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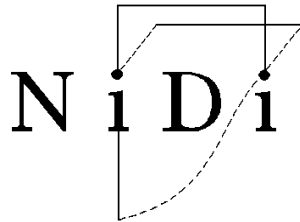
Migration aspirations and migration cultures. A case-study of Ukrainian
migration towards the European Union

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case-study of Ukrainian migration towards the
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Christof van Mol¹, Erik Snel², Kenneth Hemmerechts³
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Abstract

An abundant body of research focused on macro- and micro-level factors explaining why individuals move across international borders. In this paper, we aim to complement such approaches by exploring how migration aspirations can be explained by meso-level factors, focusing on a case-study of Ukraine. We particularly focus on how migration aspirations of individuals in two different regions can be explained by their international social networks with family members on the one hand, and with friends on the other. Furthermore, we explore whether regional migration characteristics play a role, as well as the interaction of such characteristics with individuals frequency of contact with transnational networks. Our analyses are based on the EUMAGINE-project ($n = 1,000$), and reveal how the interplay between regional migration characteristics and transnational social contact are key for explaining the decline of migration systems over time.

Keywords: Migration determinants; Migration culture; Social networks; Ukraine; European Union.

Introduction

The determinants of international migration are a classical question of interest to migration scholars (e.g. Ravenstein 1885; Zipf 1946; Sjaastad, 1962; Borjas 1987; Massey 1999; Geis, Uebelmesser and Werding 2013). When investigating the causes of international migration, however, the focus often lies on macro factors (e.g. Todaro 1969; Castles and Kosack 1973; Cohen 1987; Sassen 1988; Borjas 1989), or individual characteristics such as age, gender or socio-economic status (e.g. Sjaastad 1962; Feliciano 2005). In this article, we aim to add to the scholarly literature by exploring which meso-level factors explain why some people aspire to migrate whereas others do not, despite coming from the same country and having similar background characteristics. The focus on the meso-level is deliberately chosen to complement existing scholarship explaining international migration from a micro- and macro-perspective. Furthermore, most research focused on retrospective evaluations of migration determinants, i.e. on individuals who already moved abroad. In this paper, we take a different approach. We depart from the premise that international migration necessarily starts with an individual, or individual household, aspiring to move abroad to, for example, improve his or her living conditions. As such, the pre-migration phase encompassing migratory aspirations, which can be defined as “..the conviction that migration is desirable” (Carling 2014, 2). These aspirations can be considered as a crucial step towards actual migratory behaviour.

Examining migration aspirations necessarily implies focusing on the country of origin of migrants. In this paper, we hence focus on a case-study of Ukrainians’ aspirations to move to the European Union, based on unique survey-data from the EUMAGINE-project. The choice to focus on Ukraine is informed by recent migration statistics showing that Ukraine figures among the top countries of origin of migrants arriving in the EU (Eurostat 2014; Van Mol and De Valk 2016). The country has a long tradition of emigration, although until recently most Ukrainian migrants left for the countries of the former Soviet Union. The move to the West can be considered relatively new. Consequently, research into Ukrainian migration to Europe only recently emerged (e.g. Danzer and Dietz 2014) and much remains unknown about these migration dynamics. By taking Ukraine as a case study, this paper empirically advances our understanding of the factors influencing migration aspirations in countries of origin.

The central research question we address in this paper is hence the following: what meso-level factors explain migration aspirations of Ukrainians? In our analyses, we control for

individual micro-level characteristics such as gender, age, educational attainment and social status. On the one hand, we investigate the ‘international social networks’ of our respondents, distinguishing between contacts with family and friends abroad. On the other hand, we focus on the migration characteristics of their home region, distinguishing between high and low migration areas. Our paper is organised as follows. The next section clarifies the central theoretical notions underpinning our analyses. Next, we sketch the Ukrainian migration context. Thereafter, we explain our methodological and analytic approach. Subsequently, we present the results. Finally, we discuss our findings and conclude.

