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The Quest for the Ideal Migration Theory: A Critical Inquiry on Eleven Representative Models

Abstract: A major concern facing modern humanity is migration, which presents a quadruple dilemma – ethical: the natural aspiration of people to relocate freely; legal: the legal entitlement of people to freely exercise their private property rights; economic: the proved effectiveness of unfettered labor mobility; and cultural: the natural propensity of communities to preserve their language, religion, and customs. Although many models have done a good job of capturing the material interests of rational individuals, their reliance on *caeteris paribus* and ignorance of cultural variables make their interpretations far from accurate. Other models recreate tangible real worlds, but it is difficult to isolate and quantify the proposed qualitative factors. The *Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum*, a new tool we developed, allowed us to compare eleven migration theoretical systems along two axes: macroeconomic against microeconomic methods,

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and abstract models against those that recreate specific environments. Given the scientific disagreement about which hypothesis is most likely to explain the phenomenon, we therefore proposed the use of microeconomic analysis as a means of achieving the fragile balance between abstract and real, conceptual and tangible, universal and specific, economic and cultural, quantitative and qualitative.

Keywords: migration, neoclassical paradigm, human capital theory, Austrian economics migration perspective, new economics of labor migration, dual labor migration theory, mobility transition

Izveček: Eden izmed največjih izzivov sodobnega človeštva so migracije, ki predstavljajo štirikratno dilemo – etično: naravna težnja ljudi po svobodni selitvi; pravno: pravica posameznikov do svobodnega uresničevanja pravic zasebne lastnine; ekonomsko: dokazana učinkovitost neomejene mobilnosti delovne sile; in kulturno: naravna nagnjenost skupnosti k ohranjanju jezika, vere in običajev. Čeprav številni modeli migracij uspešno zajamejo materialne interese racionalnih posameznikov, njihovo zanašanje na predpostavko *ceteris paribus* ter spregled kulturnih spremenljivk zmanjšujeta natančnost njihovih razlag. Drugi modeli sicer uspešno ponazarjajo resnične svetove, vendar je težko izolirati in količinsko opredeliti predlagane kvalitativne dejavnike. Spekter bipolarnega testiranja relevantnosti teorij – novo orodje, ki sva ga razvila – nama je omogočil primerjavo enajstih teoretičnih sistemov migracij po dveh oseh: makroekonomske proti mikroekonomskim metodam in abstraktni modeli proti tistim, ki poustvarjajo specifična okolja. Glede na znanstveno nesoglasje o tem, katera hipoteza najverjetneje najbolje razloži pojav, predlagava uporabo mikroekonomske analize

kot način za doseglo krhkega ravnovesja med abstraktnim in realnim, konceptualnim in oprijemljivim, univerzalnim in specifičnim, ekonomskim in kulturnim, kvantitativnim in kvalitativnim.

Ključne besede: migracije, neoklasični model, teorija človeškega kapitala, avstrijska ekonomska perspektiva migracij, nova ekonomija delovne migracije, teorija dvojnega trga dela, prehod mobilnosti

Introduction

Migration is a key issue in all contemporary electoral debates across the Western world, an issue that justifies interventionist and protectionist public policies, and the source of many diplomatic or even warlike conflicts between nation-states. Individuals are also personally involved in the issue; while those in underdeveloped and developing countries dream of a better life and make plans to emigrate, those in Western countries gear up to protect their jobs and livelihoods.

Nearly 300 million people had immigrant status in 2020, representing 3.6% of the world's population, a third of whom were refugees (IOM 2024, 4–5). These low global migration statistics do not support the recommendations of the neo-classical paradigm (Arango 2000, 286) when related to the persistent income inequality that exists in contemporary societies.

In every Western democracy political election, immigration has emerged as one of the most divisive topics, often tearing the electorate apart. Increasing border security was vital

to 88% of Americans who favored the two front-runners for president, according to a recent U.S. survey (Pew Research Center 2024). For their part, Europeans assign high priority to immigration, with a quarter of Europeans saying it is the most pressing problem facing the European Union, according to a survey conducted in 2023 (European Commission 2023).

On the other side of the fence, people in third and developing world countries benefited from USD 647 billion in remittances in 2022 – 78% of all remittances worldwide (IOM 2024, 4–5). Money sent home by immigrants is necessary for both the survival of those left behind and the development of the capital that is crucial to economic development.

Given that migration views are associated with the major schools of economic thought, we believe it is necessary to clarify the theoretical components of the phenomena. Therefore, our goal is to compare the existing models, test them against the *Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum*, and outline the characteristics of a potential ideal migration equation. We will attempt to find the right balance between the historicist approaches – typical of Marxist and Keynesian economics – and the abstract ones – associated with most liberal thinkers; to find the common ground between objective economic variables and subjective cultural ones; and to determine whether the best perspective for analyzing the phenomenon is microeconomic – emblematic of the Chicago and Austrian schools of thought – or macroeconomic.

Theoretical background

Our goal in writing this study was to delve right into the authors of the theories and models that address the issue of migration. The first key figure we examined was “the undisputed founding father of the modern thinking about migration” (Arango 2000, 284), namely Ernst Ravenstein (1885; 1889). To better comprehend the Harris-Todaro model – the most representative model of neoclassical migration theory (Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana 2016, 19) – we turned to the works of Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970). The pioneering work of the American demographer Everett Lee (1966) gave us a better sense of the push and pull factors model. We looked not only to the economist Larry Sjaastad (1962), but also to Becker (1962), Schulz (1961), and Mincer (1978) for their exploration of the individual-level human capital approach to migration. For the opposite tactic, namely migration seen from a macroeconomic and historicist perspective, we analyzed the hypothesis of the mobility transition; this model was developed by Zelinsky (1971) and is based on the demographic transition model and the stages of economic growth, thus drawing our attention to the contributions of Thompson (1929), Notestein (1950), and Rostow (1959). To illustrate the migration perspective of the Austrian school of economic thought, we drew on Mises’ (2018) global labor market theory, Rothbard’s (1999; 2020) axiom of voluntary migration, and Molinari’s (2009) 19th-century manifesto for a stateless society, supplemented by contributions from David Friedman (2014), Julian Simon (1998), and Michael Huemer (2010). We have also sought to understand the socialist perspective on migration by looking at Piore (1978) and his dual labor market theory; while for the intellectually eclectic perspective on the phenomenon,

we have consulted Stark and Bloom (1985), authors of the new economics of labor migration.

Our investigation extended beyond the original theorists to examine additional contributions by subject-matter experts, including empirical studies and systematic overviews. For the interpretations associated with the neoclassical theory of migration, we examined the reviews of various contemporary scholars, including de Haas (2021), Lee, Sugiura, and Gečienė (2017), King (2012), Prakash (2009), Kurekova (2009), Arango (2000), Malmberg (1997), and Massey (1990). To capture the different dimensions of the gravity model, we referenced some relevant works, such as Klaassen and Teulings' (2017) exploration of the dynamics of international trade; Beyer, Schewe, and Lotze-Campen's (2022) emphasis on the limited applicability of the quantitative estimates generated by the model; Anderson's (2011) theoretical contributions and real-world applications focusing on the costs of international trade and migration; Bove and Elia's (2016) examination of how migration fosters cultural diversity, which in turn contributes to economic growth; and Cavalleri, Luu, and Causa's (2021) focus on the relationship between inter-regional migration and housing costs. Significant contributions to human capital theory have been complemented by emphasizing researchers who have employed specific econometric models to analyze the spatial distribution of college graduates (Kooimann, Latten, and Bontje 2018) and those who have tested the theory to demonstrate that cultural variables significantly influence internal migration (Korpi and Clark 2015).

