

Interactive comment on “Un-restricted agents? International migration of the highly skilled revisited” by H. Pethe

Anonymous Referee #1

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With the conceptualisation of the role of agency in the context of international labour migration the paper addresses a relevant question within the scope of Social Geography. While the paper provides a good overview of selected research streams within the field of high skilled migration research, it does not provide sufficient detail concerning the role of the agency. What is more, the structure of the paper should be more streamlined, as the reader is lost in some parts of the paper. However, this paper might contribute to a more substantive discussion of the role of agency in the context of highly skilled labour migration.

Although the main goal of this paper is to argue for a more actor-centred approach within high skilled migration research, this is not always reflected adequately in the paper. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to divide the paper into two parts: The first

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(conceptual) part focuses on the conceptual argument (role of agency). In this context, it might be helpful to review existing actor-centred approaches within high skilled migration research (see e.g. Rolfes 1996, Findlay / Li 1998) and related parts of social geography/sociology (e.g. sociological career studies: Schneider et al. 2002a, 2002b). In doing so, the paper would avoid the appearance of a pure description of high skilled migration patterns. In the second part of the paper, the author could elaborate on her own argument supported by empirical evidence from the green card study, as this was almost not referred to in the present version of the paper.

Non-labour migrants are of significance in the academic discourse. However, as chapter 4 appears somewhat disconnected from the rest of the paper, I recommend addressing this issue in a separate article.

Though the call for a more actor-centred approach of high skilled labour migration is justified, contributions from related fields such as low skilled migration should be considered, too. Actor-centred approaches have been quite prevalent in migration research. Furthermore, it may be advisable for the author to be more cautious in some of her observations (p. 211: international migration of labour Æ with positive effects on the nation states; p. 216: most researchers have investigated from a British perspective - see for example Avveduto / Brandi 2004, Iguchi 2002 etc.).

While it is clearly understood that the author argues for a stronger consideration of the individual's agency in migration processes, the question arises as to what extent a migrant can be conceptualised as being independent from prevalent structures. Instead of proposing a total shift from company-oriented to actor-centred research (p. 222), it may be worthwhile reflecting about an integrated approach overcoming this structure-actor-dichotomy.

Minor remarks:

- Though the conclusion that a lot of research has focused on intra-company transfers is correct, the reasons for this should be mentioned: It was not - as might be assumed

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from this paper - due to academic ignorance or overlooking but rather due to difficult data access.

- What is the criterion for being highly skilled? Is it purely as suggested the tertiary education (or rather professional experience etc.)?

- P. 218, 26: private networks - compare also migration networks approach (e.g. Fawcett 1989, Boyd 1989)

- P. 219, 24: increasing inter-company mobility of highly skilled professionals - empirical evidence/data for this statement?!

Technical Corrections:

- Data source of figure 1 is missing! - p. 214, 16: compared to semi-skilled or low skilled personnel (instead of: semi-skilled or skilled personnel) - p. 215, 18: there is some evidence (instead of: are)

References:

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