Migration aspirations: theoretical background and hypotheses

Determinants of migration aspirations

As Timmerman, Heyse and Van Mol (2011) argued, pre-migration aspirations are a central part of the migration process. Traditional migration theories such as push-pull, neoclassical and historical-structural models which explain migratory behaviour in terms of economic differentials between countries and historical dependency relations are increasingly being questioned because they fail to understand why some individuals aspire to move abroad and others do not, despite disposing of similar background characteristics (for a recent overview of migration theories, see Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014, chapter 2). In this paper, we depart from the assumption that migration aspirations are not simply a function of external factors such as natural disasters, political oppression, poverty, wage differentials of historical formed political, economic or cultural relations between countries. Although these factors undoubtedly play a role, migration aspirations are also largely dependent on information, perceptions and value systems (De Haas 2011; 2014; Carling 2013; 2014). Whether or not someone develops an aspiration to move abroad partly depends on the information or “images” he or she receives about potential destination countries, and on his or her perception of the economic and political situation in the sending country. Of course, migration aspirations do not automatically result in migratory behaviour (Epstein and Gang 2006; Cairns and Smyth 2011). Whether someone migrates or not also depends on his or her ‘ability or ‘capabilities’ to turn the wish to move into actual migratory behaviour (De Haas 2011; Carling 2013; 2014). Therefore, migration aspirations should ‘be treated as a measure of *migration potential* rather than a proxy measure of actual future migration’ (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006, 291). Thinking of migration as a

function of migration aspirations and capabilities within a given social, economic and political context thus enables us to link micro- and macro-theories of migration in a meaningful way. After all, macro-level factors and developments shape opportunities for migration and simultaneously enable (or constrain) individual migration capabilities (De Haas 2011). Similarly, Engbersen, Snel and Van Meeteren (2013) argue that macro-level situations affect the motivations of potential migrants, who may (or may not) decide to move, which in turn influences macro-level outcomes such as growing or declining migration flows between countries.

This paper links individual migration aspirations of Ukrainians to micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors. As Timmerman, Hemmerechts and De Clerck (2014a, 497) argue, migration aspirations are not equal within or across societies and constant over time. They strongly depend on information, perceptions and values of individuals. These perceptions become increasingly important today, as more and more people are exposed to migration-related images through the mass media, social media and cheap travel opportunities. Timmerman, Hemmerechts and De Clerck (2014a) distinguish between three types of perceptions (linked to the macro-, meso-, and micro-context) that may affect their migration aspirations. At the macro-level, perceptions and migration aspirations are influenced by factors that are common to all potential migrants in a country such as national migration policies, the overall economic and political situation in a country such as the human rights situation, images spread by the mass media, etc. Perceptions and migration aspirations are also shaped by micro-level characteristics of individuals such as gender, age, educational attainment and labour market situation. Migration aspirations are finally also indirectly formed through perceptions affected by meso-level factors such as international social networks linking potential migrants with family and friends in other countries, as well as the specific location where people live. More specifically, in some locations migration seems to be a “normal thing to do”. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss existing scholarship on different levels more in detail.

Micro-level characteristics

There is ample evidence that individual background characteristics such as gender, age, educational attainment, social status, marital status and parenthood influence migration decisions, and henceforth also migration aspirations. First, international migration used to be a

gender-specific phenomenon in which mainly males participated. Although recent research observes an increasing ‘feminisation of migration’ (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014), there is still ample evidence that women often have slightly different reasons than men to migrate (e.g. Timmerman and Hemmerechts 2015; Timmerman et al. 2015), or may not be able to migrate because of limited sets of rights and responsibilities (Van Mol 2015). Second, it is generally expected that the younger strata of the population are more likely to engage in migration movements (e.g. Pekkala 2003; Charles and Denis 2012), as they might be freer from constraints that might tie individuals to the home-country (e.g. mortgages, properties, families). Third, educational attainment and social status may affect someone’s migration aspirations as well. It has been widely reported, for example, that migrants are a group that is positively selected in terms of education (Feliciano 2005; Grogger and Hanson 2011). Furthermore, in contrast to the popular belief that the poorest people, ‘the hungry and the desperate’ (King and Schneider 1991, 62–63) are most likely to migrate, various studies showed that international migrants are usually not drawn from poorer parts of population, as it generally is a costly enterprise (Amit 2007; De Haas 2007; Angelucci 2014). Fourth, household demands such as marital status and parenthood might also influence the timing of migration aspirations and decisions. It has been reported, for example, that single or previously married women have higher risks of migration compared to married women (Kanaiaupuni 2000). Furthermore, a Swedish study revealed that care responsibilities for children might form a constraint to migration for individuals, particularly when they are at early school age (Fischer and Malmberg 2001). Consequently, we will take marital status and the eventual presence of children into account in our analyses.

In sum, these different studies together reveal the importance of controlling for individual characteristics in an analysis of the meso-level factors influencing migration aspirations.

