

## *The role of environment change on the learning process of Albanian return migrants' children: the case of students at Arsakeio college.*

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### **Abstract**

Migration is thought of as way without return. Recent studies show a considerable number of migrants decide to return home. In the beginning of the 1990's, after the fall of communist regime, many Albanians left their country in searching a better and safer place to live because of the unstable political and economical situation in the country. During the first years of migration, the migrant's dream or intention was to return home, after having gained enough money to get by. Although, there are a lot of studies about the Albanian migration in Greece, return Albanian migration is a highly neglected issue.

In this study we investigate the process of reintegration of Albanian migrants upon their return at home. Specifically, the study focuses on the integration of Albanian return migrants' children. We examine their confrontation with the Albanian reality, the teachers, the other students and the Albanian language. Our intent is to make evident the problems they face during the everyday life within the school environment and the problems during the process of learning and the role of teachers in helping these students during the process of learning and the teaching methods they use especially with these children.

Semi structured interviews are used with 20 students (16-18 years old) of high school of Arsakeio. Part of the study is also the group of teachers who support and orientate these students.

### **Introduction**

According to many theorists emigration has been considered as a one way trip (Holl 1987:44). But the history of international emigration shows that this conclusion does not correspond to the reality. Russell King (1977), believes that the problems the emigrants face when returning home, have kind of been neglected by geographers or social scientists. He explains that this negligence is a result of the temporary character of the international emigration within the context of the European labor market. (King,1977:241). King considers the return of emigrants as an "unwritten chapter of the emigration history".

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(King, 2000: 7) Martin Klinth (1998) thinks that this phenomenon has been very little covered by empiric studies (Klinth 11, 1998: 2 ).Jeon Pierre Cassorino ( 2004) adds that despite the different interpretations, the essence of this phenomenon still remains vague.

Consequently the lack of relevant literatures and statistical evidence about the Albanian returned emigrants were the difficulties we had to overcome in our survey. This empiric research focuses mainly on the integration of the returned Albanian emigrants' children as well as on how they face the Albanian reality, the Albanian language, the teachers and their peers. The role played by the teachers in this integration the teaching approaches and strategies are also the focus of this research.

The following is a brief outline of the article:

- a brief history of the Albanian emigration wave to Greece.
- a summary of the empiric studies on the return of the Albanian emigrants .
- the chosen methodology and the conclusion of the survey.

### **A brief history of the Albanian emigration to Greece.**

Greece and Italy are considerate the two main destinations for the Albanian emigrants. This is due to the fact that this two countries are geographically close to Albania. According to Theodoros Iosifides and King (1998) the mass movement of Albanians immigrants towards Greece is closely linked to the geopolitical changes in the socialist counties of East Europe. The collapse of the communist regime resulted in the movement of the Albanians in and out of their country. (Iosefides and King, 1998:207). Rosetos Fokiolas (2000) thinks that apart from the political and social factors, the economical factor played a major role in the emigration of the Albanians towards Greece and Italy. He explains that “the salary earned in Greece is four to six times as much the salary earned in Albania”. (Fokiolas, 2000:67).

According to the National Statistical Services of Greece in 2001, 797.091 foreign nationals were residing in Greece from which 750.000 of them come from countries that do not belong to the European Community. We should point out the fact that the immigrants in Greece mostly come from its neighboring countries. The Albanian community of immigrants in Greece is the largest one, followed by the Bulgarian community. (Triantafyllidou, Marouf of and Nikolova, 2009 : 13.17) Albanians make up half of the entire imigrant population in Greece. According to Lois Labrianidis and Panos Hatziprokopiou (2005) 450.000- 550.000 of Albanian immigrants live in Greece. Around 60% of the legal and 64% of the illegal immigrants come from Albania (Kanellopoulos, Gregor and Petralias, 2006) Researches on the labor market integration of immigrants in Greece show that the majority of the Albanian male immigrants work in the construction sector as well as other sectors, the most popular being agriculture industry, and tourism . A large majority of Albanian female immigrants are employed in another sector which means house work and cleaning. Some of them are also employed in agriculture and tourism (Balwdin – Edwards 2004, Hatziprokopiou 2003; Iosifides and King 1998). Actually the survey of Lamprianides and Antigone Lyberaki (2001) on the Albanian immigrants in Thessalonica sheds light on the employment issues in Greece. According to them at the beginning the Albanian immigrants worked in agriculture and later on, in the construction or transport sector. This was due to their gradual learning of the language of the host country. (Baldin-Edwards, 2004: 52).

