PACES

Making migration and migration policy decisions amidst societal transformations

Researching decisions to stay and migrate: A Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework

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PACES (Making migration and migration policy decisions amidst societal transformation) is a 40-month research project (2023-2026) that examines decisions to stay and migrate over time and space, researches the politics of knowledge in migration policy and seeks to use its insights to inform future migration policies and governance. PACES is carried out by a consortium of 14 partners in Europe, Africa and the USA.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The questions of how people make **migration decisions**[1] and what factors shape these decisions have been central in migration studies, generating a rich literature in various disciplines from psychology to geography and economics (Aslany et al., 2021; Borjas, 1991; Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Chiswick, 1999; de Haas et al., 2019; Fawcett, 1985; Klabunde & Willekens, 2016; Thomassen, 2021; Thompson, 2017). Several scholars have advanced models to capture the elements and processes that are key to migration decision-making (Chindarkar, 2014; de Haas, 2021; De Jong, 2000; De Jong et al., 1983; De Jong & Gardner, 2013; Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). In this paper we present the **Temporal Multilevel Analysis (TMA) framework**, which draws on existing models and expands in new directions to answer the PACES project's main research question,

How do changes in society, individual life experiences and migration policy shape decisions to stay or to migrate over **time** (over a lifetime and across generations) and across **space** (across countries and along migration journeys)?

The Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework examines how people make decisions amidst social transformation and everyday personal change. More specifically, the framework seeks to examine how people decide whether to stay or migrate as social conditions and their own personal situations fluctuate. It brings our attention to how people perceive social change and their own role in a changing context with the goal of identifying under what contextual and personal circumstances migration may be a preferred response. As already evident, this framework posits that we cannot assume that all people view societal and personal life changes equally. Instead, it proposes to explore people's **perceptions** of their social and personal circumstances, and to investigate their **values** and **expectations**, with the understanding that these are fundamental yet relatively understudied influences on a decision to stay or migrate.

Any theoretical framework must strike a balance between complexity and simplicity. On the one hand, overly complex theoretical models are often difficult to operationalize, and thus not adopted more widely in the literature. On the other hand, overly simple models can reduce social reality to only a few key indicators or dimensions that then fail to explain most real-world migration patterns. For example, the push-pull model is simple and thus widely referenced in the public and political migration debates, but it does not actually explain very much about who migrates, how and where they go, and just as importantly, who stays. The Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework brings together two known approaches – social transformation and life course – to explore how different types of change over time influence migration decision-making. In the first place, the TMA framework aims to identify specific combinations of factors, their interactions and influence on past and present perceptions and future expectations of societal and personal change. Second, it seeks to uncover whether perceptions and expectations at the societal and personal levels play a distinct role in shaping aspirations stay or migrate.

The TMA framework applies to all forms of migration and is based on three basic assumptions which are presented in the next section: migration is a dynamic and continuous process; migration decisions are socially embedded; and migration decisions are essentially comparative in nature. After presenting an overview of research on migration decision-making and the models that have been elaborated in the last few decades, this paper presents the core elements of the Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework on decision-making – social transformation, the life course, perceptions, social norms, values and expectations – and elaborates on its specific contributions. Section 5 concludes with the strengths and limitations of the TMA framework.

This document should be read as an introduction to the TMA framework. In this form, it is meant as a steppingstone to create the foundation for various research components in the PACES project. We expect the TMA framework to be further refined through its application in the empirical research of the PACES project.

[1] The PACES Glossary, which is available on the PACES website, provides definitions for terms used in this conceptual paper as well as in the conceptual paper on migration policymaking by Katharina Natter entitled 'PACES Working Paper: Researching the politics of knowledge in migration policy'. Terms that are found in the Glossary are in bold upon their first mention in this paper.

2. The migration decision-making process and social changes: basic assumptions

Decision-making is a process during which an individual, or a group of individuals, chooses an action or inaction, among two or more possible alternatives (McFall, 2015). In migration, an individual may decide whether to stay or migrate, and if migration is chosen, decisions that follow are how to migrate, when, with whom and where to (Erdal & Hagen-Zanker, 2022). Whether moving to another region within a country or to another country, (potential) migrants undergo similar decision-making processes (Huber & Nowotny, 2020; Kley, 2011). Even when moving under duress and facing major external constraints, migrants consider the options available under their circumstances and decide on when, where to and how is best to leave (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). For example, research among African asylum-seeking women in Israel found clear evidence that the women were both forced to leave their home country and also made an autonomous decision to migrate (Leffel et al., 2023). For this reason, we propose to use the same framework to study the decision-making process of all forms of migration, regardless of the motivation of migration (work, study, family, safety, or a combination), spatial coverage (within or across international borders), and time spans (circular, seasonal, temporary, and permanent migration). This means that the TMA framework does not make a hard distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration and includes all common categories of migrants, from adventure-seeking migrants to seasonal workers, from students to displaced people and refugees.

Three assumptions underpin the TMA framework. First, the *process of making decisions to stay or migrate is dynamic and continuous***.** The decision to migrate may develop gradually, not just in the period preceding migration (Halfacree & Boyle, 1993) and it may be re-evaluated over time. It is well known that **migration aspirations** do not necessarily result in actual migration (Coulter & Scott, 2015; Esipova et al., 2011; Hooijen et al., 2020; Kley, 2017; Migali & Scipioni, 2019). This may be the result of a lacking ability to migrate (Carling, 2002), a possible re-evaluation of whether migration was a suitable choice, or due to life course events (e.g., childbirth, marriage, job entry and exit, etc.) (Mata-Codesal, 2015; 2018). And after migration, a migrant may ponder upon staying, migrating onward or returning. This ongoing decision-making process is most often associated with migrants 'in transit' who make decisions along their journey, as captured in this quote, "Being 'here' might evoke the longing to reach 'there,' and once one has arrived 'there,' another 'there' might emerge—or the aspiration to return 'here' might become prominent again." (Schapendonk, 2012: 39). While migrants on the move may experience a period of intense migration decision-making, settled migrants may also frequently reassess whether it is best for them to stay, return or migrate onward. As we will see in the models presented in the next section, the decision-making process is comprised of multiple stages, it is iterative and may be reignited at various stages of the process.

Second, one of the principal reasons for the iterative nature of this process is that decision-making does not occur in a vacuum. It is *societally embedded, thus made in settings that are constantly changing*. These settings shape – and are shaped by – people, social and cultural norms, emotions such as fear and **hope** and external forces such as natural disasters, infrastructural developments and global economic or political crises. (Potential) migrants constantly navigate and interpret the changing conditions in their place of residence and elsewhere before or after starting their migration journey. Moreover, they may assess the changing conditions in relation to their own values, personal goals and expectations (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessey, 2021). As a result, changes in any of these contextual (macro) or personal (micro) areas and their interactions may prompt the reassessment of any decision previously made, leading to potentially different choices.

Third, migration decision-making entails *a comparison of alternative trajectories and potential futures*. The decision to migrate involves choices of when, where and how to migrate and towards what aim, while decisions to stay may involve choices of actions associated with staying, e.g., pursuing an education, obtaining a job in a different sector, getting a business license and a loan and so on. Some decisions to migrate, particularly when there is a strongly established migration network or culture of migration (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011), may be undertaken without a full consideration of alternatives, which makes the behavior seem automatic (McFall, 2015). These have been referred to as heuristic decisions, which are based on past successful experiences of the self or others and are used as an effortless 'mental shortcut' for future decisions.

Heuristic decisions are fast, automatic and intuitive in contrast to the slow, effortful and cautious processes of deliberative decisions (*ibid.*). That said, as migration is often an important life-changing decision, we expect people to give at least some thought to what migration and its alternatives may add to and detract from their own lives.

Having clarified these core assumptions about the nature of migration decision-making, we now look at how migration decisions and decision-making have been previously conceptualized in migration research.

3. A review of migration decision-making research

Since the mid-20th century the questions of why people migrate and how they make this decision have been the focus of many articles and, in recent years, a number of large research projects involving various social science disciplines and approaches (Beine et al., 2008; Carling, 2019; Carling & Talleraas, 2016; de Haas et al., 2019; Dustmann & Glitz, 2011; Lee, 1966; Mabogunje, 1970; Massey et al., 1993; Massey et al., 1998; Nishimura & Czaika, 2022). This literature can be divided in two broad and partially overlapping branches: the **drivers of migration** and the **migration decision-making processes**. In addition, as knowledge on migration drivers and processes increases, a third branch of research is emerging that specializes on specific phases of the migration decision-making process (Aslany et al., 2021; Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021) and on the factors associated with specific migration phases (Caso et al., 2023; Kley, 2017). This section presents an overview of these three branches of literature and their contributions to research on migration decision-making.

3.1 Factors that drive migration

Migration drivers are factors or forces that influence the inception and the continuation of migration. Migration drivers are elements of the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental context in places of origin, along the migration journey and at destination. The term driver is often used interchangeably with concepts like 'determinants' or 'root causes.' However, some scholars suggest there are important differences in these terms. For example, Carling and Talleraas (2016) suggest the use of the phrase 'root causes of migration' often reflects a narrower understanding of migration, one that is directly caused by negative conditions in origin areas such as poverty and violent conflict. In contrast, the language of 'migration determinants' can imply a causal relationship between the factors and migration, ignoring migrants' agency and that some of the factors do not directly influence migration (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). In their elaboration on the drivers of migration, Van Hear et al. (2018) propose that drivers are structural elements representing "the more external material forces that influence mobility, such as political climate or the existing of transport infrastructure", but they do not function in a determinist manner; rather "drivers work by making certain decisions, routes or destinations more likely and bringing them within the orbit of people's capabilities." (p. 928).

In recent years, research on migration drivers has advanced in a couple of areas. First, the rich interdisciplinary literature examining migration drivers has been used to create categories of migration drivers. Nishimura and Czaika (2022) identified 24 migration drivers, categorized in nine dimensions: demographic, economic, environmental, human development, individual, politico-institutional, security, socio-cultural and supranational. Based on the same data and categories, Czaika and Reinprecht (2022) found that studies on migration drivers focus on average on 2.5 migration drivers, but that the majority of studies remains focused on the role of economic and socio-cultural drivers in migration, while areas such as family ties and the environment remain largely understudied.

Another valuable review of the existing literature was carried out by Aslany et al. (2021), who focused specifically on identifying the determinants of migration aspirations, leading to six main domains: demographic and family-related factors, socio-economic factors, other individual-level factors, country and community of origin, migration-related factors, and other determinants. This analysis led to three main insights: 1. Migration-related factors, namely migration history, migrant networks, remittances, and perceptions of destination, consistently lead to an increase in migration aspirations; 2. Determinants

representing country and community-level development are important for migration aspirations,[2] but these factors are weakly researched; and 3. Individual socio-economic factors, including demographic and family-related factors,[3] do not have strong effects on migration aspirations and whenever they have effects they are ambiguous, with the exception of age, which is a strong determinant of migration aspirations (Aslany et al., 2021).

The second advancement has been a convergence in thinking that, aside from categorizing drivers according to their domain, efforts must be made to account for the complexity of their effect on migration by understanding how, where and when migration drivers operate. Van Hear et al. (2018) proposed that migration drivers could be categorized according to their function (predisposing, proximate, precipitating and mediating) and dimensions (locality, scale, duration, selectivity and tractability). They also demonstrated that configurations or driver complexes explain different aspects of specific migration patterns. On a similar line, Czaika and Reinprecht (2022) also identified specific functions and dimensions of migration drivers and indicated that drivers do not operate in isolation but in combination with other drivers, creating 'complex driver environments'.

The Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) project demonstrated the complex way many drivers influence migration, sometimes identifying their ambiguous effects (de Haas et al., 2019). For example, it showed how development processes that aim to expand job opportunities locally and decrease migration aspirations also involve modernization, improved education, changing ideas of a '**good life**', and preferences for new types of work that make young people seek new lifestyles away from their communities. The research of the DEMIG project also showed that inequality within origin communities has some influence of emigration, while public spending in origin-country governments on free public education, health facilities and unemployment benefits decreases relative deprivation and aspirations to migrate to acquire remittances. Thus, a wide range of **non-migration policies** concerning employment, education, healthcare and social protection can decrease migration aspiration, although at the same time these policies make migration more feasible as public services can provide the resources needed to migrate (de Haas et al., 2019).

These advancements reveal that migration research increasingly pays attention to the role of social change in migration. In the previously mentioned review, Aslany et al. (2021) note that subjective perceptions of upcoming positive social changes are associated with lower migration aspirations, while higher migration aspirations emerge from negative perceptions of the present and the future *in situ* and optimism towards a potential destination. An approach that has sought to explain the relations between social change and migration is the **social transformation framework** (ST), which was developed in the Migration as Development (MADE) project to examine the migration transition theory pioneered by Zelinsky (1971) and further developed by Skeldon (1997). The ST framework examines deep social change at the macro level and provides a structured perspective to observe how diverse social factors, such as politics, economics and technology, interplay and underpin social change (de Haas et al., 2020). At the centre of the ST framework is the notion that development processes entail changes in different social dimensions – political, economic, demographic, technological, cultural and the environment – which interact and shape society in particular ways. Thus, shifts in economic structure cannot be understood without considering modifications in government, interest groups and power struggles. For example, government decisions to improve national transport through railways or highways raise tensions between the regions and social groups who may benefit from these and those who may pay the price through land appropriation by the state. The ST frameworks recognizes that as societal change takes place, different segments of society are affected in a variety of ways. Following the previous example, what will happen to people who lose their land through state appropriation, if their land was an important part of their livelihood? The ST framework invites us to observe how factors interplay, change at different speeds and follow distinct sequences, engendering different social outcomes including migration patterns.

