

*CERCETAREA INTERNAȚIONALĂ ÎN DOMENIUL PROCESULUI DE STRĂMUTARE*A BRIEF REPORT ON A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

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## ABSTRACT

A BRIEF REPORT ON A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

This paper offers a brief presentation of the resettlement conference entitled “Economics, Social Justice, and Ethics in Development-Caused Involuntary Migration” that took place in the Hague from October 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, as part of the broader 15<sup>th</sup> Metropolis Conference. The focus of the paper is on the contents of this high-level scientific event as well as on the broader concerns animating the community of resettlement researchers, namely the problems of economics, ethics and social justice in involuntary resettlement processes. In this context, the trailblazing contributions of Professor Michael Cernea as well as his enthusiasm and constant encouragement for young researchers are singled out for special attention.

**Keywords:** research on involuntary displacement, conference, The Hague.

The International Metropolis Project is an international network of researchers, policy makers and NGOs promoting research for improving development policies and programs, migration processes, institutional development etc., all based on empirical social science research. One of the regular events associated with this project is the annual conference which reunites a select and diverse group of scholars, researchers, and international experts and practitioners. The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of this conference, which took place in The Hague, the Netherlands, from October 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, was devoted to “**Justice and Migration**”, a topic explored from the vantage point of what the conference organizers called “paradoxes of belonging”. The notion of paradox was, indeed, a very apt description of what the conference was about.

While a large number of workshops dealt with voluntary migration flows from different parts of the Global South to the developed North, a significant

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number of sessions boldly took a different tack. Briefly put, they were concerned with *involuntary* resettlement flows created by development projects when people are forcibly displaced for the projects' so-named "right of way" needs. The usual dilemmas faced by the voluntary migrants are quite different from the imposed risks to which the displaced populations are exposed. While the former consisted of people who migrated internationally in search of a better life for themselves, the second was composed of all those who were compelled to migrate internally to make place for development projects aimed at improving the lives of the majority in their societies. In this way, the International Conference on development-forced displacement and resettlement (DFDR), organized distinctly within the Metropolis framework, complemented successfully the broad Metropolis – 2010 event.

The moving force behind the International Resettlement Conference was Professor Michael Cernea (USA/Romania) together with Dr. Susanna Price (Australia). The institutional sponsor of this event was the International Network of Displacement and Resettlement (INDR), a professional association of social scientists from many countries interested in the study of displacement and resettlement processes caused primarily by development projects of various kinds. I thought of accounting in our Journal, through this essay, on The Hague international resettlement conference, because this relatively young domain in the social sciences is now growing rapidly in terms of research publications, policy relevance, and practical importance. Moreover, such studies have started in Romania as well. While before 1989 the Romanian state performed a considerable number of forced displacements (including some very major ones as those from the Ada Kaleh Island or the Bicaz hydropower dam), no social research was published or even permitted on such traumatic processes. The forced displacements of populations became known more through mouth-to-ear whispers than through systematic inquiry and openly reported findings. Currently, however, a number of researchers have already trained their inquiry lenses on these processes: among them Ecaterina Balica and Anca Velicu (2005), Carmen Bulzan and Florina Bulzan (2007), Mihai Pascaru (2007), Sorana Toma (2007), Monica Costache (2008), the author of this essay (Alexandrescu 2011), and probably others. As Romania is gradually engaging in post-transition development, and further industrialization and urbanization, certainly instances of involuntary resettlement will become more frequent. That means that more sociological research, carried out in depth and transparently, as well as more social policy work in this domain will become indispensable.

The name of Professor Michael Cernea, as one of the founders and leaders of this domain in social science and social policy, does not need to be introduced to the readership of this journal. Romanian sociologists, among others, know him all too well and are familiar with at least some of the writings from his long and distinguished publication record: either his early writings in Romania, or his many writings in the US. What deserves to be emphasized anew, however, is his

inexhaustible enthusiasm and unrelenting search for ways to make sociological and anthropological research relevant and useful for those who, perhaps, need it most. Not only is his continuous quest for ethically-informed applicable knowledge impressive, but so are his efforts to mobilize those who possess case-based empirical knowledge to share and build upon each-others' experiences. For Professor Cernea, it was probably not enough to be an outstanding scholar if his own-expanding knowledge was not matched by a tenacious mentoring capacity. One recent proof of this was, of course, the International Resettlement Conference hosted in the Hague, the Netherlands.

