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IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW BUT WHERE YOU KNOW: HUMAN CAPITAL, KNOWLEDGE AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Based on an inaugural lecture, this Working Paper places research on migrant skills and knowledge in context of broader changes in the theorisation and the nature of migration over recent decades. Starting with a critique of human capital theories, and existing research on skills and competences, it outlines the advantages of focussing on the different types of tacit knowledge that are transferred by migrants across international borders. This provides a counter to the simplistic dichotomy that portrays migrants as either skilled or unskilled: instead, all migrants are knowledgeable, with potential for learning and knowledge transfers. Such transfers also have to be understood as socially situated, so that the experiences of individual migrants reflect not so much what they know but where they know. This central argument is illustrated by discussion of three contrasting research projects. Firstly, the limited opportunities for knowledge transfer experienced by return migration to Portugal from Northern Europe in the 1980s, at the close of the 'age of mass migration'. Secondly, the changing opportunities for, and constraints on, learning and knowledge transactions by internationally mobile doctors in Slovakia during the course of economic and political transition. Finally, the experiences of Vietnamese migrants in central Europe in the 1990s who survived the transition from a centrally planned economy by utilizing different sources of local and international knowledge to enter market trading.

KEY WORDS

Knowledge Human capital Migration Return migration Portugal Slovakia Vietnamese Knowledgeable migrant

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INTRODUCTION

In general terms, this paper explores some strands in my research which reflect both macro changes, that have reshaped the European and global migration scene, as well as the shifting theoretical focus of migration research. This is given more specific focus by concentrating on the theme of 'it's not what you know but where you know'. In part this signals the author's background in human geography, but it is also a means of engaging with the socially situated nature of migrants' experiences of skills, learning and knowledge.

The paper begins by setting out a shifting theoretical framework that leads from a concern with human capital and skills to an emerging engagement with the concept of knowledge. A recurrent theme in this conceptualisation is that the accumulation, transfer and commodification of human capital and knowledge are socially situated. This means that we have to understand how migrants' lives are played out in particular social settings. Massey (1994: 154) expresses this in terms of places being constituted of 'articulated moments in networks of social relations' and, critically, she argues that such networks involve both localised and distanciated relationships. These relationships are expressed through diverse channels or mediums, including the internet and other forms of electronic communication, but migration and mobility - and the way these are articulated in particular social settings - also shape places. Moreover, recent thinking about migration takes us a step further in recognizing that many migrants lead transnational lives that are articulated through living in two or more interconnected places (Vertovec 2004).

After sketching out this conceptual framework, the paper explores its central themes through a discussion of three episodes in the author's own research; these span a period from the 1980s to a recently completed study. These are:

- Mass migration and return migration in the 1970s and 1980s (case study of Portugal);
- Highly skilled knowledge mobility (a 2006 case study of returnee Slovakian doctors); and
- Globalization and post-socialist migration after 1989 (a case study of Vietnamese migrants in Central Europe).

While individual migrant experiences feature prominently in this paper, these are seen as being produced and reproduced by shifting but persistent inter-relationships with structural inequalities, and scale-specific institutions.

A CHANGING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM HUMAN CAPITAL TO KNOWLEDGE

Human capital theories, which date back at least to the work of Becker (1964), contend that individual skills are the main source of economic growth. These theories make two main appearances in migration research: a concern with aggregate welfare effects, often expressed in terms of the brain gain versus brain drain debate; and the explanation of individual migration decision-making and economic returns to migration. This paper will only discuss the second of these.

In its simplest form, human capital theory understands the individual migration decision as an investment of resources in moving to a country where higher wages are available. These potential economic gains have to be balanced against the known and unknown costs and risks associated with migration (Stark 1991). Empirical research on human capital models has sought to explain the distribution of the migration/staying decision – that is, who migrates and who stays - in relation to individuals' human capital, while also controlling for the influence of a range of socio-demographic-economic characteristics, for example, gender and age (Borjas 1987).

A second strand of human capital research proposes that individual migrants have an earnings function based on the time required to accrue nationally-specific human capital, such as language skills or knowledge of local norms and social practices (Chiswick 1978). Migrants initially lack such nationally specific capital and, as a result, their productivity is lower, and so are their wages, compared to local workers with similar generic skills. Over time, as migrants acquire nationally specific human capital, their wages rise and converge with those of indigenous workers with similar generic skills. A recurring question in the research literature has been the length of time over which wage convergence occurs.

Most of the research within this theoretical framework has tended to focus on long-term immigration and settlement. It does not work nearly as well when applied to, say, highly skilled professionals relocating between branches of an international company. There are also problems when applying this model to return migration. Given that migrants have to invest in acquiring nationally specific human capital, and that their wages rise over time, how can we explain the return migration decision during their working lives, when wages will be either increasing or at their maximum. Dustmann and Weiss (2007) have reviewed the evidence on this question and suggest three rationales for the decision to return within the framework of human capital theory's assumptions relating to costs and returns. First, the balance between the migrant's returns in terms of income in the destination country and his or her preferences for consumption in the country of origin may change over time. Secondly, the individual may have higher purchasing power in the country of origin, assuming either prices in general or specific prices, such as housing, are lower than in the destination country. Thirdly, a higher value is placed on specific forms of human capital in the host country, especially in transition economies: for example, the migrants may have acquired particular technical or management skills, or language skills, for which a premium is paid in the rapidly expanding economies of their countries of origin.