Time is a central aspect of the ST framework. It distinguishes itself from general considerations of time in migration research, which use it as a lens to observe how specific events, for example a coup d'état, an economic crisis or the introduction of a migration policy influenced migration trends or migration decisions

[2] Eight determinants are included: country and community development, governance, public services, corruption, violence and insecurity, social attachment and participation, norms and values, and change over time.
[3] The socio-economic factors are socio-economic status, homeownership, employment status, income, other aspects of employment or activity, parental education, while the demographic and family-related factors are age, gender, marital status, parenthood and children, household size, family relations, and urban or rural residence.

(Tilly, 2011). In the ST framework, time is central to how people understand past events and current developments. This is not entirely new in migration research. Aslany et al. (2021) noted how perceptions of conditions in the family, community and country at present and expectations for the future can shape migration aspirations. Similarly, Leffel et al. (2023) observed that for African refugee women in Israel, migration decisions involved reflections on unresolved past and uncertain futures. Vigh (2009) found that negative perceptions of past and present conditions and negative future expectations in Bissau were contrasted with hopeful expectations of futures abroad, shaping migration aspirations. This long-term consideration of time has been elaborated by Vezzoli (2023), who proposed a framework that systematically accounts for how perspectives on the past, present and future influence decisions to stay and migrate.

Finally, there is ongoing recognition that to better understand patterns of migration and mobility in the world today, a focus on the drivers of migration needs to be complemented with attention to the drivers of immobility: the factors that retain, repel, and constrain migration processes (Schewel 2020). An unbalanced attention to migration drivers – without a concomitant attention to the causes of immobility – leads to migration theories that tend to overestimate migration flows and fail to explain widespread immobility in contexts subject to strong migration drivers.

The current literature on migration drivers points to a few promising areas of future research. First, certain drivers that seem very important in shaping migration aspirations, in particular country and community-level development drivers, e.g., satisfaction with public services and perceptions of social change, and aspects of individual-level factors, such as social identities and subjective well-being, are weakly researched (Aslany et al., 2021). Second, while the conceptualization of migration drivers is progressing, little research has sought to account for the fact that drivers change either suddenly or gradually over time, and that migration drivers may be perceived differently by people during the life cycle or during the **migration journey** (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). Third, the literature has begun to explore ways to account for people's perceptions, rather than only objective measurable indicators, and how those perceptions influence migration decisions (Chindarkar, 2014; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Lee, 1966), but more can be done to account for these intangible migration drivers. The TMA framework builds on the ST framework and brings attention to these three areas, as presented in section 4.

3.2 Mechanisms of migration decision-making

The literature in this second group focuses on identifying the sequential processes or mechanisms that lead to migration. The literature we consider here identifies specific concepts that explain causal mechanisms or, alternatively, presents models that capture the mechanisms of migration decision-making by accounting for direct and indirect effects of multiple factors at different levels. This section first presents the concepts that emerge from the literature and then turns to theories and models on migration decision-making processes.

3.2.1 Concepts

The concepts of field theory, life cycle and place utility have found a good application to explain migration decisions. Field theory proposes that migration decisions are influenced by the individual's action space, which includes the characteristics of place and people, while life cycle approaches consider that migration decisions are shaped by the individual's action space as well as characteristics associated with the life cycle and factors such as gender and class (Fawcett, 1985). The **life course approach** is related to the life cycle in that it captures the experiences associated with the unfolding of life as cohorts of people go through similar life stages. The life course approach, however, takes greater account of the changing environment of the individual. Thus, according to this approach, contextual conditions of specific places and periods shape the life course experiences differently (Halfacree & Boyle, 1993). Moreover, phases in the life course intersect with other characteristics such as gender, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, religion, and sexuality among others, shaping a multitude of pathways and influencing decisions to stay and migrate.

The concept of place utility refers to the perceived benefits or advantages that individuals associate with a particular location or place. The argument is that if a place provides utility, then people should be less inclined to leave. While much research focuses on the economic dimensions of place utility, the concept also encompasses a range of social, cultural, and physical factors that contribute to life satisfaction, well-being, and overall "utility" (Debray et al 2023, De Jong and Fawcett 1981). The related concept of **life satisfaction** has been the focus of several studies on migration decisions. Life satisfaction captures "individual tastes, preferences, self-evaluation of own life quality" and represents an individual's experienced utility of life from present and past experiences (Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014). Life satisfaction has been found to be a strong

predictor of individual migration decisions and may be used as a proxy for difficult to capture political and economic conditions (*ibid.*). However, some studies find that life satisfaction does not have a linear relation with migration decisions as both people who are the most and the least satisfied with their lives are associated with international migration decisions (Ivlevs, 2015). A new study that focused on the varied responses of dissatisfied people found that (i) livelihood hardships are consistently associated with internal and international migration, (ii) dissatisfaction with public services increases migration aspiration rather than political engagement, and that (iii) dissatisfied people with higher educational attainment respond with economic solutions as well as with increased international migration aspirations (Caso et al., 2023). It also found that dissatisfied people increase their civic and political engagement rather than their migration aspirations when they have high levels of trust in other people. Focusing on the determinants of aspirations to stay, Debray et al. (2023) found that those who aspire to stay tend to be more content, socially supported and live in communities with stronger institutions and better local amenities. These studies suggest that life (dis)satisfaction plays an important role in shaping desires to migrate or to stay. They also show that place utility and life (dis)satisfaction are subjective and influenced by one's social and cultural context.

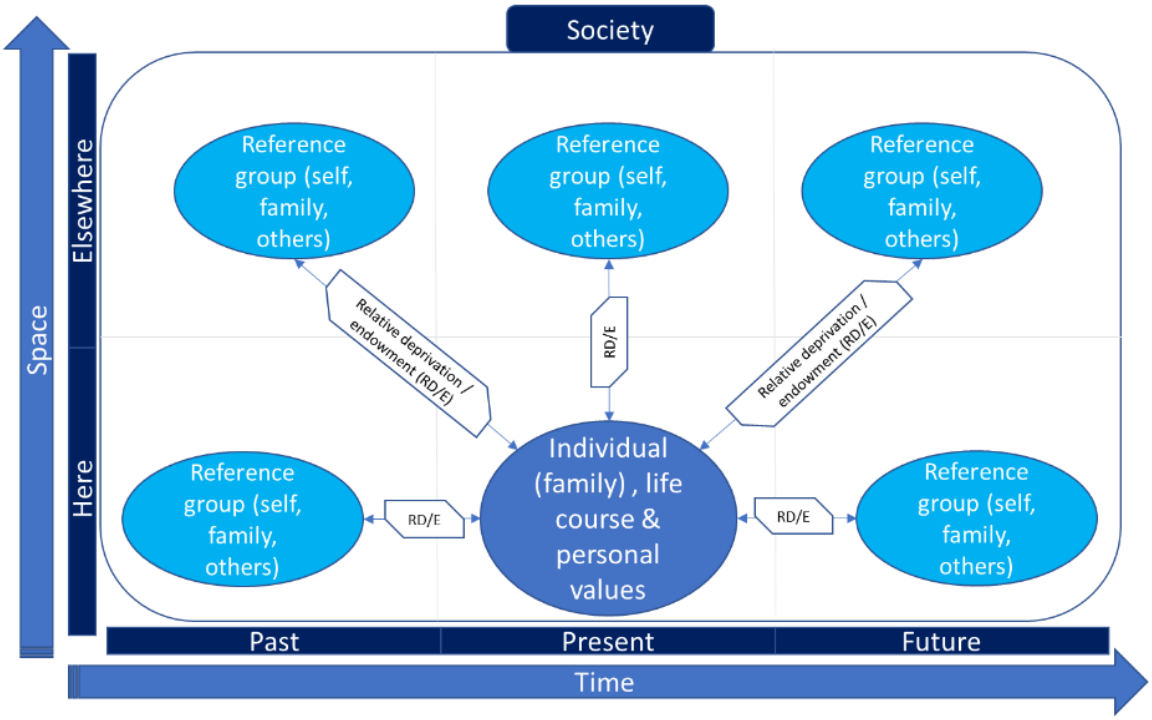
Another concept that tries to capture what people find beneficial, what they have or do not have, and their responses is **relative deprivation**. This concepts was introduced in migration research by the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) theory, which highlighted the important influence of relative deprivation on migration aspirations (Stark & Taylor, 1991; Stark & Yitzhaki, 1988). NELM identified that people compare themselves to others who are 'better off', for example migrants and their remittance-receiving households, and this comparison engenders feelings of relative deprivation. These feelings encourage non-migrant households to obtain the same secure livelihood through migration. Thus, comparisons with those who are 'better off', the reference group, underpin migration decision-making. However, it is not always clear who the reference group may be, and some studies have explored whether people tend to refer to other people within their group, to people external to the community, within the country or abroad (Czaika & de Haas, 2012).

Additional research has found that multiple references groups may exist at the same time and comparisons may be complex: a person may compare her current situation to her own self in the past, to her parents and other family members and friends at different points in time (Smith & Huo, 2014) and in distinct locations. Most often, people do not compare themselves to those who are much better or worse off and out of reach, but to those whose lives are in some way similar to their own (*ibid.*). The possibility that at any one moment comparisons may include different reference groups in different time dimensions and locations pushes us to consider simultaneously how people are connected to societal and individual past experiences, current circumstances, and future expectations. Research shows that individual perceptions of past-present-future influence life decisions, including decisions to stay and migrate among youth in northern Brazil (Vezzoli, 2023) and in Somalia and Afghanistan (Samuel Hall, 2023). These findings are an invitation to explore how perceptions of place and one's own life in the long term (past-present-future continuum) engender feeling of relative deprivation or, alternatively, relative endowment, which suggests feeling 'better off' than a reference group, ultimately influencing decisions to stay or migrate (Figure 1).

Several studies (mostly in the field of economics) have looked at how risk aversion shapes individual migration choice (Jaeger et al., 2010). Because migration is a decision-making process with high levels of uncertainty, more risk averse individuals are less likely to migrate. Some studies have documented this empirically for internal migration (Akgüç et al., 2016; Gibson & McKenzie, 2011) as well as for international mobility (Huber & Nowotny, 2013; Nowotny, 2014). Huber and Nowotny (2020) in their study of migration intentions in 30 transition economies also considered the levels of risk in the sending countries (e.g., political stability, security, infrastructure risks, etc.), and how it interacts with the individual-level risk aversion, studying the interaction of country-level and individual-level factors in explaining migration intentions.[4]

[4] In the general sense, intentions can be defined as a combination of "cognitive and behavioral dispositions that are based on learning what others expect one to do, what not to do, the probabilities that behaviors will have consequences, and what consequences there will be" (Pepitone and Triandis, 1987). When applied to migration, this definition reveals that social norms are an important element underpinning migration intentions. For this reason, social norms are one of the important factors considered in the proposed TMA framework, as will be presented later in this paper.

Figure 1. A spatial-temporal comparative framework underpinning relative deprivation-endowment and aspirations to stay and migrate[5]



Source: Vezzoli (2023)

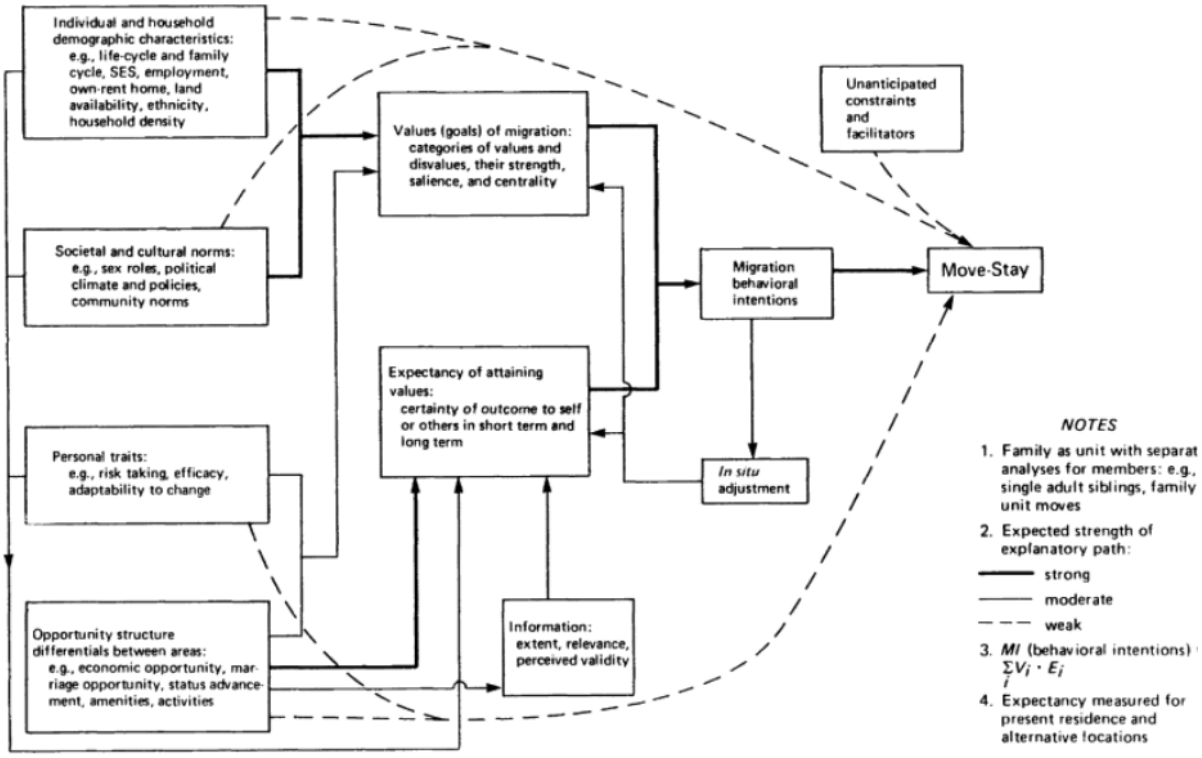
A brief mention is due to research that examines the importance of personality traits such as the orientation towards family or work, levels of ambition and power motivations. In an analysis of migrant personality, Boneva and Frieze (2001) suggested that people who seek to migrate are more work oriented, have high achievement motivation and have lower family affiliation and conclude that certain personality characteristics make some people most propense to migrate than others. These factors do not act alone in influencing migration as they interact with other psychological and environmental factors. In the migration psychology literature, several studies have looked at the link between the Big Five personality traits (openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism) and propensity to migrate (for a review see e.g., Fouarge et al., 2019). These studies find that openness and extraversion tend to be systematically related with higher chance of migration, while evidence on other traits is less conclusive. Personality traits might also influence choices of migration destinations.

