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Migration in a changing climate. Towards a translocal social resilience approach

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Abstract

Climate change and migration are drawing increasing interest from researchers and policy makers as well as from the general public. While in the beginning a simplistic and geo-deterministic comprehension of the environmental impact on human mobility had dominated the discussion, the framing of the relationship has recently become more differentiated. Vast empirical evidence derived from rural livelihoods research clearly shows that migration is an important strategy of households when dealing with multiple risks, including environmental stress. This has led to the growing acknowledgement of the idea of “migration as adaptation” in migration-environment research. We consider this conceptual development an important step for a better understanding of this nexus. Nonetheless, migration as adaptation has several shortcomings. Firstly, it is narrowly focused on migration as an adaptive response to environmental risks and neglects the significant impact of other forms of migration. Secondly, it does not cover other dimensions of how people, communities and societies deal with environmental change: a blind eye is all too often turned to processes of resilience building. Thirdly, migration as adaptation has been found to be interpreted in a way which justifies migration policies with neo-liberal tendencies. In order to overcome such drawbacks, we propose an approach that integrates translocality and social resilience. In this paper we thus introduce the concept of translocal social resilience and reflect on its conceptual implications. We will thereby show how this approach can improve the understanding of the migration-environment nexus, and how it can also shape the concept of migration as adaptation, allowing for nuanced and critical views on the dynamics in the migration-environment context.

Zusammenfassung

Der Zusammenhang zwischen Migration und Klimawandel stößt in Wissenschaft und Politik sowie in der allgemeinen Öffentlichkeit auf zunehmendes Interesse. Ein zunächst vereinfachtes und geo-deterministisches Verständnis von Umwelteinflüssen auf Bevölkerungsbewegungen weicht zunehmend differenzierten Darstellungen des Nexus zwischen Migration und Klimaveränderungen. Zahlreiche empirische Studien zu ländlicher Entwicklung aus dem Bereich der „Livelihoods“-Forschung belegen die große Bedeutung von Migration als Strategie im Umgang mit unterschiedlichen Risiken, einschließlich umweltbedingter Stressfaktoren. Daraus resultierend hat sich in der Migration-Umwelt-Forschung das Konzept von Migration als Form der Anpassung („migration-as-adaptation“) etabliert, das jedoch diverse Schwächen aufweist. Zunächst zeichnet sich ein starker Fokus auf Migration als ausweichende Reaktion auf Umweltrisiken ab, wohingegen der entschei-

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dende Einfluss anderer Migrationsformen weitgehend vernachlässigt wird. Maßnahmen, die auf Haushalts-, Gemeinde- und gesamtgesellschaftlicher Ebene zur Steigerung von Resilienz gegenüber Umweltveränderungen ergriffen werden, finden zudem wenig Berücksichtigung. Überdies lässt sich eine Auslegung des Konzepts beobachten, aus der sich die Forderung nach einer neo-liberalen Umgestaltung von Migrationspolitik ableiten lässt. Angesichts dieser kritischen Aspekte wird im vorliegenden Artikel „translokale soziale Resilienz“ als ein alternativer konzeptioneller Zugang zur Migration-Umwelt-Forschung vorgestellt. Dieses Konzept ermöglicht eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit sozialer Resilienz, indem es *Bourdieu's* Praxistheorie mit Konzepten zu „*hazardscapes*“ sowie zur sozialen Konstruktion von Ökosystemdienstleistungen verknüpft. Des Weiteren berücksichtigt translokale soziale Resilienz die Bedeutung sozialer Netze, welche die Verbundenheit von Migranten sowohl zu ihren Herkunftsgebieten als auch Zielorten widerspiegeln. Das Konzept translokaler sozialer Resilienz trägt dem dynamischen Charakter von Resilienz und Livelihoods insofern Rechnung, als dass es die besondere Bedeutung sozialer Praktiken für die Aushandlung sozio-ökologischer Verflechtungen im relationalen Raum hervorhebt und dabei auf die wechselseitige Verbindung zwischen Ziel- und Herkunftsregionen von Migranten hinweist. Der Ansatz translokaler sozialer Resilienz zeichnet sich somit durch seine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit den Ursachen von Verwundbarkeit und den strukturellen Hemmnissen für die Resilienz translokaler Akteure in Zeiten eines sich wandelnden Klimas aus.

Keywords Migration, climate change, social resilience, migration as adaptation, translocality

1. Introduction

“A better understanding is required of the extent to which migration influences vulnerability and resilience in the face of environmental change” (*Black et al 2011: 449*).

