



## **Migrants' housing in the homeland. A case study of the impact of migration on a rural community: the village of Marginea, Romania**

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### **Abstract**

*International migration induces changes in values and lifestyles, transformations perceived as well in housing practices and living standards. Building and decorating a home is one of migrants' main targets, as the house becomes a sign of wealth and social ascension that mobilizes a significant proportion of their remittances. This article aims to show how the migrants' "debrouillard" spirit and their migration experience acquired during the communist regime helped them in wheeling and dealing under the new post-communist economy and build their houses in the homeland. The paper relies on data collected in a fieldwork carried out in the village of Marginea, Romania, a rural community comprising ca. 10.500 people, characterized by strong international migration.*

### **Keywords**

*International migration, houses, homeland, communist regime, post-communist economy, "debrouillard" spirit*

### **Introduction**

The aim of the article is to show how the migrants' new houses, built in the homeland, are a result of the migrants' "debrouillard" spirit. In order to clarify this question, the article employs a case study – part of my doctoral research – on one of the "champion" villages (Diminescu, 2009) of circulatory migration: Marginea, a village in northern Romania, where I explore the impact of international migration on housing in relation to traditional models crystallized during the last century.

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This paper is organised in six sections. After the introduction, I present the context of Romanian international migration from rural areas, mentioning several theoretical approaches related to my research. Next, I explain the methodology I used in my fieldwork. In the fourth section, I profile the village of Marginea. In the fourth section, I illustrate how migration experience, housing practices and social and human capital, achieved by the villagers during the communist regime, helped them in wheeling and dealing under the new post-communist structural features and build their houses in the homeland. Finally I briefly present my conclusions regarding the migrants' "debrouillard" spirit and its effects on house practices in the homeland.

### **Romanian international migration from rural areas**

According to World Bank reports<sup>2</sup>, in 2006, Romania was in the top 10 remittance recipients, with an inward remittance flow of \$6,707 million – representing 5.5 % of GDP. In 2010, the stock of emigrants raised to 2.8 million (about 13,1 % of its population), Romania occupying the 22 position in the world top 2010 remittance - receiving countries and the fourth position in the Europe and Central Asia top 2010 remittance - receiving countries, with a total of \$ 4.5 billions

This fact is highlighted by a survey realized by CURS<sup>3</sup> in October – November 2009 (at national level and on a sample of 1602 subjects) when 27% of the respondents declared them or other member of the household were working or have worked in a foreign country. The majority of migrants' incomes are invested in cars, electronic goods, as in building / buying a home or for house extension / modernization (Anghel and Horvath, 2009). Furthermore, several scholars have shown the central place of homes within migrants' life strategies<sup>4</sup>, the house (and especially newly built ones) becoming a symbol of ascension to a new social status that mobilizes a significant proportion of their efforts and remittances:

*“The acquisition or improvement of a home is probably the single most important motivation for international migration prevailing in the world today. Remittance use studies consistently reveal it to be the most common target for migrant spending and investment”* (Massey, 1998:26).

Actually, sociological research carried out in Poland showed that the housing shortage and “their high costs relative to income” were the main factors in the emigration of young (Korcelli, 1996:296).

The story of a migrant from Vulturii (Vrancea County, Romania) to Italy is relevant: “I’ve been to Italy for three years. I planned to build my own house so that men

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<sup>2</sup> [www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances](http://www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances)

<sup>3</sup> Centrul de Sociologie Urbană și Regională (CURS) Cercetare sociologică privind România în 2009 comparativ cu România din 1989, în percepția populației, pentru Jurnalul Național, septembrie-octombrie 2009

<sup>4</sup> For a better understanding of this concept see Sandu, Dumitru (2000). Migrația circulatorie ca strategie de viață (Circulatory Migration as Life Strategy). *Romanian Sociology*, 2, 5-29, URL : <https://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/dumitrusandustudiinrevistesauinvolumec>

do not mock me saying I wasn't abroad. You know the conditions in the countryside: if your neighbour has ten rooms you need twelve to be better!" (Olteanu, 2005: 374)