Additional, highly specific applied research has provided an opportunity to track the way these theories work (or

not). Benjamin Feigenberg (2020, 106) examines the hypothesis that physical barriers reduce the volume of migration and finds that the construction of a fence in an American municipality along the Mexican border does indeed reduce the volume of migration; however, this effect varies across localities within the region. Kaloudis (2008, 31–32) examines the issue of Greek individuals in the United States of America who chose to repatriate during the 1970s and 1980s. The findings reveal that their motivations go beyond mere economic factors, as outlined by the neo-classical paradigm, to include cultural considerations, particularly the conservative ethos prevalent among Greek Americans. Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana (2016, 22) argue that the neoclassical doctrine does not adequately address the effects of political restrictions, as exemplified by the Sri Lankan government's policy of prohibiting mothers with children aged under five from engaging in domestic work abroad. Trauner (2016) analyzes the asylum policy framework within the European Union, focusing on the political and bureaucratic facets of migration. While the study does not explore the potential influence of social benefits that could attract migrants under misleading incentives, its findings offer significant insights into contemporary interventionist policies. Nowrasteh and Powell (2021) challenge the notion that immigrants undermine established cultural norms in host countries, including economic freedom and equity in decision making among power brokers. Instead, they argue that immigrants play a critical role in improving the well-being of communities. Their paper serves as a compelling manifesto in favor of unrestricted migration.

Hypothesis and general methodology

The purpose of this article is to provide a comparative analysis and critical examination of the relevance of migration theories. Certain models approach the matter from a macroeconomic perspective, stressing the mechanistic and impersonal interactions of factors of production. While these models occasionally provide a relatively coherent overview that matches researchers' intuitions, they often fall short in predicting real migration flows and explaining the behavior of specific individuals: their reliance on the *caeteris paribus* principle renders them relatively inapplicable to the real world. Alternative models examine the issue from the perspective of the individual and are successful in elucidating human behavior; however, the variables they employ are often questionable and difficult to quantify, resulting in limited opportunities for extrapolation. While abstract models cannot account for the nuances of real life, those that attempt to simulate tangible societies are frequently constrained by a historicist perspective or an overemphasis on psychological factors.

To test these hypotheses, a critical analysis of migration theories will be undertaken using a deductive research approach. This inquiry will focus on evaluating the logical coherence, empirical applicability, extrapolative potential, and school of thought affiliation of the theories.

In the subsequent section, we will assess the relevance of the theories by applying the following treatment to all eleven models discussed previously: we will contrast collective macroeconomic settings with those that address migration at the individual level or within micro-groups; furthermore,

we will compare abstract, predominantly economic models with those that incorporate qualitative cultural variables. We aim to contextualize migration within the broader range of key capitalist principles, such as the free market, private property, individual freedom, and the inherently self-interested nature of human beings. To organize all these findings, we developed a tool aimed at systematically evaluating migration theories, called the *Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum*. This framework utilizes two ordinal scales derived from the dichotomies of migration models: abstract versus real-world perspectives and macroeconomic versus microeconomic analyses. Much more comprehensive insights are provided in the subsection titled *Specific methodology*.

In the *Discussion and conclusions* section, we undertake the task of identifying the characteristics of a hypothetical ideal theory of migration, adopting a heterodox approach rather than adhering to mainstream economics.

A critical analysis on migration models

Migration has yet to develop a broadly recognized theory within the scientific community, in contrast to many other important social science topics. This underscores the need to examine and correlate each existing model to broader ideas belonging to economic thought, such as liberal, Austrian, Chicago School, socialist, and Keynesian perspectives. This critical analysis will constitute the basis for our endeavor in comparing these models and establishing the foundation for an ideal migration theory.

Ravenstein's laws of migration

Geographer Ernst Georg Ravenstein (1885; 1889), recognized as a pioneer in migration studies (Arango 2000, 284), established the first principles of population movement in the 19th century. Although these principles were not laws in a strict sense, they expressed empirical and intuitive observations influenced by the socio-economic circumstances of the industrial age.

Ravenstein (1885, 198) establishes that individuals seek to find the nearest destination to improve their material and social conditions. This dynamic creates migration streams by which the population from the periphery of cities gradually migrates to urban areas, while the vacated spaces at the peripheries are filled by migrating populations from rural regions (Ravenstein 1889, 286). Nonetheless, those who decide to relocate over great distances are probably prone to go straight to major industrial hubs (Ravenstein 1885, 199). Ravenstein (1889, 286) spots several reasons for emigration, including harsh regulations, high taxes, a toxic social environment, and poor infrastructure, with the primary attraction being the pursuit of prosperity.

Ravenstein's laws influenced the perspectives of neoclassical economists and foreshadowed the gravity model, the Kuznets curve (see Kuznets 1955; Kapuria-Foreman and Perlman 1995), the Zelinsky (1971) hypothesis, among other theories. (King 2012, 12–13) Despite the limitations of living during a time when ardent revolutionaries drew political boundaries based on ethnicity, Ravenstein (1889, 288) is credited as a clear-eyed liberal who acknowledged the positive effects of the free movement of people: "Migration means life and progress; a sedentary population stagnation".

Neoclassical migration paradigm

It follows from neoclassical logic that individuals from capital-scarce, labor-surplus, low-wage societies are inclined to migrate to labor-scarce, capital-surplus, high-wage communities (discussed by King 2012; Arango 2000; Massey 1990; Prakash 2009; Kurekova 2009; Malmberg 1997; Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana 2016; and by Lee, Sugiura, and Gečienė 2017). It is recognized that labor will inevitably shift from the region where it is abundant to the place where it is in short supply. As a result, migration flows will cease as capital levels are equalized and regional income differentials are eliminated (Lee, Sugiura, and Gečienė 2017, 227). However, it is not only labor that migrates, but also capital, which tends to be transferred from high-wage to low-wage societies, with the ratio of labor mobility serving as a pivotal factor of the employment level (Massey 1990, 14–15).

Neoclassical theory conceptualizes a society made up of perfectly rational individuals existing in a static, ahistorical universe (Kurekova 2009, 7; Malmberg 1997, 29). This perspective neglects the impact of cultural, social, and political factors, as well as the fact that individuals' aspirations are influenced by the cultural and hierarchical power dynamics that exist within micro-communities such as families, neighborhoods, and friendship groups; consequently, this theory frames migration exclusively as an economic concern related to the displacement of labor (Prakash 2009, 8–9, 22; Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana 2016, 22; King 2012, 14; Malmberg 1997, 29–30; Massey 1990, 9).