There is growing concern about the impact of global climate change on patterns of human mobility¹ and the challenges that may result, such as conflicts and humanitarian crises (*Afifi and Jäger 2010; Piguet et al. 2011*)². The UNFCCC³ (2010) has recognized these issues as constituting a field requiring urgent action, and have called for researchers and policy-makers to engage in advancing the understanding of the relationship between the environment and migration as well as the creation of necessary policies. At the same time, international organizations (e.g. IOM, UNHCR), national governments (e.g. UK, Germany) and a growing research community (for an overview see *Piguet and Laczko 2014*) have intensified their engagement in the issue. Yet, most attention has been drawn to the question of how climate change acts as a driver of out-migration. Policy recommendations tend to focus on adaptation measures that prevent or reduce migration, since migration is usually considered as a problem or a threat (e.g. WBGU 2008). This dominant discourse drawing on *El-Hinnawi's* (1985) publication on environmental refugees has shifted considerably in the past few years. Today, there is a growing consensus that the relationship between climate change and migration is more complex and multifaceted than that

suggested by simple cause-effect models and rather alarmist projections (*Black et al. 2011a; Warner and Afifi 2014*). Instead of presenting migration as an outcome of failing climate mitigation strategies, migration is increasingly viewed as a strategy of and for adaptation. The narrative of migration as adaptation, which the influential Foresight Report on climate change and migration advocated for (2011), is, in turn, replacing the one on environmental refugees (*Barnett and Webber 2010; Scheffran et al. 2012; Tacoli 2009*)⁴. But what does migration as adaptation mean? How is migration as adaptation conceptualized? What shortcomings can be identified and how can we move on?

This article will not reiterate the evolution of the discourse on climate refugees and its critique, as it has been done by distinguished scholars before (e.g. *Felgentreff and Geiger 2013; Piguet 2013*). The starting point of our contribution is the recent paradigm shift towards migration as adaptation. An important point of reference is the above-mentioned Foresight Report (2011) and related scientific publications (*Adger et al. 2015; Black et al. 2013; Black et al. 2011b*), which have significantly promoted this idea. The article will neither provide a discursive nor a political economic critique of the new policy narrative, which has been done, among others by *Methmann and Oels (2015)*, *Bettini (2014)*, *Felli (2013)* as well as *Felli and Castree (2012)*. Instead, we build on the critique which is raised in these publications that migration as adaptation can be considered as a neo-liberal narrative that promotes the individualization

of risks and a shift of responsibility from states and collective actors to those already overburdened.

We propose the concept of translocal social resilience as a critical analytical framework to create a comprehensive understanding of migration in the context of environment and climate change, which could provide evidence for policy-making beyond the neo-liberal agenda. In this vein, we seek to link Bourdieudian-influenced critical scholarship on vulnerability and resilience as well as migration and translocality. In the following sections we describe the development of migration as adaptation as a policy narrative, address its scientific roots and current conceptual framing. We then proceed to discussing its shortcomings and outlining translocal social resilience as a critical approach to the environment-migration nexus.

2. “Migration as adaptation” – a genealogy of an evolving policy narrative

The relationship between environment and migration has been debated in a controversial manner over the last decades. The “maximalist” – to use *Suhrke’s* (1993) often cited categorization – asserted a direct relationship between environmental stress and human mobility (*El-Hinnawi* 1985), underpinning their arguments with hyperbolic number claims of “environmental refugees” (*Myers* 2002). The “minimalists”, on the other hand, understood migration as a complex process – which consisted of a myriad of factors, with the environment playing a small ‘push’ role – and rejected the notion of environmental refugees completely (e.g. *Black* 2001). Most recently, more nuanced publications have surfaced, which frame migration as complex and multi-causal, giving more weight to the environmental impact on drivers of migration. With the recent narrative on migration as adaptation, the debate explicitly emphasizes the merits of migration in the face of climate change (*Black et al.* 2011a).

This transition has been driven by a shift in the policy sphere and an active science-policy interface. *Felli* (2013: 341ff.) and *Bettini* (2014) have reconstructed the recent emergence of the new policy narrative: *Felli* identified the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a major actor in promoting the policy shift from climate refugees to climate migrants and the notion of migration as adaptation. The process of constructing a new discourse has involved the problematization of the issue and raising aware-