Referring to the Romanian migration context, Diminescu observes that villages are represented in both internal and international migration and all these movements follow the "logic of villages or regional networks" (Diminescu, 2009: 52-53), about half of Romanian migrants emerging from rural areas (Sandu, 2010). Between 1994 and 2000, several centres of migration appear, concentrated around some core-villages, "champions of circular migration" (Diminescu, 2009: 53). These flows are oriented towards the same areas of the destination countries. It is the case of Certeze (a village in Oas County) and its environs, where a great majority of the peasant population migrated on the periphery of Paris, being involved with street newspapers (Diminescu, 1999). The housing situation of these migrants, in the host country – France –, differs greatly from that of the native village: to accumulate the money so necessary to build a house in the country of origin, the villagers live in abandoned houses, on the outskirts of Paris. With such sacrifices, they succeeded to regularly send money to their families left behind in Romania, resources that were invested in housing (Diminescu, 1999). The researcher points out the main cause of migration, which was not the poverty or the fact they were deprived of their only means of subsistence in a dysfunctional economic context, but the "endemic lack of money in order to ensure the access to goods that constitute the family honour" (Diminescu, 1999:3). This attitude may be explained by the analytic lens of the 'new economics of labour migration' (Stark, Bloom, 1985), an approach that explains how "People engage quite regularly in interpersonal income comparisons within their reference group. These comparisons generate psychic costs or benefits, feelings of relative deprivation or relative satisfaction" (Stark, Bloom, 1985:173). This approach emphasizes on the "mutual interdependence" (Stark, Bloom 1985:174) of the family members and states that migrants rely in their behavioural patterns upon "network and kinship capital" (Stark, Bloom 1985:175). Also, its theoreticians argue that one of the reasons income-seeking migrants are sent abroad is "to reduce their relative deprivation compared with some reference group" (Massey et al., 1998 :26). Nevertheless, migrants' work abroad is not only gain oriented but also status oriented and in some cases, building or improving one's home in the country of origin is a form of reducing relative deprivation. Regarding the concern presented by this theory for the economic side of the phenomenon, Castles and Miller (2009) observe that international migration cannot be analysed only through the lens of economic factors without considering the various constraints (political, economic, historical, social, and cultural) of the origin and destination countries.

Moreover, the international migration of the inhabitants of Oas County, in order to gain the financial resources to build a house for the family's honour, was supported and influenced by the internal migration experience of the villagers during the communist regime. This culture of mobility was formed as a result of the multiple activities performed by the villagers: subsistence agriculture, blended with sheep breeding (transhumance) and the forest works. Since 1970, men first, then women and even children began to work in other areas of the country. The land clearing, a well

remunerated occupation, allowed them to accumulate the resources much needed for the construction or conversion of rural houses (Moisa, 2009). The accommodation conditions of migrants in the host country is similar to that of the years 1970-1980 when, working in the forest, in mountain areas, they were forced to build primitive huts made out of branches and leaves (Moisa, 2009). After 1990, the villagers are turning to suitcase commerce (especially women) in Turkey, Poland, Ukraine, and to construction sites (men) in Hungary and former Yugoslavia.

Hence, the culture of internal and cross-border mobility has “contributed in a structural manner to the selection of candidates” (Diminescu, 2003:10) resulting in a high selectivity of temporary emigrations (Sandu, 2010). Indeed, certain scholars observe the formation of a culture of migration at community level (Massey et al., 1998) and of “values associated with migration which become part of the community value system” (Şerban, Grigoras, 2000:33).

In Italy, many Romanian migrants “have a rural background and a previous mobility experience” (Diminescu, 2003:18): “abandon Marginea was the only modality to earn money, build a house and get married in order to become a respectable man” (interview with Ioan 8 / 6/2006, Cingolani, 2009: 69). Thus, Cingolani observes that “people of Marginea arrived at the dawn of the Revolution and the great exodus to the West with a tradition of high mobility inside the country and even a subtle knowledge of the reality outside Romania” (Cingolani, 2009: 75).

Another element that has been preserved is the use of social capital of the community: as before a team leader brought people from the village of Certeze to perform the forest clearing, so now there are some villagers (migrants) who “get important construction work and appeal to labour force in their village” (Moisa, 2009:6) to come and join them. For the Romanian migrants in Italy, the social capital - church or extended family support - become essential in finding a home and a job (Cingolani, 2009). Nevertheless, certain scholars describe Romanian migrants in Italy as being “individualist” and cooperating only with members of their families (Eve, 2008).