Meso-level factors

Meso-level factors in migration research generally refer to the crucial role of “...sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (Massey et al. 2005, 42). Existing scholarship extensively documented how family and friendship networks, community organisations and other intermediaries stimulate and facilitate migratory movements (e.g. Massey 1990; Stark and Taylor 1991; Faist 2000; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Massey

et al. 2005; Boyd and Novak 2012). Garip and Asad (2013) distinguish two types of social support that are relevant for migration (based on DiMaggio and Garip 2011): *social facilitation* and *normative influence*. The first refers to actual support of migrants, making migration easier and decreasing the costs. The latter points to the influence that previous migrants have on migration aspirations of prospective migrants. This ‘normative influence’ is particularly relevant for this paper. Through all kinds of communication (personal contacts, visits, letters, emails, social media, etc.), previous migrants influence the perceptions of potential migrants about migration and potential destination countries (Timmerman et al. 2014b).

In some sending communities, large numbers of out-migration might generate a ‘culture of migration’. With an increasing number of emigrants, values and cultural perceptions of a local community might be changed, due to the previously described normative influence (Massey et al. 2005, 47). In such communities, migration becomes a normal thing to do, whereas staying at home is perceived as a failure (Massey et al. 2005, 47; Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014, 44). Moreover, as non-migrants are constantly confronted with stories about and the symbols of successful migration (luxurious presents, large houses and ‘conspicuous consumption’ of migrant families), they might develop feelings of ‘relative deprivation’, stimulating their aspirations to migrate (Stark and Taylor 1989; Stark and Taylor 1991). The rise of a culture of migration in sending communities – next to social support in migrant networks and other ‘feedback mechanisms’ – is one of the factors that gives migration a self-perpetuating character, often coined by the term ‘cumulative causation’ (Massey 1990; Massey et al. 2005). Recent migration research, however, also identified ‘negative feedback mechanisms’ that may have a “migration-undermining” effect (De Haas 2010; Engbersen, Snel and Esteves 2016). For example, returning migrants might talk about unemployment, harsh migration policies and the sometimes hostile public opinion climate in destination countries, which might proactively discourage potential newcomers to come to Europe. As such, settled migrants may turn from ‘bridgeheads’ to ‘gateclosers’ (Fonseca, Esteves and McGarricle 2016; Snel, Engbersen and Faber 2016). Recent work of Timmerman, Hemmerechts and De Clerck (2014a) in the Turkish context also hints at the existence of such negative feedback loops. These authors showed that individuals living in high-migration areas have less positive ideas about moving to Europe, and are also less likely to have migration aspirations compared to individuals living in low-migration areas. Their argument is that negative reports of migrants about moving to and living in Europe

are widespread in high-migration areas, whereas they lack in low-migration areas. This shows that cultures of migration may also affect migration aspirations negatively.

In sum, migration aspirations might be highly influenced by the social networks of a given individual as well as the migration characteristics of the region where he/she lives in. Based on this previous scholarship, two hypotheses can be formulated with regard to the influence of meso-level factors on migration aspirations. First, we expect that individuals who have more frequent contact with relatives (*hypothesis 1a*) and friends (*hypothesis 1b*) abroad are more likely to dispose of migration aspirations. Second, people living in regions with a high number of emigrants might have lower migration aspirations, due to ‘thicker’ negative feedback loops (*hypothesis 2*).

Macro-level factors

Finally, migration aspirations are also influenced by macro-level factors such as natural disasters, poverty, unemployment and violence or political oppression in the sending countries of migrants (for an overview, see for example Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014, chapter 2). Since these factors affect the perceptions and aspirations of all potential migrants in a certain country in more or less the same way, they are hard to examine in a single-country case study as ours. Nevertheless, we indirectly measure macro-level factors in our analyses through the perceptions respondents hold about the quality of life in both Europe and Ukraine.