Human capital theories offer some disarmingly simple and direct ideas: simultaneously appealing in their internal logic and also open to a hostile critique from those who believe that they have assumed away too much – perhaps all - of the real world occupied by migrants. One of the most trenchant criticisms is that empirical research within this framework has ignored the facts that '. skill is a definitional minefield' (Noon and Blyton 1997: 78). Much of the empirical investigation by human capital researchers has relied on econometrics, and the combination of the data requirements of these models and the limited secondary data available on skills, means that their analyses often rely on surrogate measures such as educational qualifications (Auriol and Sexton 2002). It is an approach that values technical skills (measured by diplomas and certificates) over social skills (Reich 1991). This approach is also problematic because of the socially constructed definitions of skills, which frequently reflect the interests of dominant groups of workers or employers, to the disadvantage of, for example, women and migrants

My research has partly developed in response to this critique. In a study of returned migrants from Slovakia to the UK (Williams and Baláž 2004, 2005a), I sought to link

international migration research to the burgeoning generic literature on competencies (especially Evans 2002) as an alternative to skills. One of the key findings of this research demonstrated that although relatively short term migrants in socially defined ‘unskilled’ caring and cleaning jobs, such as au pairs, did not acquire many technical skills, they did develop significant competencies in the UK: learning, networking, and communication competencies, for example, as well as self-confidence. These had relatively limited economic value in the UK, but were often translated into higher wages and career enhancement after returning to Slovakia.

The conceptual shift from skills to competencies is not, however, without difficulties, and has also attracted criticism. As Ainley (1993: 357) argues: ‘’Skills’ formerly understood by many as complex *social* processes, were now de-contextualized and de-constructed into finite, isolable `competencies’ to be located as the property of the individual, who then carried them, luggage-like, from job to job.’ It is a powerful critique which has particular resonance for international migration studies, where the ‘luggage’ of competencies, as Ainley terms it, has to be carried not only from job to job, but also across international borders, in an apparently unproblematic manner. In reality, of course, competencies, like skills, have particular economic values in specific social settings because they are relational – in the sense of being determined by relationships with other individuals, but also in being organizationally and institutionally specific.

Partly in response to this problem, my more recent research has explored the value of a knowledge perspective (Williams 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Knowledge is an even more slippery concept than skills. Polanyi’s (1958) distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge is the usual starting point in this literature. Tacit knowledge, which is akin to the highly personable knowledge that individuals may find difficult to express, can often only be transferred between individuals face to face. This gives a very specific role to international migration in knowledge transfer, as a means of realising co-presence. However, it is difficult to apply the general notion of tacit knowledge to a detailed analysis of knowledge transfers. However, Blackler (2002) provides an useful typology that distinguishes between different types of tacit knowledge: embodied (learning through practice), embrained (cognition), encultured (cultural nature of knowledge) and embedded (in institutions and organizations) knowledge.

This conceptual scheme provides insights into the complex ways in which migrants can secure economic returns to different types of knowledge before, during and after migration. The approach has a number of advantages. First, it allows us to link research on migration to that on the role of knowledge in the economy, which has been one of the dominant discourse in academic and policy discussions on economic performance and development in recent years. This is most obvious in the research on highly skilled migrants (originating in the UK in the work of Salt and Findlay (for example, 1989)). However, - and this is the second advantage – knowledge is not the preserve of elite workers in elite industries. Instead, all workers are potentially knowledgeable, especially if the full typology of knowledge is considered. This is the basis for arguing for the need to focus on 'the knowledgeable migrant' (Williams and Baláž 2008a), rather than the migrant in the knowledge-based economy. It is a concept that draws on the work of Thompson et al (2001) on the knowledgeable worker. Thirdly, the identification of the two strands of embedded and encultured knowledge, reiterates the importance of the socially situated nature of migrants' experiences of knowledge and learning, which takes us back to the theme of 'where you know'.

Knowing, learning and knowledge are generally understood as being socially situated (see Brown and Duguid 1991). The knowledge that migrants acquire, share and use is shaped by their relationships with significant others in particular places, As indicated earlier, these places should be understood as articulated flows within and into a particular setting. At one level, the significant others include, most obviously, workplace-based relationships with other migrants, indigenous workers, and managers. But the boundaries of modern workplaces are blurred, and critical relationships may also be formed with individuals in other organizations. Individuals may be embedded in formal or informal associations, one manifestation of which are what Wenger (1998) terms communities of practice. These may be highly localised, perhaps within single firms of localities, but they can also extend across international boundaries, including the places where migrants formerly lived and worked. Indeed, migrants are particularly instrumental in creating forward and backward linkages across space and time. And those who lead genuinely transnational lives may be engaged in multiple knowledge transactions with other individuals who are widely distributed between multiple places.

Socially situated knowledge is also shaped by the multiple sites within which individual lives are played out in particular places. Voydanoff (2001) provides an useful perspective on this, arguing (although in a different context) for the need to understand how individuals', seemingly separate, lives in the workplace, family and community are interlinked. By extension we can identify the potential for knowledge spillovers between these three spheres. There is now considerable research on how the social integration of individual migrants is dependent on overlaps between these different spheres, but our understanding of the resultant knowledge spillovers is still limited. For example, do migrant parents improve their language at home as a result of talking to their children who have been learning the same language more formally at school, and if so how does this influence their ability to communicate ideas in the workplace?

The importance of the socially situated nature of knowledge emphasises the limitations of the human capital approach, with its focus on the relationship between 'what you know' and individual economic returns. Instead, and emphasising the link between place and socially situated knowledge, this paper contends that 'it's not what you know but where you know' that is important in determining outcomes for individual migrants – and indeed for their places of origin and destination. This will be explored in context of three previous episodes (from a larger series) in my research, that reflect both the theoretical shifts outlined above, and macro changes in the context of migration.

