro a month, but I was not provided with insurances…and when they don't call you to work you remain jobless and I had therefore to return to Albania. When I found a job there, I went back to Italy again. We looked for and found jobs in Italy even though we were living in*

Lezha. For instance, they told us that we would be paid an amount of money in order to construct a building as a carcass for a certain period. We go there, do our job, get paid and afterwards we return to Albania. Nowadays this is the way to work there, since it is very hard to afford the cost of living there without having a stable job... The ticket of travelling by ferry from Italy to Albania is 50 Euro while there in Italy you can't afford living without having a job. (E., male, 33, Italy)

In an effort to understand which factors impact upon decision-making for Albanians and be involved in transnational activities, what emerges is that the dynamic of attraction exerted by the demand for seasonal work in sectors of the economy like tourism and agriculture. In this case, the access to labour market usually takes place with the mediation of migration networks of co-ethnics and Greek and Italian employers.

In fact, norms are changing and roles are reversing. The case of Albanians in Greece and Italy illustrates the mutability of the transnational migrant's narrative. Exclusion was known to be a feature of emigrants, as they departed from their origin country and severed ties with networks there (Levitt, 1998). Now, we observe the feature to be relevant for migrants still living in Greece or Italy, a trend going hand in hand with reactive transnationalism. To counter the risk of downward mobility, Albanian migrants respond to their obstacles by engaging less in immediate socio-economic spheres in Greece and Italy and participating more in transnational activities that transcend Greek and Italian 'porous borders'. In a way, the crisis has encouraged transnational mobility and return migration and gave them a renewed dynamism because of decreasing opportunities at destination which therefore made conditions are origin also seem more attractive.

Family and ethnic networks

The term transnationalism is often used to define that form of social formation that crosses and stretches beyond national borders, and is activated through ethnic migrant networks (Faist, 2010b, p. 9). In this context, the transnationalism of Albanians refers to a network of various relationships such as the familial, social and political, which go beyond the conventional borders of Albania and Greece/Italy, and link the societies of origin and settlement (King *et al*., 2013, p. 127). These relationships are seen as basic (micro-level) units on which other forms of transnational behaviour and institutions are structured (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2002). In fact, migrant networks constitute a form of social capital, since specific resources (like financial and human capital) can be mobilised through certain types of social groups and relationships (Ammassari and Black 2001, pp. 21-22). According to Lyberaki and Lambrianidis (2004) this is a trend, easily observable in the Albanian case in both countries. In addition, as our study shows, they are also integrated in networks within both Albania and two host countries. At meso-level migrant networks and their organizations have increasingly been qualified as 'transnational actors' (Portes *et al.,* 1999; Vertovec, 1999). It has been acknowledged the role of migrant organisations in transnational practices as they provide

the networks and infrastructure to facilitate and sustain various forms of transnational engagement by individuals and communities (Faist, 1998, p. 214; Morales and Jorba, 2010, p. 269). In case of Albanians, however, the role of migrant organisations as facilitators of integration or/and as 'transnational actor' both in Italy and Greece appear extremely weak. In addition, their transnational transfers are less conditioned by established collective representation based on ethnic line.

The ethnic networks in particular are considered to contribute to the development of relationships of trust and to the promotion of individual or collective interests, strengthening social capital. Consequently, on the basis of this social capital, agents may call for help and ensure access to work, housing and social protection (Jandl *et al.*, 2009, p. 20). Sometimes, however, the dysfunctional aspect of ethnic networks in combination with lack of skills and proper documents contribute to the annulment of the transnational project.

> *Last year I went to Stockholm with some friends. Some other friends had gone earlier and promised they would help us. They didn't help us to find work and accommodation, we spent all our money and we came back to Greece. We couldn't pay the hotel. We couldn't rent a house because we had no proper papers or social security number (S. male, 27, Athens).*

Transnational transfers are rather conducted mainly through the family networks (e.g., remittances, finding a job, business and investments), but also other goods and services circulate through these social networks including Greek and Italian networks. In the context of the expansion of the basic factors behind the diptych of integration and transnational mobility of Albanians, family dynamics cannot be separated from the labour-economic dimension. Family networks are the main support and solidarity structure through which the phenomenon of Albanian migration to Greece and Italy has been developed (Mai, 2011, p. 19). In this sense, most Albanian migrants identify themselves with the narrow and/or expanded notion of family structure (Mai and Paladini, 2013, p. 60).