The neoclassicists fail to explain why, in practice, very few people migrate, even though the wage differentials between countries are substantial (Arango 2000, 286). The validity of

their explanations is further called into question since countries with comparable economic conditions exhibit markedly different migration volumes (King 2012, 14). Sociologist and geographer Hein de Haas (2021, 1) challenges the prevailing economic determinism, arguing that neoclassical theory and the push and pull factors model, while widely accepted in the inner circle of the discipline, do not accurately reflect the complexities of human mobility in practice. However, neoclassical theorists deserve credit for laying a valuable foundation for subsequent academic advances in the field.

Gravity migration model

Economists have incorporated gravitational laws into a variety of econometric models to illustrate how geography and demography interact (discussed by King 2012, 21). Essentially, the movement of migrants between two places is more pronounced when the product of their populations is greater, while it becomes less significant as the square of the distance between them increases (discussed by King 2012, 12).

The gravity model serves as a static and abstract framework that does not adequately capture the dynamics of human societies. Although it may be useful for comparing migration flows into and out of communities with identical characteristics, this *caeteris paribus* assessment is found primarily in textbooks rather than in real-world applications. A study by a team of German researchers (Beyer, Schewe, and Lotze-Campen 2022, 1) has demonstrated through rigorous measurements that the results generated by this model are often less accurate than simple estimates derived from historical data series on migration flows.

Harris-Todaro model

Harris and Todaro (1970) examine migration through a macroeconomic lens (Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana 2016, 19–21) by employing a classical cost-benefit analysis (Massey 1990, 5). Their model is intended to serve as an update to the neoclassical migration theory (Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana 2016, 19).

Todaro (1969, 140) notes that the decision to migrate is based on two rational economic considerations: a comparison of real urban incomes with real rural incomes and an assessment of the prospects for securing employment. Consequently, the effect of a minimum wage in the industrial sector may lead to the creation of one additional job, which may induce more than one worker to leave the agricultural sector and migrate to urban areas. This phenomenon can be attributed to the allure of the state-mandated industrial wage, which is not aligned with the relatively low probability of obtaining stable employment. The industrial labor force may thus become unbalanced, with the surplus of workers leading to an increase in unemployment.

The model's reliance on the historical context of the Industrial Revolution undermines its potential for universal applicability. Accordingly, Todaro (1969, 139) acknowledges that his framework is primarily relevant to underdeveloped countries, particularly in Africa and South America. Furthermore, the analysis focuses exclusively on internal migration, as Harris and Todaro (1970, 127) intentionally exclude variables related to physical barriers and political obstacles that may impede international migration. Todaro (Todaro and Smith 2012, 341) admits that while individuals' assess-

ment of their career prospects can be considered psychological, his method is fundamentally based on economic incentives.

Although their views may initially appear to oppose the implementation of a minimum wage, Harris and Todaro (1970, 132–133, 137) ultimately contend that the fundamental problem of unemployment is rooted in rural-urban migration; they suggest that subsidizing manufacturing wages or restricting migration could serve as viable solutions. The strong advocacy of interventionist economic policies, along with the emphasis on psychological variables and mathematical formulations, underscores the influence of Keynesianism (see Keynes 2009) on the model.

Push and pull factors model

Everett S. Lee (1966) develops the push and pull factors model as a synthesis of macroeconomic perspectives and individual approaches to understanding migration flows. According to Lee (1966, 50), individuals, driven by their personal characteristics, make decisions to migrate based on an evaluation of various factors – economic, social, climatic, and others – present in their current location, weighed against those in the potential destination area, as well as any physical or political barriers that may impede the journey, such as closed borders, difficult terrain, or similar obstacles. However, for migration to occur, individuals must perceive clearly favorable conditions in the destination area, as they must overcome the *natural inertia* (Lee 1966, 51) that binds them to their place of origin.

The Lee (1966, 52–57) model uses the foundation laid by Ravenstein (1885, 167–235; 1889, 241–305) to formulate a series of migration hypotheses. It is observed that the flow of immigrants tends to increase in correlation with the availability of a wide range of employment opportunities at the destination (Lee 1966, 52–53). The passage of time seems to facilitate an increase in the volume of migration due to westernization and the process of industrialization (Lee 1966, 53–54). Migrants who respond to the incentives offered by the positive factors at the destination are positively selected and typically have strong occupational backgrounds (Lee 1966, 56). When the favorable conditions at the destination diminish, some migrants choose to return to their places of origin, thus creating a counter-flow of migration (Lee 1966, 55). The characteristics of the migrants – such as fertility rates or education levels – tend to average the characteristics of the residents of the area of origin and those of the area of destination (Lee 1966, 57).

Lee (1966, 50–51) cautions against making hasty conclusions based on the push and pull calculus, as some destination-specific factors are unknown. Furthermore, it is essential to consider individuals' unique characteristics, including intelligence, various personal preferences, devotion to their homeland, and even their *life cycles*. Ultimately, it is not the factors themselves that hold significance, but rather the subjective perceptions that individuals possess regarding the conditions in both the areas of origin and destination (Lee 1966, 51).

The model does not provide reliable results regarding the actual volume of migration (de Haas 2021, 1), largely due to the inclusion of subjective and difficult-to-quantify variables.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the utilitarian perspective that Lee (1966, 50; see also Mill 1994, 18) assigns to his theory contributes to a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations for migration.

Mobility transition

The mobility transition hypothesis aims to identify the patterns of migration behavior, which presumably correlates closely with the level of economic development, the historical context, and the demographic dynamics (Zelinsky 1971, 234ff.). This framework is influenced by the stages of economic growth theory introduced by Walt Rostow (1959) and the demographic transition model formulated by Warren Thompson (1929; see also Notestein 1950; Kiser 1974). Thompson (1929) posits that demographic indices are predictable, implying that birth and death rates can be determined by their relationship to a community's stage of economic development. According to Walt Rostow (1959; 1971), the Western industrialization model is universally applicable, and as human societies move toward the age of mass consumption, they follow similar patterns of economic development that are only altered by government intervention, war, or market imperfections. Wilbur Zelinsky (1971) adopts the logical structure established by his predecessors, Thompson and Rostow, and introduces the five stages of the mobility transition.

In the initial stage of the mobility transition, characteristic of medieval Europe and contemporary underdeveloped nations, migration occurs at a minimal level, primarily involving political, military, and religious elites (Zelinsky 1971, 234–236). During the next stage (Zelinsky 1971, 230, 236–241), living standards

improve, fertility rates increase slightly or remain stable, while mortality rates decline rapidly and significantly, leading to pronounced population growth. Although agricultural practices become more efficient, the resulting surplus of farmers causes an exodus from rural areas to urban centers, while regions in the early stages of modernization attract professionals from more developed places. In the third stage (Zelinsky 1971, 230, 244–245), the birth rate declines and approaches the death rate, resulting in a slowdown in population growth. In terms of mobility, rural-urban migration decreases in volume, while circulatory movements to and from work increase, driven by advances in communication and transportation technologies. The fourth stage (Zelinsky 1971, 230, 245–246) is typical of advanced societies: migration from rural areas is approaching its lowest point, as surplus labor from earlier stages has diminished; specialists from less advanced societies move to advanced societies; and there is significant intercity migration, as individuals seek to capitalize on any financial or leisure opportunities that arise. The final stage of the mobility transition is a prediction of a future super-advanced society (Zelinsky 1971, 231, 247–249): demographically, the mortality rate reaches the lowest biological minimum possible for humans; the birth rate is no longer influenced by economic factors but varies according to the cultural norms of the time; mobility may ultimately be influenced only by psychological or physiological factors; however, as the author predicts, mobility will be tightly controlled politically to prevent the outflow of individuals from less advanced societies.