## **The return of the Albanian immigrants**

In 1990 the political, economical and social changes forced many Albanians to leave their country in search of a better life in the developed European countries. Greece and Italy were the most popular destinations within the Albanian immigrants. Over the years the Albanian immigrants began to adjust to the characteristics of the economy and society in Greece. Despite that, their wish to return home was always in the back of their minds. Beryl Nicholson (2004) believes that many Albanian immigrants return after an short period of stay. Their initial aim is to make money and supplement the family income, till they find a stable job in Albania. A little research has been done on the return home phenomena. But they do not include the features and implication of the phenomenon. It is thought that it is a temporary option (Mancellari et al .1996; Kule et al. 2002 ). In his study Nicholson (2004) points out the fact that many returnees use the money they have earned abroad mainly for better living conditions, secondly to establish a micro-enterprise and thirdly to buy equipment for the business their family has established. The investment of the returned immigrants in micro-enterprises is considered as a good source of income for the economy of the country. This is quite obvious in the southern villages.

Overall the return of the Albanian immigrants has been presented as a failure. The returned immigrants fall into two categories: Immigrants that have not managed to integrate in the host country and those that have been expelled. (Labrianidis and Lyberaki; 2004:84). The research conducted by Labrianidis and Lyberaki (2004) and Brikena Kazazi (2006) focuses on the integration of the returned immigrants in the labor market, their work status, and the circumstances before and after the immigration. They also aim at finding out the reasons that force Albanians to immigrate as well as the reasons that force them to return home. Another survey conducted by Eglantina Germeñji and Lindita Milo (2009) deals with the work status of the returned Albanian immigrants. Their research reveals that Albanian immigrants in Italy and Greece have been available for low wage and low skilled work, which has had a negative impact on their further professional education. Furthermore the immigrants prefer establishing their own business rather than being employed. A recent research conducted by Kalie Kerpaci and Martin Kuka (2012) focuses on the reasons that forced Albanians to immigrate to Greece and on the other hand the reasons that forced them to leave the host country. It also deals with the double identity they acquire as a result of socialization.

## **Methodology**

This research is based on the interviews of 20 students aged 16–18 from “Arsakeio”, the Albanian-Greek College in Tirana. We chose this age group because their opinion is more reliable and detailed. They belong to the second generation of the returned Albanian immigrants who have just left Greece. The group of teachers who support and help these students is part of the survey too. The information we provide is collected through semi-structured interviews. Open and closed questions are used in the interviews. The survey conducted in their particular college provides an in depth look at the impact of this new environment on the students who have just left a different reality.

## **Survey conclusions**

First impression in Albania

The interviewed students think that Albania is developing.

*“Every time I visit Albania I notice changes, especially in Tirana. I’m really impressed”*

Students were impressed by the lifestyle and the mentality in Albania. They call the Albanian society narrow-minded and individualistic.

*“I’m impressed by the people, their language, their traditions. Tirana is bigger than the town I used to live in, in Greece.”; “My friends back in Greece were friendly, quiet while here you can easily be misunderstood.”; “My peers’ behavior in Albania is different from my peers’ behavior in Greece. The People in Albania have another type of psychology which is different from the one in Greece. There is a lot of competition here, they are not friendly to each-other. The people around me in Greece were friendlier and they supported each-other”*

In the college they were welcomed by the teachers to closely cooperate with the students and help them overcome their difficulties. On the other hand students that have returned from Greece earlier, help those that have just returned.

*“The teachers were a great help to me. They were aware of the difficulties I was experiencing with the Albanian language and the new environment.”; “To my surprise my peers were really friendly to me. They understood my problem and also my fear for this new environment. They might have been in my place before.”; “I was not expecting my peers to behave in such friendly way, I did not have this in Greece.”*

According to some students the teachers in the college are very strict and demanding, which is quite unusual for the teachers in Greece. The Greek teachers are described as liberal.

*“The teachers in Greece were very friendly and kind to us. They were not demanding. Unlike the Greek teachers, the teachers in the college want us to learn and know everything they teach us.”; “Teachers here are devoted to any student during lessons and they explain everything thus making the learning process easy”*

Students at school don’t notice big differences in the teaching approaches. They point out that in the Greek schools social sciences take prudence over exact sciences.