> *Two years ago my father wanted to open an electric goods store in Kruje with me to help the family there. I knew that was not a good idea by I couldn't say no to my father. I used all the money I'd saved up in Greece. But the shop didn't go well so we shut it down. That's how we lost our money and work (Nori, male, 26, Athens).*

Many times, while some members of family take care of children in countries of settlement, other members of family work in Albania while the other in Greece or Italy. Nowadays, economic crisis might also be perceived as an opportunity to invest in Albania while maintaining strong ties with extended family both in Albanian and back in Greece.

> *We are five siblings. We rented some farmland in Rodos and grow watermelon. Three months ago the older brother gave up everything and left to Albania. He has bought a house there and is*

looking forward to open his own business in Vlora. Our parents are also there and someone had to take care of them. He got half of family with him and left behind the older daughter who actually lives with one of the other brothers. (L., male, 28, Greece)

As has been shown by several studies (e.g., Iosifides, 2007), the most basic reason behind the close ties to family networks is found in the type of family migration that marks this particular group. As such, the transnational mobility patterns of Albanians in the era of crisis are seen as a process of individual/family reaction vis-à-vis institutional and socio-economic exclusion (disintegration) in both countries. In addition, where transnational ties and family networks back in Albania or in other countries are adequately mobilised, they may offer a small resilience or access to minimal resources with respect to the dream for a better and more secure living.

Concluding, this is clearly about family networks and how family solidarity becomes transnational which in the end is seen as a means to overcome the crisis and offer resilience to the core family. Indeed, people became transnationally mobile and families divided across borders in search of employment and better income. This trend reflect how the crisis has led to new forms of transnationalism with some family members being more trasnationally active why other staying put either for economic reasons (e.g., to save money) or lack of legal documents.

Political transnational mobility

One of the key parameters of political transnational mobility is that immigrants' political integration in countries of settlement can occur simultaneously with transnational political practices (Martiniello, 2005). In terms of 'democratic political process' this would contribute to both democratization in the country of origin and the evolvement of multi-cultural democracy in the receiving countries (Faist, 2000). In this context, the political opportunity structure (in countries of origin and settlement) as embedded in national integration policies as well as the citizenship regimes are considered the feedback mechanisms through which migrants' political transnational mobility is being shaped (Bauböck, 2003).

In Greece and Italy, migration policies have perpetuated a model of managing migration which has stressed the security issues, stricter borders control and legalization procedures, and not promoting the real issues related to full integration, the access to citizenship and political participation. Therefore, the imagined temporary character of migration is restricted to *presence* rather than *participation.* In this context, the active civic and political participation as well as the representation of immigrants in mainstream associations like trade unions or political parties has not been facilitated at all (Gropa and Triandafyllidou, 2005, p. 4). The main reasons include the insecure legal status, the prolonged immigration policy vacuum which has reinforce

the feeling of mistrust towards the Greek and Italian states and the exclusion from the access to political rights and citizenship status.

In Albania, on the other hand, the level of political participation of Albanians migrants settled in Greece and Italy has been historically very low. Indeed, many Albanians migrants cannot participate in Albanian elections although they make up a great part of the voters list. Whereas national law guarantees the political rights and vote of Albanian migrants abroad, article 11 of the Albanian electoral code stipulates that this right can only be exercised on the territory of Albania (HRC, 2012, p. 12). Recently, however, the three major Albanian political parties (PS, PD and LSI) have put significant efforts to engage Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy in political developments in Albania (Krasniqi, 2014). It has been estimated that approximately 80.000 Albanian migrants living in Greece and Italy have travelled to Albania in order to cast their vote in the national election that took place in 26 of June 2013.

The question raised here is whether this development is perceived as a form of 'negotiating' the option of return as a result of ongoing crisis in both Greece and Italy? Or it marked a new historical phase in transnational political participation of Albanian migrant? One of the interviewees believes that:

> *Albanians went to vote because they believe it could help them to establish social and political ties with the (corrupt) system there. It is seen as a strategy to network and find a work for themselves and their children in Albanian (R, male, 36, Greece)*

As the above excerpt illustrates, some of Albanian migrants saw the elections the only alternative to engage themselves in a political party with a hope that the system will give them a secure job in return. However, the majority of respondents strongly believe that the political mobilization of Albanian migrants in Greece reflects the dynamic of political pressure that potential returnees put to the Albanian political system.