3.2.2 Theories

Building on the notions of place utility and choice behavior, the value-expectancy model is a cognitive model which involves three components: (i) a person's valued goals; (ii) the options of meeting one's valued goals through staying or migrating; and (iii) the decision to stay or migrate is based on the assessment of the expectancy – or likelihood – of reaching the valued goals at the current or in alternative locations. The value-expectancy model allows to weigh multiple valued goals whenever these are present and determine their contribution to the intention to migrate. This model assumes that alternatives are possible, i.e., both staying and migrating can be realized, and individuals have the ability to make a choice. The choice between alternatives reveals motivations based on both the context and individual preferences. In the value-expectancy framework, the behavior is instrumental to reach certain goals that are valued by the individual or a family, who compare moving versus staying or different destinations (De Jong, 2000; De Jong & Fawcett, 1981) (see Figure 2).

[5] Distinct combinations would be relevant for different individuals, depending on family history (e.g., parents immigrated) and personal preferences (e.g., active contacts with friends living elsewhere).

Figure 2 The Value-Expectancy Model of Migration Decision-Making



Source: de Jong and Fawcett 1981, p. 54.

Some researchers have adopted the theory of planned behavior to explain migration decision-making processes (Kley, 2017). Using terminology that resembles that used in the value-expectancy model, the theory of planned behavior centers on the idea that *outcome expectancies* – namely a person's estimate that a certain behavior will result in certain outcomes – can predict intentions. The values attached to the aimed outcome, such as high career ambitions, are likely to affect behavioral intentions. If migration greatly increases the chances of fulfilling the outcome expectancy, e.g., the desired career, then migration is a likely decision. A person's perception of his or her abilities (*behavioral control*), such as in obtaining the desired job in a new location, would be a core predictor of migration intentions and eventually actual migration behavior (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). The theory of planned behavior initially proposed a two-phase process whereby intentions sufficed as good predictors of behaviors. Hoppe and Fujishiro (2015) expanded the model to three phases to include: a pre-decisional phase, which corresponds to aspirations and no preparatory actions; a pre-actional phase, which sees the person exploring options for migration by gathering information and making contacts; and the actional phase that involves concrete actions to achieve a goal. In their application of the theory of planned behavior to migration decisions, these authors focused on migration expectations and attitudes, values around job and careers, and beliefs about their own ability to reach their goals (*self-efficacy*). Their key finding was that migration was neither purely rational nor linear unlike what is anticipated by the theory of planned behavior, which is a highly rational approach for explaining human behavior. They found that many contextual and social factors, such as normative beliefs, and personal reasons interfered with what was planned, leading to different outcomes than planned. For example, they found evidence of non-migration among individuals who had a work contract and made arrangements to migrate because their circumstances had changed (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015).

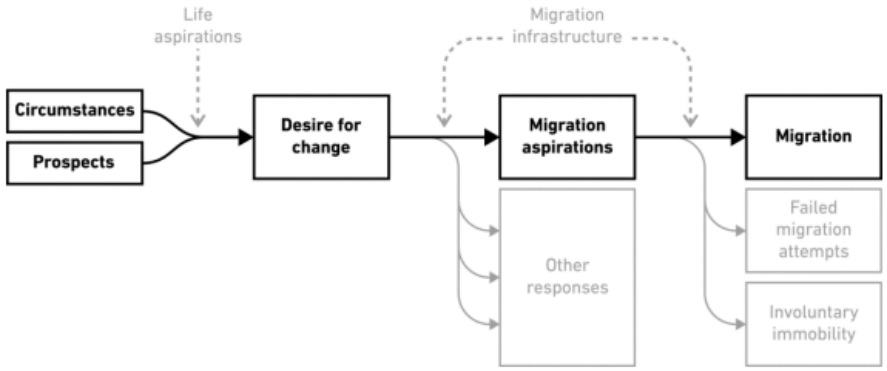
To account for the influence of biases and emotions on migration decision-making, some researchers have relied on prospect theory, which states that people are not rational actors because human behavior is affected by the framing of choices and our emotional responses to them. In general, prospect theory, which was introduced by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, shows that when making decisions people are influenced differently by potential gains and losses, so that avoiding losses may be a stronger factor in

shaping decisions than the prospect of potential gains, a phenomenon referred to as loss aversion (Clark & Lisowski, 2017b). Czaika (2015), for example, finds evidence of loss aversion when examining intra-European migration flows into Germany between 2001 and 2010. Migration flows responded more strongly to negative than to equal-sized positive economic prospects, indicating loss aversion of potential migrants. Prospect theory helps to explain why people often do not make decisions that lead to the highest expected utility by emphasizing that people are more concerned about losing what they have than about what they might gain. Complementary to the concept of loss aversion, Clark & Lisowski (2017) discuss the 'endowment effect' that comes with sustained residence in a particular place. Over time, people come to value their residences and ways of life in a particular place for its 'use value' rather than its 'exchange value,' such that a resident becomes "less willing to give up the current location than would otherwise be the rational decision" (p. E7433).

A model introduced by Carling and Talleraas (2016) and refined by Carling (2017; 2019) streamlines the causal links leading to migration outcomes and breaks down the migration decision-making process in three broad steps (Figure 3). First, the formation of migration aspirations is narrowed down to circumstances and prospects which combined with life aspirations trigger desire for change. Circumstances are the conditions of states and communities and the people living in these locations, commonly known as the 'root causes' of migration. These operate along prospects, which may be interpreted as opportunities for improvement or, alternatively, feelings of stagnation. A desire for change stems from "the difference between the present conditions and the desired state of affairs" (Carling, 2017: 21), while it is also possible that there may be no such difference and hence no desire for change (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2020). Life aspirations may strengthen a desire for change as when a woman aspires to have a career in a society that discourages women from entering the labor market. This suggests that demographic and socio-economic backgrounds influence life aspirations. Moreover, life aspirations are themselves subject to change, reflecting changing circumstances as well as the changing characteristics of individuals during the life cycle. For example, as a person's education levels change, life aspirations will adapt. And when there is a grave family crisis, some family members may adapt their life aspirations, e.g., abandoning their studies to work and support the family.

Second, a desire for change may be channeled into migration aspirations or other possible responses such as education, entrepreneurship, voicing discontent in peaceful manners or through violent actions. Ultimately, for Carling and Talleraas the choice of migration over other possible responses depends "on the *relative* appeal and feasibility of the different possible responses." (italics in original text) (2016: 8). Third, not all migration aspirations result in action as many factors can intervene to prevent migration – such as a person's abilities and aspects of the migration infrastructure, such as information availability and migration regulations. As a result, three outcomes of this causal link model are possible: migration, failed migration and involuntary immobility.

Figure 3. Model of the causal chain leading to migration outcomes



Source: Carling (2019), based on Carling and Talleraas (2016) and Carling (2017)

In a re-elaboration of this model, Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2020) partially addressed the linearity of this model by indicating that migration outcomes may lead to the re-start of this process. In addition, these

authors also suggested that subjective and intangible factors such as emotions and values, which may not be captured by the circumstances and prospects, are important in the decision-making process. Furthermore, Erdal and Hagen-Zanker (2022) stress the importance of emotions, personality traits and attitudes as well as the role of migration and non-migration policies in migration decision-making.

Czaika et al. (2021) contributed to the debate on the migration decision-making by identifying four dimensions of migration decision-making: the formation of migration aspirations, the processes of searching and evaluating information about migration options, the planning and implementation of migration decisions and the locus of control. The first three of these dimensions refer to aspiration, planning and preparation phases previously identified. The fourth dimension, the locus of control, addresses whether the decision is taken voluntarily or shaped by external forces.

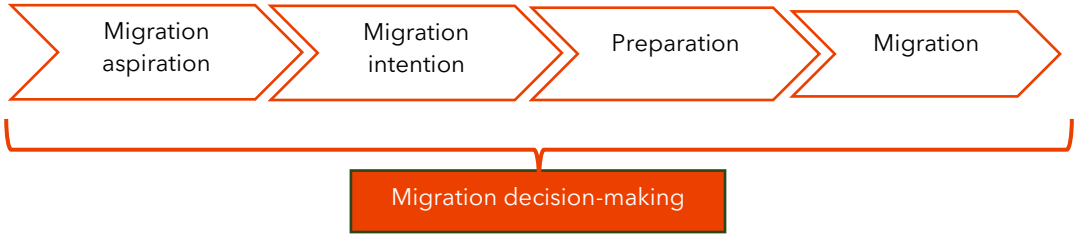
Overall, some of the models presented have identified mechanisms and some have examined the phases of migration decision-making, from the emergence of an aspiration to the actualization of migration (see Table A1 in the Annex for a summary). Overall, these models reflect rational choice notions and rely on precise migration-decision phases when in practice often plans are constantly changing and people walk back on their plans as life 'happens' and circumstance change. As new models are introduced, we observe attempts to include a variety of factors, including the more subjective and intangible ones, as well as efforts to examine in greater depth specific phases of migration decision-making. The next section takes a brief look at those phase-specific studies and then positions the Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework within the literature reviewed.

3.3 Research on specific phases of the decision-making process

It is widely accepted that migration decisions take place over the long term so that thoughts about migration may start long before actual migration aspirations are consolidated. Research also shows that migration aspirations may or may not lead to intentions, preparation and eventual migration. Migration aspirations may be thought of as desires that emerged and may just as easily fade (Kley, 2017). Intentions signal a stronger consideration, while the preparation phase entails active planning. Some authors suggest that it is only during the preparation phase that migrants should be considered 'potential migrants' (Migali & Scipioni, 2019). However, even planning may provide an inaccurate estimate of actual migration. Research reveals that even among potential migrants who had already made concrete plans, e.g., accepted a job, some did not actualize migration, suggesting that contextual, social or personal factors interfere at any phase of the migration process, making a person rethink a migration decision (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). Overall, while it is useful to recognize distinct migration decision-making phases (see Figure 4), these may overlap, some phases may last years and others just days and, as we just saw, some people may backtrack. Thus, we take what is valuable from identifying these phases without fully abiding to rational choice assumptions that may accompany some of the conceptualization of these phases.

Nevertheless, distinguishing these phases can be analytically valuable. Kley (2017) analyzed the facilitating and constraining factors that shape migration at the pre-decisional phase (migration desires), the pre-actional phase (planning) and the actional phase (realization). The analysis revealed that perceived opportunities at destination, life course events such as occupational change or separation triggered migration aspirations, while ties in the community of origin decreased migration desires. In this early phase, social change was associated with people's reconsideration of migration aspirations. In the planning phase, Kley (2017) noted that opportunities at destination and ties in the community of origin were less relevant in the formation of migration intentions and planning. The factors that influenced the realization of migration included having a dwelling in the country of destination, having completed education, having friends who are migrants, a partner who wanted to migrate or the dissolution of a partnership. These findings suggest that once a migration decision has been made, potential migrants tend to focus on concrete aspects that will enable their migration.

Figure 4. Phases of the migration decision-making process



Some of the research reviewed in previous sections focuses on the first step, the formation of migration aspirations. For instance, Aslany et al.'s (2021) evaluated the evidence on migration aspiration determinants and identified the strongest determinants (migration-related factors and determinants representing country and community-level development) as well as gaps in research. Caso et al. (2023) put into action the model by Carling and Talleraas (2016) and Carling (2017) (Figure 3) and explored how dissatisfaction may lead to migration aspiration and other responses. In their study, they analyzed differences between factors that encourage change *in situ* through economic, civic or political action and those factors that stimulate internal and international migration. By associating migration and other responses to dissatisfaction, the study by Caso et al. (2023), addresses previous suggestions that migration aspirations often do not signal actual migration desires; rather they suggest that something else is missing (Migali & Scipioni, 2019), perhaps linked to feelings of relative deprivation.