MASS MIGRATION: SOUTHERN-NORTHERN EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND RETURN

Kindleberger (1967) contended that the key to sustained economic development in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s was the availability of labour which contributed to a virtuous cycle of economic growth, overcoming one of the most persistent of supply side constraints, that is in the labour market. International migration was a key component of the labour supply expansion, and made a significant contribution to sustaining the system of Fordist mass production that was in relative ascendancy during these decades (Fielding 1993). These international migration flows into Northern Europe were largely drawn from Europe's ex-colonies and from Southern Europe (King 1998). This phase of European international

migration was epitomised by, amongst others, the Southern European man working in the French or German car factory, and the woman concierge or cleaner working in Paris or Frankfurt. There was also an assumption that he or she was likely to be a ‘guestworker’ which emphasised the presumed temporary nature of this migration.

The skills and the rural/urban origins of the migrants shifted over time, but they were generally considered to be relatively unskilled, representing ‘muscle drain’ rather than ‘brain drain’. To some extent they fitted the human capital model of migration: their human capital could secure far higher returns in Northern Europe rather than in Southern Europe. Alternatively, in terms of knowledge, they possessed embodied (practical and bodily) and embrained (cognitive) skills which made them adaptable to the needs of the mass production economy, especially the assembly line. They lacked encultured and embedded knowledge of the host societies, but this was not detrimental to working on production lines, where only a minimum - if critical - adaptation to the organizational culture of a Taylorist labour process was required. The same applied, in some ways, to the many cleaning and low paid urban service jobs occupied by migrants. One implication of this, however, was that the hypothesised earnings function did not seem to fit their experiences. Lack of nationally-specific human capital was not a significant barrier to obtaining their particular jobs, so there was no gradual increase in incomes over time. Instead, these types of jobs provided little opportunity for career progression, and the migrants usually encountered a glass ceiling, within a very flat occupational hierarchy, early on during their sojourns.

There were, of course, costs associated with migration, both material and social, but the latter were, to some extent, mediated over the years by family reunification mobility, although many nuclear, let alone extended, families and systems of familial care were still fragmented over space. In the era prior to budget air travel and low cost electronic communication, such fragmentation was often deep, and face-to-face contacts were usually reduced to short return visit of a few weeks every summer. However, the costs and risks associated with migration were reduced over time by the growth of dense social networks between destinations and origins, linking not only countries, but also particular villages or towns in Southern Europe to specific urban neighbourhoods in metropolitan northern Europe (Castles and Miller 1993). In many ways this was an articulation of the argument that ‘It’s not what you know, but where you know’. ’Where’ in this context implied

not only a selective knowledge of destinations but also, more precisely, knowledge of housing and jobs.

Many migrants lived out lives characterised by the myth of return (Brettell 1979), and in fact became long term or settlement migrants, although recent work by Rodriguez and Egea (2006) demonstrates how complex, and gendered, post work mobility patterns can be for the mass migration generation. However, from the 1970s onwards there was a relatively high level of return migration from Northern to Southern Europe. Cerase's (1974) earlier research on Italian migration to the USA had already alerted researchers to the complexity of return decision making: there were returns of failure, of retirement, of conservatism and of innovation. Some evidence could be found for all of these in Southern Europe (King 1986). Human capital theories discussed earlier (Dustman and Weiss 2007) take us some of the way towards understanding the decision making process amongst the returnees, especially the arguments relating to real price differentials and changing preferences between production and consumption. However, with hindsight it is clear that competing theories, such as 'the new economics of labour migration' (Taylor 1999), may offer additional or even greater insights into some aspects of return: these emphasise the specific objectives of the migrants in terms of the income and savings required to support the larger household group in situ.

The process of return to Southern Europe has been extensively documented, not least in the collection of essays brought together by King (1986). It was in this context that I undertook, with Jim Lewis, a study of returned migration to Portugal in the mid 1980s. This was a comparative study of returned migrants to Portugal from both Northern Europe and from the ex-colonies in Africa (the latter are not discussed here). One of the distinguishing features of the study was its comparative dimension: it did not study return migration to Portugal, but to particular and contrasting places within Portugal. Questionnaire surveys were undertaken with returned migrants in three locations, which can be characterised as dynamic urban (Leiria), medium growth industrial town (Mangualde), and a remote village (Foios) on the Portuguese-Spanish border (Lewis and Williams 1986).

The theme of 'it's not what you know, but where you know' emerged in four distinctive ways in the findings of this study. In common with other research in that period (King 2000), the findings confirmed the dominance of the return of retirement and of conservatism. There

was little evidence of the return of innovation, or the effective transfer of human capital and knowledge into the Portuguese economy. Where returned migrants did invest in small businesses, this was most likely to be in small-scale consumer services, such as bars or small hotels. This is hardly surprising of course, because of the places that they returned to. Even amongst those who were economically active after their return, it was difficult to transfer the skills of say the German car production line to (most of) Portugal. Moreover, the particular nature of their socially situated experiences of migration – often living in relatively bounded Portuguese communities in foreign cities – had provided only relatively limited opportunities to acquire encultured knowledge, including language skills while abroad. In any case, the economic return to such knowledge in rural or remote areas in Portugal was as limited as the return to technical skills. It was hardly surprising, then, that many chose not to take paid work and to retire, or decided to invest in small-scale businesses, which were often more consumption than production oriented.

Secondly, their savings were devoted more to consumption than to production, with their main priority being the purchase of land and purchase/renewal of a house. This reflects 'where you know' in that a large proportion of the migrants were returning to their communities of origin. Land purchases were about positionality, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, where this often defined social position in the community. The conspicuous display of wealth in the building of a large house, filled with imported consumption goods, was also a feature that was noted by several researchers in this period (for example, Rhoades 1978). This was about redefining how you were known in a community where you had grown up and emigrated from.