*“The teaching approaches are almost the same, the teachers in Greece were friendlier. During the brakes they talked to us about different problems we had. But during the classes they were demanding. The same gals for the teachers in this college. They add that old teachers are stricter than young teachers.”*

## **Re - socialization issues**

The interviews given by these students shed light on some of the problems they face while adjusting and adopting to the new reality, to the new environment at school. Our survey shows that the returned emigrants children encounter social and psychological and learning problems. School sums really difficult to them. According to the teachers of the college, students over 16 are the ones who need help and support the most. As adolescents they need special care. They also add that students who live with their relatives find it harder to adapt.

*“Young students find it easy to adapt to the new reality, while the old ones have a really hard time. Some students live with their relatives, and this is a disadvantage. They surely need their parents care to overcome difficulties.”*

One of the interviewed students said:

*“A life with my grandparents and the absence of my parents makes it even harder for me.”*

The finding of the survey showed that the frequent visits to Albania in the past helped some of this children to adapt to the Albanian society, every day life and also the learning process. Unlike them, the children born in Greece and who visited Albania less frequently found it difficult to detach themselves from the Greek reality. They claim to be living between two worlds, the Greek one and the Albanian one. Moreover some of them still regret their return to Albania.

*“I was against returning to Albania. I was sad.”; “My life in Greece was quite different. There I had my school, my friends, my life”; “I was brought up in Greece and Albania was strange to me.”*

At the beginning they had to face their fear of a new life and reality. They felt nervous about their peers’ attitude towards them

*“At the beginning my peers were cold to me.”; “In Grevena I knew everybody , talked to them , greeted everybody. In Albania I felt alone.”*

The Albanian language was another obstacle to them. Their Albanian was not fluent and full of grammatical mistakes .They hesitated to speak it, lest they could be ridiculed by their peers. They and that to their surprise their peers were friendly and helped them pronounce the words correctly. This happens because most of them have been in this position before.

*“My friends were kind and friendly, they didn’t laugh at my poor Albanian. I had only been t Albania on holidays and I had never cared about the language. But things are different now. I’m here forever and I should speak it fluently now.”*

The insufficient knowledge of the Albanian language has a negative impact on the learning process too. The vocabulary used in school books is difficult. They speak colloquial albanian, so they cannot understand the terms in the school books.

*“I made a lot of mistakes when speaking. The language used in school books is quite different from the colloquial Albanian I speak.”; “The difficulty that I encountered was teaching vocabulary used in school books which I did not know”.*

The most difficult subjects for the students are science Math and Albanian. The advanced programs of the exact sciences are an obstacle to them. In their interviews they state the subjects at school include topics they have never dealt with in Greece.

*“The poor vocabulary the lack of the grammatical and morphological knowledge were the reasons why I was not good at albanian language. At the beginning I was not doing well at math either. As far as the exact sciences are concerned I can say that I’m gifted at them so I progressed quickly.”; “The school program in Greece are simple and the school day ends earlier. While in Albania the school programs are difficult especially in the high school.”*

The moment, the time they returned from Greece influences the students’ integration at school. Those that returned 2-5 years ago feel nostalgia for the life they had in Greece, which results in to a slow integration. The students that returned in 2010-2011 (the time the Greek crises started) believe that Albania will give them more chances and

opportunities and that they will be able to have either private or public education.

*“I had chosen professional high school in Greece and I wanted to go to the University. In Albania I have the opportunity to study where ever I want. “;” With the idea that Greece is in crisis and was not recovering, I thought that Albania would be different and I would have many opportunities to study where I want. To study, there (Greece) is a lot more difficult, earnings were not sufficient and I understood that my family would have sacrificed a lot for me”;*

## **Methods and strategies for involving students returnees, during the learning process**

Recently, the Greek-Albanian College” Arsakeio” the number of returning students is increasing gradually. Teachers at this school are trying to find different and efficient methods of teaching and learning especially for this group of students. In this way, students will find it easier to integrate within an unfamiliar society. This category of students first undergo preliminary examinations in Albanian and mathematics, in order to identify knowledge in these two key subjects. It is observed that in general children returnees have little knowledge of the Albanian language and therefore the college held special classes for Albanian language for the needs of students. Some special classes are organized where students divided in groups learn Albanian language to cope with the difficulties they face in this language. In addition, students are doing some additional hours in mathematics in order to become familiar with the basic concepts of this subject. Taking into account the results of previous examinations of the language, students are placed in three groups as follows:

1. In the first group are enrolled those students who speak and read with difficulty.
2. In the second group, students who speak Albanian but do not know how to read and write.
3. In the third group, the students who have little knowledge about Albanian language.