The value-expectancy model focuses on the formation of migration intentions (De Jong, 2000; De Jong & Fawcett, 1981). However, in current migration terminology, the value-expectancy model seeks to explain migration aspirations as this model is much less concerned with the realization of migration behavior, reflecting the assumption in the theory of planned behavior that intention is a strong sign of behavior that will follow. Conversely, the migration aspiration-ability model (Carling 2002; Carling and Schewel 2018) and the aspirations-capability framework (de Haas 2021) highlight the wide gap that exists between expressed migration aspirations and actual migration. Carling and Schewel (2018) identify a range of approaches that they refer to as 'two-step approaches' to migration that share a basic distinction between the evaluation of migration as a potential course of action and the realization of actual mobility or immobility at a given moment. They identify two-step approaches as a broad class of analytical frameworks, highlighting that many researchers do not use the vocabulary of aspiration and (cap)ability – nor do they form a cross-referenced body of literature – yet the underlying logic is distinct (Carling and Schewel 2018, 947). This distinction and different combinations of aspiration and (cap)ability reveal different types of voluntary and involuntary mobility and immobility.

Figure 5. Expanded aspiration-capabilities framework for conceptualizing migration agency

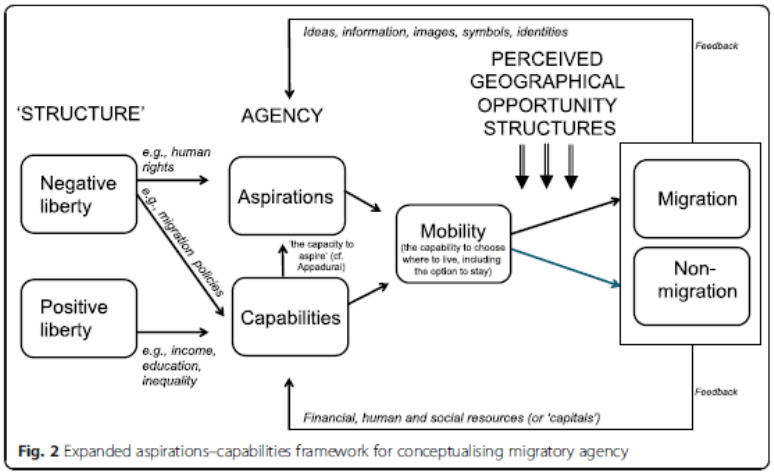


Fig. 2 Expanded aspirations–capabilities framework for conceptualising migratory agency

Source: de Haas 2021:25

de Haas brings together the social transformation and the aspiration and capability model in one single meta-theoretical framework. He conceptualizes migrations as an intrinsic part of social change and "all forms of migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within given sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures" (p17). In this framework, macro-structural conditions shape people's positive (freedom to) and negative (freedom from) liberties as well as aspirations and capabilities. While positive and negative liberties affect the freedom of people to make migration decisions, aspiration and capabilities represent

people's agency to make migration choices (Figure 5). Ultimately, de Haas explains migration agency as being framed by opportunity structures which (i) give people certain positive and negative freedoms, (ii) affect people's capabilities and aspirations and (iii) shape people's perceptions of their living conditions, (iv) making them decide to stay or migrate.

The literature reviewed above reveals that great strides have been made to identify the varied importance of drivers, the need to think more dynamically about configurations of drivers and how they interplay and produce certain realities and peculiar forms of migration. Migration decision-making models range from the very complex, such as the value-expectancy model, to the very simple that explains basic mechanisms in specific contexts, such as the NELM model. And increasingly, as knowledge on migration decision-making advances, studies explore specific phases of this process while seeking to bring together different analytical levels and both tangible and less tangible elements. Yet, research has struggled to put some of the emerging ideas into practice, for example how constant social change and people's perceptions of it shape preferences to stay or migrate. In the next section we present how we take a step in this direction with the Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework.

4. The Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework

The Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework is proposed as a way to explore people's perceptions of long-term societal and personal changes and their role in the formation of decisions to stay and migrate. We start from the understanding that individual decision-making of all kinds is fundamentally shaped by an individual's context (McFall 2015), a notion that several of the models and approaches described in the previous section seek to include. However, with few exceptions, applied research tends to focus on either macro-level societal factors such as employment levels or on micro-level characteristics such as socio-economic background and risk aversion. The TMA framework seeks to bring these two levels together by analyzing social change through the social transformation framework and personal change through the life course approach. It makes use of some of key concepts used in the value-expectancy model – values, valued goals, expectancy – but understands that not all decisions can be explained through rational choice models or conventional understandings of cost-benefit calculations.[6] In fact, the TMA framework makes space for the subjective interpretation of societal and personal circumstances, the exploration of social norms and values[7] and how people give meaning to their surroundings and their life, and the process of making life decisions, including staying and migrating. The TMA framework takes an ambitious step in its attempts to link the macro- and the micro-levels and its reliance on interpretivist approaches and insights from social psychology to explain how people make decisions to stay and migrate.

With this ambition in mind, the TMA framework aims to explore how the dynamic interactions of individuals and their environment may engender mismatches between 'what is' unfolding in society and 'what is desired' by an individual (and his/her family) and what may be the potential impact on decision-making. The model put forth by Carling and Talleraas (2016) (see Figure 3) suggests that such mismatches may engender a desire for change, which incites migration aspirations, among other possible responses. De Jong and Fawcett (1981) described a similar process with the notion of values and 'valued goals', and the 'expectancy' of attaining one's valued goals (see Figure 1). In this case, 'what is desired' are the 'valued goals', while 'what is' is reflected in the 'expectancy', which in turn is strongly shaped by the opportunity structure, namely the context with various activities and opportunities. While valuable, these models are rather static and do not account for the dynamicity and continuous iterative nature of migration decision-making processes which are influenced by diverse and changing preferences within and across societies (de Haas, 2021). To examine these aspects in

[6] See Pepitone and Triandis (1987) for the cultural biases in many social psychological theories, such as in cost-benefit models. While most people may engage in some cost-benefit calculations, this theory does not account for ethics (e.g., what is fair) and for the role of cultural elements, such as self-reliance or fate, which alter how both costs and benefits are interpreted. For example, when fate is seen a key determinant, high costs may be seen as worthwhile regardless of the benefit. Conversely, when individuals feel they have control over life, they are willing to pay much lower costs for the same benefit.

[7] Social norms and values influence how individuals process information and make decisions (Pepitone and Triandis 1987). The definitions and applications of social norms and values in the TMA framework are presented in the coming sections.

a dynamic manner, the TMA framework analyzes the forces and mechanisms that operate in the formation of migration aspirations and desires to stay by exploring societal and personal changes, perspectives on these changes and expectations for the future that shape the aspirations to migrate or, alternatively, to stay. As mentioned above, we rely on the social transformation framework and the life course approach.

The social transformation framework, briefly introduced in section 3.1, focuses on social change at the macro level and how it translates into the lives of residents of specific locations. While the ST framework can be applied to the national level, we are particularly interested in cities that are changing in profound ways as they undergo shifts due to infrastructural and housing development, economic restructuring, demographic transitions, power shifts, the expansion or narrowing of democratic values, changes in employment and educational opportunities, and shifts in human and labor rights. The social transformation framework invites the exploration of how residents and migrants experience these changes. We pair the social transformation framework with the life course approach to capture how societal changes are experienced across cohorts undergoing similar life stages.

Rather than taking the social and personal changes at face value, we study people's perceptions of these changes, who evaluate 'what is' *in situ* and assess it in comparison to 'what they desire'. This seemingly direct assessment hides layers of comparisons: a person may compare her current location and her personal life experience *in situ* by drawing on past experiences, present perceptions, and future expectations. This same person may also compare two or more locations over time and her own life journey to that of other people, for example friends and school mates on their own life journey (these comparisons are visualized in Figure 1). Within this set of comparisons, we argue that to understand people's perceptions and expectations of their social and personal world, we must also consider the influence of social norms and values**.** Previous work suggests that social norms, including norms about migration, influence migration aspirations (Carling & Schewel, 2018; De Jong, 2000). Values and visions of the 'good life' are also essential to understand aspirations to migrate or stay. For example, the concept of 'lifestyle migration' explores how certain visions of a good life give rise to certain kinds of migration among relatively affluent populations (Benson & O'reilly, 2009; O'Reilly & Benson, 2016). In a different context, Schewel (2022) shows how changing values and visions of the good life generate desires for international labor migration from Ethiopia. Farbotko (2018) highlights the importance of indigenous values and worldviews to explain desires to stay and voluntary immobility in the Pacific, despite the threat of rising sea levels.

By embedding social norms and values in the formation of perceptions and expectations, we seek to elicit new insights on how perceptions of society over time, one's position in said society, and the expectations to fulfil one's desired life aspirations can shed light on the emergence of desires to stay and migrate. In this way, we aim to answer questions such as, do people with positive future expectation of their place of residence – such as improved services, economic opportunities and quality of life – and positive self-expectation – such as their ability to meet their life aspiration with the resources available *in situ* – desire to stay? Do people with negative future expectation of their place of residence and negative self-expectation – the inability to fulfil their life aspirations with the resources *in situ* – desire to migrate? But then, do people with negative future expectation of their place of residence and positive self-expectation desire to stay or migrate? And what about when people have positive societal expectations but rather grim self-expectations? Is this when migration stands out as a dominant choice? Do we find such mismatches and, if so, when do the societal or the personal dominate? What are the characteristics of these patterns and of the individuals following specific patterns? The TMA framework brings together the necessary conceptual elements and analytical approaches from various disciplines to answer these questions.

After presenting the core questions in the PACES project, we elaborate on the social transformation framework, the notions of perspective, social norms, values and expectations, and the life course approach. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 bring together all these elements in a consolidated framework that can be applied to people who have never migrated and for those who have already embarked on a migration journey.

4.1 What questions does the TMA framework address?

As presented in the introduction, PACES has set out to answer the main research question,

How do changes in society, individual life experiences and migration policy shape decisions to stay or migrate over time (over a lifetime and across generations) and across space (across countries and along migration journeys)?

This question is disassembled into nine questions: three that seek to better understand the processes underpinning the relevance of societal and personal changes and their interplay; three exploring the specific combinations of factors that may play a role in the desires to stay/migrate; and three that explore specifically the role of future societal and personal expectations and their interplay in shaping desires to stay and migrate (Table 1). Overall, by uncovering the relations between societal and personal perceptions and expectations, this research aims to identify specific processes and combinations of factors that explain how people make decisions to stay and migrate.

Table 1. Overview of questions

Level	Processes	Factors	Expectations
Societal	How does the changing social context, including migration and non-migration policies, influence the desire to stay/ migrate?	(4) What societal factors have the most direct/salient impact on the desire to stay/migrate in changing social contexts?	(7) How are expectations of future social change connected with the desire to stay/migrate?
Individual	How do the life cycle and life experiences influence the desire to stay/migrate?	(5) What is the role of personal factors on the desire to stay/migrate?	(8) How are expectations of future personal change connected with the desire to stay/migrate?
Interplay	How do 1 and 2 interact and influence the desire to stay/migrate?	(6) What are the prevailing combinations of factors, at different levels, that interact to produce the desire to stay/migrate?	(9) How do 7 and 8 interplay and shape desire to stay/migrate?

4.2 Social transformation

As previously stated, the social transformation framework (ST) provides a structured perspective on how diverse social factors interplay and underpin social change (de Haas et al., 2020). While the ST framework may be thought to only capture macro level social changes, in fact it is a useful approach to observe the manifestations of macro level social changes in societies, communities and for individuals (micro level social changes). de Haas' (2021) single meta-theoretical framework presented in the previous section (Figure 5), identified one way to do that. Here we propose to explore how, within the timeframe of a deep social change, life in a region, city or community may undergo profound shifts, affecting economic restructuring, changing social relations and cultural preferences that may otherwise seem unexplained (de Haas et al., 2020).

Because of its depth, a social transformation generally affects the five dimensions of society – political, economic, demographic, technological and cultural – plus the physical environment, which comprises both the natural environment and its resources and human-built environment and influences all dimensions of society. These dimensions do not exist independently but affect each other, leading to a constellation of factors that engender different social outcomes. The ST framework has been proposed as a valuable approach to study a variety of social phenomena and it has been adopted to support in-depth analyses of specific phases of the mobility transition (Zelinsky, 1971) at the country level and in specific communities in Brazil, Ethiopia, French Guiana, Italy, Morocco and the Netherlands (Osburg, 2020; Rodriguez-Pena, 2020; Schewel & Asmamaw, 2021; Vezzoli, 2020b, 2022) or in the context of major political and economic transformation of the post-communist countries (Kureková, 2011; White et al., 2018). These cases showed how profound national changes influenced countries and their migration patterns over the long term. These cases also show that events, such as a revolution, the opening of a railway station or a major highway, are of particular interest and deserve great attention as they may be either the cause or the outcome of social transformation.

In the case of Italy, the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy that took place from the 1850s well into the 1970s related to state (re)formation and modernization, urbanization, the peripherization of the South and the fundamental change in the social structure and people's livelihoods that unfolded unevenly across the Italian peninsula. These profound changes created strikingly different migration patterns across Italian regions with some regions undergoing a rapid switch from international emigration to receivers of internal migration to those who remained the sources of international emigration and internal migration

(Vezzoli, 2020a). When observing some of these migration patterns at the lower level, the dynamics of societal transformation gain more nuance. In Cisternino, a small rural town in Southern Italy, the efforts of the Italian government to introduce a modern democratic state in the post-WWII period affected local livelihoods. In particular, the formalization of labor relations with contracts and social benefits made local artisans, who were the lifeblood of the local economy, along with small farmers, unable to hire workers. Along with the introduction of public sector employment and socio-cultural changes linked to new understanding of what it meant to be 'modern', the formalization of the labor market was one of the reasons that triggered two decades of high emigration followed by return migration as new economic opportunities emerged (Vezzoli, 2024, in print). Thus, changes across social dimensions and their specific interactions shape people's livelihoods and may lead some segments of society to aspire to migrate and others to stay and adapt to the changing social circumstances.

