

Exploring consequences of recent Eastern European mobility trends

Tara Madhav and Elizabeth Wahl (The Harker School)

INTRODUCTION

Relations between the Russian Federation and Eastern European countries have faced a variety of factors affecting their relationship since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. My project focuses on mobility trends in Former Soviet State countries and their role in Russian relations with the region. Why does studying mobility matter? According to University of Tennessee professor Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, mobility is the word that defines contemporary Eastern Europe. A region still striving to regain geopolitical autonomy, Eastern European mobility trends are a blueprint for the future of the region socially, politically and economically.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

According to Wilbur Zelinsky's model on mobility patterns, as societies become more and more advanced, rates of migration become less as rates of circulation increase. This interplay between migration and circulation was well in play during the heat of the Cold War, with commuting on the rise and migration on the decline (Fuchs and Demko, 1978). Primary factors for this trend were based in increased urbanization and modernization for one, and a contained geopolitical presence that made diverse types of mobility difficult.

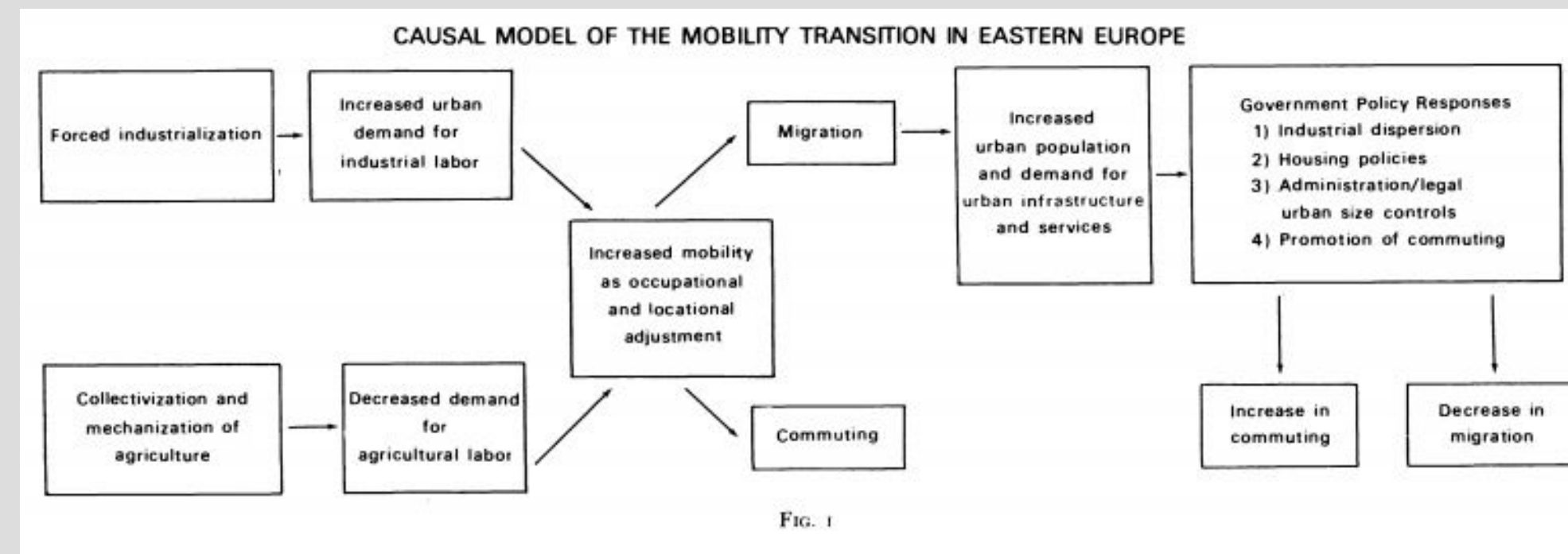


Figure 1. Factors involved in mobility trends post-WWII to the 80s

The 90s

The dissolution of the Soviet Union allowed for diverse types of mobility. Additionally, the new Russian Federation took a back seat to FSS issues as they adjusted to a new page in their history. Yeltsin, an impulsive leader who strived to escape a communist past, wanted Russia to become a part of the global capitalist market but was too inconsistent to deliver huge change. Relations between FSS countries and Russia came together in the form of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Mobility trends during this time period skyrocketed and then plateaued. According to a 2005 UN Report, inflow numbers were higher than outflow numbers throughout the 90s, and greater flexibility in the socio-economic market led to greater levels of intra-national migration.