Paradoxically, in the second stage, Zelinsky (1971, 241–242) indicates that societies face the risk of stagnation due to the demographic and economic pressures associated with exponential population growth, evoking the pessimism of the Malthusian perspective (Malthus 1992). At the same time,

it is observed that in the final stages of the mobility transition, subjective variables such as cultural, personal, or even physiological factors emerge, making it more difficult to apply this rigid but volatile scenario to contemporary societies. On a positive note, we point to the concept of the spatial and temporal diffusion of the stages of the mobility transition, which is modeled on the proliferation of cancer cells in a living organism (Zelinsky 1971, 242). Although grounded in historical determinism and possessing a uniform collectivist stance, Zelinsky's integrative perspective – which is part of modernization theory (see Lee, Sugiura, and Gečienė 2017, 226) – is valuable for explaining historical migration patterns. According to sociologist Hein de Haas (2021, 4), the theory deserves credit for demonstrating that migration is not a random, chaotic, or haphazard phenomenon.

Dual labor market theory

The dual labor market theory (Piore 1978, 26–27) is built on the premise that the capitalist system oscillates between expansion and recession, boom and bust, thereby preventing any state of equilibrium. This dynamic environment ultimately leads to the emergence of two distinct labor markets: the primary market, which consists of stable, well-paid white-collar jobs, and the secondary market, which is characterized by low-wage, informal, and precarious blue-collar positions that require physically demanding work. Furthermore, Piore (1978, 32) implies that private enterprises are designed to operate in accordance with the principles dictated by capital and the aspirations of the urban middle class. This means that the labor factor of production is forced to adapt to the availability of financial resources, factories, and machinery (Piore 1978, 28).

The *rigidization* (Piore 1978, 34, 38–39) of the labor market is an inherent phenomenon of the capitalist system, the result of a historical, cyclical process (Piore 1978, 47–48). However, this transformation requires a revolutionary stimulus to fully take hold (Piore 1978, 30), namely large-scale union protests: consider the massive union protests in France in 1968, in Italy in 1969, and in the United States in 1937–1938 (Piore 1978, 33–46). The outcome was that longstanding employees, predominantly local men, would set up a kind of workers' bourgeoisie with institutionally protected regulations that prevented others' access to the mainstream labor market. Those who were marginalized – namely, young individuals, farmers, women, minorities, and immigrants – were clearly subject to discrimination and, lacking alternatives, were compelled to accept low-wage, unstable, and undesirable positions within the secondary working sector (Piore 1978, 27, 30–32). This process is empowered by state institutions that actively seek to recruit compliant and unassertive immigrants from less developed nations (Piore 1978, 47). Immigrants – like women and farmers – peacefully accept such jobs because they have little to lose, are not entirely dependent on industrial labor, and have the possibility of returning to their place of origin (Piore 1978, 47).

The dual labor market theory advocates the idea that the capitalist state, along with labor unions, paradoxically contributes to the perpetuation of social and economic inequalities, thereby exacerbating the disparity in job stability between the two social classes of workers: the privileged white-collar professionals and the hopeless blue-collar employees. This analysis is approached from a macroeconomic perspective and an ideologized version of society that is essentially an adaptation of the materialist dialectic found in socialist literature (see Marx and Engels 1962, 17–25, chapter Bourgeoisie and Proletariat; see Marx 1966, 242–313, chapter on the Workday).

New economics of labor migration

The new economics of labor migration theory (NELM) holds that the principles of economic analysis that govern lifeless objects, such as bottles of wine, cannot be directly applied to individuals who possess independent will and emotions (Stark and Bloom 1985, 173). While rational economic calculation continues to play a role in migration, it is important to note that the new approach brings cultural factors into the mix. In contrast to the neoclassical approach, this methodology shows that individuals assess their actual and expected earnings in relative terms and relate these estimates to the earnings of their reference groups, which may include friends, neighbors, and colleagues (Stark and Bloom 1985, 173–174). Migration is influenced not only by the will to achieve maximum economic benefit, but also by the individual's goal of improving his or her relative position within the social group. Moreover, the decision to migrate is not made by the individual alone but is part of a collective strategy that includes family members who do not migrate (Stark and Bloom 1985, 174–175). This practice can be seen as a form of calculated risk management that focuses on diversifying family income, which is particularly important in developing societies characterized by unstable labor markets and high unemployment rates (Stark and Bloom 1985, 178).

Stark and Bloom (1985, 177), the authors of the theory, rely on a better understanding of human behavior and argue based on certain facts that are ignored by most academic systems: immigrant networks become a determining factor in the decision of those left at home to emigrate; as time goes by, individuals tend to focus less on actual wages and more on their economic and social status. Stark and Bloom (1985, 174,

176) also caution researchers to consider the asymmetry of market information: employers in the destination location may not always be aware of the true skills of potential immigrants, while certain attributes of migrants may be valued differently by employers in different destinations.

NELM brings a more contextual understanding of the phenomenon, although this orientation may pose real challenges for a proper quantitative measurement. To address these difficulties, Stark and Bloom (1985, 176) suggest that researchers examine migration trends either as phenomena shaped by historical contexts or as processes of spatial diffusion. They also advocate the use of longitudinal empirical analyses that track the evolution of migration over time, rather than relying solely on cross-sectional methods that are strictly limited to a specific point in time (Stark and Bloom 1985, 177). It is important to note that the NELM creators propose a meso-level analysis, focusing on the intermediate determinants of migration, such as family, household, social networks, and local communities, which distinguishes their *modus operandi* from many theoretical contributions in the field.

Human capital migration model

Human capital theory grew out of the scholarly contributions of economists Gary Becker (1962), Theodore Schultz (1961), and Jacob Mincer (1978). These scholars advocated a focus on individuals and their personal motivations, arguing that education, health, migration, and training should not be viewed as mere life choices. Rather, these factors must be understood as deliberate, calculated investments aimed at boosting incomes and improving the quality of life.

Economist Larry Sjaastad examines the setting of human capital theory to align it with the phenomenon of migration. He (Sjaastad 1962, 80–83) argues that the issue of mobility ought to be analyzed through the lens of individuals' efficient allocation of resources, moving away from the traditional approach of assessing migration rates based on income disparities between regions. The decision to migrate is fundamentally influenced by the expected return on the investment that each individual makes for this purpose (Sjaastad 1962, 87–88; Kooimann, Latten, and Bontje 2018, 646). This judgment is built on a comparison of the income expected to be earned at the destination versus the income currently earned in the place of residence (Korpi and Clark 2015, 21). Additionally, it is important to consider the private monetary costs associated with migration, which include expenses related to transportation, education, or professional re-qualification. Non-monetary costs and benefits, such as the psychological effects of relocation, must also be considered (Sjaastad 1962, 83, 85–86).