This tendency to work and move within networks of family or friends is stressed by a theoretical approach to international migration – that of migration networks - crystallized at the end of the eighties, which emphasis on the role of the family and the community. A migration network refers to the links established between migrants and their relatives or friends in the origin and destination country, as between migrants and the community of origin (Massey et al., 1998). These networks facilitate and sustain the migration of the individuals from the community of origin, mitigating risks that can emerge due to migration (Şerban, 2009).

## **Methodology**

The research is based on data collection and analysis of both primary and secondary sources (such as official documents, statistical databases, locality master plan and regulations and other derived works) and on a fieldwork carried out between 2009 and 2011 in the village of Marginea, using the observation method and the informal and semi-

structured (qualitative) interviews. The observed material and interviews were recorded on camera and/or using sketches and notes. The informants (comprising ca. 100 persons) were selected from the migrants as well from the non-migrants. The latter include migrants' parents or grandparents and old villagers. I have also met key informants: a professor in history and son of a former communist mayor, the engineer charged with the issue of planning permission, a carpenter and member of the village council, three brothers involved with local building companies etc. I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with ca. 45 migrants and non-migrants. The majority of the respondents were gathered using local social and kinship networks, a sort of a snowball sampling method. I tried to develop a closer familiarity with some of them in order to gain their trust and be able to revisit them, collecting more data, observing hidden details and space practices. Consequently I was accommodated (at the beginning alone, then with my young child) for some days in 2009, 2010 and 2011 in a guesthouse in Marginea, owned by a family of migrants, talking with the landlady, observing their interactions and practices. The home of this migrant was next to her parents in law's house, so I could observe their relationship, too. As my family owns a house in Rădăuți – the town closest to Marginea – it was easy for me to conduct this field research. I used the method of direct (participant) observation along with indirect observation throughout my stay in Marginea and Rădăuți. I went shopping in Marginea supermarkets, shops and on Friday market. I ate in the two main restaurants of the village (hold by two former migrant families) several times and also in few migrants' and villagers' homes. Moreover, I bought local products from the villagers and I made an excursion into the nearby forest, together with two migrants and our children. My child played with several children in the village, helping me to interact with the locals.

The research includes data for 50 households of migrants analysed in my fieldwork. Of these, 35 households had at least one member who did not yet returned. In addition, cca.72% of the households had at least one member which fit the age group 14-29 years, at the time of emigration. Most of the households in my fieldwork consisted of married couples.

Italy was the most searched destination country. More than half of the households had at least one member who lived abroad (continuously or with interruptions) 10 years and over 10 years. However, 31 families were still living abroad, while 4 households had one returned member and other still working abroad.

At this point, I should refer to the risk of misunderstanding the informants (or respondents) in an interview situation when using it (the interview) “to reveal an underlying pattern” (Silverman, 1973:33). The use of triangulation<sup>5</sup> could be a mean to avoid that kind of misunderstanding people or empirical data, when searching for terms that are not found in our respondents' formulations. In this sense, triangulation may include the “simple observation” (Denzin, 1970:268) of “Physical traces and signs left

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<sup>5</sup> According to Denzin, “triangulation is the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object”, but the author sees it “as involving varieties of data, investigators, and theories, as well as methodologies” (Denzin, 1970:301)

behind by a population”, which “are generated without the producer’s knowledge of their future use by sociologists”, because “such data have none of the reactivity that arises when a subject knows he is being studied” (Denzin, 1970:262). Likewise, a form of “simple observation” consists in studying house plans and other material traces as “a text that can be read by those who know the language of built form” (Duncan, 1985: 137).

In addition to the methods listed above, I used the technique of comparison of the past - the farmhouse until the years 1989 - with the new rural house since the fall of the communist regime.

### **Marginea**

Marginea is a village in northern Romania (Suceava County), close to the Ukrainian border. The village is crossed by the river Sucevita as well by important national routes. Marginea is located in the vicinity of important churches and monasteries (UNESCO patrimony) and is also renowned for its black pottery workshop – which received the visit of several religious and political personalities during the communist regime: the Iranian Shah (1967), the Paris Mayor (1973), the Japanese Prince Akihito (1973), the queen of Holland (1975), etc (Crăciun, Popescu, 2007). Having a population of ca. 10 500 inhabitants, the locality is the largest village of the county.