CASE STUDY ONE: RETURNED MIGRANTS IN CENTRAL PORTUGAL IN THE MID 1980s

This study was based on 327 questionnaires undertaken with sub-samples of returned migrants from Europe, 'retornados' from the ex colonies (excluded here), and non migrants in three contrasting places in central Portugal: the small city of Leiria, the old market town of Mangualde which was also home to a small-scale Citroėn assembly works, and the very remote village of Fóios, in the interior of Portugal, only a short distance from the Spanish border.

There was a distinctive pattern of rural-urban drift evident in the distribution of the migrants, with a general shift from rural to urban settings. However, there was a slightly higher level of mobility amongst non-migrants, indicating that emigration could be been a strategy to enable individuals to remain in their area of birth. All figures are percentages.

Municipality	Returnees living in area of birth (%)	Non migrants living in area of birth (%)
Fóios	100	97
Mangualde	89	90
Leiria	62	55

Returnees were generally more likely than non migrants to have invested in housing than in business, indicating a preference for consumption. However, both returnees and non migrants were more likely to have invested in business in the more dynamic Leiria region, than in rural Foios. Their businesses also had more employees on average in the more urban areas.

Municipality	*% investing in housing*	*% investing in business*	*Mean employment per business*
Fóios			
Returnees	64	28	1.8
Non emigrants	83	6	1.5
Mangualde			
Returnees	76	19	1.8
Non emigrants	62	31	2.4
Leiria			
Returnees	88	34	2.5
Non emigrants	48	34	2.7

Source: Lewis and Williams (1986)

However– and this is the third point - the story is more complex than suggested so far because the findings also indicated the importance of rural-urban drift on return. It was no coincidence that the dynamic urban case study area had not only the largest proportion of returnees who had been born elsewhere in Portugal, but also the largest proportion of economically oriented returnees. Those who returned to the city of Leiria – whether they knew it as previous residents or decided to relocate there – found greater opportunities to use their material capital (their savings and remittances) and sometimes their human capital, than did returnees to more rural areas.

Finally, there were also the rather poignant experiences of the children of the migrants. A number of studies at that time (for example, Brettell 1979) recorded the often reluctant return with their parents of children who had grown up in France or Germany. Their generic human capital, acquired in schools abroad, was often considerable, but they also lacked some of the nationally specific human capital that was required to utilise this effectively, particularly in rural Portugal. Moreover, irrespective of that human capital, or the encultured knowledge they acquired after return, 'where they knew', in terms of shaping their goals and reference points, were Frankfurt and Lyons, not Foios or even Leiria. They were a generation who often knew more about what happened in Paris than in Portugal, and who looked forward to the time when they could return to France or Germany as young adults.

HIGHLY SKILLED MIGRATION AND CIRCULATION

The second research episode, comes 20 years later, and is a study that I undertook in 2006 in collaboration with Vladimir Baláž. The focus of this research was the international circulation and return mobility of Slovak doctors. To some extent this reflected a personal research shift to direct exploration of the knowledge paradigm, but it was also a reflection of a broader reorientation in migration studies during the 1990s.

There has been a growing interest in highly skilled migration, dating from at least the late 1980s (for example, Salt and Findlay 1989). This research has focussed on particular groups of migrants, especially on health workers, IT specialists, scientific researchers (for example, Bach 2003; Biao 2006) and the employees of transnational companies (for example, Beaverstock 2002). The new focus reflects both the increasingly strategic role of

skilled migrants as a component of selective national and regional human capital development and technology transfer strategies in particular countries (Williams and Baláž 2008a), and changes in the regulation of migration which are increasingly (relatively) favourable to skilled as opposed to unskilled migrants. There are many iconic figures in this new – and often highly gendered - age of skilled migration, including the New Zealand nurse in London, the Indian electronics engineer in Silicon Valley, and the financial whiz kids of the world's financial capitals. Of course, there are also parallel needs for less skilled migrants in such world cities, as Sassen (2000) reminds us. Although the latter are increasingly recognized, or perhaps re-recognized, in recent migration research, policy makers and researchers still tend to perceive them as empty knowledge vessels, with little or no capacity for learning and knowledge transfer. In other words, the focus of research on skills and knowledge has been on elite workers, in elite industries in elite places, although there are important exceptions (for example, Matthews and Ruhs 2007).

The research gaze also shifted from Southern to Eastern Europe in the 1990s as researchers caught up with the major transformations in that region. The opening of borders, and economic restructuring, generated large scale international migrations, much of it cross-border to neighbouring countries, but also over longer distances, creating new migration scapes and networks (Wallace and Stola 2001). EU enlargements in 2005 and 2007 further selectively transformed the regulatory framework for migration in much of the former Eastern block. The iconic figures of the early phases of this migration were individuals such as the Polish doctors who seasonally harvested potatoes in Germany to subsidise their continuing practice as doctors in their home countries. But this was only part of the story of a complex pattern of migration flows, caught for example in Jordan and Düvell's (2002) study of the diverse and flexible ways in which Polish migrants used different channels to move into and out of the UK before 2005.

Another shift in migration was from relatively longer term migration, followed by settlement or return, to new forms of shorter term mobility, circulation, and long distance commuting (King 2002). In reality of course, 'traditional' long term migration was always more complex than a simple pattern of emigration and return. However, there have been important shifts in the social, temporal and spatial composition of migration flows in Europe. Technological and social changes have facilitated shorter term mobility, which provides new types of opportunities for learning and knowledge transfer. The implications of this are underlined

by the indicative evidence that the learning curves for young, well educated migrants are much shorter than is suggested by the classic human capital literature on 'traditional' migrants (Williams and Baláž 2005a). Moreover, we increasingly need to understand that different types of mobility may be substitutable as migrants move through the life cycle, with changing needs and obligations; typically, longer term placements are replaced by long business trips and long distance commuting, at least in some industries (Millar and Salt 2008).