The above examples also support previous findings of how non-migration policies may play an important role in migration without any intentions to do so (de Haas et al., 2019). Other examples include foreign trade and the inflow of foreign direct investment as forces that interconnect countries globally, and shape labor migration across countries. In fact, Sanderson and Kentor (2008) find that FDI stock increases emigration, and greater trade integration tends to decrease emigration. Other examples are education policies in Ethiopia (Schewel & Fransen, 2018, 2022) and in Guyana (Vezzoli, 2014) and transportation needs and infrastructural development in northern Brazil (Rodriguez-Pena, 2019). In the case of migration from Central and Eastern Europe following their accession to the EU, Kureková (2013) documents the role of welfare states and their differential targeting to varied social groups in explaining different levels and composition of migrants across these countries, aiming to explain both mobility and immobility patterns from the perspective of the origin countries.

Evidence of the influence of migration policies in migration decisions is more ambiguous. At the macro level, research shows that migration policies are generally effective, as most people migrate within the confines of the law, but that migration policies are most effective when their goals work along migration drivers. This is the case when migration policies seek to attract certain types of workers when the conditions in place are already very attractive for migrant workers. Conversely, when migration policies seek to counter structural migration drivers, such as when they seek to limit the arrival of migrant workers when there is high labor demand, they engender unintended consequences, including shifts from regular to irregular migration channels (de Haas et al., 2019). At the micro level, past research suggest that migrants do not have precise information about migration policies and the information may be inaccurate (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2020). Research on the role of information campaigns indicates that migrants refuse the legitimacy of migration policies that seek to stop them from migrating (Pécoud, 2010). These cases suggest that it is the interpretation and perception of migration policies that influence migration decisions (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2020: 11), calling for greater attention to how migrants understand migration policies and their objectives.

Overall, the social transformation approach starts from observing changes at the macrolevel, but it enables the exploration of microlevel processes by focusing on how people make sense of social changes. It asks how people see themselves and their community in a changing society and seeks to shed light on questions such as: How do people react when new developments, such as the buildup of infrastructure or the erection of a new border wall, is promoted in a community? How does this shape their perception of the community in the present and future? And how are these perceptions related to decisions to stay and migrate? Such questions enable the exploration of local migration histories, the meaning of migration for people over time, the existence of social norms concerning migration – e.g., migration not being appropriate for young women before marriage –, the presence of important migrant networks and a culture of migration. In turn, these data enable the observation of how combinations of factors shape migration trends and the decisions made by those who migrate and those who stay.

As previously mentioned, time is a central component of the ST framework. In the TMA framework, we argue that people's perceptions are formed through an assessment of what has been, what is and what may be, and these time-influenced perspectives have a role in shaping aspirations to stay or migrate. Before turning to the life course approach and how it combines with the ST framework, we introduce the notions of perceptions, social norms, values and expectations.

4.3 Perceptions, social norms, values and expectations

Before presenting the definitions of these four concepts, we introduce the logic that brings these concepts together and shows their relevance in the process of making decisions to stay or migrate. This logic applies both to people living in their regular place of residence and migrants on the move, both of whom are evaluating their options and their possible next steps:

(1) People observe, perceive, and make personal evaluations of the place of their regular or temporary residence on the basis of its developments, the characteristics of society, including its social norms. These perceptions inform past and present perceptions and future expectations of place;

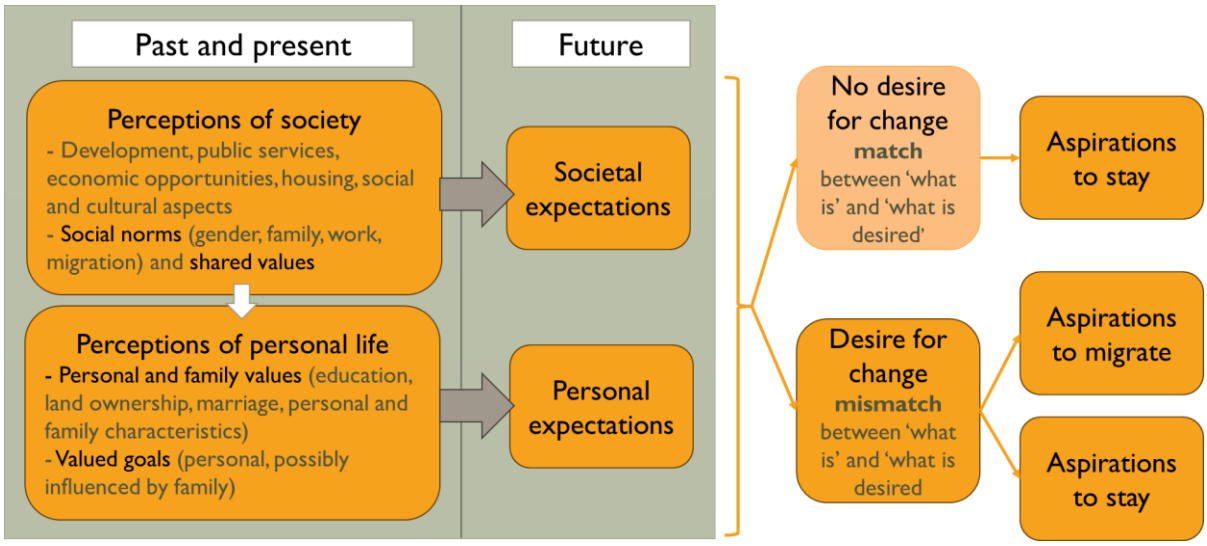
(2) People perceive and evaluate their own position in society, considering their personal and family values, and their own specific goals, e.g., their perception of a 'good life' and the personal expectations of whether the 'good life' they value is possible *in situ*. These perceptions inform past and present perceptions and future personal expectations;

(3) The comparison between societal and personal perceptions and expectations reveals a (mis)match between 'what is' and 'what is desired', exposing a potential desire for change at each of these two levels;

(4) When a desire for change emerges, the individual evaluates whether the necessary change to fulfil one's valued goals can take place *in situ* within a specific timeframe (in relation to a life span) or whether the possibility for change or its timeframe do not meet one's expectations.

This process is embedded in recurring processes of comparison between society and the self, comparing what is possible societally and what is personally desirable and considering what are realistic changes over time. The fact that, in this sequence, migration aspirations only emerge when change is desired seemingly suggests that migration is the outcome of negative conditions. This ignores the fact that migration aspirations many be intrinsic, thus born out of an inner desire to experience other ways of life around the world, rather than instrumental, namely fulfilling a certain function such as to earn more money or obtain a specific degree (de Haas, 2021). However, even intrinsic migration aspirations fulfil a mismatch between 'what is' and 'what is desired', i.e., different ways of life, cultures and environments. This may be the case of someone who could have a fulfilling life and profession by staying put but would much prefer to live in a more culturally diverse place. While not born out of negative conditions, migration is still the outcome of something a person desires that cannot be achieved locally. Figure 6 visually represents the process described in steps 1-4. Now we turn to defining these four terms, which are as challenging to narrow down as they are valuable to explain individual decision-making.

Figure 6. From perceptions to expectations and aspirations to stay or migrate



Perceptions

Perceptions, which we use interchangeably with the term interpretations, are defined as individual observations and evaluations of one's personal and contextual conditions. Unlike cognition, which is the mental process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought and experience, perception is

the ability to see, hear or become aware of something through the senses. Thus, factors and processes that seem objective are perceived and interpreted by individuals based on their personal experiences. Over half a century ago, in his *A Theory of Migration*, Lee (1966) indicated that "it is not so much the actual factors at origin and destination as the perception of these factors which results in migration" (Lee, 1966: 51). For example, an economic downturn is strongly felt by someone who has lost their job but may be barely noticed by someone whose work is in a sector not affected by the downturn. Perceptions could lead someone to see a country as progressive, with negative effects on intentions to migrate abroad (Chindarkar, 2014). However, perceptions change, as observed among African migrants whose idea of Europe changed and became more concrete along their migration journey (Schapendonk, 2012).

We can conceptualize perceptions as capturing subjective assessments of the past experiences and present conditions. Perceptions of society reflect interpretations of societal change, educational and employment opportunities, health services and social protection as well as less tangible aspects such as social norms, shared values and perception of whether a society is open or close to change. Perceptions of society are influenced by collective narratives. For example, one may hear recurrent statements such as "nothing ever changes in this town!". Rather than being taken at face value, these narratives provide a starting point for rich conversations about the individual's perspective on that society's past, present and future.

Perceptions about one's own life and its trajectory are strongly shaped by family, values and valued goals, reflect considerations of past personal goals and achievements and reflections on the current situation. The societal and personal levels are not completely separate as societal perceptions influence personal perceptions. Societal and personal perceptions may match, as when someone holds positive societal and personal perceptions, or not match as when someone perceives society in a rather positive manner but feels negatively about one's personal situation (see section 4.5). This relation is of crucial importance as we argue that societal and personal perspectives together set the baseline for and inform what people expect for the future.

Social norms

Social norms are unwritten and informal rules that regulate the behavior of people. Social norms are at the core of social cooperation and social order and include norms about honesty, keeping promises and reciprocity. Adhering to social norms strengthens the functioning of social groups as norms are generally seen as non-negotiable. Social norms, which are also known as normative beliefs, are part of shared expectations about how members of the group should handle social situations (Bicchieri et al., 2018). However, norms may come from various sources of influence in society and may be more or less internalized (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987). So, while some members of society may have a strong commitment to honesty, for example, others may be less committed to it. In fact, social norms belong to normative systems that are specific to each society and culture (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987). It is therefore essential to understand people's normative system and how it guides their behavior.

In migration research, social norms have been used to understand migration decisions particularly in relation to gender norms and the family sphere. Gender norms that assign male family members the responsibility for the financial well-being of the family and women with the caring responsibilities would encourage migration among men and non-migration among the women. In Thailand, De Jong (2000) found that gender roles influenced migration intentions as the presence of children and elderly parents resulted in the decrease of migration among women and an increase among men. In many societies marriage has entailed the migration of one of the spouses, often the bride, but migration may be a way to avoid strict norms about marriage, as found among Ethiopian women migrating to the Gulf (Schewel, 2022). Social norms may shape destination preferences when specific destination countries may have a particular 'reputation' in the community (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2020; Neubauer, 2022).

Overall, the study of social norms in shaping migration aspirations and decisions has been limited, but these studies have demonstrated that social norms can be very influential in encouraging or discouraging migration. Social norms follow their own contextual logic and are not necessary based on rational thinking and, since they may be a driver of behavior, may explain migration-related behaviors. For example, we may observe preferences to stay when the context may suggest that migration could bring advantages (Hofstede et al., 2022; Mata-Codesal, 2018; Vezzoli, 2023) or migration when staying may seem beneficial. This may be due to the fact that normative expectations, namely what one believes others believe should be done, are more important in affecting behavior than personal normative beliefs (Bicchieri et al., 2018). In other words, if those around us believe that migration is a socially appropriate option, we are more likely to migrate even if we may

believe that migration is not appropriate for us. Social norms and the dynamics between normative and personal beliefs gain additional relevance when studied in relation to migration policies, which may seek to create incentives for people to stay or migrate. For example, what happens when migration policies push in one direction and social norms push in the opposite direction?

Social norms that are relevant to migration and migration policies need to be studied more closely to examine their influence on migration aspirations of specific groups of people. More specifically, we seek to identify whether social norms about migration, such as the desirability of women's migration, interplay with migration policies, which are based on destination countries' assumptions about migrant behavior and social norms in countries of origin.

Values

Values are considered in the sense of (i) what is valued by an individual, a family or a community, and (ii) as valued goals as developed in the value-expectancy model. Values are related to but are different from social norms. Values and social norms can regard the same issue, but while social norms provide rules to which we are expected to abide, values reveal what gives meaning and direction to life. So if we consider the topic of reciprocity, social norms may stress reciprocity among members of society, but some people may not value community and reciprocity, instead valuing independence and self-sufficiency. While individual values are important in decision-making, they may be strongly influenced by family: for example, a family's values towards migration – whether it is seen positively or negatively – would have an influence on how the individual values migration (Harbison, 1981). Both social norms and values influence how individuals process information and make decisions; ultimately decisions involve an evaluation of whether valued goals and their consequences conform with cultural standards (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987). This does not mean that contradicting decisions are not made. Rather, it suggests that an evaluative process that includes social norms and values is part and parcel of the decision-making process and we expect that to be true also for decisions to stay and migrate.

In the TMA framework we first seek to understand what people value and what is central to their personal value system, revealing, to the extent possible, whether the values expressed are personally valued or influenced by the family or the community. Values that have been found to be relevant in decisions to stay or migrate include career, higher income, family orientation, peaceful environment, strong connection to the community, religiosity, money, or other symbols of material achievement (Williams et al., 2014). A personal value system reveals insights on what people hold dear and how they may behave. Thus, by identifying that people value certain aspects of their life can shed light on why certain people would make certain mobility choices, including staying when leaving may offer better opportunities (Clark & Lisowski, 2017b; Mah, 2009; Preece, 2018).