Marginea is one of the “champions” villages of Romania concerning international migration. In 2011, according to the census, the number of migrants reached 2153 persons (without counting the persons temporarily absent from the locality). The number of houses built between 1994 and 2011 - within 17 years - raises to ca. 1750, while the number of dwellings built before 1990 - within a span of ca. 90 years - is about 1750 units.



**Figure 1: Marginea forty years ago (courtesy of Professor Toader Magopat)**

Cingolani stresses that “with international migration the construction sector has experienced an unprecedented expansion” and “housing density is the highest in the region” (Cingolani, 2009: 150), a fact which explains why, in central areas of the village, new homes are “backed each other without meeting the minimum safety distances” (Cingolani, 2009: 151). Forty years ago, the space between traditional dwellings was

rather wide (figure 1), Marginea being defined as a village having a “dispersed structure with irregular forms, with houses and annexes separated by fields and orchards” (Cioară, 1979).

Nowadays there are areas where the dwellings are closely spaced (figure 2), without following the minimal distances imposed by law.



Figure 2: Marginea nowadays (July-August 2009)

### **New challenges, old practices and mindsets**

The structural mobility of the inhabitants is a product of a long tradition, international migration coexisting along with commuting before 1989. Moreover, in Bukovina, seasonal work was practiced even during the XIX century (Chelcea, 2010).

In 2011, the main destination countries for Marginea migrants were Italy and England, other destinations being Germany and Greece<sup>6</sup>. The most important motivation for their international migration resides mainly in a search for a job or higher wages in terms of significant income disparities among Romania and other EU countries<sup>7</sup>. Thus, given the economic crisis of recent years, villagers of Marginea either tend to adopt a circulatory migration, depending on the working opportunities in the destination country, or they come back home, unable to cope with the increase in maintenance costs. However, despite the economic crisis, some of them continue to work abroad, in order to win a salary “a little higher” than in Romania:

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<sup>6</sup> England is coming as a new option within locals' migration strategies as it offers higher wages and more job opportunities. Moreover, a recruitment center for seasonal work (e.g. in agriculture) in Germany was established in Rădăuți.

<sup>7</sup> “Despite the salary increase after the year 2000, the minimum wage reached 150 Euro. This level places Romania on the last position in Europe, next to Bulgaria. In the leader countries, the minimum salary is 7-9 times higher than in our country (1100 or 1400 Euros in France, respectively Luxembourg). In the destination countries of Romanian migration, Spain or Italy, the minimum wage is 4 times higher than in Romania” (Ilie, Stanciu, 2010:27).

“Now I was talking to one of the guys who work here, he works in Greece ... [he said to me] I could spare five hundred, seven hundred [euro] per month and send home to my Dad to continue the construction work for the house ... now I go back [to Greece] but I do not think I can set aside even five hundred [euro] a month, however I go because here [in Romania] is a little harder than there [in Greece]” (interview with SP, Marginea, 2010).

According to Cingolani, one of the structural characteristics of the Romanian society during the communist regime was the informal economy. Its strategy consisted in “acquiring goods and services that the State is not providing” by semi-legal or even illegal means (Cingolani, 2009:38). Also, Villanova notes that “State's failure at different levels leads to attitudes of distrust that justify clandestine practices, the “debrouille” (Villanova, 1994: 47). Consequently, family, religious or community networks take on the role and duties of the State. Actually, in an interview with a group of respondents, in one of Marginea’s building enterprises, they remembered:

“The mayor we had during the Ceaușescu regime [...] he was facilitating us certain arrangements. As an example, when he caught someone bringing cut wood from the forest [illegally], [he asked him:] what do you want to do [with it]?[and the man answered:] I want to build my barn [...] for animals, [...] but you should make it look nice, he said [the mayor] [...] We are the only ones to transport the shingles by plane, from Marginea to Milișăuți [another village], during the Ceaușescu regime. We could not transport it by any other means, as the police (“militia”) would catch us on the way, you had to manage, and because there was an industrial airport on the field there, towards Sucevița [a village close to Marginea] [...] and the villagers of Marginea, in order to sell their stock, load it in the plane [...] by car no way, by horse-carriage you could be caught, you had no chance [...]”

“People of Marginea created all the reasons to make money. They make money even from stone. When there was a shortage of salt, they went to Pleșa Hill [a nearby hill] and brought salt [...] it is a spring with salted water there. [...] When others had no salt, they sold the salted water. So they got money to buy food.”