The research episode that is discussed here is a study of the learning and knowledge transfer experiences of doctors who have returned to Slovakia after varying periods spent abroad. Human capital theories provide a good approximation of the emigration experiences of doctors from Eastern Europe. Although benefiting from generally high standards of medical training in their home countries, they also face relatively low wages in countries where public spending is still recovering from the double onslaught of recession and neo-liberal policies. There are plentiful opportunities for such doctors abroad, where they can earn returns much higher than in their home countries. Nominal wages for doctors in the UK and France are about ten times higher than can be earned in Slovakia (ILO 2002). Of course, such migration incurs costs and risks, although these are more predictable in a highly regulated profession such as medicine than in many other occupations. When working abroad, such doctors usually lack nationally specific human capital, or some element of embedded and encultured knowledge – for example, full recognition of their qualifications in some destination countries, language skills, or knowledge of health service practices. As a result, their experiences broadly accord to the classic earning function, although many also encounter glass ceilings in their careers abroad. This is, by now, a reasonably well researched story (Raghuram and Kofman 2002). In contrast, the research reported here has focussed on a range of shorter to medium term mobilities, sometimes of only a few months, ranging from short training placements to regular sojourns to work abroad in particular countries, to periods of several years working abroad in well paid jobs in centres of excellence (Williams and Baláž 2008b). It has also explicitly drawn on Blackler's (2002) typology of knowledge, discussed earlier, and is based on in-depth face to face interviews.

'It's not who you know, but where you know' emerges in three important ways in the findings of this study. The first is the channelling of migrants to particular destinations

abroad. For doctors who went abroad to work before 1989, their choice was largely determined by international relations, with countries such as Libya – that is a form of, 'who your country 'knows''. These usually offered considerable material returns, but little opportunity for knowledge transfer back to Slovakia. This was not always so, however, and in one notable case the interviewee had spent time in both Hungary and West Germany, picking up sufficient innovative expertise to translate a leading Germany research book into Slovak. This opened the way to a future career characterised by high levels of international mobility and knowledge transfer. After 1989, the availability of scholarships, and the opening of borders, led to substantial short term mobility for work and training purposes. 'Where' they trained – and the knowledge they acquired - was partly dependent on the communities of practice (Wenger 1998) and the social networks of their Slovak mentors. This was often critical in their own initiation into both formal and informal professional networks, and sometimes set in train repeat circulation to the same destination for working and training purposes. It similarly shaped their distanciated (Amin 2002) learning via the internet, which was often complemented by short term mobility to conferences or to foreign hospitals, which constantly refreshed their social networks.

Secondly, 'where you know' also shaped the nature of their knowledge transfer to Slovakia. Several interviewees commented that the increasing internationalisation of medical knowledge via the internet and other means, meant that they had less to learn from going abroad in 'technical' terms. However, this was mediated by the fact that some forms of knowledge – especially embodied knowledge – could only be learnt by observation and practice alongside experts. There were also the advantages of learning about different approaches to medical practices (encultured knowledge) and different ways of organizing health care delivery (embedded knowledge) which could only effectively be acquired by spending time abroad. The internet was seen as a complement rather than a substitute for these forms of learning.

Many migrants returned home with varying amounts and types of knowledge, but even their most cynical colleagues could only offer muted criticisms of 'what they knew'. However, and this is the third and perhaps most important conclusion to be drawn, it was difficult to transfer some forms of knowledge from abroad to Slovak hospitals. Those who had been abroad for training returned, of course, to the same hospitals. But even for those who returned after working abroad, and had to seek new jobs, social contacts shaped their

job seeking in Slovakia – so again the 'where' dimension was important in knowledge transfer, and their experiences of this were strongly socially situated. In some hospitals, returnees reported that younger colleagues 'swarmed like bees' about them, anxious to learn new techniques and other medical practices.

However, there were also constraints on the transfer of embodied and embrained knowledge, such as a lack of equipment, but these could usually be overcome in due course. In contrast, transferring embedded and

CASE STUDY TWO: INTERNATIONALLY MOBILE DOCTORS IN SLOVAKIA

This study was based on 24 in-depth interview in 2006 with doctors who had spent at least 3 months studying or working outside of Slovakia. They ranged from relatively short scholarships, to doctors who had worked abroad for several years. The selected quotations below give insights into their experiences of knowledge transfer and learning.

Experiences abroad

Doctor A had been to the Netherlands in the mid 1990s

> *it was a professional revolution for me. The best gold standard was in the Netherlands. It was like someone from Africa coming to work in Slovakia. They had different technology, and different medicines – at that time.*

Doctor B, who had gone to Germany rather later, found that by then the equipment gap had largely closed, but that migration made it possible to acquire embodied knowledge

> *You observe similar operations, similar diagnoses and patients and similar solutions – but! – you see minor differences, which are not mentioned in books. You can see and learn some details, which are very useful to learn. And I really did. You can see it and imitate it, because this is a practical matter. They tell you this is something new and we do it in such and such way. You discuss it and remember.*

Other doctors, such as C who had been to Switzerland, commented on how they had acquired embedded and encultured knowledge abroad.

> '*yes I could learn it in Slovakia, but in my country I couldn't see the system they use in Switzerland. It is very complex – the treatment of a particular diagnosis, consulting with other clinics in the same hospital, and interdisciplinary meetings*.'

Experiences after returning

Some doctors were deeply disappointed. D who had been to Germany stated:

> *I expected my colleagues would be pleased to learn about my experience. I even hoped the management would ask me to give lectures. But … they transferred me to a post, where I couldn't use what I knew.*

In contrast, E had found his colleagues enthusiastic to share his learning:

> *'the young ones were like mosquitoes around me, and I was really pleased to share my knowledge with them'*.