The term valued goals is a core element of the value-expectancy model. Valued goals reveal what a person seeks to attain, namely a goal that holds value to the individual. Thus, a valued goal is based on what an individual values but is attached to a specific outcome. A person may value family, but the valued goals may take different forms. For a person, the valued goal may be to stay close to family members, even in difficult financial circumstances. For another person, valuing family may result in the goal to earn more money to support and give high standards of living to the family, even if it means migrating.

While values open a window on what has meaning in one's life, valued goals provide more concrete information about possible behavior that might unfold to reach the intended outcome. Research utilizing the value-expectancy model has shown that people consider their valued goals and where they expect to obtain the valued goals influence decisions to migrate and where to migrate, internally or internationally (De Jong et al., 1983). We find that understanding both what participants value and their valued goals merits attention as it will reveal not only what gives meaning to their lives but what outcomes they seek and the behaviors that they may pursue, including migration as well as other responses that involve staying.

Expectations

Expectations are generally described as the belief that something will happen or should happen in the future. We consider two types of expectations: (i) societal expectations: what a person expects to happen in general in society, with no specific relation to what the person wants; and (ii) personal expectations: what a person expects will take place in relation to the values and desires of said person, e.g., the expectation of attaining valued goals (De Jong & Fawcett, 1981). The expectations of obtaining urban employment and earning certain wages were at the core of early models of rural-urban migration (Harris & Todaro, 1970). Mabogunje

(1970: 11) also talked about the notion of expectations to understand how the stimulus from the environment was transmitted to individuals and thus was crucial to understanding rural-urban migration. The term expectancy, used in value-expectancy model, closely resembles our notion of personal expectations as it refers to the certainty that a valued goal would be reached in the future. Expectancy originates from an evaluation of the opportunity structure which emerges from a comparison between the place of residence and its features and other areas of possible residence. Migration behavior ensues when there is the expectancy that migration will lead to the valued goal (De Jong et al., 1983). Expectations may then be positive or negative and may have repercussions on migration behavior. For instance, an analysis of Gallup data suggested that those who expected worsening economic conditions and had more pessimistic view of future prospects had higher migration intentions to move abroad than those with better expectations (Migali & Scipioni, 2018).

The term personal expectation mirrors the notions of expectancy and expectation just described. In contrast, the term societal expectations reflects the disinterested expectations of what the place of residence may offer. We separate these two types of expectations because they may not coincide, revealing new insights of people who, despite having positive expectations about the place of residence, have negative personal expectations and may therefore aspire to migrate. Conversely, people may prefer to stay even when the circumstances would seem to suggest that migration may be advantageous (this is further elaborated in section 5.4).

A note of caution is needed concerning the challenges of studying perceptions and expectations, be it at the societal and personal levels. We refer in particular to the role of cognitive dissonance in relation to perceptions, and motivated reasoning and beliefs in relation to expectations. First, research has revealed that people may change their beliefs after having acted inconsistently with such beliefs in an attempt to diminish the discomfort experienced from having acted out of alignment with their beliefs. For example, when applied to voting, people who voted for a political candidate tend to have a more favorable opinion of such candidate in the future in comparison to those who did not make that choice, i.e., vote for that candidate (Mullainathan & Washington, 2009). What does this mean for studying social and personal perceptions and migration? Cognitive dissonance could take place when people who aspire to migrate may describe their societal and personal perceptions in ways that justify this preference. For instance, a person may share negative perceptions of their city and its opportunities as a way to convince themselves and others that migration is the best choice. A potential dominance of negative societal and personal perceptions among those who express migration aspirations could be the result of this effect.

Second, when studying expectations, research has found that motivated reasoning plays a role. The term motivated reasoning refers to people's reliance on evidence that support and bolsters their favored outcome. In common parlance, motivated reasoning is referred to as *wishful thinking*. Motivated reasoning is visible when people like to think of their future as bright and they tend to use arguments and evidence that supports their visions of a positive future (Helzer & Dunning, 2012). If we related this to preferences to stay and migrate, a person who has migration aspirations may use motivated reasoning and rely on motivated beliefs of a bright future elsewhere and an unbright future *in situ* to explain why migration is necessary. Conversely, someone preferring to stay may stress their positive expectations of the future *in situ*. To a certain extent, this argument goes against our stance that societal expectations may be disinterested. Both cognitive dissonance and motivated reasons are real challenges and we are aware of that these biases may raise criticism to the TMA framework. To minimize the potential effects of these biases, the data collection has been designed to include several questions about society and personal life from different angles, so as to detect any dissonance and motivated reasoning in people's answers.

Through the adoption of the Temporal Multilevel Analysis framework, we seek to understand people's perceptions about society and their personal life, the social norms that influence their lives, what participants value and their valued objectives and what participants believe will happen (expectations). We expect to observe that if a person's values and valued goals match with what that person expects will happen locally, then the person will not desire change and will be disinclined to aspire to migrate at a specific point in time. Another person may expect that their valued goals cannot be achieved in situ, even if many opportunities are objectively available (for example if s/he wants to experience different ways of life), leading to migration aspirations. We expect that people who seek to attain their valued goals, compare distinct possible options such as different places, experiences of others in situ and elsewhere, and consider what may be a good option for them. To capture all this, we aim to understand how perceptions, social norms, values and valued goals feed into societal and personal expectations and, in turn shape decisions to stay, migrate, migrate onward or return. Because it is well documented that social norms, values and expectations may affect differently people

along the life course and distinct socio-demographic characteristics (De Jong et al., 1996; Gubhaju & De Jong, 2009), we now describe the last component of the PACES framework, the life course.

4.4 Life course approach in PACES

In the TMA framework the life course perspective allows for a comprehensive, dynamic, and processual approach to studying decision-making at the micro-level. We define life course as a series of phases that unravel over a lifespan of an individual and encompass a form of change (Clark & Lisowski, 2017a). A life course perspective examines change over time as well as discrete life events and experiences. Kley (2017: S42), for example, identifies six classes of life course events: (1) completing school, leaving the parental home, starting higher education or an apprenticeship; (2) completing studies, entering the labor market; (3) occupational change; (4) marriage or childbirth; (5) the moving away of friends or relatives; (6) the end of a partnership. In many instances, these events require a physical move. *A key adaptation of the life course approach in the TMA framework is the introduction of the choice to migrate as an option along and within other individual-level forms of change*.

Aligned with the intersectionality framework (Anthias, 2012), we acknowledge that diversities across age, gender, education, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status/class imply social divisions and hierarchical structures. The TMA framework adds to this perspective by arguing that these inequalities shape meanings and interpretations of social transformations, life changes, and changes in migration policy, and successively decisions around migration. Such intersectional processes result in diverse and sometimes contradictory positions of advantage and disadvantage over time and space. These processes influence how people perceive themselves in relation to their community, which affects migration decisions.

Several intersecting norms around phases in the life cycle may encourage or discourage migration decisions. We thus account for a strong role of norms and normative aspects as highlighted in the previous section. Ideas about masculinity, femininity, household roles, belonging, the use of public and private spaces, access to and position in labor markets, shape ideas about who migrates or not, when, with whom and for what purpose. Norms form expectations about own behavior and that of others and they are interlinked with personal-level characteristics. They might explain why individuals with observably the same characteristics might decide to migrate in some context and decide to stay in others. For example, while migration might be seen as acceptable or even desirable among young single males, once a person has married and has children, it might be seen as unacceptable or, conversely, there might be more societal pressure to emigrate to provide for the family. Strong social norms are attached to gender when females are expected to care for children and elderly parents (De Jong, 2000). This, again, might shape aspirations to migrate as well as the actual behavior by, for example, encouraging migration of full families in some contexts and single male migration in others. We outline these contradictions in greater detail below for four main biographical characteristics that have received attention in the literature.

Age. Biological age can have different social and cultural meanings across societies (Aslany et al., 2021). However, compared to other demographic characteristics like gender or education, age has one of the most consistent relationships with migration aspirations and behavior. Youth and young adults (roughly ages 15-40) are generally more likely to have the desire to migrate and to actually migrate, as compared to older adults (Debray et al., 2023). Being young implies a set of characteristics (e.g., good health, being single), certain attitudes (e.g., a sense of adventure and desire to explore new horizons) or life-course events (e.g., transition from education to the labor market) that might increase both aspirations and capabilities to migrate (de Haas, 2021; Kahanec & Fabo, 2013; Kley & Mulder, 2010). Migration among young adults may also be associated with specific social norms concerning the transition into adulthood (Jónsson, 2008). Migration may be highly desirable among young people when the circumstances do not allow them to fulfil commonly expected age-related life stages, such as having the means to court a potential spouse in pursuit of marriage (Vigh, 2009). In other instances, social and political structures may not give opportunities to young people, marginalizing them in society and encouraging them to look for opportunities elsewhere (Carling and Talleraas 2016). Age may also be relevant in how migration is perceived. Research has shown how intergenerational shifts might shape attitudes towards migration and migration policies (Bordone & de Valk, 2016).

Gender. When studying people's decisions to stay or migrate, we must account for gendered identities, norms and relations and the intersections between gender and other factors such as race, ethnicity, class or ability. Women may be expected to care for aging parents or parents and siblings in ill-health, and an expression of disinterest in migration may be the result of a woman's internalized acceptance of such social

norms rather than her lack of aspiration and choice to stay. Labor markets can also be gendered. For example, demand for female domestic workers in the Middle East has led to gendered international migration trends to meet that need from some origin countries like Ethiopia (Fernandez, 2019).

Gender is also relevant in migration policies and the policymaking process. Albeit hardly considered, migration policies are based on cultural assumptions on gendered roles and reflect policymakers' assumptions and their own understanding of gender roles in migrants' countries of origin. For example, European countries historically separated the right of residence from the right to employment, which meant that migrant women who were generally admitted as dependents of a spouse were not allowed to work, creating women's financial dependence on the spouse (Zlotnik, 1990). Even today, domestic worker's policies might have a woman in mind even though almost 24 per cent are men, while seasonal worker policies show a preference for female workers based on the assumption that women, who supposedly have a strong attachment to their family back home, will be more likely to return rather than overstay (Glass et al., 2014).

Education/skills. Education is linked to migration in multiple ways (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011). On the one hand, higher levels of education are generally associated with greater capabilities to migrate. Docquier et al. (2014) find, for example, that college graduates exhibit greater emigration rates than their lower-educated peers, not because they have greater intentions to migrate, but because they have better opportunities and chances of realizing international migration. On the other hand, formal education can have significant impacts on internal and international migration aspirations. Schewel and Fransen (2018), for example, find that in Ethiopia, even just primary levels of educational attainment are associated with greater desires to move.

From a temporal perspective, the aspiration to migrate might shape educational choice before the actual migration is realized, implying a complex two-way relationship between education and migration. Alternatively, a mismatch between attained education or skills and job opportunities has been raised as reason for some young people to consider migration abroad (Kaczmarczyk & Okólski, 2008; Kureková, 2011; Quinn & Rubb, 2005). As noted above, attaining education and joining the labor force is a life-course event which opens a window of opportunity to realize migration before life as a working adult brings about settlement. In some cases, seeking labor market integration in a foreign labor market might better reflect an individual`s own life expectations, and at times may be engrained in the norms of the broader community where having experience working abroad may open greater opportunities in the origin country.

Class/socio-economic status. Migration scholarship has given constant but wavering attention to class as an important form of social difference that shapes migration. Access to resources enables migration, while their absence can make an aspiring migrate involuntarily immobile (Carling, 2002). Van Hear (2014) showed that while the capacity to migrate is largely dependent on resources, aspiring migrants may use different types of capital to facilitate their migration. Scholarship overall confirms that one's socio-economic background shapes mobility and immobility. Research on 'lifestyle migrants', which reflects the migration of relatively privileged individuals, has shown that class is central both in the desire of British lifestyle migrants to migrate and in the shaping of a new life in Spain. Curiously, while this was meant as an escape from the class concerns of these migrants, once in Spain the migrants' cultural and economic practices reproduced their distinctive markers of class, thus influencing their life in Spain (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010). Class is also central in migration policies. Discourses that stress the desirability of migrants based on their 'merit' and their contribution to society are grounded on economic and identity class markers. Class then acts as a selection process since these requirements exclude many aspiring migrants from accessing migration (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018).

We operationalize the life course in three interrelated ways:

(1) From the perspective of life course events that unfold along individual´s life and introduce personal-level changes that can facilitate or constraint migration decision-making at any stage of the migration decision-making process as defined in this conceptual framework. Examples of events include: finishing studies; job entry and exit; finding a partner, marriage or divorce; child birth; caring for parents; deaths, etc. Migration aspirations may strongly emerge as a result of the blockage from progressing in the locally-expected stages of the life cycle, such as from obtaining a job to having one's own apartment or being able to court a potential spouse (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Vigh, 2009). At these different points in individual´s life, the preference to stay or migrate can be re-evaluated, while at the same time the context of broader social changes unravel within the given community.

(2) In view of individual characteristics and biographic aspects that – as has been shown by previous research - (significantly) shape one´s aspirations and capabilities to migrate. The main characteristics include gender, age, education and skills, and socio-economic status. Other aspects not reviewed here, such as ethnicity, religion, and (dis)ability, may also be important. In line with the intersectionality framework, we will consider interaction of these factors and how they result in varied opportunity structures between individuals. Essentially, these factors and their intersections imply also different levels of "freedom" in decision-making process as well as inequalities in the possibility to realize migration or to be able to stay. The intersectionality framework is useful to capture the essence of these features.