The present essay attempts to give an image about the debates of this major international conference, but its richness definitely prevents a complete account. Therefore, I focus on some of the newer themes that the conference brought up. One of this is the strong emphasis on social justice and ethics in carrying out some of the sharply controversial processes in development – the process of obtaining “right of way” for project constructions by displacing and involuntary resettling some resident population groups. In international sociological parlance such processes are most often defined as “DFDR processes”, *i.e.* development-forced displacement and resettlement. The other theme which I will address below is the issue of impoverishment risks embedded in displacement processes, and the use of a theoretical and analytical model – the impoverishment risks and reconstruction model (IRR) – for examining these risks, their intensity, manifestation, outcomes and, indeed, paradoxes.

The title of the resettlement conference – “Economics, Social Justice, and Ethics, in Development-Caused Involuntary Migration” – reflects the long-term concerns of Professor Cernea, Price and of a distinguished group of resettlement scholars over the last three decades. Involuntary displacement and resettlement induced by development projects (including dams, highways and urban renewal schemes) has been a growing preoccupation for social scientists over the last fifty years (early examples include Colson 1960 and Scudder 1962). The paradoxes of *development* projects (which lead to the impoverishment of vast numbers of people), the staggering magnitudes of these processes (involving in the past decade around 15 million people annually, or about 150 million worldwide) and the repeated failures of governments and development agencies in correcting these unintended outcomes have drawn the attention of growing numbers of scholars. Among the topics which have garnered the most interest are precisely those included in the title of the Hague conference: economics, ethics and social justice. Before discussing the rich content of this conference I will briefly trace the intellectual history of each of these key terms in the resettlement literature<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A key resource that I used in this brief review was Cernea's extended annotated bibliography available at: [http://displacement.net/members/component/option,com\\_comprofiler/task,userProfile/user,240/Itemid,101/](http://displacement.net/members/component/option,com_comprofiler/task,userProfile/user,240/Itemid,101/)

The consideration of social justice, for example, was tackled in Cernea's early publications that addressed the social aspects of development, a daring and novel element in the usually "technocentric, commodocentric, and econocentric" (Cernea 1996: 15) orientations and biases of the development establishment. The title of the book expressed unambiguously the stance taken by, and the carefully crafted argument of, the volume's editor and co-authors: "*Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*" (1985<sup>2</sup>). Since then, all work on resettlement was animated by this simple but powerful idea: that "'putting people first' is the crux of any development project" (Cernea and Freidenberg 2007: 12). The economic aspect of displacement resettlement was taken up in several of Cernea's articles (1993 and 1998) but received extensive treatment in his edited volume titled *The Economics of Involuntary Resettlement: Questions and Challenges* (1999). Of particular interest is the exchange between Cernea and the economist Ravi Kanbur (Cernea and Kanbur 2002) on the compensation principle in involuntary resettlement.

As mentioned above, the ethical aspects of displacement and resettlement were tackled early on in Cernea's work (e.g. Cernea 1995). His permanent interest in ethical issues, however, helped in developing a key analytical model for investigating (and dealing with) the *unethical* consequences of development-induced population displacements. This model – known as *The Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model*<sup>3</sup> – was painstakingly developed and refined over a whole series of publications (Cernea 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000 and in the most recent volume, in 2008). The IRR model was destined to have a long and distinguished career<sup>4</sup>, becoming currently the most widely used theoretical and analytical model in the international resettlement literature, and being reflected in an impressive number of writings by a wide diversity of authors (e.g. Agnihotri 1996; Thangaraj 1996; Joseph 1998; Mathur 1998; Mahapatra 1999; Sapkota 1999; Dwivedi 2002; Pandey 1998; Schmidt-Soltau 2003; Heggelund 2006; Modi, 2009; Mathur 2011; and countless others).

The 2010 Hague conference further illustrates the continued relevance of the IRR model. Of the 38 papers presented at the conference, ten (over one fourth of all papers) used the IRR explicitly in their analytical approaches. Others built in more or less direct ways on the key analytical insight of the model – namely that more often than not, development projects result in mis-development for the populations affected by poorly planned and underfinanced resettlement schemes.

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<sup>2</sup> The book was revised and expanded in 1991; it is the latter edition which has been included in the list of works cited.

<sup>3</sup> Cernea's IRR model postulates that involuntary displacement results in eight impoverishment risks: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, marginalization, social disarticulation, and loss of access to common property.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.his.com/~mesas/irr\\_model/irr%20references.htm](http://www.his.com/~mesas/irr_model/irr%20references.htm)

More than the figure mentioned above, what is important about these papers is their geographic and thematic diversity. For example, Latha Ravindran and Briesh Sahoo, economics professors at the Xavier Institute of Management in India, seek to categorize different mining-affected families in a community from Orissa State, India, based on measuring the intensity of impoverishment. They suggest that the eight risks of the IRR model may have different intensities in different projects and sectors, and therefore, they should be attributed different weights. Ravindran and Sahoo developed and proposed some original measurement procedures to assess risks intensity, and thus, to refine further the use of the IRR model by other researchers. Devi Prasad also uses the IRR model to explore the recent resettlement and relocation experiences in the state of Gujarat and in India more generally.