And F emphasised both a pragmatic view, and an understanding of his colleagues, in terms of how to transfer knowledge successfully.

> *I had no problems. But look – I did not return like an overoptimistic, energetic man, who wants to change everything. I didn't try to convert my colleagues to new treatment methods. ….. So, I had no problems, when I made smaller changes in Slovakia. They [colleagues] asked about my experience, we discussed some details and what was worth implementing was actually implemented.*

Source: Williams and Baláž (2008b)

encultured knowledge was far more problematic. There were manifest obstacles – how, for example, to transfer the Swedish culture of active dialogue between doctor and patient to Slovakia, where doctors were rarely questioned by largely passive patients. Or how to transfer the 'system' of Swiss paediatrics to a general hospital in Bratislava – where, by definition, this required wholesale organizational change rather than interpersonal knowledge transfers. Ultimately, of course, power relationships were critical, and it was those returnees who understood the politics of local hospitals who were better able to effect knowledge transfers. But many faced frustration as senior managers and consultants, who often felt threatened by the returnees, erected barriers to knowledge transfer. Our interviewees were not, however, always pessimistic on this point, because over time many returnees did rise to positions of authority, and were able to reorganize the practice of medicine within their departments, if not within their hospital as a whole. As such, the reorganization of medical practices was very much shaped by 'where they knew', both before and after migration.

GLOBALIZATION, POST-SOCIALIST MIGRATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EASTERN EUROPE

The changing nature of international migration in recent decades has many dimensions, some of which have already been mentioned in the discussion of Slovak doctors' mobility. There has been a growth not only of skilled labour migration but also of the movement of other migrants as well; for example, through irregular channels, as refugees, as students, and on seasonal unskilled work permits. We are also more aware of the gender, age and ethnicity dimensions of migration, although still a long way from a clear understanding of how these intersect. Diasporas and transnationalism have become part of the vocabulary of migration studies (for example, Cohen 1997), as has the notion of mobility rather than migration.

It has probably been impossible to talk about European migration without reference to the global scene for at least two centuries, but the pace of globalization has also undeniably quickened in recent decades. We are increasingly aware of the complex geographies of European migration, and that expanding social networks and secondary migrations can result in what once would have been thought of as the most unlikely presence of particular

migrants in particular places. For example, Chinese migration to Central Europe is a fascinating story of struggle and adaptation. Its origins lie in the 'shuttle trade' by Chinese petty traders, selling cheap clothing in Russia from the late 1960s (Nyíri 2003). After 1988, many moved to Hungary taking advantage of a temporary waiving of visa entry requirements, to be followed by subsequent migrations to neighbouring countries.

There has also been growing appreciation of the complex economic survival strategies employed by many migrants. In many European societies, migrants are disproportionately likely to be self-employed or small business owners. Ethnic entrepreneurs – not necessarily the same as migrant small business owners - have been described as 'unsung heroes' (Kloosterman and Rath 2003: 1) reflecting both their considerable achievements, and the relative lack of research on their activities, although there is an emerging literature in this area (for example, Light and Gold 2000), which at least touches on the knowledge dimension.

There are two ways of telling the stories of migrant self employment and small business ownership. First there is the positive or 'good news' story. This argues that, by starting their own businesses, migrant entrepreneurs can create jobs for themselves and overcome some of the barriers they face as employees – for example, the failure by employers to recognize their formal qualifications or their diverse knowledge. They can find it either difficult to enter some industries, or encounter a very low glass ceilings when they seek to advance their careers within particular organizations. One response to these obstacles is to become self-employed, or to establish small businesses that may employ others. These enterprises can be either in the mainstream economy, or in the ethnic enclave economy. If they succeed they can create jobs for others, whether from their own families, ethnic group or another ethnic groups. They can also bring a new lease of life to some sectors, such as garment production, which indigenous entrepreneurs have been abandoning. They make a profit, or at least survive in such sectors, because they can draw on specific and distinctive knowledge and social networks.

In contrast, there is the negative or bad news story, which emphasises that many migrants have felt compelled to taken this route because of the difficulties they face as employees. Migrants may face outright racism in some contexts, and the 'othering' of all 'newcomers' in other settings. In any event, they survive in increasingly crowded specialist markets (for

example, the multiplication of imitative ethnic restaurants) through long hours, low incomes and intense self-exploitation and exploitation of their family members. Even if they do succeed, they lack the resources, including knowledge, to break out from what turns out to be an economic cull-de–sac in the enclave economy. Reality is far more complex than this simple dichotomy suggests and, for example, migrant owned businesses are found not only in low-productivity consumer service sectors, but also play a key role in high tech complexes such as Silicon Valley (Saxenian 2006). However, whether or not establishing small firms is ' .. positive for the individual … it is clear that it is not a successful way to fight economic marginalization and segregation' (Hjerm (2004: 739) for migrants in general.

This brings me to the third episode in my research, a study undertaken in 2005, in collaboration with Vladimir Baláž, of Vietnamese market traders in Slovakia (Williams and Baláž 2005b; Baláž and Williams 2007). This research because an opportunity to say something about the globalization of migration. Vietnamese market traders in Slovakia – and indeed throughout much of Eastern Europe (Iglicka 2001) - are an example of the 'unlikely presence of particular groups in specific places' that was referred to earlier. Moreover, it is also a case study that illustrates how the globalization of labour, trade, investment and knowledge can be interwoven in the creation of migrant enterprises.