(3) One´s perceptions and subjective interpretations of personal achievement, shaped by life-course events and individualities, are dynamic and the result of comparisons across one's past, present and future. The focus on biographical events and experiences over the life course, allows for an identification of what shapes perceptions about personal opportunities, present and future life aspirations and preferences to stay or migrate. In essence, we use an intersectional approach, acknowledging that perceptions are shaped by time, context, personal characteristics and social norms.

4.5 Comparisons across levels and over time

In the previous sections we have presented how both the social environment and the personal life course change over time, shaping individuals' experiences of the past, perceptions of the present and expectations for the future. We also explained how comparisons take place over distinct places and over time, that is between one or more locations and between diverse groups, with whom the individual draws comparisons, e.g., parents who migrated from another region or friends who have recently emigrated. Figure 7 brings all these elements together in a visual form. It shows how social transformation in various dimensions influence people's past experiences, present perceptions and future expectations. Social transformation also influences the life course, as people may, for instance, postpone starting studies, or having a child, when there are high levels of political or economic uncertainty. At the micro level, the phases of life, in combination with personal characteristics, shape past experiences and present perceptions, and influence expectations about the future. The social and personal levels follow their own continuous trajectory, but they are not completely separate. Important social events may influence both the societal and life course levels, but some people may recognize important social events at the societal level but not mention any consequences at the personal level. Similarly, a localized social change, e.g., the opening of a local nursery, may be revealed in personal reflections but not as part of social transformation, although this change may be part of the expansion of public services in the city. This figure provides a visual representation of how the long-term patterns of positive or negative changes over past, present and future and across the societal and personal levels may influence people's decisions to stay and migrate.

However, a practical question remains: How do we analyze these multifarious comparisons and explore how they influence decisions to stay or migrate? In this section, we present ideal-typical tables and possible testable hypotheses for how people make sense of social transformation (Table 2), how they perceive their own life trajectory over time (Table 3) and how these two levels combine to influence the outcome, namely the desire to stay or the aspiration to migrate (Table 4).

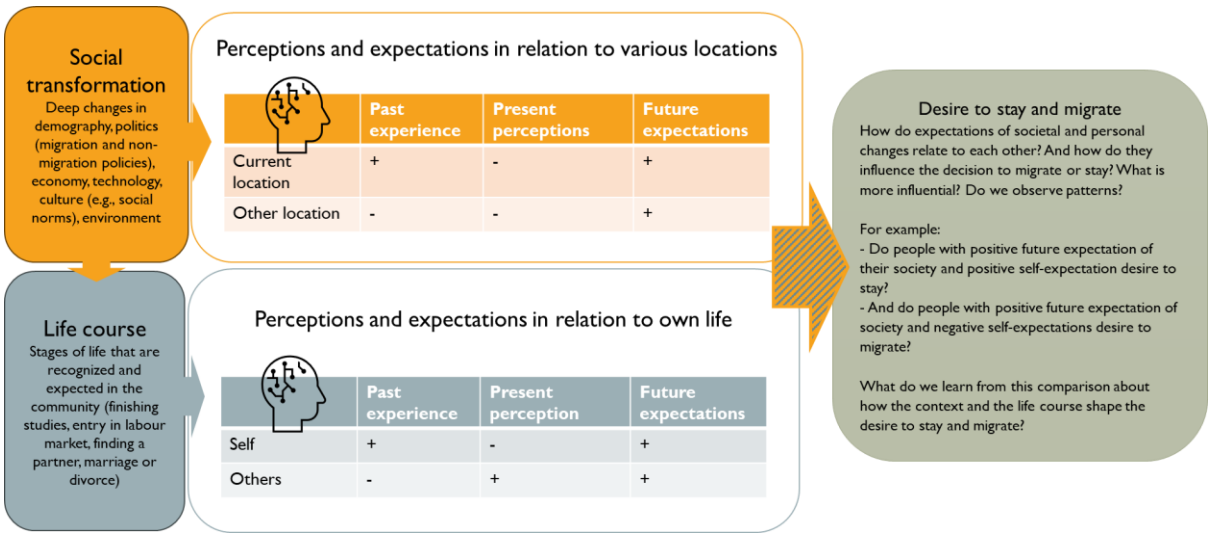
Table 2 presents possible ideal-typical combinations of how people may form positive or negative perceptions of a location based on assessments of various aspects (e.g., public services, transportation) not only on current conditions, but also considering what has happened in the past and what they expect in the future. Past research using this approach has shown that people's subjective experiences and perceptions will often not reflect official histories and development markers such as GDP per capita, employment rates, literacy levels and female participation in the labor force. The focus of Table 2 is then to understand how the dynamic processes of social transformation (macro level changes) are perceived by people over time (see Box 1

Box 1. How do we account for people's experiences, perspectives and expectations on social transformation?

At the start of the research, we gain an overall understanding of the location where research is conducted. This background research also takes place along the social transformation and life course components. For the social transformation, we seek to understand the city and its surrounding area from reading about its history, exploring reports and statistical data and through interviews with local experts, historians and, whenever possible, reading (auto)biographies of local people.

for a brief look at the methodology). The argument we make is that specific past-present-future combinations may be associated with reasons that justify staying or migrating. In some cases, it is possible to see how both migrating and staying may appeal based on the values and valued goals of an individual.

Figure 7. Decision-making rooted in social transformation and life course



In Table 2, a plus (+) indicates that a person gives an overall positive assessment of the location, suggesting that there may be economic opportunities, public services such as schooling and healthcare, and a good level of satisfaction with governance. When thinking of the future, a plus suggests positive expectations and hopefulness that positive changes will take place. A minus (–), on the other hand, indicates an overall negative assessment of the location with, among possible features, few or decreasing economic opportunities, low access and poor quality of public services, and poor governance. When thinking about the future, a minus reveals expectations that negative changes will take place, which may be associated with hopelessness and even despair towards this location's future developments.

The plus (+) and minus (-) are aggregate figures compiled from both direct questions on past experiences, present perceptions and future expectations as well as multiple questions that elicit information about specific aspects of the place of residence such as availability and quality of education, health services, urban infrastructure and transport, governance and quality of life. This approach may reveal some interesting insights. For example, people may describe positively various aspects of society, but they may still give an overall negative overview. This may indicate that factors that for this person make a location 'a good place' were not included among those solicited. This opens the road for questions about what is valuable to this person. It is also possible that, if a person has migration aspirations, the negative overview may possibly reflect cognitive dissonance bias linked to the person's justification of their preference to migrate. Despite these possible shortfalls, we propose, as a starting point, to give equal weights to the direct question and the most specific questions about social transformation.

Table 2. Ideal-typical combinations of positive-negative past experiences, present perceptions and future expectations of location and aspirations to stay or migrate (social transformation)

CASE	Past experience	Present perceptions	Future expectations	Reasons to stay or migrate
A	+	+	+	A history of past and present opportunities contributes to positive expectations for the future, encouraging staying.
B	+	-	+	Past opportunities have given way to current difficulties. Positive future expectations, coupled with strong commitment to place and its development, encourage waiting it out as things might turn around (as in the past).
C	-	+	+	An adverse past has given way to current opportunities and positive expectations for the future, encouraging staying.
D	-	-	+	Opportunities have been limited, but positive future expectations trigger 'waiting it out' and commitment to development. For some, however, waiting for improvement may not be suitable and migration may be a good option.
E	+	+	-	A positive past and present experience is contrasted with a negative outlook. Place attachment, loyalty and commitment to place and its development, may result in 'waiting it out', but migration aspirations may develop.
F	-	+	-	After a difficult past, positive developments are unfolding but they appear to be short-term as the future outlook is negative. Commitment to shape change or willingness to ride out the bad times may encourage staying, but migration aspirations may increase.
G	+	-	-	A history of positive developments gave way to limited opportunities and dire expectations for the future. Place attachment, a sense of loyalty and commitment to development may encourage staying, but for a growing number of people 'waiting it out' may no longer appeal.
H	-	-	-	Persistent limited opportunities and low possibilities to improve livelihoods would encourage migration aspirations. Place attachment, the desire to endure and commitment to shape change may persist if aspects of life that are valued are still achievable *in situ*. These feeling may wane as time passes and hopelessness for change becomes entrenched, leading to growing migration aspirations.

Table 3 follows a similar logic as Table 2 but here the focus is on how people perceive their own life in the current location which may be related to general expected roles at various life stages. Evaluations of one's own past experiences and present opportunities are combined with expectations about whether it will be possible to attain valued goals in the near future, e.g., a specific education or profession, building a strong community, or having a good life. A plus (+) indicates that a person has a positive assessment of what s/he has achieved in the past or is currently achieving, which closely related to the person's valued goals. When thinking of the future, a plus signals positive expectations that one's valued goals are achievable locally. In contrast, a minus (–) indicates an overall negative assessment of whether one's valued goals were met in the past or are being met in the present. When thinking about the future, a minus sign indicates that the expectations are that one's valued goals will not be met *in situ*.

As for Table 2, the plus (+) and minus (-) are aggregate figures compiled from both direct questions on past experiences, present perceptions and future expectations in their personal lives as well as multiple questions that elicit information about specific aspects of their lives. The past, present and future will correspond to specific phases of participants' lives, so that the past 25 years may correspond to childhood, primary and secondary school or it may correspond to courtship, marriage and starting a family. Each of these phases are

associated with specific needs, e.g., friends and a lively social life, need for higher income, family support, social services, safety, and so on. As indicated previously, personal characteristics and their interplay also matter, so being the firstborn and a female may bring extra caretaking responsibilities in some instances or may be associated with great pressure to marry by a certain age. These phases and their associated norms are captured in the life script (see Box 2). Through in-depth semi-structured qualitative questions, we will collect life narratives which will enable us to access several types of information, relate to the life script and generate overall assessments. For example, when learning about childhood, we would ask about ability to go to school, access to materials for school (notebooks, pens, uniforms), quality of schooling and achievements, obstacles, specific (un)met wishes around school, but also explore in a similar fashion access to food and basic resources, family life, life in the community, ability to travel and see other places, and insights about what was important to them at this moment in life. We will collect data in a similar fashion to cover three main life phases which will be decided depending on the location-specific and cohort specific life scripts.

Box 2. How do we account for people's experiences, perspectives and expectations on the life course?

As preparation for the life course, we construct a 'life script', which "represents a series of events that takes place in a specific order and represents a prototypical life course within a certain culture. In addition to expectations about event sequences, life scripts come with age norms – that is, each transitional event in the life course is assumed to take place within a certain age range" (Rubin & Berntsen, 2003: 2). A life script is the blueprint that exists in people's minds and helps to structure their life story, but is not an individual's life narrative, which is personal and includes private knowledge. A life script may be different for different cohorts as technology, political and economic changes and important historical events will shift how society is organized and what is appropriate for certain ages.

Life scripts tend to associate an intense period of life events up to the age of 40. These events are generally seen positively, e.g., completing one's studies, getting married, starting a family. After 40, events are fewer and experienced more negatively, e.g., divorce, death of parents and so on. Life scripts then help to see what is expected in a certain society, the importance of the events within a lifetime and whether the phases are culturally associated with happiness or sadness. It is important to note that life scripts are generic and provide the structure to understand life narratives, which are the personal stories that often do not follow the cohort-specific life script or its timing. We can hypothesize that when the life script and individual life narratives are in conflict, individuals may experience unease, desire for change and may consider migration.

As identified for Table 2, it is possible that we may find discrepancies between a person's overall assessment of their past (or present or future) and their disaggregated answers or descriptions of their past. For example, while a person may give a rather positive assessment of their life, the details may appear rather negative, e.g., inability to go to school as a girl to prioritize the brothers or poor living conditions during childhood. There may be many reasons for these discrepancies. The past may be framed more positively because the feelings of hardship are long gone and the years of youth are associated with more positive than negative events (Rubin & Berntsen, 2003). It may also be that such conditions were seen and perceived as 'normal', namely in that socio-cultural context that was how most people lived or what was expected of girls and boys. Thus, the past was not lived negatively; it is only when the past is reconstructed based on new standards that it takes on a negative outlook. Thus, we can learn a great deal about how people make sense of their life, what has mattered, matters and will matter for their life to be fulfilling, i.e., a good life, when we encourage them to gaze to the past, present and future. At present, for table 3 we propose to weigh more heavily the direct questions because we suspect them to include intangible feelings embedded in evaluations of one's personal life which would otherwise be lost. However, this will be considered further at a later stage.

Table 3. Ideal-typical personal life perception of past experiences, present perceptions and future expectations, resulting reasons to stay or migrate (life course)[8]

CASE	Past experienc	Present perception	Future expectatio	Reasons to stay or migrate
A	+	+	+	Past positive experiences and positive perception of the present life conditions are accompanied with the expectation that future valued goals will be achieved locally, encouraging staying.
B	+	-	+	A positive assessment of past achievements is not matched by similar perceptions of the present. This may be perceived as a slump when the expectation is that valued goals will be achieved locally in the future, encouraging 'waiting it out'.
C	-	+	+	An adverse past has given way to current perceptions of achievement and similarly positive expectations for the future locally, encouraging staying.
D	-	-	+	Past and current development have been negative, but expectations of meeting own valued goals locally as well as a commitment to place, may trigger 'waiting it out'. It is also possible that for some, migration may gain appeal.
E	+	+	-	A positive past and present experience is contrasted with a negative outlook and the expectations that one's valued goals will not be attained locally. While those with place attachment may prefer staying, migration aspirations may also emerge.
F	-	+	-	After negative past experiences, the present is perceived positively, but the future is perceived to be unconducive to meeting valued goals locally. While 'waiting it out' may take place, migration aspirations may also arise.
G	+	-	-	Positive past experiences were not sustained and gave way to present negative perceptions and similar expectations for the future *in situ*, leading to a strong increase in migration aspirations.
H	-	-	-	Constant negative experiences and expectations of more of the same in the future *in situ* are bound to raise strong migration aspirations.