ness among policymakers and researchers through high-level panels (2007), IOM publications (the first by *Brown* 2008) as well as publications in authoritative journals, such as *Forced Migration Review* by senior staff members of the IOM. It has involved the creation of empirical evidence through research at the science-practice interface – especially by the UNU-EHS and research consortia funded by the European Union, e.g. “Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios” (EACH-FOR 2007-2009) or more recently “Migration, Environmental and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy” (MECLEP 2014-2016). Also, international organizations such as UNHCR (2011), UNDP (2010) and World Bank (2010) have addressed and promoted the issue – although in a less active manner (*Felli* 2013). On the international climate policy arena the “paradigm shift” – as *Gemmen* (2015) terms it – has been expressed in the Cancun Adaptation Framework (2010), which calls for “measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation (...)” (UNFCCC/CP/2010/2, 11 February 2010, para. 4(f); see *Warner* 2012 for a detailed analysis). The IOM has recently shifted the environmental migration issue from their research unit to one of management, and has fostered the operative mobilization for the issue among policymakers through capacity building training workshops⁵. At the same time, national and regional actors in the development sector have addressed the issues, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2012) for the Asia Pacific Region, GIZ (*Lacy* 2011) and BAMF (*Müller et al.* 2012) in Germany and especially the Foresight Report on Migration and Global Environmental Change (Foresight 2011), which was issued by the UK government.

The latter is particularly important, as it gained an authoritative character through the involvement of leading scientists in the field (e.g. *Richard Black, Neil Adger, Andrew Geddes*) and publications in acknowledged journals (e.g. *Nature Climate Change, Global Environmental Change*). Furthermore, it has outlined in detail what the policy shift would involve. The report has brought four issues to the attention of the climate-migration science and policy community: First, the report rejects a mono-causal, geo-deterministic reading of the environment-migration nexus, acknowledging migration as a normal aspect of life and stressing the complex, multi-causal, non-linear character (Foresight 2011: 31). Second, the report sheds light on the role of

immobility. It highlights that migration processes involve those left behind; so-called “trapped populations,” which are unable to move as well as those who choose not to move (Foresight 2011: 29). Third, the report brings destination areas into focus, addressing the problem of movement to risk areas as well as the relationship between migration, urbanization and related issues (Foresight 2011: 180). Lastly, it explicitly highlights migration as adaptation – acknowledging the potential benefits of migration through remittances, especially as a means of insurance and risk diversification (Foresight 2011: 144), as well as its transformational potential (Foresight 2011: 143). Policy recommendations linked to the migration as adaptation concept revolve around migration management and the facilitation of temporary and circular labour migration, measures to enhance livelihoods through micro-credits and micro-finance (Foresight 2011: 142), the facilitation of remittances, and the utilization of migration as an insurance strategy (Foresight 2011: 144).

Felli and Castree (2012; and *Felli* 2013) see the shift in the policy discourse to migration as adaptation as a change in accordance to the general recent emphasis in climate policy from the sole focus on mitigation to the acknowledgement of adaptation (*Pielke et al.* 2007). This – as *Felli and Castree* (2012) observe – is linked to a shift of responsibility away from states and collective actors to the “adapted” and entrepreneurial migrants and their households. Blame, in essence, is shifted from Northern actors who must mitigate greenhouse gases to independent individuals, mainly in the global South, who must take advantage of existing or newly-created structures of governance in order to adapt. As the Foresight Report envisions, these “new” systems of governance would revolve around creating regional or bilateral labour schemes that make it easier for individuals to have the option to migrate. Meanwhile, as *Felli* (2013) notes, the terms and rights enshrined within these systems would be mostly dictated by Northern countries. As the Foresight Report’s (2011) emphasis on insurance schemes exemplifies, it is up to the enterprising individual to seek out and obtain ways in which to reduce risk, and the only outlet happens to be the market. From this point of view, migration as adaptation is part of a neo-liberal agenda (*Bettini* 2014; *Felli and Castree* 2012), suggesting more flexible and globalized labour markets as the “silver bullet” for addressing the migration-environment nexus.

3. Migration as adaptation – scientific roots and current application

The ideas related to migration as adaptation and the way it is conceptualized are rooted in two established research strands: a) migration and rural livelihoods vulnerability and b) migration and development:

Research on migration in the context of vulnerability of rural livelihoods – the first strand – has emphasized the embeddedness of migration in the local livelihoods context (*McDowell and de Haan* 1997). There is a general consensus that the importance of migration in rural areas in the context of agricultural change is growing worldwide (*Kelly* 2013; *Tacoli* 2009). Authors such as *Rigg et al.* (2012: 1470) have termed this widespread trend as the “delocalization of life and living” in rural areas of the Global South. Interpreting migration from livelihoods vulnerability perspectives (*Etzold and Sakdapolrak* 2012; *Sakdapolrak* 2008, 2014) offers a way of contextualizing the environment-migration nexus, and enables a nuanced understanding of the associated interactions: While households are exposed to multiple social and ecological drivers – including climate-related stresses – migration as a multi-local livelihood strategy is one of various ways in which households endowed with different sets of assets cope and adapt. Migration in this context could be a sign of failure of the local adaptive capacity, a means of adaptation, or an enhancement strategy that reduces vulnerability and strengthens resilience. Publications on migration as adaptation reflect insights of that research strand by embedding (environmental) migration within the rural livelihoods context (e.g. *Khoa et al.* 2012), by considering migration as not (solely) a crisis but a normal aspect of people’s livelihoods (*Tacoli* 2009) as well as through a conceptual underpinning within the framework of vulnerability and resilience (*Klasen and Waibel* 2013).