The Ukrainian context

With almost 6 million Ukrainians living abroad, Ukraine is one of the leading migrant sending countries worldwide (Duvell 2007; IOM 2008; Vollmer et al. 2010; Kubal 2012). Today, more than 10 per cent of Ukrainians works abroad, or about one fifth of the total working age population, generally on a temporary basis (Strielkowski and Sanderson 2013). Ukraine thereby is one of the main sending countries of migrants at a global scale (Borshchevska 2012). The large majority of these Ukrainians living abroad live in the Russian Federation or one of the other successor states of the former Soviet Union (World Bank 2010). The most common destinations for Ukrainian migrants, however, are neighbouring countries, with Poland and Hungary being the primary destinations in the European Union (Malynovska 2006). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is also a continuous inflow of Ukrainian migrants in

other countries of the European Union. In 2009, for example; Ukraine was ranked fourth among the top countries of origin of newly arrived migrants in the EU, after Indian, Moroccan and Chinese migrants (Eurostat 2014). Recent forecasts of Ukrainian migration towards the European Union estimate that by 2050, between 1 and 2 billion Ukrainians will be living in the EU (Cajka, Jaroszewicz and Strielkowski 2014).

Initially; Ukrainians primarily moved to Southern European countries such as Italy and Portugal. Baganha, Marques and Góis (2004, 27) describe, for example, how Ukrainians all of a sudden became the largest immigrant population in Portugal in the early 2000s. These authors offer three explanations for this sudden mass inflow: the lack of control by other EU member states in granting short-term visa, the ease of movements within the Schengen area, and human trafficking practices by Eastern European ‘travel agencies’ that offered attractive ‘package deals’ to Ukrainians, including travel documents, transportation and job opportunities (particularly in construction work for the UEFA European Championship in Portugal in 2004). But also Portuguese regularization programs for irregular migrants in the early 2000s made the country more attractive than other EU-countries.

The EU-enlargements of 2004 and 2007 also brought large Ukrainian communities within the EU territory. Already before the accession, large numbers of Ukrainians lived in countries like Poland and Hungary. Since 2004, there was a continuous inflow of Ukrainian nationals in the EU – both in the ‘old’ (EU15) and the ‘new’ EU-countries of 2004 and 2007 (EU12). According to numbers of the OECD, Italy, Germany, and to a lesser extent Spain are the main receiving countries for Ukrainians in the EU15 (OECD 2015). With about 10,000 Ukrainians arriving annually, Poland is the main receiving country in the new member states. The peak of Ukrainian migration to the EU in 2007 was mainly due to the inflow of almost 40 thousand Ukrainians in the Czech Republic in that year. Several characteristics of Ukrainian emigration suggest an influence of individual characteristics. It can be observed, for example, that Ukrainian migration is highly gendered (Dietz 2010). In the Czech Republic and Portugal, for example, flows of male migrants predominate, as they mainly work in the agricultural and construction sectors in these countries (Dietz 2010). Ukrainian migration towards Italy and Slovakia, in contrast, is characterised by a high number of female migrants, who generally work in the care and domestic services sector (Dietz 2010; Tyldum 2015). Considering the socio-economic profile of Ukrainian migrants, it has been reported that those with higher education

mainly move to Russia instead of the European Union (Dietz 2010; Marques and Góis 2010; Danzer and Dietz 2014). Moreover, many Eastern European migrants seem to experience occupational downgrading once arrived in the EU (Danzer and Dietz 2014; Heyse et al, 2015). Also for the Ukrainian diaspora, it has been observed they mainly work in low-skilled jobs (IOM 2008). In Europe, these lowly-skilled jobs are mainly situated in the agricultural; construction and care and services sector (Dietz 2008; 2010; Markov, Ivankova-Stetsyuk and Seleshchuk 2009, cited in Strielkowski and Weyskrabova 2014, 34).

Structural factors at the macro-level, including the labour market situation, however, also influence the size of migration flows from Ukraine. The most prominent emigration motives of Ukrainian migrants seem to be low salaries and a lack of job opportunities in the homeland (Dietz 2008; 2010). Nevertheless, in certain regions of Ukraine, emigration is more widespread than others, pointing to the possible existence of a culture of emigration in certain regions. On the country level, about one fifth of the population in working age resides abroad (Duvell 2007). However, a population survey conducted in the frontier areas of Volyn and Lviv revealed higher numbers; almost half of the respondents had relatives who lived abroad (Malynovska 2006). In Zakarpattia this number rose to around 70 per cent. According to IOM (2008), about 15 per cent of Ukrainian households would have at least one member with foreign experience. Furthermore, Ukrainian migrants appear to ‘maintain close ties with their family and friends; visit Ukraine very often and invest their earnings in Ukraine’ (Markov, Ivankova-Stetsyuk, and Seleshchuk 2009, cited in Strielkowski and Weyskrabova 2014, 34). This suggest feedback mechanisms operating through social networks can also be detected in Ukraine, underlining the relevance of the Ukrainian context for studying meso-level factors influencing migration aspirations. In this paper, we will further unravel how these social networks and regional migration characteristics impact on migration aspirations of potential migrants.