Sjaastad (1962, 91–93) implies that the analysis of migration should encompass the social costs incurred by communities, as well as the indirect effects on individual decision-making processes. For example, young immigrants may be attracted to places with a subsidized educational infrastructure, since they are more likely to have children in the future and to benefit directly from this policy than older immigrants (Sjaastad 1962, 92). However, social costs are more difficult for migrants to assess, as they are indirect, uncertain, and less tangible and may alter individual decision making.

Sjaastad's (1962) contributions to the field of migration have significantly shaped academic discourse (Harms 2012). His model is noteworthy for recognizing the individual as a rela-

tively autonomous decision maker, thereby shifting the focus of migration studies from the structural production factors to the realm of human capital (Massey 1990, 2). However, Sjaastad (1962, 91) acknowledges certain limitations within his model, stating that his methodology is primarily applicable within the context of a market economy, where the essential conditions for optimal resource allocation are met. The impact of the Austrian school of economics on the development of human capital theory is highlighted through its focus on individual choice, subjective value, and the entrepreneurial perspective on education and skills enhancement.

Austrian global labor market theory

Economist Ludwig von Mises provides a theoretical setting for the labor market and migration in an ideal global context with no protectionist policies and no barriers to immigration. In his seminal work, *Human Action* (Mises 2018, 645–646), he argues that individuals should not be viewed solely as economic entities, but as human beings whose decisions are shaped by personal beliefs, emotions, and aspirations. Mises (2018, 646) highlight that people place an intrinsic value on non-material satisfactions, such as the gratification derived from their occupation and the joys associated with the place where they live. As a result, wages cannot be regarded as the only factor influencing employment decisions. This viewpoint reflects the Austrian school's subjectivist methodology, which holds that people's opinions affect how much work is worth and how much people should be paid.

Mises (2018, 646) identifies two key factors that influence individual mobility: a cultural variable referred to as attach-

ment and an economic variable called cost. Attachment covers elements such as ancestry, language, education, religion, mentality, family ties, and social background that may limit the propensity to migrate. Cost refers to the expenditure required to maintain a comparable standard of living in the destination, including fluctuations in the prices of consumer goods (Mises 2018, 147). Mises (2018, 647–648) asserts that, given equal wages, individuals will display preferences for different job locations; so to induce migration, the market wage must exceed the cumulative sum of the standard wage – defined as the universal salary for each type of job – the individual's attachment to the place of origin, and the cost of maintaining a like-for-like standard of living in the new place. Although Mises does not specify this, it is reasonable to infer that individuals make a comparative evaluation between the attachment to the two places – home and destination – that results in a positive or negative value.

Individuals are likely to migrate provided that the salary in the destination area is sufficient to compensate for initial income, cost-of-living differences, and the loss (or gain) associated with being tied to the place of origin (Mises 2018, 647–648). However, Mises (2018, 706, 775) argues that this equilibrium of factors of production is not realized in modern societies. The main reason for this discrepancy is the protectionist policies of governments, which limit the access of foreign individuals and foreign capital to the local market. In addition, trade unions prevent the beneficial effects of competition from workers outside the labor organization and complicate the transfer of capital from less productive areas (Mises 2018, 795). As early as the mid-20th century, the Austrian economist (Mises 2018, 848–849) warns that etatism-related policies that contradict the *laissez-faire* principle have contributed to con-

flicts between nation-states and will continue to do so. This situation illustrates how freedom of movement for individuals serves as a promoter of peace. Although the analysis is grounded in the classical principles of liberalism, which are increasingly rare in the 21st century, it remains supple and balanced, incorporating a global perspective alongside a microeconomic vision. The Misesian perspective on migration skillfully integrates the cultural component into the economic analysis in a way that other theories have failed to do.

Libertarian voluntary migration axiom

Rothbard (2020) postulates a society devoid of state borders and common property, without public courts and public education systems (see also Rothbard 1999), national armies and official law enforcement agencies (see also Molinari 2009), alongside any other potential public services. Virtually an infinite number of micro-communities would operate at a decentralized level, each of which would be controlled by one or more private owners, companies, or corporations (Rothbard 1994, 7). It is assumed that all land – including parks, roads, and all transportation infrastructure –, all services, and all goods would be owned or provided by private owners, who would have the exclusive authority to determine the eligibility of potential immigrants based on economic utility and cultural compatibility (Rothbard 1994, 7).

In other words, individuals have the autonomy to seek happiness in different places, whether that be in environments that offer competitive wages or in settings that align with their cultural values. However, this pursuit is contingent upon their acceptance by the owners of the factories where

they wish to work, the residences they intend to live in, and the land where they seek to spend their leisure time. This universe might function naturally based on voluntary contracts signed between private owners and the individuals who sell their labor (Rothbard 1994, 6). As a result, micro-communities of various kinds can emerge, with each owner or group of owners having the discretion to discriminate against migrants according to their own cultural beliefs, thereby admitting some individuals into the community while excluding others (Rothbard 1994, 7).

The reasoning behind the libertarian axiom of migration prompts an essential question concerning the primacy of fundamental rights: should the individual's freedom of movement be considered paramount, or should the consent of the property owner or the incumbent community take precedence in accepting an individual's claim to membership? Philosopher Michael Huemer (2010) advocates that immigrants should be granted freedom of movement and, like all individuals, should be protected from *harmful coercion*. He contends that the economic impact of migration on the incomes of native workers is minimal, and that opposition to immigrants on cultural grounds is an expression of nationalist prejudice. David Friedman (2014, 67–69) makes a straightforward case for the quick opening of borders. While appealing to historical nostalgia for a nation built by immigrants, he underlines the benefits that immigrant labor has contributed and continues to contribute to American society. Economist Julian Simon (1998, 152) takes a more cautious stance, asserting that in no way do immigrants pose a threat to economic stability, quite the opposite. However, he acknowledges that it is reasonable for societies to maintain moderate measures to restrict access to the community of

individuals deemed dangerous. Rothbard (1994, 7), on the other hand, sees the right of individuals to manage their private property according to their own preferences as of primary importance, and thus to grant or deny access to immigrants at their own discretion. He (Rothbard 2020, 391) insists that this decentralized world scenario would yield significantly improved market conditions and hence greater freedom and prosperity. This interplay of ideas between the freedom of movement and the exclusive right to private property is Rothbard's crucial contribution to a deeper understanding of the migration phenomenon.

Results. The Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum

Theories and models of migration may be subjected to evaluation, comparison, and systematization following various criteria. One should consider factors such as the simplicity, complexity, or intricacy of these theories, their compatibility with other theoretical frameworks, the mathematical plausibility of their quantitative estimates, and their alignment with contemporary political ideologies. It is essential to recognize that these criteria are inherently subjective, open to interpretation, and of varying relevance to our analytical approach. For systematizing migration theories, we consider it worthwhile to use the micro-macroeconomic dichotomy and to contrast the abstract theoretical realm with real social contexts. This involves analyzing the differences between economic assessments carried out at the levels of individuals, small groups, communities, as well as the world scale, while also addressing the measurable quantitative dimension versus the relativizing qualitative dimension (e.g.,

based on psychological causality). Furthermore, a distinction should be made between universal applicability and specific, historically oriented applicability, and between global and regional approaches – the latter may be relevant only to certain societies.