The second strand of research, upon which “migration as adaptation” draws, focuses on the effects of migration dynamics on development pathways in the place of origin of migrants – a subject which has been a central concern in migration studies for a long time (*Adamo and Izazola* 2010; *de Haas* 2009). Empirical evidence suggests that the relationship is complex, context-specific and influenced by multiple factors on different scales (*Massey et al.* 1998). Research has highlighted the selectivity of migration; causes and motivations; temporal and spatial patterns of migra-

tion; the flow of social and financial remittances, and return-migration as important processes through which the feedback loops of out-migration are mediated. In this complex interaction, mono-causal explanations cannot be identified. Assessments of evidence for the effects of out-migration on socio-economic development, for example, can be placed on a continuum ranging from pessimistic to optimistic (for an overview: *Massey et al. 1998; Mendola 2012*). On the one hand, pessimistic interpretations conclude that out-migration and remittance flows lead to the development of dependencies, hinder local economic progress, increase social inequality and facilitate excessive consumption that cannot be maintained by local livelihoods; on the other hand, optimistic outlooks emphasize the beneficial development potential of such impulses for establishing local enterprises, loosening the risk and liquidity constraints of households to productively invest and, via multiplier effects, for generating benefits for those who cannot participate in migration processes. Insights of this research strand are reflected in the consideration of those left behind not directly participating in the migration process (*Toyota et al. 2007*), in an increasing focus on feedback processes of migration, particularly the role of remittances (*Kelly 2011*), and in the acknowledgement of migration's transformative potential for adaptation (*Vertovec 2006*).

Building on the insights of these two research strands, a growing number of publications have addressed migration as adaptation in the context of climate change in recent years (e.g. *Tacoli 2009; Barnett and Webber 2010; Warner 2012*). However, only a few of these contributions address migration as adaptation on a conceptual level (see *Adger et al. 2002, McLeman and Smit 2006, Deshingkar 2012, Scheffran et al. 2012, Black et al. 2011b, Black et al. 2013, Warner and Afifi 2014*). Among them are some rather brief conceptual outlines (e.g. *Deshingkar 2012*); others address different aspects without full integration (e.g. *Scheffran et al. 2012*). The most comprehensive and integrated framing of migration as adaptation is given by *McLeman and Smit (2006)*. Despite the heterogeneity of the publications, four common conceptual features can be identified:

First, migration is interpreted as a result of the interplay of exposure to environmental and climate-related risks and the capacity to cope and adapt (*Black et al. 2013; McLeman and Smit 2006*). Different mobility outcomes – including migration, dis-

placement and immobility (*Black et al. 2013*) – are considered as the manifestation of adaptive capacities in the light of exposure to stresses (*McLeman and Smit 2006: 35*). Multi-causality of migration and other drivers of migration which interact with environmental and climate related stressors are explicitly acknowledged (*Black et al. 2011*). *Scheffran et al. (2012: 120)* differentiate between a) in-situ adaptation that can prevent (forced) migration, which highlights the role of non-mobility related adaptive response; b) migration as adaptation, which acknowledges migration as an adaptive response in the face of environmental and climate related stress and c) migration for adaptation, which considers migration – regardless of the reason for the movement – as a forced adaptive transformation.

Second, most publications draw on the conceptual clusters of vulnerability (*McLeman 2010, Black et al. 2013*) and/or resilience (*Adger et al. 2002, Scheffran et al. 2012, Deshingkar 2012*). By drawing on insights from this research a deterministic understanding of the environment-migration nexus is avoided. However, the differences in the understanding of the two concepts – vulnerability and resilience – are often rather vague. *McLeman and Smit (2006)*, for example, refer to vulnerability as a function of exposure and adaptive capacity; *Deshingkar (2012: 2)* refers to resilience as the “ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses” and addresses the issue in a similar way.

Third, households represent the analytical focus of most conceptualizations. The endowment with assets is emphasized as an explanatory variable for mobility in the context of climatic and environmental stress (*Deshingkar 2012; McLeman and Smit 2006*). Differentiation is mostly made between physical, natural, human, social and financial capital. The role of social networks is highlighted by some contributions in particular (*Scheffran et al. 2012*).