Methodology

Data

Our empirical analysis is based on a unique dataset on migration aspirations, collected in the framework of the EUMAGINE-project, funded by the Seventh Framework Programme. The project investigated the influence of perceptions of human rights and democracy on migration aspirations and decisions of Ukrainians in four research areas: (1) Zbaraz, a region with high

emigration rates in Western Ukraine; (2) Novovodolazka, an area in Eastern Ukraine with a specific human rights situation; (3) Znamyanska, area with low emigration rates in Central Ukraine; and (4) Solomyansky rayon/Kyiv, a region including the capital, with an immigration history. In each area, a representative sample of 500 respondents aged 18-39 was drawn, as this population has the highest probability of perceiving emigration as a valuable option. A stratified cluster sample with random walks was used to collect the sample. Within the selected households, respondents were randomly chosen. The selected respondents were questioned face-to-face with structured paper-pencil questionnaires. The data had to be weighted to account for differences in the selection probability of respondents. A selection probability weight was calculated for the within-household selection for each stratum.

In line with the purposes of this paper, we will use data from two regions characterised by contrasting migration numbers: Zbaraz, a high emigration region, and Znamyanska, a low emigration region. The transnational networks of respondents in both regions are different given their migration history. Respondents in the Zbaraz region, for example, more often reported to have family abroad (33 per cent) compared to those from the Znamyanska region (14 per cent) (weighted data). Therefore, a comparative analysis between both regions is relevant for uncovering how transnational social networks and regional characteristics related to migration aspirations.

Variables

Dependent variable. Our dependent variable are migration aspirations, which were measured by the following question: ‘Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to go abroad to live or work some time during the next five years, or would you prefer to stay in Ukraine?’.

Respondents who answered ‘yes’ were also asked which country they would prefer to go. The combination of these two questions resulted in a dichotomous variable that measures the migration aspirations to Europe (0= *no migration aspirations*, 1= *migration aspirations*).

Independent variables. As stated previously, we expect transnational contacts of individuals to provide feedback about migration experiences and possible destinations, feeding into migration aspirations. Therefore, the frequencies of transnational contact with family members and friends abroad are considered as crucial variables. Respondents had to indicate how often they had

contact (spoken, written, sms) with their family and friends abroad over the last 12 months. Importantly, they were explicitly asked to indicate relatives or friends on whose help they could count on if needed, in order to avoid reference to ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter 1973). Furthermore, these family members and friends abroad had to be at least 16 years old. In our empirical analyses, we use the mean frequency of contacts with significant family members and friends abroad, which ranged between never and 365 times.

Second, we are interested in how the broader migration characteristics of the region in which individuals live influence migration aspirations. Therefore, a second dichotomous independent variable indicates the region where respondents live. The region with low emigration numbers is thereby used as the reference category (0 = *Znamyanksa*, 1 = *Zbaraz*).

Control variables. As migration aspirations likely vary according to individual background characteristics and general perceptions of the macro-situation in Ukraine and Europe, we have two categories of control variables.

In our analyses, we control for six individual background characteristics based on our literature review. First, a dichotomous variable indicating gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*). Second, a continuous grand-mean-centered variable, indicating age in years.

Third, respondents’ education was measured by a continuous variable, indicating years of education, ranging from 0 (*no education*) to 23 years. Fourth, we constructed an index measuring the material wealth of respondents using principal component analysis (Cronbach $\alpha = .76$). The range-standardized scale goes from 0 (*low material wealth*) to 4 (*high material wealth*). Fifth, marital status is included in our analyses as a dichotomous variable (0 = *unmarried/divorced/widowed/separated*, 1 = *married / co-habitation*). Finally, we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent has children (0 = *no children*, 1 = *at least one child*).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the total sample, Znamyanska & Zbaraz.