Return: negotiations and limbo

By examining the diptych integration vis-à-vis transnationalism, it is assuming that return does not constitute the end of a migration cycle but it is rather part of a transnational system based on the interconnection of social, cultural and economic relationships that cut across traditional (national) borders. Nevertheless, return migration has mainly been examined in the context of migrants' contribution to the home country (Duvall, 2004) and not as part of transnational mobility and cross-border transfers. The transnational character of returning Albanians is confirmed by the study of Vadean and Piracha (2009) which shows that almost 50 percent of the returnees expressed their intention to re-migrate.

The migrant returning to Albania has, till the end of 2000', been considered as an act of integration's failure. According to the public opinion there have returned in Albania those migrants who have not been able to

integrate into the receiving countries, or who have been forcibly returned by the police (Barjaba, 2000). This trend, however, has drastically changed as it appears that migrants tend to form a population 'living in two countries'. This was corroborated by the study of Labrianidis and Kazazi (2006) that found that the migration cycle of Albanian returnees is characterized by economic success in respect of the old debate about whether returnees are 'successes' or 'failures'. Apparently, their study delineate the emerged transnational space linking Italy, Albania and Greece, where population movements seem to be becoming easier and easier despite national barriers, while other forms of mobility have also intensified.

Currently, the return is seen as a strategy for coping with the detrimental impact of the economic crisis on Albanian households in Greece and Italy (Gedeshi and De Zwager, 2012, p. 250). However, as several interviewees witnessed multiple geographical paths and ventures were followed before taking the decision to return to Greece or going back either to Italy or Greece. Here the transnational mobility patterns appear very dynamic.

> *I was left without a job and money. I took my family and went to Albania. I stayed there one year. There I bought a van and opened a butcher shop in Tirana as my parents have their own livestock. But as nothing functioned properly I closed down it and moved to Italy where my first cousin is a building contractor there. Nothing happened there either. Although underemployed and undocumented, here I am again, back in Rodos. I left my wife and children with my parents in Albania. (R., male, 35, Greece)*

Another dimension of return, usually ignored, is multiple return visits which as Vathi (2015, p. 124) supports have changed in terms of their meaning and frequency over time. In some cases, it might reflect weak social integration in Greece or Italy or/and it would be part of return scenarios' preparedness.

> *With the money I saved in Greece I built the family house here (Albania) that I finished a year ago. What did I do? I collected my day offs in my job in Patra and then let a friend in my place when I was away and I was coming to Albania to watch the construction works and take care of my elderly mother. I used to travel to Albania almost once a month until the house was finished. Then I returned for good (N., male, 44, Greece)*

Some parents see investments made during the migration years as a means to provide housing and employment, for them and their children in case of return. But, in many cases the issue of return is usually resisted by the children because the alienation they feel towards Albania (Vathi, 2015, p. 134). Consequently, the decision of return will be taken knowing in advance that parents will return in Albania and children will remain in Greece or Italy

We lived in Italy for 16 years. My husband remained jobless, while I never lost my job. However, we returned to Albania around three years ago, namely in 2011. But, as we noticed that things were not going on as we had predicted, after a year in Albania, I will return to Italy. My children are there. They never returned to Albania (V., female, 49, Italy)

In fact, younger Albanians – as the study of Mai (2011, p. 12) have shown - are the most sceptical about the possibility of an improvement of the socio-economic situation in Albania, while wishing to build a future in between Italy and Albania in the context of enduring economic instability and socio-cultural ambivalence and stagnation, both in Albania and in Italy (Mai, 2011, p. 14).

The economic crisis might have precipitated the return of those who have completed their transferring capital project and have to some extent satisfied the dream of developing their own venture in Albania.

Before returning to Albania, I took all my savings from Greece in 2008 and transfer them to Albania. I had realised that the crisis was approaching and I was afraid of losing my money there. I brought them by car in Albania. My money was here (Albania) while I was working there (Greece). In 2013 I returned and used my money to run my own shop (I., male, 38, Greece)

This is corroborated by the study of Germenji and Milo (2009) who found that Albanian returnees mainly from Greece and Italy do transfer financial capital and to a lesser extent human capital upon return. Their findings seem to suggest that there is a high preference of returnees for self-employment, which is reflected in migrants investing back home after completion of a process of accumulation of money and skills required to successfully start up and run a business. In this context, the study of Gedeshi and Gjokuta (2008) found that most of the returnees use to keep transnational contacts with the host countries. This form of social capital it is believed to help returnees to develop commercial and economic relationship with the host countries.