Besides the internal destinations – some informants practised an internal migration during the Ceaușescu regime - , a certain number of villagers succeeded in working abroad for one to twelve months in countries such as Israel, Iraq, Libya. This was possible for those who “had some political connections” or they “could even buy a visa. They paid 5000 dollars or 10 000 dollars a visa”.

Despite the communist laws and regulations and due to their wheeling and dealing methods, certain villagers became rich:

“I know people that had millions (of lei) during the Ceaușescu regime but they couldn’t do anything, if they unveiled their money [...] they were my uncles”.



Where did they invest their earnings during the communist regime? At that time, real estate investments were forbidden. Consequently, the creativity and prosperity display were limited by the barriers imposed by the communist authorities:

“During the Ceaușescu regime it wasn't allowed to own two houses, it wasn't allowed to possess two cars [...] you would be caught immediately”.

This “popular entrepreneurial spirit of the opportunistic - *debrouillard* kind” (Morawska, 1999) constitutes one of the traits that survived the communism as Cingolani points out: “The commercial capacity gained within the informal economy combined with the mobility competence were the first resources used to face the increasing uncertainty” (Cingolani, 2009:80). These abilities were effective in the first phase of the Romanian migration – when Romanian quasi-tourists practiced a “suitcase migration” - as in its next periods when Romanian migrants, in order to find employment, made use of the “informality and flexibility characteristics” (Cingolani, 2009:50) of the Italian construction and handicrafts enterprise sector. Also, buying visas or illegally crossing Romanian or EU borders were common practices, testifying of this “*debrouillard*” spirit mentioned above.

Even the teenagers were regular with this “*debrouillard*” way of life: “he [C.- her brother] was always in search of money [...] Yes they [her two brothers] worked hard in the forest since they were small ... they carried wood [...] to make planks for the furniture” (interview L, Marginea, 2010) - as his father was employed in a furniture workshop. Therefore C. left the country for Italy at the age of 14 and worked (illegally) in the building sector, along with his father. Actually, more than half of the households analysed in my research had at least one member who left the country at an early age (less than 25), while four were even minors (age between 14 and 17) and only four or five persons have migrated at the age of 40 or over.

The below life stories provide an illustration concerning the villagers struggle to survive the new post-communist economic conditions or to achieve their goals (usually building a house for themselves or their sons).

1) B. is a man from Marginea, about 60 years old. He married “late” (according to his own statements), at 29 years old, as his father died and he had to take care of his mother and sisters. B. has seven children and he was the only breadwinner of the family, having to support also his mother and the mother-in-law.

After 1989, he tried to immigrate to Australia, where it was his wife's uncle, but failed as he did not satisfy the conditions for asylum. Then he practiced “suitcase commerce” in Yugoslavia and Poland. In Yugoslavia, B. went for a three week period to sell different products (e.g. glass decorative object, shirts, pyjamas etc.), then returned home and went again. It was a circular migration. Within this few weeks of stay in Yugoslavia, he got a temporary job, willing to earn more money. Therefore, within a span of three weeks, B. was able to save one thousand marks. Using the economies he made in Yugoslavia, he managed to buy a car and provide for his family: “all my children were dressed in blue jeans [...] if I did not have, let them enjoy”.

He also worked in Israel. He stayed there for one and half year, then returned home and went again for one and half year. In 1998, B. chose another destination: Italy. It took him eight days to reach this country, as he was an irregular migrant. He remained there for two years, hired in a pizza restaurant and in the building sector: “I earned money and sent home”. B. had to pay ca. 2000 marks for a visa to bring his eldest son with him in Italy. After a period of time, he helped one of his daughters to join him in Italy. Nowadays almost all of his children have migrated in Italy or the UK. One of his sons graduated a Romanian University and was employed in the UK.

Owning large plots of land, the man got also involved in raising cattle. He used to sell beef and use the money to support his children. During the Ceaușescu regime, selling beef was a money-making (but illegal) activity:

“I was bringing frozen meat to Bucharest [...] I went in the mountains, bought a cow, slaughter it, froze it, bring it to Bucharest, Ploiesti [...] I had relatives and they ordered me [to bring meat for them][...] I did not lack meat even during the Ceaușescu regime [...]”

