

Semester Research Topic Proposal

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Title: Revisiting Migration Theories through the Lens of High-Skilled Migration**Abstract**

This research aims to explore the interplay between individual's willingness to migrate, as framed by Hein de Haas's capabilities and aspirations migration theory (2021), and the macro-structural influence of economic agglomeration on high-skilled migrants.

Introduction

In an interconnected and globalized world, high-skilled migration has become a significant force shaping a competitive labor market. High-skilled individuals, equipped with tertiary education, specialized knowledge, and in-demand technical expertise, are increasingly seeking opportunities beyond their national borders [1]. Firms, local economies, and institutions play a crucial role in facilitating the flow of talent across borders, often attracted by the cost savings and competitive advantages offered by highly skilled workers.

Despite the growing prominence of high-skilled migration and its multifaceted implications for labor markets and economies, existing migration theories are limited in providing a comprehensive explanatory framework. While existing migration theories, such as push-pull models and neoclassical economic theories, often assume rational utility maximization, they are reductionist and fail to account for the diverse migration patterns observed and a high-skilled migrant's agency over the decision-making within a dynamic global labor market.

This research aims to revisit these migration theories by exploring the capabilities and aspirations migration framework [2] through the lens of high-skilled migration and agglomeration economies. By integrating micro-level individual decision-making with macro-level economic structures, this research seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of high-skilled migration.

Background

From Thomas Schelling's 1971 foundational model of segregation [3], social scientists have been trying to understand the motivation behind an individual's decision to migrate. Schelling's segregation model, while insightful in demonstrating how micro-level preferences can lead to macro-level segregation, simplifies real-world complexities by assuming relocation is costless and unrestricted. Beyond simple preferences, people's worldviews do not remain static and can evolve over time based on their experiences.

Everett Lee's push-pull model, a comprehensive migration theory introduced in 1966, suggests that an individual's migration decision is driven by both "push" factors that compel them to leave their place of origin and "pull" factors that attract them to a new destination [4]. Lee's model recognizes the significant influence of personal factors such as age, gender, and social class on migration, but it does not fully account for human agency. The push-pull model depicts migrants as passive actors responding to external structural forces, without fully accounting for their agency in the decision-making process.

Hein de Haas introduced a capabilities and aspirations migration theory in his 2021 paper to conceptualize relocation as a function of their abilities, agency to choose, and perceived geographical opportunities. He defined, “human mobility as people’s capability (freedom) to choose where to live – including the option to stay – instead of a more or less automated, passive and ‘cause-and-effect’ response to a set of static push and pull factors (2021)”.

Economic hubs, formed by geographically concentrated firms, foster a cooperative ecosystem that boosts productivity, reduces costs, and encourages knowledge sharing. In a globalized economy, companies can draw talent from anywhere in the world. This competitive advantage attracts high-skilled migrants from a global talent pool, who are drawn to the opportunities despite challenges like high living costs and congestion. These agglomeration economies act as a magnet for migration due to their benefits and potential for innovation.

Building upon the foundation laid by theories like Lee's push-pull model, this research will incorporate de Haas's capabilities and aspirations framework to create a richer accounting for the agency of high-skilled migrants' decision-making within the context of agglomeration economies.

Problem Statement

There is a need to revisit migration theories to better understand the dynamics of high-skilled migration and the role of agglomeration economies. This research aims to fill this gap by integrating the theoretical capabilities and aspirations migration framework with empirical data from the OECD International Migration Database, which includes information on high-skilled migration and can be used to analyze migration patterns and trends.

The OECD International Migration Database can help identify geographical clusters that host large proportion of international high-skilled migrants; their country of residence and areas within those countries.

Expected Outcome

Development of an agent-based model to simulate and visualize how individual capabilities, aspirations, and macro-level agglomeration factors interact to influence high-skilled migration decisions, providing a more contextualized understanding of migration patterns. This is the first phase in implementing micro-level agency-driven decision model for the high-skilled migrant.

Methodology

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data.

- **Data Collection:** Use of real-life datasets, including the OECD International Migration Database [5], World Bank Migration and Remittances Data [6]
- **Agent-Based Modeling:** Development of ABMs to simulate individual decision-making processes based on aspirations and capabilities.
- **Spatial Computation:** Use of GIS and spatial analysis to validate ABM results and analyze migration patterns.
- **Econometric Analysis:** Application of econometric techniques to assess the economic impacts of high-skilled migration and evaluate policy effectiveness. Policies adopted by

OECD such as points-based systems, post-entry rights, bilateral agreements, student visas and intracompany transfers.

References

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