In the process elaborated in the TMA framework, the next step consists of bringing together these two sets of data to analyze how people's perceptions of location and personal life compare and observe any patterns that may explain the emergence of migration aspirations or rather the desire to stay. More specifically, tables 2 and 3 seek to identify whether specific past-present-future combinations are associated with staying or migrating. Table 4 presents three hypothetical persons, each with their two past-present-future combinations side-to-side.

- Case 1 shows a match of social and personal expectations, suggesting that this person feels positive about future local developments, level of opportunities and quality of life and as well as about her ability to achieve her valued goals.
- Case 2 has the same societal perceptions as Case 1, but despite having had good past experiences, he holds negative present conditions and expectations for the future. The mismatch between positive social and negative personal expectations could have different outcomes, but here we suggest that it may lead to migration in search to fulfil valued goals elsewhere.
- Case 3 perceives the current positive social conditions to be temporary, yet this person feels good about his current achievements and future expectations, leading to a preference to stay.

Cases 2 and 3 show mismatches and in both these cases the life course trajectory and personal future expectations determined the expected outcomes. However, it is also possible to envision that the societal

[8] Future elaborations of this table will seek to include the phases in the life course and key demographic characteristics identified in section 4.4.

expectations override: Case 2 may feel that the best option, after all, is to stay because he has recently heard that his cousin has received a loan to start a small business and he may be able to work with his cousin. Perhaps this is the way to achieve his r valued goals locally, e.g., he is going to make it work right here. On the other hand, case 3 may feel that migration may be the best option for him after all. This was influenced by the fact that his father lost his job, and he feels some pressure from the family to provide financial support. At the same time, he has received news that a good friend who emigrated to France is doing very well.

This reveals some of the challenges of this two-level comparative process. Case 2 has negative perceptions of achieving his valued goals, but this may only be partially influenced by a past-present comparison of the self. A comparison to someone else, his cousin, may make staying suddenly seem a good option. Conversely, Case 3 has negative expectation of the place of residence and may base the decision to stay based on self-confidence and the ability to make it through the expected turbulent times. Ultimately, however, he may base the decision on changing family circumstance and a personal comparison to a friend who emigrated.

Table 4. The interplay between societal past-present-future and personal perceptions and resulting decisions to stay or migrate, for a potential migrant

CASE	Level of analysis	Past experience	Present perceptions	Future expectations	Reasons to stay or migrate	Expected outcome
1	ST	+	+	+	A history of past and present opportunities contribute to positive expectations for the future locally, **encouraging staying**.	Stay
	LC	+	+	+	Past positive experiences and positive perception of the present life conditions are accompanied with the expectation that future valued goals will be achieved locally, **encouraging staying**.	
2	ST	+	+	+	A history of past and present opportunities contribute to positive expectations for the future locally, **encouraging staying**.	Migrate
	LC	+	-	-	Positive past experiences were not sustained and gave way to present negative perceptions and similar expectations for the future locally, leading to a strong increase in **migration aspirations**.	
3	ST	-	+	-	After negative past experiences, the present is perceived positively, but the future is perceived to be unconducive to meeting valued goals locally. While **'waiting it out'** may take place, **migration aspirations** may also arise.	Stay
	LC	-	+	+	An adverse past has given way to current perceptions of achievement and similarly positive expectations for the future locally, **encouraging staying**.	

Studying the influence of present perceptions and future expectations is certainly not completely new, but the inclusion of how the past influences migration has been much more weakly explored (Aslany et al., 2021; Vezzoli, 2023). This line of exploration is ambitious but plausible and thinking in combination of perceptions over time seems fruitful. Yet, we may not find any meaningful patterns and we may observe that the explanations lie most strongly with migration-related factors, as suggested in the two variations for Cases 2 and 3 suggested and in recent literature (Aslany et al., 2021). It is also possible that through this exercise we may uncover that the past is only marginally relevant as people mainly assess their present situation and/or

future expectations in the decisions to stay or migrate. These findings, while rejecting our proposed framework, would still be a valuable contribution to current literature on the effects of social change and reference groups on decision to stay or migrate.

4.6 Migration decisions after migration

Once a person has embarked on a migration trajectory, the decisions related to staying, moving onward or returning can also be examined through the TMA framework. The central idea remains that a person would reassess the context of the place of (temporary) residence, his/her own personal experiences and goals and determine whether continued residence or migration is the way to fulfil a valued goal. While the framework remains the same and the research questions do not vary, the elements may take on different degrees of importance as the location changes and life unfolds, providing the person with new information and experiences. Interesting questions to explore are,

- What conditions matter in shaping the desire to stay or migrate after a first migration? Has the relevance of the context and social change shifted over space and time?
- What are the personal values and desires? Have they changed over space and time?
- Is there still a mismatch between what a migrant values and desires and what is feasible locally? Is migration aspiration still the result?

By applying the same model to migrants' different places of residence, we can understand whether the weight of what shapes migration decisions changes over the journey, i.e., as people experience life in different places and as life unfolds. A few assumptions underlie the application of this model after migration. To start, we assume that the knowledge of a location is lower among migrants than among residents, so that the contextual social changes in the past would weigh less among migrants than among residents. We also assume that migrants and residents both perceive and expect different things from a location, so that what a resident may perceive as positive may be perceived negatively by migrants and *vice versa*.

Table 5. The interplay between societal past-present-future and personal perceptions and resulting decisions to stay or migrate, for a migrant

CASE	Level of analysis	Past experience	Present perceptions	Future expectations	Reasons to stay or migrate	Expected outcome
1, ORIGIN LOCATION	ST	+	+	+	A history of past and present opportunities contribute to positive expectations for the future, **encouraging staying**.	Migrate
	LC	-	N/A	N/A	Past negative experiences encouraged migration.	
2, CURRENT LOCATION	ST	N/A	+	+	Relatively limited knowledge of the past, but positive perception of present opportunities and positive expectations for the future, **encouraging staying**.	Migrate
	LC	N/A	-	-	Negative past experiences in origin location, present negative perceptions and similar expectations for the future, leading to a strong increase in **migration aspirations**.	

Among the factors that may gain importance after departure are migration policies, as migrants enter new countries where they may not have the right to stay and work. The knowledge and interpretation of migration polices is bound to change over time and in different locations as migrants become exposed to new realities and acquire new information that may help or hinder their onward journey. An interesting question is how

these new perspectives on migration policies change migration decisions, if at all. Migration policies are an element of the changing social context and are studied as part of social transformation. Table 5 shows how the framework applies to a migrant.

In sum, through the application of the TMA framework we seek to first understand societal changes, what such changes mean for people, whether local society can sustain their life's ambitions, values, expectations, triggering desires to stay or rather for change and possibly migration aspirations. Secondly, we seek to understand how migrants on the move assess their current location – what they observe and what they give value to – and whether anything changed along their migration experience. Moreover, we examine whether migration has changed their personal aspirations, what they value – family, work, education – and assess whether what they expect from society and what they value continue being unaligned, leading to continued migration aspirations or, alternative, to other responses.

5. Advantages and limitations of TMA framework

The TMA framework seeks to contribute in innovative ways to advance research on decisions to stay and migrate. This framework is articulated to bring together and compare people's perceptions of societal change and personal change over time. By disentangling the time dimension, we seek to capture people's perceptions of past change, present conditions, and future expectations to observe how they influence mobility choices. By establishing a two-level comparative model, we seek to observe how people's perceptions of society and personal life relate and whether we observe any visible patterns that are associated with the emergence of migration aspirations or desires to stay.

Despite of the advantages of this novel research perspective, the TMA framework has some limitations. First, tables 2-5 rely on perceptions of various societal and personal aspects, which must be cautiously observed from a number of selected factors that are meaningful in shaping perceptions of society and personal life. Another challenge lies in how to include in an effective manner the phases of the life course and demographic aspects in the life course tables. Moreover, ultimately, all the perceptions and expectations must be converted into individual measures, which would enable comparisons but will undoubtedly lose some of the richness and may appear unidimensional.

Second, the process of comparison that we propose is very complex as people may reveal that in their decision-making they compare themselves to themselves, to others and to multiple other locations across time. We are exploring existing approaches that trace change over time to identify the most promising techniques that we can adapt to our needs. We are currently drawing inspiration from representations of network model in biographic life (see Schoumaker & Beauchemin, 2015) and the mobility trajectory mapping (see Mazzucato et al., 2022). Third, analyses that combine macro- and micro-level factors presents some challenges. In addition to more conventional statistical analyses, we are also exploring techniques such as QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis) and NCA (Necessary Condition Analysis), which would allow us to identify configuration of conditions leading to migration and stay outcomes.

A final note concerns meso-level factors and their seeming absence in the TMA framework. We are aware that information, social connections, migration policies and several other migration-relevant factors play an important role in shaping aspirations to migrate and to stay. And indeed these factors are included in the TMA framework, both within the social transformation and the life course analyses. Within the analysis of societal changes, we would explore whether there is a strong presence of migrants and returnees, information about migration, norms about migration, migration policies, migration agents or, conversely, organizations that seek to promote local opportunities for young people and so on. At the personal level, meso-level factors will be captured via knowledge on migration in the family, access to family and friends in other locations within and outside of the country, accessibility to visas and permits, narratives and norms about migration and visible migration attempts by the participant and people in the participant's close network of family and friends. It was a conscious choice to make the TMA framework a two-level comparative model and embed the meso-level into the macro and micro levels. While we do not currently see any drawback to this approach, we may encounter unforeseen limitations upon implementation.

Despite these limitations, we strongly believe that the TMA framework can open new avenues to better understand how people make sense of their social and physical environment and their personal lives within it over time, and how past experiences shape present perceptions and future expectations. By including examinations of social norms and values, their roles and changes over time, we feel that we will generate new insights on the relevance of past experiences on present and future decisions that involve staying and migrating.

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Annex

Table A1. Factors, processes & mechanisms in selected migration decision-making models

Factors identified as relevant for migration decision-making	Processes and mechanisms
De Jong and Fawcett (1981), revised by De Jong (2000)	
1. Individual human capital 2. Household characteristics and resources 3. Community characteristics 4. Migrant networks 5. Family migration norms 6. Gender roles 7. Values/expectancies 8. Residential satisfaction 9. Behavioral constraints/facilitators	2 phases: migration intentions > migration behavior • Individual human capital, household characteristics and community characteristics influence all other factors (listed left), thus those 3 factors only have indirect influence on migration intentions • Factors 4-9 influence migration intentions and migration behavior.
Boneva and Hansan Frieze (2001)	
1. Motives: achievement, power or affiliation motivation 2. Values: work or family centrality 3. Personality traits 4. Other psychological factors 5. Opportunities in sending and receiving countries 6. Environmental factors in sending and receiving countries	2 phases: desires to emigrate > migratory behavior • Motives, values and personality traits influence migration desires. • Migration desires result in migration behavior, which can be influenced by opportunities and environmental factors in sending and receiving countries.
Otrachshenko & Popova (2014)	
1. Home country characteristics (unemployment, GDP per capita, governance, etc.) 2. Individual socio-economic characteristics 3. Life satisfaction 4. Individual economic/non-economic reasons for migration	1 phase: • Home country characteristics influence life satisfaction and decisions to migrate • Individual socio-economic characteristics influence life satisfaction and decisions to migrate • Life satisfaction and individual economic/non-economic reasons for migrate influence decision to migrate
Hoppe and Fujishiro (2015)	
1. Expectations 2. Attitudes about migration 3. Values around work and career 4. Beliefs about their own ability to reach their goals (efficacy)	4 phases: • a pre-decisional phase • a pre-actional phase • the actional phase • actual migration
Kley (2017)	
1. Opportunities, or lack thereof, at place of origin and potential destination 2. Social support, or lack thereof, at place of origin and potential destination 3. Individual resources to overcome obstacles	3 phases: • a pre-decisional phase (considering migration) • a pre-actional phase (planning migration) • the actional phase (realizing migration) Effort to determine the relevance of the three factors in the three phases
Carling and Talleraas (2016), Carling (2017, 2019)	
1. Circumstances 2. Prospects 3. Desire for change 4. Migration infrastructure	2 phases: migration aspirations > migration • Circumstances along with prospects for improvement may lead to a desire for change. • The desire for change may lead to migration aspirations among many other possible responses, e.g., pursuing an education or actively trying to change the circumstances. The presence of a migration infrastructure may contribute to the emergence of migration aspirations.

	• Migration aspirations, influenced by the ability to migrate and the migration infrastructure, may lead to migration, failed migration attempts of involuntary immobility.
Czaika et al. (2022)	
1. Basic needs, capacity to aspire, changing aspirations 2. Information about migration, type of information, sources of information 3. Time 4. The individual, the groups and external forces	4 dimensions: • Formation of migration aspirations. • Searching and evaluating information about migration options. • The planning and implementation of migration decisions. • The locus of control.