B. was also selling meat to the school teachers - commuters living in the town. Nevertheless, the money he got were not used in building a new home as “*Those days [...] were not for houses [...] those days this was the house: with maximum three rooms*”

Now he has six cows but plans to sell them (as they are no more a profitable investment), keeping only one for his family needs. This trend of abandoning agricultural or raising cattle activities was also observed by certain scholars, who mention it along with the development of building and service sectors, a process that leads to “the transition from a quasi-agricultural organization to a modern organization” (Anghel, 2009:256)

B. is looking forward to develop a business with a fish farm, located in a nearby village. The problem is that he failed up until now, as the fish were stolen from the pond. That’s why he decided to build a hut and a fence in order to secure the fish pond. The hut is made from recycled logs of his mother’s traditional house which was demolished to make room for his eldest son’s new home.

This case of recycling old wood is not singular. I’ve met several situations in which old brick, wood or iron was used to build walls, roof structures, doors or even entire houses (weekend houses). The practice was common in the past, the peasants recycling the well preserved logs of their traditional houses in order to build new homes. Nowadays some migrants even reuse (or restore) the furniture, objects or devices that Italians no longer need.

After marriage, B moved into a lodge built on the same plot with his mother’s traditional house. The lodge consisted of two rooms with no bathroom. One room is the “*cea casa*” (the good house) used “only for [keeping] things” or during the summer as a guest room. The family lived in the other room. It was a multifunctional room: used for sleeping, cooking and making homework.

Today, the B. dwelling comprises two small buildings, very modest and simple: one is the old lodge and the other, built after the fall of the communist regime,

accommodates a kitchen, a bedroom and a bathroom. This second building was necessary as the children have grown up.

Now, the father is in charge of the building work for his children's new houses. They send him money and he supervises the construction process. Contrasting to their parents' home which is similar to a shelter, the three of his children houses (that I visited in Marginea) resemble more to a mansion: a two floor building made of masonry, with specialized rooms, one or two bathroom and several bedrooms. Two of the houses were not yet completed, but the third was already furnished and I was impressed by the quality of its interior design, chosen as from a design review.

2) G. is a former wage-earner woman, about 63 years old, married and mother of three sons, who went in Israel during the Ceaușescu regime for periods of one to three months. She worked as a housekeeper, mainly for Romanian Jews. One of them has recommended her to others families, as she was honest and reliable. This woman finally obtained more jobs, working for 14 ladies per week. After the fall of the communist regime, she went again in Israel, between 1998 and 2003, along with her second son and her sister and nephews. Her son wasn't married that time and had already a house of his own, but the building was not yet finished. The aim of his trip to Israel was to finalise the construction work. He was hired in Israel for a three-year period, then came back home, but his mother remained two more years without any return to Romania during her sojourn in Israel, living "in one apartment [...] we were paying 800 euros per month" Several persons lived in there in three-four rooms - two in a room.

Hard living conditions, added to different migration experiences during the communist period, prepared the post-communist migrants to endure all the inconveniences of the destination country like accommodation in overcrowded rooms, hard-working and busy schedules.

The money she earned in Israel was used to buy a tractor and for providing support to her elder sons (to build or finish their homes). She also built a fence for one of them, made of stone who "cost several thousands euros".

Even now she would go to work, but in Italy:

"Now I'm unhealthy, weren't I so unhealthy, I would go to Italy. Now it's better in Italy. You take care of an elderly woman or man, they give you one thousand euros, you have your room, and you have a TV [...]"

One trait that survived post-communist transformations is the household solidarity and family assistance and interdependence. In the past building a house "was always a collective effort" (Stahl, 1978 :98). This habit is still maintained in Marginea, mainly within the nuclear family, as one of my informants (family of migrants) pointed out:

"We save money together [...] we and our boys we save [money] together [...] first we finalised this [house] and moved in [...] and now the other [one of the boys' house]"

3) Another migrant, M., 38 years old, one of the ten children of a family, remembers how they lived till she reached 23 years old:

“we were living in a kitchen [...] adjacent to the main house [...] there [in ‘cea casa’ - the good room] we kept the dowry, we had our good things there, but there was no stove [...] in the summer time you could stay there and we had another room in front, but during the winter we stayed all there [in the kitchen] crowded [...] with the parents, all in one place [...] we had not enough place around the table [...] there [in the kitchen] was the bedroom, we had all there [...] we slept three or four in a bed while the children were small, after growing up [...] we left the house”.