Lastly, feedback processes of migration on the places of origin of migrants play an important role. The focus is on the function of remittances not only as an additional income source enhancing livelihood diversification, but also as a source of investment for adaptive measures. The transformative potential of migration is addressed with regard to agricultural change (*Deshingkar 2012*), change in the social structure of communities (*McLeman and Smit 2006*) as well as innovation and institution building (*Scheffran et al. 2012*).

4. The limitations of migration as adaptation

Even though this conceptual development can be viewed as a contribution to a better understanding of the migration-environment nexus, we have identified limitations which function not only as barriers to a full comprehension of the migration-environment nexus, but which also run the danger of justifying neo-liberal policies. The first two points of the critique resonate with general concerns raised against mainstream livelihoods analysis (see *Sakdapolrak* 2014). The remaining three points reflect the lack of recognition of the full complexity of migration (see *Greiner* and *Sakdapolrak* 2013):

First, there is the tendency that agency of the household – as the focal analytical unit – is over-emphasized and that migration is interpreted as the result of rational decisions of households utilizing their assets strategically. This view fails to consider that not all action can be considered as strategic and that migrants and those who stay should be treated as persons with “perceptions and ideas, hopes and fears, norms and values” (*Kaag* et al. 2004: 54), which influences their actions and decisions. Furthermore, the strong focus on the household neglects the embeddedness of households in wider power-laden social relations and related structural constraints. This means an over-emphasis on individuals and households as the subjects of change and transformation, which is then reflected in policies and recommendations for migration as adaptation.

Second, assets – which play a central role in the framing of migration as adaptation – are mostly considered as objective facts and portrayed in a static manner (with the exception of *McLeman* and *Smit* 2006). By taking endowment with assets for granted, issues of unequal access to assets, of their genesis and accumulation as well as the socially-embedded and contested nature are neglected. Such specific selective conceptual reading and interpretation of scientific contributions results in a shift of attention from socio-economic contexts to the capacity to adapt and the quality of adapting. This, in turn, presents societal actors as having the same interest, rationality and aspirations, only differing in the level of assets they command. Consequently, the individual would be the one who has to respond to a changing climate. This neo-liberal reading of migration as adaptation has been strongly criticized by *Felli* and *Castree* (2012) as well as *Bettini* (2014).

Third, while financial and social remittances play a role in all publications, connectedness remains under-theorized. The question why some keep connected, why some return, others do not, and even how the pattern changes over time is mostly not touched upon. Even though social networks are addressed, the term is mainly used in a metaphoric manner, often used interchangeably with social capital or assets that actors either possess or lack, neglecting potentially negative aspects such as social pressure within networks (*Steinbrink* 2009). Furthermore, they tend to take networks for granted, rather than focusing on the way networks evolve over time (*Islam* and *Walkerden* 2014) and are “formed in practice” (*Ryan* 2011: 708).

Fourth, the Foresight Report (2011) has highlighted the importance of considering destination areas when addressing migration in the context of environmental and climate change. But the conceptualization of destination areas remains widely absent. While remitting is taken for granted, the role of remittances is only accounted for as far as their impact on migrants’ sending areas is concerned. Socio-spatial settings which migrants are situated in and where thus financial and social remittances hail from have attracted little attention. Since the focus is also on more generalized categories of migration streams, mainly international and rural-urban movements, the specific places of destination of migrants and their life circumstances there have been neglected. Consequently, the embeddedness of mobile actors in their respective places of arrival and their influence on social and financial remittances is not adequately addressed.

Finally, the link between social and ecological spheres remains poorly addressed. While in most conceptualizations environment is considered as a threat, a comprehensive understanding needs to address both sides – environment as a threat as well as a source of benefits for society. Despite referring to the concept of resilience, literature on migration as adaptation has developed in remarkable isolation to current research on social-ecological resilience (*Folke* et al. 2010; for an exception see *Oliver-Smith* 2012) and ecosystem services (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). This is a missed opportunity – as we argue – since these concepts would provide a fruitful basis for operationalizing complex social and ecological interactions beyond one-sided notions of ecosystems as either “threat” or “resource”, while at the same time shedding light on linkages across scales and societal processes of adaptation and transformation (*Walker* et al. 2004).