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A History of Mobility Trends



The 2000s

The 2000s saw an incredible turmoil that changed the internal climate in many FSS countries and the interactions between Russia and FSS.

Mobility trends were affected by the accession of 8 Eastern European, including 5 FSS countries — Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Estonia and Latvia — to the European Union in 2004. This shift meant two things: 1. A greater movement away from Russian geopolitical alignment, particularly in the context of organizations like CSTO and CIS and 2. A greater connection with the west through the expansion of labor markets.

The EU gave each member state seven years to decide provisions for allowing laborers from new member states to enter. Review would be considered every 2, 3 and possibly 2 years until the final guarantee of free market movement in 2011. FSS countries faced backlash over the effects of Eastern European labor beyond these restrictions. The stereotype of the “Polish plumber” and the restrictions placed upon Eastern European labor by the EU was a reminder of the difficulties still facing workers in the East. Additionally, the Russian Federation continued to be a fixture of traffic through the region. Mobility trends showed that some of these new to the EU countries, like Poland, had sizeable migration flows while others, like Hungary, did not. Again, the concept of separate national identities came into play as to how mobility flows continued to fluctuate.

During the 2000s, Russia became a much more assertive country under the leadership of the aggressive Putin. Incidences like the Orange Revolution in Ukraine underlined the political tensions between FSS countries attempting to forge new political connections and expand labor markets. The Russo-Georgian War was a blatant example of how Russia was willing to exert its power over regions it deemed appropriate to interfere in. Russian interference in FSS countries would reach peak form in the 2010s with the annexation of the Crimean peninsula.



Figure 3. Diagram of factors in mobility trends. Source: Institute for Social-Ecological Research

Type of migration (c)	1985-1989 (d)				1996-2000			
	High	Medium	Low	Negligible	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Outflow	E, LA, LI, P, R	B, C	H		B, LI, P	LA, R	C, E	H, SK, SL
1. Emigration								
2. Temporary employment abroad (e)			R, LI	B, C, E, H, LA	P	R	H, LI, SL	B, C, E, LA, SK
3. Ethnicity-based outflow	B, P, R		C, LA, LI	E, H		R, LA	E, LI	B, C, H, P, SK, SL
4. Outflow of refugees and/or asylum seekers	P	C, H, R	B	E, LA, LI		B, R	C, LI, SK	E, H, LA, P, SL
5. Outflow of false tourists (f)	P		H	B, C, E, LA, LI, R	B, LI, P, R	C	E, H, LA, SK, SL	
Inflow		H		B, C, E, LA, LI, P, R	C, H, R, P, SL	B, E, LA, LI	SK	
1. Immigration								
2. Employment of foreigners (g)		C	H	B, E, LA, LI, P, R	C	H	P, LI, SK	B, E, LA, R, SL
3. Ethnicity-based inflow	E, LA, LI	H		B, C, P, R		R	E, H, LA, LI, P	B, C, SK, SL
4. Inflow of refugees and/or asylum seekers				All	H		C, P, SK, SL	B, R
5. Inflow of false tourists and/or illegal migrants (f)				All		C, H	B, LI, P, R, SK, SL	E, LA
5a/ for transit to the West				All		C, H	SK, SL	
5b/ for work				All		C, H	SK	B, E, LA, LI, R, SL
5c/ for petty trade	H	C		B, E, LA, LI, P, R	P	C, H, SK	B, E, LA, LI, R, SL	

Figure 4. Categories of mobility flows according to country. Source: The United Nations.

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The 2010s and looking forward

Mobility patterns in the 2010s are marked by definitive events and geopolitical events. I will analyze these patterns in tandem with an outlook onto the future of Eastern European mobility trends.

- Massive refugee influxes have triggered many countries to limit immigration. How will this affect the labor market in the Eastern European/Central Asian region, a region which is experiencing large flows of migration right now?

- The presence of Russia in Crimea not only disturbs the territorial integrity of the Ukraine, it also brings up concerns about the safety of FSS countries on the Russian border. This, combined with the presence of NATO forces, brings up new tensions in the ability to freely move through the Eastern European region.

- Russian economic downturn has led to decreases in migration going through the region — how will FSS countries have to adjust to economic problems that may curb the ability of their citizens to move around?

IN CONCLUSION: How will Russia continue to impact FSS countries, and how will FSS countries continue to forge their own national paths?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my mentor Elizabeth Wahl.

All figures are from other sources and have been accordingly cited.