Specific methodology

To enhance the comprehension of migration models, we have developed a special tool called the *Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum*. This tool employs qualitative variables that are quantitatively represented on two semantically distinct ordinal scales. The variables are categorized into two sets of bipolar adjectives corresponding to abstract and real models, specifically macroeconomic and microeconomic models. To assign values to each variable on the semantically differentiated scales, we have referred to the assertions made by the originators of these models, along with the conclusions drawn by authors in the relevant literature, assertions and conclusions that we have filtered through our own critical apparatus.

Abstract theories, characterized by universal validity, have been associated with concepts such as timelessness, the immaterial, generic, conceptual, notional, quantitative, and objectivity. In contrast, realist theories have been linked to limited validity in terms of time or space, focusing on notions corresponding to the concrete, the tangible, the perceptible, the qualitative, and subjectivity. Whereas abstract models tend to recreate timeless and generic worlds, those inspired by real life may envision societies that are contingent on historical context (historicist) or made up of

individuals tied to the interpretable transformations of human nature, such as psychological attributes. To navigate this wide range of possibilities, each migration model is assigned a score from -2 to 2 on the abstract world-real society scale (AWRs), categorized as follows: conceptual abstract world (-2), relatively abstract notional world (-1), neutral world/society (0), relatively real perceivable society (1), and tangible real society (2).

Any migration model can include both macro- and micro-economic perspectives, but what we are interested in using on our scale (MaeMie) is the first level of constraint or the first reference point of economic analysis: if the actions of individuals are determined by the macroeconomic interplay of factors of production, we categorize the model as a global macroeconomic model (-2); if the framework is spatially restricted to a specific geographic area, it is a regional macroeconomic model. On the other hand, if the economic structure is shaped by the actions of individuals, there is a microeconomic paradigm. If the object of investigation is not the individual but a small group of people, such as a family or a household, then the approach is clearly mesoeconomic (1). There is also the middle ground (0), where the two perspectives, micro and macro, have similar proportions.

Results

We have used the specific methodology to evaluate and compare eleven representative models of migration using what we have labeled as the *Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum*. The results are summarized in the table below, with their detailed interpretation discussed later in this section.

		(Mae) Macroeconomic		(Mie) Microeconomic	
(Aw) Abstract world	Global framework (-2)	Regional scenarios (-1)	Middle ground (0)	Mesoeconomic group-level analysis (1)	Individual level approach (2)
Conceptual (-2)	Gravity migration model				
Notional (-1)	Neoclassical migration paradigm				Libertarian voluntary migration axiom
Neutral (0)		Harris-Todaro model	Push and pull factors model		<i>Ideal theory</i>
Perceptible (1)		Ravenstein's laws of migration		New economics of labor migration	Austrian global labor market theory
Tangible (2)	Dual labor market theory	Mobility transition			Human capital migration model

(Rs)
Real society

Table 1: The Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum

Inspired by the laws of Newtonian physics, the gravity migration model (discussed by King 2012 and Anderson 2011) is abstract, static, timeless, mechanistic, with the individual reduced to the status of an atom orbiting in a vast impersonal macroeconomic universe; for this reason, we have categorized it as abstract-conceptual (–2 AwRs) and macroeconomic-global (–2 MaeMie).

Although the neoclassical migration paradigm (discussed by King 2012; Arango 2000; Massey 1990; Prakash 2009; Kurekova 2009; and by MalMBERG 1997) seeks to understand the economic motivations of human action, it uses the macroeconomic interplay of factors of production to explain migration flows, thereby aligning itself with the macroeconomic-global framework (–2 MaeMie). This theory, although still abstract, is conditional on the existence of the free market economy, which is why we have noted it as abstract-notional (–1 AwR), i.e., somewhat more rooted in the physical world and sensibly less generic than the gravity migration model.

Zelinsky (1971) constructs a model in which each phase of the mobility transition is spatially constrained by the stage of technological evolution. Certain hypothetical prescriptions apply to underdeveloped societies, while others address developing, advanced, or super-advanced ones, situating the theory within a macroeconomic-regional framework (–1 MaeMie). The model incorporates predetermined fertility and mortality rates, as well as different migration patterns among farmers, workers, and professionals. It also postulates that in the future, birth rates and migration will fluctuate based on cultural, psychological, or political variables, thus portraying a society anchored in tangible reality (2 AwRs).

The microeconomic perspective (2 MaeMie) of human capital theory (Sjaastad 1962) stresses that migration streams should be understood as the aggregate of individual human actions, in contrast to the neoclassical paradigm, which interprets these movements through the impersonal mathematics of factors of production (Massey 1990, 2). While both theories recognize that the decision to migrate is influenced by an individual's assessment of the monetary costs and benefits associated with relocation, human capital theory incorporates cultural variables, referred to as non-monetary, as well as social variables, such as improved climate or access to educational facilities at the destination. These factors correspond to the realities of a tangible possible world (2 AwRs).

The Harris-Todaro model (Harris and Todaro 1970; Todaro and Smith 2012) conceptualizes migration as a seemingly impersonal process that ignores any geographic barriers or landforms that might impede the mobility of individuals. However, this mechanical framing is subject to mundane factors, such as the propensity for rural-urban migration and the inclination of governments to implement a guaranteed minimum wage in the economy. Consequently, an abstract-real equilibrium is established between the perceptible society and the fictive world (0 AwRs). While the model has a well-defined macroeconomic component, its applicability is regional (–1 MaeMie) rather than global, as Todaro (1969, 139) notes that his theory is relevant only to underdeveloped nations.

Ravenstein's (1885; 1889) laws delineate the patterns of migration flows and counterflows, examining the phenomenon from a distinctly macroeconomic perspective. However, his analysis is largely based on an extrapolation of the demographic conditions and internal migration dynamics observed in the United Kingdom, which limits the applica-

bility of his axioms to the regional context (–1 MaeMie). His (Ravenstein 1885; 1889) observations are oriented towards the aspirations of individuals to improve their material circumstances, which lends a somewhat abstract nature to his conclusions. Yet he acknowledges the fundamental interests of individuals in ascending the social ladder, as well as the qualitative factors that influence people's displacements, such as oppressive legislation, excessive taxation, adverse climatic conditions, and inadequate infrastructure. These elements resonate with real-life experiences, leading to the conclusion that Ravenstein's laws effectively describe a society that is perceptible in the real world (1 AwRs).

Everett Lee (1966) proposes a mathematical, utilitarian approach: the volume of migration is equal to the difference between the pull factors, on the one hand, and the push factors and barriers to migration, on the other. In addition, these factors may include specific characteristics of migrants that are ingrained, for instance, in the inertia that keeps individuals in their place of origin. The simulated world of the push and pull factor model integrates abstract notional parameters as well as perceptible features of the world, being rather a neutral model on the abstract world-real societies axis (0 AwR). The same model alternates macroeconomic influences on the volume of migration, such as government policies or business cycle phases, with individual approaches, such as ephemeral emotions or accidental events in the lives of human beings. In fact, Lee (1966) provides rather a general context for understanding the phenomenon of migration, leaving researchers free to choose their own approach for empirical validation of the research; as a result we can say that the framework seeks a middle way between macroeconomic and microeconomic approaches (0 MaeMie).