5. Towards translocal social resilience

Following the call by *Black et al.* (2011: 449) that a better understanding of the role of migration for vulnerability and resilience in the face of environmental change is needed, we build on the contribution of *McLeman and Smit* (2006) and propose translocal social resilience as an integrated analytical framework. In doing so we want to address the limitations of the conceptualization of migration as adaptation and at the same time overcome its neoliberal interpretations. In the following, we outline our conceptual approach beginning with its premises, followed by a description of its three basic components:

The basic premise of our approach to the environment-migration nexus is the following: We start from the observation that migration, regardless of the projected environmental changes, is already occurring and will continue to be a major dynamic of global change (UNDP 2009). Migration is an integral part of livelihoods of many people and households around the world (*Kelly* 2011). Therefore, we argue that in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the environment-migration nexus we need to analyze mobility in the specific context of vulnerable livelihood systems (*Sakdapolrak* 2008; *Findlay and Geddes* 2011), which necessitates an understanding of people's vulnerability implicit in everyday life (*Wisner and Luce* 1993). We consider this as an argument against the over-emphasis of research on exceptional events and crisis, which disguises the root causes of vulnerability and the role of mobility within it. Following *Richmond* (1993) we consider migration and displacement not in a dichotomous manner, but as poles on a continuum of proactive and reactive patterns of mobility which result from the interplay between structural forces and human agency. Due to fine-grained socially and spatially differentiated patterns of mobility in the context of vulnerability (*Perch-Nielsen et al.* 2008; *Tacoli* 2009), we need to create an understanding of the household and individual level without neglecting their embeddedness in social and ecological contexts. We emphasize the need to systematically address and theorize "indirect feedback dynamics that operate through the impact of migration on the sending and receiving contexts" (*de Haas* 2010: 1587) – an aspect which is often neglected, as *de Haas* observes. Following the insights from research on resilience of social-ecological systems (*Folke et al.* 2010; *Brown* 2014), we consider it crucial to understand the environment-migration nexus not as a one-sided relationship of the

environmental impact on migration decisions, but as a specific mode of human-environment interaction that entails various types of complex feedback dynamics (*Greiner et al.* 2015; *Oliver-Smith* 2012; *Murphy* 2015).

On a conceptual and theoretical level we seek to link recent scholarship on migration (*Thieme* 2011; *Taylor* 2011; *Thieme and Siegmann* 2010) and translocality (*Brickell and Datta* 2011), as well as on social vulnerability (*Sakdapolrak* 2010; 2007) and social resilience (*Obrist et al.* 2010; *Keck and Sakdapolrak* 2013) which is theoretically informed by *Bourdieu's* Theory of Practice (*Bourdieu* 1998). Our conceptualization of translocal social resilience builds on three basic components:

- 1) social practices of mobile and immobile actors;
- 2) social construction of human-environment relations;
- 3) translocal connectedness.

First, informed by the Theory of Practice (*Bourdieu* 1998), translocal social resilience is interpreted in terms of social practice (*Sakdapolrak* 2014). It is understood as the interplay between the structural properties of households' livelihoods embedded in local and translocal networks and specific risk contexts, and human agency. The latter refers to the choices, freedoms and capabilities of mobile and immobile actors to – among other things – establish and maintain translocal connectedness which influences the preparedness for future uncertainties (*Adger et al.* 2002). Seen from this stance, social resilience entails the capacities to cope with and adapt to risks and to transform their livelihoods. The capacity to cope refers to the ability to react and to recover from an external shock, while the capacity to adapt entails the ability to not only respond to an external shock but also to reflect on potential development strategies and to deal ex-ante with possible future shocks. The capacity to transform instead refers to the ability to purposefully change the mode of social ecological interactions and explore alternative livelihood pathways (*Keck and Sakdapolrak* 2013, *Walker et al.* 2004).

Following *de Haan and Zoomers* (2005) social practices are operationalized in terms of style and pathways. The latter indicates that the practices of translocal social resilience, the decisions and actions taken by mobile and immobile actors, to cope, adapt or transform their livelihoods have a history. They are rooted in past personal or collective experiences and learning processes. While pathways point to the temporal

dynamic, the notion of style points to the need to see action and decision not in an individualized and atomized manner but as distinctive features of groups sharing social position, cultural repertoire, knowledge, interests and prospects – and therefore also the expression of the social position of actors in the social fields (*de Haan and Zoomers 2005: 40*). These social fields are characterized by power-laden relationships between dominant and subordinate actors who compete over resources. Rules governing the fields – which are often contested – determine access to resources and therefore shape ways of dealing with risks (*Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97; de Haan and Zoomers 2005: 43; Thieme 2011*). Actors' positions in the field are linked to the unequal endowment with various forms of capital (*Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 96*). Capital, in this interpretation, is not considered as given or static but as “accumulated labour” and “social energy” (*Bourdieu 1986: 81*). It has a dynamic character and is a result of social struggle over power-laden social relations and therefore necessitates – as *van Dijk (2011)* points out – to question how it is generated, distributed and destroyed.

Altogether, a practice-based understanding of translocal social resilience accounts for the interdependent relation of actors' agency and structural features in social fields reflecting in constant negotiations of capitals, which eventually influence the capacities to cope, adapt and to transform, and therefore, the way society interacts with its environment.