		Total sample					Znamyanska					Zbaraz				
		n	Min.	Max.	/ prop.	SD	n	Min.	Max.	/ prop.	SD	n	Min.	Max.	/ prop.	SD
<i>Dependent variable</i>																
	Migration aspirations	855	0	1	37.93	/	475	0	1	35.3	/	380	0	1	41.2	/
<i>Independent variable</i>																
	Frequency of contact with family	997	0	365	13.05	46.54	500	0	120	2.61	9.61	497	0	365	23.55	63.53
	Frequency of contact with friends-	1000	0	365	2.98	19.23	500	0	54	1.25	5.16	500	0	365	4.71	26.60
<i>Control variables</i>																
	Gender (male)	1000	0	1	0.40	/	500	0	1	0.40	/	500	0	1	0.40	/
	Age	980	18	39	28.50	6.05	487	18	39	29.56	5.89	493	18	39	27.46	6.03
	Years of education	1000	8	23	12.88	2.04	500	8	23	12.46	1.93	500	8	21	13.31	2.07
	Material wealth	999	0	4	1.52	1.20	500	0	4	1.80	1.24	499	0	4	1.24	1.10
	Marital status (unmarried)	1000	0	1	0.35	/	500	0	1	0.31	/	500	0	1	0.38	/
	Parenthood (no children)	999	0	1	0.36	/	500	0	1	0.28	/	499	0	1	0.44	/
	Perception quality of life in Europe	959	1.20	4	2.78	0.45	500	1.20	4	2.68	0.47	459	1.60	4	2.88	0.40
	Perception quality of life in Ukraine	997	1	4	2.50	0.53	500	1	4	2.54	0.53	497	1	3.80	2.47	0.53

Source: EUMAGINE project.

Next to these individual background characteristics we included two variables measuring the perception of respondents of the quality of life in both Ukraine and Europe. In five questions, respondents were asked about their opinion about the quality of schools, the quality of life for men and for women, governmental poverty reduction and health care in Ukraine and Europe. The answer options ranged from *very bad* to *very good* on a 5-point Likert scale. The perception of the quality of life in Europe is coded from 0 (*very bad*) to 4 (*very good*), the perception of the quality of life in the Ukraine from 0 (*very bad*) to 4 (*very good*). These items were used to construct two composite scales (Cronbach $\alpha = .77$ for Europe and $.72$ for Ukraine).

Analytic Strategy

Given the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable, we conducted a stepwise logistic regression analysis for analysing the impact of social networks and region of origin on migration aspirations in Ukraine. At stage one, we introduce frequency of contact with family. At the second stage, we investigate the relationship between frequency of contact with friends. Third, we add the region of origin and the control variables to the model. In the fourth and fifth model, we investigate the interaction effect between the region of origin and frequency of contact with the transnational family on the one hand, and with the transnational friendship network on the other hand. Previously to running the analysis, collinearity among variables was tested. The variance inflation factors in the model with all the variables included did not go beyond 2.160, indicating no problems of collinearity.

Results

Descriptive results

In a first analytic step, we investigate the descriptive statistics of our variables, both for the total sample and both regions separately (Table 1).

Regarding our dependent and independent variables, it can be observed that 38 percent of respondents ($n = 325$) had aspirations to migrate to Europe. Furthermore, when looking more closely to the numbers of the two regions, it can be noticed that the share of respondents with migration aspirations was significantly higher in the high emigration region (Zbaraz, 41.2 percent) compared to the low emigration region (Znamyanska, 35.3 percent) ($\chi^2 = 2.82, p < .09$). Next, Table 1 clearly shows that our respondents had more frequent contact with their family

networks abroad compared to contact with friends. Significant differences between the two regions can also be detected here. Respondents in Zbaraz have more frequently contact with family ($t = -7.27, p < .001$) and friends ($t = -2.86, p < .001$) compared to respondents in Znamyanska.

With regard to the control variables, Table 1 reveals that 40 percent of the respondents in the total sample are male. No significant differences regarding the gender composition could be detected between the two regions. The age profile of respondents from both regions, however, significantly differs ($t = 5.52, p < .001$). Whereas the average age of respondents in the total sample is 28.5 years, those from Znamyanska are significantly older compared to the respondents from Zbaraz. Also regarding the socio-economic background variables significant differences can be observed. Respondents from Zbaraz studied significantly longer ($t = -6.76, p < .001$) and have score lower in terms of material wealth ($t = 7.61, p < .001$). Finally, when considering the family characteristics, it can be noticed that respondents from the high emigration region (Zbaraz) are more likely to be unmarried ($\chi^2 = 5.09, p < .01$), and without children ($\chi^2 = 23.98, p < .001$).