The dual labor market theory (Piore 1978) operates at the global macroeconomic level (–2 MaeMie), suggesting that the capitalist world is undergoing structural transformations within the factors of production, specifically capital and labor. It portrays society as vividly real (2 AwRs), with actors such as unemployed peasants, married women, and impoverished immigrants who fervently strive for a better life while navigating unjust institutions and revolutionary labor unions.

The new economics of labor migration (Stark and Bloom, 1985) views migration as a financial risk management option available to families, adopting a mesoeconomic stance (1 MaeMie). This model is based on rational and systematic risk management; however, applying such theoretical considerations at the household level makes the theory less abstract and more relevant to real-world conditions. It also incorporates cultural variables such as personal ambition, peer group influence, and employer subjectivity, which improves the description of a perceptible society (1 AwRs).

Global labor market theory (Mises, 2018) aims to analyze migration from a microeconomic perspective (2 MaeMie), drawing on the traditions of the Austrian school of economic thought. In addition to evaluating wages and the cost of maintaining a standard of living in the destination place, Mises (2018) argues that ancestry, language, religion, or mentality influence an individual's decision to relocate. This cultural and social dimension shapes the perception of a real society; however, in the absence of a historically determined scenario, and provided that individuals are not confined to specific psychological endowments, the theory deals with a perceptible real world (1 AwRs), not a tangible one.

Rothbard's (2020; 1994) society is described as timeless, with no state traditions or historical consciousness, but with a wide range of personal values assigned to individuals. As a result, the axiom of voluntary migration could be argued to transcend the conceptual framework and imagine a notional hypothetical universe (-1 AwR). Rothbard's (2020; 1994) focus on decentralized micro-communities allows for the identification of elements relevant to mesoeconomic analysis. Even so, the individual is the main actor in this formula, since the core of migration phenomena is largely based on the voluntary contract between the immigrant and the private owner. Thus, the Rothbardian axiom of voluntary migration includes a microeconomic dimension (2 MaeMie).

Discussion and conclusions. Towards a better understanding of migration

In addition to testing our research hypotheses, the critical analysis of migration models sought to outline an ideal theoretical pattern. We tried to resolve the conundrum of whether human mobility can be better understood by recreating a tangible society or a conceptual one, employing a macroeconomic perspective or a micro- or mesoeconomic approach.

Although abstract models aim for universal applicability across time and space, the quantitative results often fail to capture the complexity of real-world situations. Models that accurately replicate real-world societies are more likely to deliver accurate predictions, but the cultural factors they rely on are difficult to define, quantify, and adapt to various communities and different times.

Macroeconomic models offer a better picture of migration trends, but they tend to standardize human behavior by reducing it to crude collective archetypes, thereby limiting individuals to the status of agents of production. While these theoretical structures seem logical and intuitive, they are artificial and inadequately reflect the delicate interplay of individual, economic, and cultural incentives. Conversely, microeconomic models place the individual at the center of the researcher's inquiry. By focusing on the individual and extrapolating from there, these models are designed to identify broader patterns of migration behavior that allow for more relevant conclusions. It should also be noted that many macroeconomic models fall prey to ideological partisanship, while microeconomic models run the risk of being overwhelmed by the more or less relevant details of human nature.

Given these considerations, we conclude that there cannot be a perfect theory of migration, but that microeconomic approaches can get closer to a viable solution. With their own minds and consciousness and their own spiritual and material desires, individuals cannot be reduced statistically to mere numbers in an amorphous society. While mesoeconomic research is arguably more relevant than macroeconomic perspectives, the former overlooks the notion that individuals are motivated by the same financial and spiritual needs, even within the closest family at home.

In the case of the abstract-real dichotomy, resolution remains elusive. The study of migration must be conceptual enough to assume a more general character and yet be tailored to the everyday reality of the world and the peculiarities of human nature. In practical terms, the purely rational and self-interested concept of *Homo oeconomicus*, driven exclusively

by immediate material concerns, must coexist with other facets of humanity: *Homo socialis*, who is influenced by social relationships and norms; *Homo culturalis*, whose choices and verdicts are shaped by traditions; *Homo politicus*, who faces daily civic challenges; *Homo spiritualis*, who reflects on moral values; and *Homo ludens*, who seeks creativity and joy beyond utilitarian needs. Developing a framework for migration that effectively integrates these diverse horizons while ensuring practical relevance is a challenging yet indispensable task.

Some theories may be too conceptual, such as the gravity model (discussed by King 2012 and by Anderson 2011), or too generic, such as Ravenstein's laws (1885; 1889) and the push and pull factors model (Lee 1966); others may lack cultural considerations, as in the neoclassical paradigm (discussed by King 2012; Arango 2000; Massey 1990; Prakash 2009; Kurekova 2009; and by Malmberg 1997); in addition, some other frameworks may have an ideological bias, such as the dual labor market theory (Piore 1978), or an overconfidence in the reenactment of structural economic changes, as seen in the Mobility transition theory (Zelinsky 1971) and the Harris-Todaro model (Harris and Todaro 1970; Todaro and Smith 2012; Todaro 1969). Simply by exposing their ineffectiveness, these theories have contributed significantly to our understanding of migration. What is more, they have provided valuable empirical insights. For instance, Ravenstein's laws (1885; 1889) show that women were more likely to migrate in the 19th century than men. The gravity model (discussed by King 2012 and by Anderson 2011) reveals that both distance and population size have a significant impact on migration volumes. The push and pull factors model (Lee 1966) suggests that certain working and living conditions in destination areas may remain unclear. According to the Harris-Todaro

model (Harris and Todaro 1970; Todaro and Smith 2012; Todaro 1969), government-imposed minimum wages can drive rural-urban migration and lead to unemployment. The dual labor market theory (Piore 1978) argues that unions and regulatory institutions can adversely affect labor force dynamics. Finally, the new economics of labor migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) holds that wages cannot be equated with the mechanisms that determine the formation of all other prices.

The initial analytical paradigm for migration scholars was created by the neoclassical paradigm and its successors. These theorists offer an abstract and rational interpretive system that, while rudimentary and monochromatic, has enough components to provide a comprehensive perspective on mobility trends. Later on, human capital theory (Sjaastad 1962) established an important intellectual frontier by clarifying the relationship between migration and investment in professional skills. The emerging new economics of labor migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) has framed the phenomenon as a mechanism for reducing financial risk. Within the realm of ethics, Rothbard (2020; 1994) deserves recognition for steering discourse away from etatism by prompting an inquiry into which principle holds greater precedence: the freedom of movement or the absolute right to govern one's private property.

The benchmarks considered essential for guiding a would-be ideal theory of migration are closely aligned with the Austrian school of thought. Ludwig von Mises (2018, 645–648) brought to light a flexible, market-inspired model that frames the self-regulating effect of migration as relative rather than absolute, as the impact of market wages on decision making is tempered by a subjective component known as attachment, which includes affective factors spanning familial longing, linguistic ties,

and religious affiliation. It can be argued that Mises (2018) elegantly integrates cultural constraints into the migration equation, but a downside may be the fact that he tends to prioritize collective influences on individual decision making, favoring a sociological perspective over a social anthropological one.