Second, our conceptualization refers to the social constructedness of human-environment relations, implying that both spheres cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Furthermore, the full comprehension of the migration-environment nexus, we argue, necessitates the conceptualization of the environment not only as a threat but as the crucial resource for livelihoods. In our view, the combination of the concepts of “hazardscapes” developed by *Mustafa (2005)*⁶ with *Ernstson's (2013)* observations on the “social production of ecosystem services”, provides a fruitful way to address both favourable and adverse environmental aspects in the context of migration.

With *Mustafa's* concept of “hazardscapes” (2005), environmental and climate-related stresses are not simply treated as “natural events” originating outside the social sphere altogether. The concept of hazardscapes, which was inspired by the idea of landscape as “the materialized result of complex human-environment

relations” (*FOR 1501 2010: 7*) in geography, acknowledges both the “constructedness of nature in human contexts” and “nature in the realist sense” (*Escobar 1999: 2*). The experience of hazards is “not just a function of the material geographies of vulnerability, but also of how those hazardous geographies are viewed, constructed, and reproduced” (*Mustafa 2005: 566*). Hazards, therefore, have a pluralistic character, in temporal, spatial and social terms. While *Mustafa* focuses on adverse character of the environment, *Ernstson's* remarks on the “social production of ecosystem services” (*Ernstson 2013*) looks at the flip side, the tangible and intangible benefits obtained from this human-environment interaction. In the context of environmental and climate change, *Ernstson* considers the capacity of social-ecological systems to provide sufficient and viable ecosystem services as a crucial aspect of resilience (*Ernstson 2013*). This way, *Ernstson* provides a systems perspective on human-environment relations. However – similar to *Mustafa's* interpretation of hazards – *Ernstson* does not perceive ecosystem services as something objectively existing “out there”, but as a human-environmental relation produced through social practices of articulation, regulation and distribution of benefits derived from ecosystems (*Ernstson 2013: 8*). We consider both concepts as useful for the understanding of migration in the context of climate change as they address social-environmental interactions in a non-essentialist manner, while not losing sight of the physical aspects of the environment. Taking together both concepts provides an analytical framework that helps to operationalize the migration-environment nexus in both its adverse and beneficial nature.

Drawing on relational approaches to space and place (see *Appadurai 1996: 178; Bourdieu 1997*), research on translocal social resilience also needs to take into account connectedness of actors at a distance and interlinking of places as constituting elements of resilience.

Hence, third, our approach emphasizes the continuing and enduring links between migrants and their areas of origin (*Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004*). In the course of widespread migration and multiplying forms of mobility (*UNDP 2009; Sheller and Urry 2006*), the translocal connectedness of people and places to others in different and often distant localities intensifies (*Zoomers and Westen 2011*). We utilize the concept of translocality, which systematically seeks to capture these processes and dynamics (*Hedberg and do Carmo 2012; Brickell and Datta 2011; Zoomers and Westen*

2011; Greiner 2010; Steinbrink 2009; Oakes and Schein 2005). It builds on research of migration networks and remittances and uses insights from studies on transnationalism, but seeks to integrate these into a more holistic, actor-oriented and multi-dimensional understanding of grounded socio-spatial interdependencies (Brickell and Datta 2011). Translocality emphasizes the importance of a simultaneous analytical focus on motilities and localities, which entails focusing on multiple forms of mobility and connectedness without neglecting the importance of the places where people live (Oakes and Schein 2005). The focus on places and localities does not mean a neglect of global processes, but – following Marcus (1995) – “the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations” (Marcus 1995: 102) and is therefore a vital part of the analysis. Three aspects are of particular importance: place, locales/translocales and networks (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). In the following we refer to them by integrating the conceptual considerations outlined above:

- A dynamic and multi-dimensional notion of place is strongly emphasized. Place is considered as a node where negotiations between mobile and non-mobile actors – unequally endowed with various forms of capital – are grounded; where particular global flows converge and influence the social production of ecosystem services as well as the perception of ecosystem threats and benefits and hence influence the social resilience of households and communities (Brickell and Datta 2011: 10; Ernstson 2013; Mustafa 2005).
- Migration stretches the locales, i.e. the settings for social interaction, beyond places. Migration processes feed into and, at the same time, are shaped by pathways and styles of social practices constituting social fields. The social field as the context for social practices is insofar expanded as locales are eventually stretched to translocales – translocal social fields – through the establishment of routine activities in and between multiple places. Remote interactions within translocales, in turn, impact on pathways and styles of practices and therefore on social resilience.
- Social networks are considered to be an outcome of, as well as a precondition for, translocal social practices, and crucial for exchange and communication (Steinbrink 2009; Greiner 2011). Both migrants and non-migrants are embedded in

these networks (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) which allow the circulation of resources, information and commodities, as well as transferring social remittances, i.e. ideas, practices and identities, and hence influence the capacities to cope, adapt and transform livelihoods at the place of origin of migrants (Levitt 2001).