Several interviewees in their attempt to find jobs and deal with impact of crisis had followed multiple (internal) paths within a country. Being unable to make ends meet, they decided to return to Albania buy taking primarily into consideration the best interest of their children.

During the first years we lived in Fudge, a province of Frosinone, right in the centre of Italy until 2008. Then in 2008 given that the crisis had started we moved to Verona in the north because we thought that the crisis would be felt more in the centre and South of Italy and the wonderful North inspired us more. So we decided to move to Verona…We lived in Verona the last 4 years until we returned to Albania in August 2013 to prepare our daughter for the beginning of the new school year (A, female, 40, Italy)

Some migrants have not managed to invest in Albania (e.g., buying a house or a shop) their return depends on the power of family networks back in Albania as a survival strategy plan. Below is an example of an Albanian migrant family reconnecting with family back home:

> *We are jobless and have lost social security coverage. My husband has two years unemployed. I work as occasionally leaflet distributor for 20 euro per working day. We haven't paid the rent for sixth month now. We're thinking seriously to return to Albania. My dad works as security personnel to a shop with shoes in Elbasan and he has spoken with the owner for me to work there. I have no house there. We'll stay with my parents for a while until being able to rent our own apartment. My son burst into tears when I refer to the future return to Albania (M., female, 30, Greece).*

Indeed, the study of Mai (2011, p. 12) shows the dynamics of othering and marginalization are key in interviewees' decision to return to Albania. Indeed, a mass return of migrants from Greece and Italy to Albania would increase the unemployment rate that stands currently at 17 percent (Kushi and Kushi, 2015). At the same time, the weak Albanian welfare system and public services sector has come under strain in its attempts to provide services for many new economically deprived citizens. For a poor country is trying hard to stabilize its public debt. The feeling of insecurity is also reflected in the strategies followed by an Albanian respondent upon his return.

> *Before returning to Albania, I renovated my residence permit to make it permanent, and afterwards I returned to Albania. I renovated my documents while I was still working, in order to have social and health insurances there (I., male, 34, Italy)*

Clearly, this study shows that the attitude towards return has been primarily developed through a transnational understanding and evaluation of opportunities in both home and host country thus also throwing light on integration patterns in Greece and Italy (Vathi, 2015). As such the findings offer significant evidence on how return does not constitute the end of a migration cycle but instead is part of transnational system which entails a matrix of social, cultural and economic relationships whose dynamics cross cut countries, cultures and societies.

4. Conclusions

The presence of Albanians in Greece and Italy has signalled a change in the human geography of Albanian migration in those countries. As Mai (2011, p. 22) has eloquently elaborated in the case circular migration between Italy and Albania, the specificity of the diasporic experience and of the socio-economic and cultural capital accumulated by Albanians both in Italy and Greece offer an ideal background for the study of integration and circular/transnational mobility, especially in a comparative perspective.

Furthermore, the impact of the economic crisis in connection with both liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian citizens to EU and establishment of long-term resident status, has given a new dynamic to the (dis) integration and transnational mobility nexus. In the light of the above developments alongside the integration challenges the question raised in this study was what are the currently links between the level of integration and transnational mobility of Albanians in both countries.

The return and transnational movements for seasonal (often informal) employment in specific sectors of the economy (e.g., agriculture and tourism) is currently the most frequent means by which the transnational migration of Albanians to Greece and Italy is currently reproduced. In this respect, the advent of the crisis has changed economic, social and political circumstances, subduing the forms of transnational mobility that has come to characterize Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy. Being economically and socially marginalized, they seem to reconsider their stay in both countries and many are heading back to Albania or moving towards other industrial countries of Western Europe with the aim of finding employment opportunities (Triandafyllidou, 2013; Gemi, 2013, 2014).

At the same time it has become clearly evident that the current socio-economic situation in which Albanians in both countries find themselves has reversed the process of integration. Since their relations and residence must be re-evaluated, Albanian migrants are under pressure to re-establish or strengthen transnational ties to their networks in Albania or elsewhere, because of the need to face the crisis' consequences, whilst return increasingly prevails. The ability of Albanians to participate in transnational practices has been triggered, generating severance and reconnection between migrants and their receiving and sending countries. Through the analysis of various first and second generation interviews of Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy, de-legalization and exclusion are pondered as an emerging phenomenon in transnationalism. In this sense, transnationalism serves more than just an integrative and reproductive tool because exclusion adds a new dimension to the transnational narrative in which ties are severed and belonging is negotiated. We consider exclusion to be another element integral to the concept of transnationalism and also to strengthen the explanatory typology of 'reactive transnationalism.' In this context, within the Albanian migration to Italy

and Greece, the interplay between integration, transnationalism and return unfolds regardless of the lack of targeted policies at a governmental level both in Albania and in Italy and Greece