This situation caused her problems when receiving visitors:

“Once one of my colleagues came [...] I was attending the high school that time [...] and I truly say to you that I didn’t allow her to enter the house. You could imagine what a gossip I caused, but I didn’t allow her to enter the house. Because my mother had a baby and in those times there was no pampers [...] and maybe sometimes it smelt [...]. We had also animals in the stable [...] but we cleaned the house regularly [...]. And once, when someone came to me [...] a colleague, and she told to my classmates that my home is a mess [...] and I felt so hurt that I told I’d never receive anyone in the house”.

After the fall of the communist regime, she and her sister, along with their mother struggled to improve their living conditions:

“I was sewing, she was cutting decorations, we were sleeping three hours per night [...] and my mother sold it to the Serbians [...]. And we had clothes [...] we were well dressed, none would say we are ten [children]” but “we worked very hard”, even during the holidays.

These unpleasant circumstances did not stop her or her younger sister to graduate the University (economics). Her sister was the first who immigrated to France. Thereafter she helped (giving money) all her siblings to migrate to Italy. As a result, several of her brothers were able to support the construction<sup>8</sup> work for their houses in the homeland.

M. worked for two years in Italy, being accommodated in her brothers’ crowded dwelling. Then she returned to Marginea and got married. Today she is living in a large house with her husband and their three children. The house was built by her husband (a former migrant), but they planned together the furnishing and interior decoration. Now, M. can be proud of her new house as “[...] The new house is a symbol of economic and social success. The old one is the symbol of painful remembering [...]” (Schiltz, 2003:107). There is more than enough space for her family. Due to economic reasons, the house has no central heating yet, during the winter they use one stove and several

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<sup>8</sup> The construction work was supervised by their mother

radiators to heat only four rooms (the house has nine rooms): two bedrooms, the kitchen and the bathroom.

The above mentioned story is not an isolate situation. The majority of my respondents lived in similar conditions in their childhood, using only one or two rooms during the winter, even if the home had more spaces – but without a heat source. Furthermore, one of the traditional house characteristics, due to financial reasons, was heating only one room in the winter:

“To lit only one fire at a time, this is the principle preserved insistently by the peasants” (Stahl, 1978: 117).

This practice was transferred to the new houses by adopting a heating system with radiators that allows them to choose which room to heat during the winter<sup>9</sup>. In addition, several migrants decided to maintain the old heating system, with stoves, or to combine stoves and radiators in one heating system. Concerning this topic one of my respondents explained:

“If I have no money [...] to heat the entire house, what shall I do? I shut the door and burn the wood in the stove, isn't it? How did our elders live before? [...] in one room there he cooked, and there he stayed, and there he was receiving guest, there he washed himself”

Actually, a number of them, while adopting a central heating system, have also maintained the old stoves as a trace of the ancient saving behaviour, dating back to their communist and peasant origins.

## Conclusions

We have seen how the experience of the informal economy, the “debrouillard” spirit of Romanian migrants during the communist regime, along with the kinship and community networks, have formed a human and social capital which was exploited abroad, in Italy, and even in a country like France. Nevertheless, not only their migration experience or the wheeling and dealing during the communist regime survived the new economical context, fostering the achievement of their goals (mainly home improvement or acquisition and better living standards), but also several practices from the past. Indeed, Professor Kaufmann notes that the Latin version of the word “habit” is “habitus”, stressing that “habits are personal, so deeply registered that it is difficult to change” because they have a “structuring” force (Kaufmann, 1997: 253). Therefore, the habit can be considered as a memory of human knowledge (Kaufmann, 1997), which is why “The transition from one culture to another comes slowly and with successive adjustments,

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<sup>9</sup> For further reading on spaces selective heating see my doctoral thesis. *Locuințele migranților în țara de origine: un studiu de caz despre transformarea locuinței rurale sub impactul migrației internaționale. Comuna Marginea, jud Suceava (septembrie 2012)* University of Bucharest at <http://www.bu.u-bordeaux2.fr/babordplus.php?special=these>

the residents of Marginea continuing to use the internalized habits despite the change in the structure of their houses” (Cingolani, 2009:158).

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