Like all economic theory research, this study is inherently subjective, shaped by the authors' normative assumptions and reliance on secondary data, which may introduce biases that affect analytical precision. Our focus on some specific migration models, while illustrative, limits its scope. Moreover, insufficient attention to practical dimensions – integration challenges, policy implications, and migrants' lived experiences – as well as geopolitical factors, such as regional conflicts and diplomatic tensions, risk oversimplification. We address these limitations here in a brief synthesis to balance abstraction with real-world complexity and strengthen the theoretical contribution of the paper to migration studies.

Although this research examines what we consider to be the eleven most relevant models of migration, it does not claim to be exhaustive. For example, in contrast to approaches that emphasize wage differentials, labor market demand, or econometric measures of cultural factors, transnational migration theory offers an alternative to traditional economic models. Rather than viewing migrants as detached from their home countries, the theory defines them as *transmigrants* actively engaged across national borders. Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1995) characterize *transmigrants* as inhabiting *transnational social spaces* that allow not only economic exchange, such as remittances and entrepreneurship, but also meaningful social and political participation in both home and host countries. This perspective challenges conventional

notions of citizenship, belonging, and emigrant-immigrant stances by pointing to fluid identities and ongoing transnational relations. Nedelcu (2016) further reinforces this dynamic by exploring the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in facilitating migrants' *co-presence* by enabling real-time interaction with families, professional networks, and civic groups around the world. Such technological capabilities are particularly beneficial for skilled migrants, who can influence policy and intellectual discourse remotely without physically relocating, thus challenging the *brain drain* concept itself. Nevertheless, transnational migration theory's dependence on specific historical contexts and its subjective elements limits its generalizability. While it enriches our understanding of the fluid status of migrants today, it remains one valuable perspective among others, providing important but not definitive insights into the multifaceted nature of migration.

As the transnational migration theory illustrates, traditional theories often overlook essential aspects such as integration, migration policies, and the lived experiences of migrants. Consequently, the theories examined in this paper should be directly tested for their practical relevance to the real challenges faced by host societies. In what follows, we highlight some of the findings on these issues. Meso- and micro-level approaches – such as the new economics of labor migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) and the human capital perspective (Sjaastad 1962) – prioritize individual/household strategies, implying that integration programs (e.g., language training, credential recognition) are most successful when aligned with personal incentives rather than rigid structural policies. However, migration governance remains contentious, as evidenced by Mises's (2018) global labor market theory and Rothbard's (2020) voluntary migration axiom, which

highlights the clash between open borders ideals and state regulatory imperatives. While restrictive policies risk stifling individual action and society's economic potential, incorporating subjective factors – language barriers, religious diversity, and social norms – into policymaking can facilitate cultural integration and promote cohesion.

The geopolitical dimension of human mobility is another variable that constitutes the weak point of economic theories. Migration occupies a central role in global politics, reflecting complex cultural, ethical, and legal tensions, as reflected in the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, n.d.) or the European Union's 2015 response to the migrant crisis (European Commission, 2016). Its prominence in Western electoral debates and the dependence of developing countries on remittances underscore its dual function as both a political flashpoint and a socio-economic lifeline. Our comparative analysis shows that different economic paradigms – Marxist critiques of labor exploitation, Keynesian demand-side policies, Austrian free-market principles, and Chicago school microeconomic rationalism – each offer valuable insights. But abstract and macroeconomic models, such as neoclassical, Harris-Todaro, and gravity, often fail to capture the forced displacements seen in crises such as today's Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, or Ukraine. Although some theories, including the push and pull model and Ravenstein's laws, recognize geopolitical crises as push factors, they do not adequately interrogate their full impact. In contrast, Mises' (2018) framework remains sufficiently flexible, incorporating critical variables such as wage differentials (reflecting severely reduced wages in conflict zones), attachment costs (negatively affected by war-related risks), and increased cost of living (due to inflation and scarcity-induced price spikes).

Thus, the Misesian economic perspective complements geopolitical analyses by quantifying how conflict undermines local quality of life and accelerates displacement.

Despite the best efforts of theorists, contemporary migration remains significantly influenced by regulations that stifle mobility through arbitrary bureaucratic barriers that defy both economic efficiency and human agency. These governmental restrictions affect the mobility of individuals to a greater extent than economic or cultural forces (Arango 2000, 293). This practice is not unprecedented; it was denounced by Mises (2018, 648) some 80 years ago, when the free movement of individuals was confined in the name of economic autarchy of sovereign states. Regulations impose more systemic distortions than armed conflict: war-induced migration adheres to survival-driven market forces, while centralized migration planning disregards economic logic and individual aspirations.

Author contributions

Author A, Cristian Manolachi: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review, and editing. Conducted the in-depth analysis of migration theories and developed the *Theory Relevancy Bipolar Testing Spectrum*. Designed the research framework and drafted and revised the manuscript.

Author B, Gabriel Claudiu Mursa: resources, supervision. Provided valuable bibliographic references and resources, as well as detailed and constructive feedback on the initial manuscript, thereby improving the research framework and enhancing the overall quality of the published work.

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Iskanje idealne teorije migracij: kritična analiza enajstih reprezentativnih modelov

Povzetek

Migracije so bile v antičnih, srednjeveških in predmodernih časih močno omejene z materialnimi možnostmi in kulturnim znanjem; v času industrijske revolucije so bile večinoma omejene na preselitve s podeželja v mesta ali na množične odhode v razvite države; v 20. stoletju pa so bile strogo regulirane zaradi protekcionističnih strahov. Danes pa postajajo migracije vse bolj kompleksen pojav in eden ključnih izzivov novega tisočletja. Iz tega razloga je pomembno kritično preučiti in primerjalno analizirati najpomembnejše modele migracij: gravitacijski model migracij, neoklasični migracijski model, libertarni aksiom prostovoljne migracije, model Harris-Todaro, model potisnih in vlečnih dejavnikov, Ravensteinova pravila migracije, novo ekonomijo migracij delovne sile, avstrijsko teorijo globalnega trga dela, teorijo dvojnega trga dela, prehod mobilnosti ter model človeškega kapitala.

Raziskava teorij migracij kaže, da ne obstaja enoten, splošno sprejet model, temveč več teorij, modelov in aksiomov, ki so odvisni od ekonomske šole, iz katere izhajajo. V iskanju idealnega modela, ki bi pojasnjeval pojav migracij v sodobnem ekonomskem, političnem in kulturnem kontekstu, sva razvila lasten mehanizem testiranja na bipolarni lestvici. Po kritični preučitvi vsakega modela razprava skuša identificirati dihotomijo med abstraktnimi in realnimi teoretskimi pristopi ter med mikro- in makroekonomskimi metodami.

Razprava ugotavlja, da idealni teoretični model predpostavlja mikroekonomski pristop, ki je nasproten interpretaciji golih količin proizvodnih dejavnikov. Na osi abstraktno-realno pa je treba doseči subtilno ravnotežje med količinsko merljivimi abstraktnimi spremenljivkami in nestanovitnimi kulturnimi spremenljivkami, da lahko raziskovalci zajamejo tako realnosti družb kot tudi posebnosti posameznikov, pri tem pa kljub temu oblikujejo splošnejše formule. Obstoječi model, ki se najbolj približa našim merilom za idealno teorijo, je Misesova avstrijska teorija globalnega trga dela.