*“In order to be admitted to the school, students undergo a series of tests to check the level of their knowledge. Also teachers discuss the class to place students according to age and knowledge. In addition, problems are identified. Than, the teachers compile a program for Albanian language and Math.”;*” *In our school, we aim to create a suitable environment. Although the Greek language is spoken in the school they find it easy to adapt. Next, the school provides some additional classes within the Albanian language learning process. Special groups created in the early hours of study for those students who have difficulty in Albanian.”;*” *It has become a practice to undergo preliminary examinations in Albanian language, literature and mathematics. “*

The purpose of Arsakeios leaders is to create a warm and welcoming environment. In this way they assign a group of teachers who play a supporting role in the integration of these students. Teachers in this group must have good knowledge of the Greek language or any other language to have a good communication between them and the students, to be more comfortable and understandable.

*“Teachers recommended me to underline the words that I did not understand and than they will explain those words to me. Teachers who knew Greek helped me enormously in explaining the words that I did not know. It made me not feel ashamed or afraid to ask about anything that I did not understand. “;*

*“Teachers treated me like all other students. The teachers did not separate me from the rest of the students, but they tried to introduce me gradually to the learning program. They showed me how to read and where to focus more in order to cover gaps. “;” In the beginning, the teacher instructed me to read extra books from the simplest vocabulary to the hardest. “*

Teachers try to deal with delicacy by encouraging their participation in the class without creating feelings of shame and inferiority. At first they give time to adapt to the new school environment by not loading the students with too much information. Teachers for these students recommend using simple instructional materials.

*“I do not give them a lot of materials in order for them to find sufficient time to adapt. This is because I don't want to make them feel insulted or demoralized from their difficulties. Faced with all this difficulties they become withdrawn, causing their isolation in the new environment. “;” Initially, I focused in the fifth grade where the Albanian language grammar bases are set. Later I gradually passed by reading literary texts, analyzing and retrieving values and the ideas of each part .. “*

Also, Arsakeios staff in cooperation with the Directorate engages them (students) in organizing numerous activities that take place within the academic year. This is a way to make them feel like members of the school in the first months of arrival.

“Our schools politics is to engage the students in various activities. We have a tradition that we celebrate every holiday regardless of religion or nationality. So, every month we have new activities and returnees or newcomer students are the main protagonists. This makes them feel more accepted within this environment. “

### **Why do they choose Arsakeio College?**

Arsakeio College is one of the first choices that Parents of returnees from Greece do to continue the education of their children. They think that the college environment provides suitable conditions for the gradual integration of children as: Greek language development, special programs for these pupils, qualified staff with Albanian and Greek teacher. They think that children in this environment will also find other students back who can understand their world. Another reason that parents choose this college is the result of top graduate students in previous years. There are times that the children themselves, seeking to enroll in this school because the teaching is conducted in Albanian and Greek. They believe in the college environment Arsakeio varies very little with it in schools in Greece.

*“Children find it easier to be familiar because in Arsakeio Greek language is taught. Exactly for this reason parents enroll them here. Parents think Arsakeio as a bridge passage from the Greek to the Albanian environment. In general, our school offers some conditions which other schools do not have such as infrastructure, specialized program, qualified staff of teachers and the results that have been in our school years. “;”When I arrived in Albania I came with the condition that I would go on a Greek school in order to not change the language.”;”At first, I enrolled in public school, but for me it was very difficult because I could not understand the lesson. Teachers there can not explain my Greek language lessons... Here I feel just like in Greece”*

### **Conclusions**

Albanian immigrants face many difficulties upon their return home. One of the difficulties they face is the further education of their children as well as their integration.

Thus immigrant parents choose a school which have conditions similar to those in Greece. College Arsakeio is one of the most common choices. There are times when the children are required to attend in Arsakeio because there find peers who have lived in Greece or any other country. As parents and students, college Arsakeio is viewed as a transition bridge from a known society (Greek society) to an unknown society (Albanian society). In interviews, they are expressed positively for the hospitality and warmth offered by teachers and other students. During the process of re-socialization, they face difficulties in Albanian and exact sciences. The academic program here according to them is more compressed than in Greece and gives more importance to exact sciences. In Greece, the educational system focuses more on social sciences and strengthening of critical thinking among students. Albanian teachers are more demanding, while the Greeks more liberal. College teachers try to deal with this group of students with delicacy by encouraging their participation in the class without creating feelings of shame and inferiority. They use various methods to facilitate the integration of students as special classes for learning the language, their involvement in the class, specialized program and their involvement in various activities.

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