Conceptualizing translocal social resilience in this way emphasizes i) the everyday practices of social actors who are embedded in social fields, which are structured by the endowment of social actors with different forms of unequally distributed capital and, at the same time, are ii) embedded in translocal social networks that facilitate the flow of resources, practices and ideas between places. An approach to translocal social resilience as constituted by practices in translocal social fields therefore places emphasis on the circumstances under which connectedness emerges, is maintained or is non-existent. Furthermore a translocal social resilience approach to the environment-migration nexus stresses iii) the agency of mobile and immobile actors with regard to the articulation, regulation and distribution of ecosystem services and hence unravels the constructed and politicized nature of human-environment relations.

When attention is drawn to understanding translocal dynamics, manifold questions relating to the environment-migration nexus emerge: In what way does the utilization of translocal networks broaden, hinder or nurture access to resources? How do ideas, knowledge and ideologies that migrants acquire flow back into their sending areas? What kind of social learning processes do they initiate? What are the material, political and discursive effects in terms of agricultural practices and sustainable resource use? How do such changes affect social stratification and power relations, and what effects do these changes have on the social resilience of households and communities?

6. Concluding remarks

Migration as adaptation has emerged as an important policy narrative in the debate on the climate change-migration nexus. We have sketched the evolution of the narrative that stresses the multi-dimensionality and the potential merits of migration in the context of climate change, as a countermovement to previous deterministic and security-oriented discussions around climate refugees. The IOM and an active

science-policy interface (e.g. Foresight Report) have played a crucial role in the promotion of the idea. However, migration as adaptation has also been found by several critics (e.g. *Felli, Bettini*) to facilitate neo-liberal policy options by shifting the responsibilities to deal with climate change from the state to already overburdened and vulnerable migrants. Behind the background of existing discursive and political economic critique of this new policy narrative, our contribution focused on the way migration as adaptation has been conceptualized. We carved out the commonalities of the conceptual framing and highlighted its limitations, namely its neglect of both structural constraints to individual agency and the unequal distribution of assets, its little consideration of actors' connectedness through social networks and the linkages between origin and destination areas of migrants, as well as the poor conceptualization of human-environment relations inherent in the migration-climate change nexus.

In the face of such shortcomings, we suggested, as one possible way forward, the conceptual framework of translocal social resilience. Thereby we account for interrelations of human mobility and environmental changes, which both are dynamics looming large in people's livelihoods. Trying to circumvent the trap of normativity, we integrate a critical reading of social resilience informed by the Theory of Practice with the concept of hazardscapes and the concept of the social production of ecosystem services. Furthermore, we account for translocal connectedness drawing on a relational approach to space and places. Our approach thereby acknowledges that resilience and livelihoods are not static but based on social practices in contested local and translocal social fields, provoking processes of re-negotiation, adaptation and/or transformation of livelihoods. Such processes of change are building on, and at the same time feeding into, the mode of social-ecological interactions in the very places of origin and destination. An analysis of migration in the context of climate change from a translocal social resilience approach moves beyond rationalistic interpretations of the environment-migration nexus that have resulted in neo-liberal policy recommendations and focuses both on the root causes of vulnerability, including the structural and systemic constraints, as well as on the scope for agency and resilience of actors. It explicitly takes structures and processes on multiple social and spatial scales into account, and it especially brings back the perspective on actors, their mobilities, translocal embedding and their capacities for agency in the age of climate change.

Notes

- ¹ In April 2007, the United Nations Security Council held its first debate on the impacts of climate change on peace and security in which the probability of "migration on an unprecedented scale because of flooding, disease and famine" was acknowledged. Online available at: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>.
- ² The paper is based in part on *Sakdapolrak, P.* 2014: Building resilience through translocality. Climate change migration and social resilience in rural communities in Thailand. – TransRe Working Paper Nr. 1, Department of Geography, University of Bonn, Bonn.
- ³ UNFCCC, Cancun Adaptation Framework (CAF), 2010 Climate Change Conference, Cancun, Mexico (COP 16/ CMP 6), para. 4(f). Online available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf#page=4>.
- ⁴ *Gemenne* (2015) has recently criticized this shift and called for a renewal in the consideration of the term 'climate refugees'.
- ⁵ E.g. the Asia-Pacific Training for Policymakers and Practitioners on Migration, Environment, Climate Change and Adaptation in Seoul 21st-23rd March 2013, organized by the IOM.
- ⁶ See also remarks on "riskscapes" by *Müller-Mahn* and *Everts* (2013).

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