The origins of Vietnamese migration to Slovakia lie in the Vietnam War and the geopolitics of the Cold War. Whereas Vietnamese migrants in North America or France were predominantly from South Vietnam, those in Eastern Europe were from North Vietnam. There had been some Vietnamese migrants in the region in the 1960s, funded in part by the 'fraternal assistance' package provided by Central European states. However, this increased significantly after the reunification of Vietnam in 1975. 'Agreements on Mutual Help' were signed between Vietnam and several Eastern European countries, including Czechoslovakia, which included studentship and industrial apprenticeships, in what crudely could be seen as an exchange of human capital for industrial exports. Some 40,000 young Vietnamese came to the former Czechoslovakia in the late 1970a and 1980s, and many stayed after their visas had expired.

After 1989, the sharp shock economic transition in the former Czechoslovakia resulted in an estimated 30% decline in national income, while official unemployment rates soared officially to more than 20% in a society where unemployment had, at least formally, been

virtually unknown under state socialism. Economic recovery did not begin until the mid 1990s and average incomes did not regain their 1988 levels until the end of the 1990s. Many Slovakian manufacturing firms closed down under the impact of global competition, and suffered from the institutional gap in regulating emerging markets, and Vietnamese migrants were amongst the first to loose their jobs. As many were irregular migrants, they did not qualify for assistance from a crumbling welfare system. Faced with acute 'blocked mobility', or more accurately a crisis of economic survival, the overwhelming majority of the Vietnamese migrants turned to market trading. By the 2000s, however, Vietnamese market trading was being undermined by the unlikely combination of transnational supermarket chains, and Chinese traders.

This rapid shift into market trading can be explained in relation to two main theoretical perspectives. First, by Waldinger et al's (1990) well known 'interactive model which posits that ethnic entrepreneurship is the outcome of a combination of resources and opportunities. There are two types of 'opportunities' – market openings and access to
transition. And they were able to secure relatively easy access to pitches and stands that constituted 'property' in market trading. The model also posits that there are two types of group characteristics: predisposition factors, and resource mobilization. In some ways, the Vietnamese migrants lacked a predisposition for entrepreneurship as they tended to be from rural families, with good party connections in Vietnam. However, this was overwhelmed by the basic need to survive in a very cold economic climate. Finally, and perhaps critically, they benefited from strong resource mobilization both within the Vietnamese community in Slovakia and via their contacts in Vietnam. Although an useful starting point, Waldinger et al's theory does not explain the high concentration (70-80%) of Vietnamese migrants in market trading. Instead, there is also a need to consider the particular contingencies of a transition economy in the 1990s, and therefore the paper also drew on Altvater's (1998) concept of arbitrage (exploiting cost and exchange rate differentials, in this case between neighbouring countries), and the empirical work on border trading in Eastern Europe (Sik and Wallace 1999).

CASE STUDY THREE: WINNING, THEN LOOSING, THE BATTLE WITH GLOBALISATION: VIETNAMESE TRADERS IN SLOVAKIA IN THE 2000s

This study is based on 87 face to face interviews with Vietnamese market traders in 2003.

Migration from Vietnam to the former Czechoslovakia was very selective:

> *My father was killed in the War. I came here to work in the machinery factory …. But it was great to have been selected and sent to Czechoslovakia. We were expected to learn the socialist-style of work in a socialist country. This was a real privilege that was mainly given to the children of Party functionaries* (Uhan, in Central Slovakia).

Those who stayed on usually did so informally:

> *we just stayed here without registering with the authorities. Those who registered after 1989 had lots of problems. Many were expelled. So, others did no want to take a risk…..the Vietnamese who made their stays legal had to arrange this over several months or even years. It was very costly ..* (Tang in Bratislava)

In establishing businesses, they drew on their international networks

> *I followed my family and friends. We started trading by importing clothes and shoes … and sold these from a pick-up truck in a car park. Later we rented a stall in the open-air market. Now we rent a shop on the main street.*(Mo in Bratislava)

A knowledge of police culture and Slovak trading practices was essential for survival*:*

> *I import most goods illegally .... We have friends among the custom officers at the border. I pay them something in Slovak or foreign money, or I give them a share of the goods. In return, they allow me to bring in undeclared goods.* (Vu in Zilina)

They also relied on a dense network of contacts amongst the Vietnamese community in Slovakia:

> *We can come to see each other at any time, because we are always at work – by day, by night. We rest, when we are tired, but we never take holidays and we don't know days off (Tian in Martin)*

In the 2000s, they faced tough competition from supermarkets and Chinese migrants.

> *People in Vietnam still think, everything is better and easier in Europe. A rich Vietnamese, however, would not come to Europe and sell gods on an open-air market. The time of the hypermarket has come. They took over many of our customers* (Luen in Turčianske Teplíce)

> *Many Chinese have come to Slovakia. They had much better finances than we did …... They have a great choice of good, cheaper goods and are pushing us out of the market* (Kuen in Martin).

Source: Williams and Baláž (2005b)

Turning to the theme of this paper, human capital – or 'what they know' - was an important element in the success of the Vietnamese. Before 1989 they had started to manufacture jeans, from imported denim, by cutting and sewing in their dormitory accommodation at night and weekends. The human capital, or the embodied knowledge they acquired, was carried over into their first trading ventures, as was the small but essential amounts of financial capital that they had accumulated. They also had sufficient encultured knowledge of Slovak society to negotiate their way through the rapidly changing regulatory framework of the period of 'Wild East' capitalism in the early 1990s. This included employing Slovak women to front their market stalls in some instances, as a foil to police persecution and their limited language skills.

However, the contingencies of place are also importance in explaining their relative success because, as one interviewee commented ' .. the father of Vietnamese trading was central planning and the mother was transition'; in other words, the roots lie in the very specific conditions in Slovakia in the early 1990s. Four particular strands of 'where you know' are important.