Finally, we consider eventual differences between the two regions regarding the perceptions of respondents on the quality of life in Ukraine and the European Union. As can be noticed, respondents in the low-migration region have a significantly more positive image on the quality of life in Ukraine ($t = -2.06, p < .01$). In contrast, respondents from the high-migration region dispose of a significantly more positive perception of the quality of life in Europe ($t = -7.12, p < .001$).

Multivariate results

As a final analytic step, we aim to explain the migration aspirations of respondents in both regions through step-wise logistic regression models. Results are presented in Table 2. Model 1 only includes the mean frequency of contact with family abroad. As expected, a significant correlation with migration aspirations is detected.

Table 2. Logistic regression (odds ratios)

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
		Family contact	Contact with friends	Region	Region x Family	Region x Friends
		(n = 851)	(n = 855)	(n = 802)	(n = 802)	(n = 802)
<i>Constant</i>		0.558***	0.607***	1.093	1.005	1.053
<i>Independent variables</i>						
	Frequency of contact with family	1.008***		1.007***	1.030**	1.007***
	Frequency of contact with friends		1.003	1.000	0.999	1.013
	Region type (ref: Znamyanska)			1.024	1.104	1.052
<i>Control variables</i>						
	Gender (ref: female)			1.311 ⁺	1.307 ⁺	1.306 ⁺
	Age			0.981	0.982	0.981
	Years of education			0.995	0.991	0.995
	Material wealth			0.974	0.977	0.976
	Marital status (ref: unmarried)			0.825	0.827	0.828
	Parenthood (ref: no children)			0.890	0.886	0.898
	Perception quality of life in Europe			1.376 ⁺	1.403**	1.374 ⁺
	Perception quality of life in Ukraine			0.587***	0.595***	0.591***
<i>Interaction terms</i>						
	Region x Frequency of contact with family				0.977 ⁺	
	Region x Frequency of contact with friends					0.986
	Nagelkerke R^2	0.030	0.000	0.081	0.087	0.082

Source: EUMAGINE project.

Note: *** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; + $p < .10$; weighted data.

In model 2, the mean frequency of the respondents' contacts with friends abroad is included. Interestingly, no statistically significant correlation with migration aspirations is observed. Thus, as far as transnational contacts affect migratory aspirations of those left behind, this goes only for contacts with family abroad.

Model 3 presents the full model, including control variables and the region respondents live in. Controlling for confounding factors, this model confirms the significant relationship between frequency of contact with family members abroad and migration aspirations. Once again, the relationship between frequency of contact with transnational friendship networks proves non-significant. Remarkably, no significant differences between both regions are detected when controlling for other factors. Although our descriptive analysis revealed higher percentages of migration aspirations in the high emigration region (Zbaraz) compared to the low emigration region (Znamyanska), it seems this difference can be explained by the intensity of transnational family contacts, as well as gender differences and perceptions of the macro-situation. The model further reveals that migration aspirations are particularly related to a negative perception of quality of life in Ukraine instead of an overtly positive perception of quality of life in Europe.

In a last step, we investigated two interaction terms. More specifically, between the region of origin and frequency of contact with the transnational family network (model 4) and with the transnational friendship network (model 5). The interaction effect between region of origin and the intensity of contact with the transnational family networks proves to be statistically significant. This is not the case for the interaction effect with the transnational friendship network. This result indicates that in regions characterised by a high number of emigrants (in our case Zbaraz), having more frequent contact with family members in Europe decreases the likelihood of disposing of migration aspirations to Europe.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we aimed to investigate what meso-level factors influence migration aspirations, focusing on a case-study of Ukraine. Two hypotheses were formulated on the role of social networks and the characteristics of sending communities. First, we expected that among those respondents with more frequent contact with relatives and friends abroad, migration aspirations would be higher. Second, we postulated that in sending regions characterised by high numbers of

emigrants, migration aspirations might be lower due to the existence of negative feedback loops. Our results only partially confirm the first hypothesis, and confirms the second hypothesis.

First, the analysis revealed that those individuals who have more frequent contact with family members abroad are more likely to have migration aspirations. The same relationship is not confirmed, however, for frequency of contact with friends. This might be related to the changing composition of networks of migrants over time. It has been widely demonstrated, for example, that over time, contacts with the home-country decrease (e.g. Hedberg and Kepsu 2008; Levrau et al. 2014), and this holds particularly true for contacts with extended family and dispersed friendships (Eve 2008; Viry 2012; Mollenhorst, Völker and Flap 2014). After all, maintaining relations requires a considerable effort and time (Ryan and Mulholland 2014), and ‘migrants’ physical absence hampers such maintenance, leading to a progressive decrease in contact frequency’ (Koelet, Van Mol and De Valk, 2016). Furthermore, ‘the combination of the obligation to help kin, and the high level of structural embeddedness means that kin are both cognitively and time-wise less demanding relationships to maintain than non-kin relationships’ (Roberts et al. 2009, 139). From this perspective, it is logical international family networks are most strongly related to migration aspirations.