The last point concerning the integration-transnationalism nexus deserves some further discussion in order to critically assess policies at both sides of the border that promote or put obstacles to different types of transnationalism. First, *to what extent do the integration conditions both in Greece and Italy encourage transnational mobility*? In the case of Greece, despite the repeated attempts to regulate both the status of labour migrants and the social and political rights/citizenship of long-term migrants, has failed to provide an appropriate legal framework for the maintenance of transnational mobility by making it difficult for transnational migrants to renew their stay, secure a permanent status and have access to citizenship. On the other hand, despite the bilateral agreement with Albania (seasonal work) and *metaklisi* system for seasonal and temporary workers both Greece and Albania do not seem to benefit from the dynamics of geographical transnational mobility.

In Italy, on the other hand, the experience of transnational mobility and return unfolded in the absence of support to their integration in host country or their reintegration in Albania (Mai, 2011, p. 22). As Mai (2011) supports the absence of a clear model of integration in Italy and of policies supporting transnational mobility and returning to Albania has created space for networks of family members and friends being the most important support and solidarity for Albanian migrants, both at home and abroad. Notwithstanding, some initiatives promoted by the Italian governments through the quota systems and bilateral agreement with Albanian government might have a role to play in enhancing transnational mobility for employment and economic reason.

In Greece, the transnational mobility pattern of Albanians have been shaped accordingly with the impact of the crisis on opportunities for employment, the legal status, the level of influence and facilitation provided by ethnic networks, the integration policies, the liberalisation of the entry visa for Albanian nationals, the bilateral relations between Albanian and Greece, and the unstable political and socio-economic situation in Albania. However, the number of Albanian transnational migrants is likely to increase substantially also due to their integration in local labour markets and society, the proximity with Albania and the Schengen visa liberalization regime. The introduction of the new Code of Migration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014) is expected to limit the trajectory of de-regularisation, while providing an opportunity for reverting to regularity for all those who lost it, introducing the stay permit for the second generation and establishing the long-term residence permit. Renewing the stay permit nowadays translates in keeping a door open to Greece, for the migrants, and not losing a significant volume of social security contributions for the Greek State.

Second, *what are the conditions in Albania that may encourage transnational mobility of Albanians in Greece and Italy?* This study indicates that transnational mobility benefits from liberalisation of visa regime as one can travel back and forth when there is a need to and the strong family networks. A positive development from the side of the Albanian state which might have contributed to encourage transnational mobility is the function of migration service counters in several regional which promote the legal migration for seasonal employment purposes mainly towards Italy. From a transnational political perspective, the Albanian political parties have put lately significant efforts to engage Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy in political developments in Albania. It has been estimated that approximately 80,000 Albanian migrants living in Greece and 30,000 in Italy travelled to Albania in order to cast their vote in the national and local election that took place on 26 June 2013 and June 2015 respectively. The question raised here is whether this development is perceived as a form of 'negotiating' the option of return, or whether it marked a new historical phase in the transnational political participation of Albanian migrants. This study suggests that a considerable number of Albanian interviewees have an existing intention of returning to Albania as they believe that there we feel more secure due to the ownership of a property and the strong family ties. Whether the return will take place sooner or later (or never) will depend on the family composition (i.e., age of children), ability to perform transnational practices in Greece and Italy, the duration and depth of the crisis, and dynamics of pull factors (networks) in Albania.

Third, *what type of transfers take place through the transnational mobility of Albanian migrants?* The transnational practices of Albanians transcend the borders between Greece-Italy and Albania and promote the exchange of capital and information. There has been an increase of participation in transnational practices: some have been revived and intensified, while others deteriorate in order to adapt to circumstances of the crisis. Engaging in new forms of transnationality has provoked the phenomenon of exclusion, and immigrants are severing connections that once tied them to Greece and Italy. The crisis has triggered the evaluation of resources and networks in both Greece/Italy and Albania. Now, immigrants reconsider their livelihoods and contemplate emigration once more: back to their origin country or another country. In this context, a rise in number of visits to Albania (physical mobility) is observed, whereas the virtual mobility and remittances transfers have been dramatically reduced. Interestingly, however, is the fact that the investments in ownership of a property and entrepreneurial activities appear to have been increased.

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