First, the political economy of transition created exceptional opportunities for market trading. This was due to a simultaneous decline and polarization of incomes, on the one hand, and radical changes in the production and distribution systems of a centrally planned economy. Not only did domestic production collapse, but this was accompanied by several waves of privatizations (Dallagio 1995), one of which resulted in about 10,000 small scale business outlets – including shops – being sold off by the state (Williams and Baláž 1999). This both weakened the retail system in the short term, and added to the supply of property on the market. Furthermore, transnational retail chains were initially reluctant to invest in Slovakia given what they perceived as high levels of risk in a poorly regulated and economically depressed economy. In combination, these factors created highly specific opportunities for Vietnamese migrants to move into market trading in the 1990s, through creating new supply chains and distribution channels centred in particular places (see the third argument below).

Secondly, 'where' mattered in the sense of how the Vietnamese lived in cities such as Martin and Bratislava. They were highly segregated, not so much by neighbourhoods but in terms of individual blocks of flats (*paneláks).* This spatial proximity reinforced mutual trust

amongst dense networks of co-ethnics in these places, which in turn was an important ingredient in a ‘culture of lending’ (Light and Gold 2000: 86). Groups of Vietnamese migrants formed lending circles, whereby they loaned capital in turn to their members to set up as market traders. This was essential to their success given the general institutional failure of venture and financial capital in the early transition period. It was also a very specific form of encultured knowledge.

Thirdly, ‘where they knew’ was also essential in sourcing supplies. They drew on their social networks in (and embedded knowledge of) Vietnam, initially to source denim for jeans production, and later for clothing to sell in the markets. This was particularly significant in the early 1990s when there were acute shortages of low cost clothing in Slovak markets. Later they diversified their sources, drawing more on Chinese suppliers. They also drew on the Vietnamese diaspora in neighbouring Central European countries, exemplifying Thuen’s assertion (1999: 749) that ethnicity is one way in which the challenge of passing borders can be transformed from an obstacle to an opportunity.

Finally, ‘where they knew’ also contributed to their relative decline as market traders after circa 2000. There were many reasons for this including the arrival of competition from Chinese migrants to Eastern Europe. This decline is initially surprising, because – compared to the Chinese – the Vietnamese had been trading in Slovakia for about two decades by this stage, and had accumulated considerable encultured and embedded knowledge that facilitated trading. However, the Chinese also drew on ‘where they knew’, in this case the more direct relationships they had with individual factories in China. Moreover, the Chinese state also provided better support to these suppliers via export guarantees and credit schemes, than was the case in Vietnam.

CONCLUSIONS: THE SOCIALLY SITUATED NATURE OF LIFE COURSE MIGRATION

International migration is one of the most significant phenomena which is shaping lives of migrants and non migrants throughout the world, both in the sending and the receiving countries as well as – via trade and other effects - third countries. Obtaining a better and

deeper understanding of this phenomenon, in the face of populist discourses and politics, is one of the most challenging and pressing issues that face social scientists, let alone those in the policy arena.

This paper has argued for the need for a more nuanced and more broadly based, theoretically informed approach to understanding the experiences and impacts of international migration. Human capital theories do have an important place in social science research, not least because they focus on the balancing of individual returns and costs/risks associated with migration, as well as spawning the important debate about the welfare and economic development implications of brain drain versus brain gain. However, there are limitations in the value of a human capital, skills or the competences perspective for understanding the experiences of individual migrants. Hence, this presentation has advocated the value of focussing on the different types of tacit knowledge possessed, transferred and transformed by migrants. This general argument has been illustrated through the three research episodes that have been re-visited, which indicated the value of the knowledge perspective in bridging our understanding of very different research phenomena, under very different global, national and local conditions.

It is important to re-emphasise, however, that the argument in favour of a knowledge perspective is not a call to focus on highly skilled migrants – rather, it is an argument that all migrants are knowledgeable, and they can or potentially may play important roles in the economies of diverse sectors and places. The notion of the ‘knowledgeable migrant’ explicitly recognizes that all migrants are knowledge bearers, even if this is not immediately obvious in terms of their technical skills. Moreover, they have an enormous capacity for learning and for sharing knowledge.

However, successful learning involves co-learning, which requires openness on the part of all those involved, whether co-workers or management. This openness, and rejection of the ‘othering’ of the newcomer is significant not only in the workplace, but in the other domains within which migrants live their lives, such as the neighbourhood. The struggle for greater openness and co-learning represents a difficult battle in context of the current politics of migration in most counties. But is a battle which is important not just because of social equity but also because the different encultured and embedded knowledge possessed by

international migrants means they are bearers of ‘unusual’ knowledge and contribute to a social diversity that potentially incubates creativity and innovation.

Finally, an emphasis on co-learning and relationships with others, brings us back to the theme of this paper – the importance of ‘where you know’. Knowledge is socially situated – and that is explicitly recognized by the concepts of embedded and encultured knowledge. Portuguese migrants in Northern Europe, in the age of mass migration and Fordist production, only needed to acquire relatively minimal, if critical, amounts of such knowledge to secure and carry out their jobs. However, this also meant that they knowledge they carried home to Portugal was, at least in terms of production, also constrained. They had acquired relatively little encultured and embedded knowledge, and there were relatively limited opportunities anyway for using this economically in most places of return. Two decades later, international mobility has become an essential instrument in learning and knowledge acquisition for many types of migrants, ranging from students, to au pairs, to financial analysts and – as discussed here - Slovak doctors. Their experiences illustrate that some forms of learning and knowledge transfer are conditional on co-presence, which implies the need for international mobility or migration – even if this is interwoven with other forms of learning, e.g. via the internet. The example of the Vietnamese market traders underlines not only the globalisation of migration and knowledge transfers, but also the importance of knowledge transfers within and between places for all types of workers, including in this instance manual and technical factory workers made redundant during the sharp shock transition in Eastern Europe. In each of these case studies, where you know is as important as what you know.

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