Second, our analysis reveals that in principle, no statistically significant differences can be detected in terms of migration aspirations between people living in a low- and high-migration region. Interestingly, however, our analysis reveals that in high emigration regions, a higher frequency of contact with family members abroad is related to lower migration aspirations. This relationship, once again, does not hold true for frequency of contact with friends abroad. This might again be related to the fact that transnational friendship connections generally decrease over time, as well as by the lower level of structural embeddedness of non-kin relationships. Negative migration stories of close relatives abroad, in contrast, thus have a higher potential for curbing migration aspirations in regions characterised by a culture of migration. The mechanism behind this relationship, however, remains to be uncovered by future research. It might be possible, for example, that in high-migration regions, migration is omnipresent in stories of friends and relatives living nearby as well, leading to a cumulative effect of negative feedback. Potential migrants might thus be more regularly confronted with negative stories in their wider social circles, and hence dispose of a more complete set of information on the disadvantages of migration. These findings are in line with a comparison made of migration aspirations between

high and low emigration areas in Turkey, demonstrating that perceptions on Europe were significantly more negative in the high compared to the low emigration region (Timmerman, Hemmerechts and De Clerck 2014a). The family feedback mechanism might then constitute a ‘turning point’, adding negative information from a well-trusted source, hence lowering their migration aspirations. In low-migration regions such cumulative effect might be absent, as there might be only a single feedback loop within the proper family instead of multiple feedback loops within the wider community. This might explain why migration aspirations are not as heavily affected. Particularly qualitative research in home communities might have the potential to uncover the mechanisms behind this relationship.

Finally, some limitations of our study should be mentioned. First, our data does not allow for any causal interpretations, as it is based on cross-sectional data. Future studies could benefit from a longitudinal perspective, allowing to track changes over time. Such approach would allow to disentangle more precisely the relationship between increasing emigration numbers, transnational social contacts and migration aspirations. Second, the explained variance of our models remained rather low, suggesting there are other factors at play that are not captured by our study. It is plausible, for example, that the variation in migration aspirations is explained by personality characteristics. It has been shown, for example, that compared to the local population, migrants have different attachment styles (Polek, Van Oudenhoven and Berge 2011), higher achievement and power motivation, and lower affiliation motivation and family centrality (Boneva and Frieze 2001). Future research could try to build more inclusive models, incorporating psychological characteristics as well. Third, the data on which our analyses were collected before the start of the Ukrainian conflict. Given the changed geo-political situation and the enduring conflict, it is not unlikely migration aspirations and the number of people who are willing to migrate significantly changed. Furthermore, it is also plausible the main motivations for migration changed due to the conflict, particularly for individuals and families living in the conflict zone.

In conclusion, in this paper, we highlighted the importance of transnational family ties in the migration decision-making process among Ukrainian individuals. The family remains at the core of the migration process, and has the potential to stimulate and curb existing migration dynamics. Particularly this last point is interesting, as it shows the cumulative effect of migration can reach a certain threshold. From the moment onwards when migration in a community

reaches its saturation, feedback mechanisms from family members abroad play an important role in the stagnation and decay of out-migration over time.

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An abundant body of research focused on macro- and micro-level factors explaining why individuals move across international borders. In this paper, we aim to complement such approaches by exploring how migration aspirations can be explained by meso-level factors, focusing on a case-study of Ukraine.

We particularly focus on how migration aspirations of individuals in two different regions can be explained by their international social networks with family members on the one hand, and with friends on the other. Furthermore, we explore whether regional migration characteristics play a role, as well as the interaction of such characteristics with individuals frequency of contact with transnational networks. Our analyses are based on the EUMAGINE-project (n = 1,000), and reveal how the interplay between regional migration characteristics and transnational social contact are key for explaining the decline of migration systems over time.

The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) is an institute for the scientific study of population. NIDI research aims to contribute to the description, analysis and explanation of demographic trends in the past, present and future, both on a national and an international scale. The determinants and social consequences of these trends are also studied.

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