Half-way around the world, in Costa Rica, Gabriela Stocks, a PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Florida, discusses the short vs. long-term effects of resettlement on a community, again employing the IRR model in combination with Thayer Scudder's four-stage framework for successful involuntary resettlement. Jayantha Perera moves the focus of interest back to Asia, to the case of one hydropower development project in Nepal which, interestingly enough, was in the planning stage for over two decades yet never reached the stage of implementation. He argues for an expansion of the IRR model by including 'planned-only-project' scenarios within the ambit of resettlement theory and practice. Projects that are planned and then abandoned, argues Perera, "harm people, disintegrate communities, and label communities as 'displaced community' and 'host community' generating hostilities against each other" all the while there is no firm commitment to implement these projects. These 'planned-only-project' scenarios may become increasingly common at the global level, as NGOs coalitions mobilize successfully to prevent or at least mitigate some of the worst forms of impoverishment risks. The case of the planned Roşia Montană project, Romania, may illustrate this trend as well (more on this below).

Some papers took a comparative or multiple site approach. While developing a portfolio review of 224 World Bank-financed projects in Africa that implemented Resettlement Action Plans (RAPs), Maria Cruz (lead social scientist at the World Bank) used the IRR model to build a monitoring framework by identifying elements of RAPs that suggested high risk. Dolores Koenig, from the American University, studied development-caused forced displacement and resettlement (DFDR) in urban areas, covering five cases in four countries, namely Bamako in Mali, Dakar in Senegal, and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, all located in savanna West Africa; and Mumbai and Delhi in India. Her main finding is that in most urban projects, developers focus on the IRR risks of homelessness and landlessness, while paying little attention to the more significant risk of joblessness. At the same time, Dolores found, the risks of marginalization and community disarticulation have a negative effect on the risk of joblessness. Renu

Modi, an independent, well-experienced Indian researcher (Modi 2009) and former consultant with the Inspection Panel of the World Bank explores the contentious and complex resettlement and relocation (R&R) process involved during the implementation of the Mumbai Urban Transport Project (MUTP), India. Her key insight is that the R&R policy for this project was based on inadequate baseline surveys and false assumption that over 99 percent of project-affected households were “squatters”. The subsequent upward revisions in the numbers of displaced included a significant percentage of private property owners and middle income shop owners. The use of a uniform standard in compensating housing, adequate for prior houseless slum dwellers but applied indiscriminately to other middle-class house owners, has thrown the resettlement operation out of gear, delayed the project and resulted in enormous cost overruns.

In turn, Anouk Fouich, Tunisia, representing the African Development Bank (AfDB) at the conference, discussed in her paper the relatively recent formulation and the official adoption by the AfDB of a formal policy on involuntary resettlement for its own projects in Africa. Quite interestingly, she emphasized that AfDB also adopted Cernea’s IRR model, like the World Bank and explicitly included in its policy detailed definitions of the impoverishment risks identified in the model. The policy asked AfDB’s borrowing countries in Africa to take into account these risks and to protect the people through counter-risks and socio-economic reconstruction measures.

Finally, other two papers explicitly build on Cernea’s IRR paradigm in analyzing and interpreting specific case studies from the Sardar Sarovar project in India (Arjun Patel) and the proposed Roşia Montană mining project in Romania (Filip Alexandrescu). Both papers share an interest in the problems of community disarticulation, which are obvious, albeit very complex, in both the Romanian Rosia Montana and the Indian cases. On the other hand, the social nature of the “communities” differs in the two contexts. Patel discusses what has happened to tribal communities during multiple shifts, namely “from non-monetized economy to monetized economy, from agriculture-forest-river-animal husbandry based economy to agriculture based economy, from relatively isolated place to a place having more exposure, from ‘little tradition’ to ‘mainstream tradition’, and lastly but most importantly from tribal social structure which is more egalitarian to a non-tribal social structure which is non-egalitarian”. At Roşia Montană, one does not encounter all these profound changes in community structure and meaning, since this place has long been a rather cosmopolitan mining town. However, the Roşia Montană paper (Alexandrescu 2011) documents how the mobilization of a community organization opposing the mining project has had unexpected consequences for the displacees. While many were able to negotiate adequate compensation packages for their properties with the mining company, thus minimizing the risks of impoverishment, this relative individual success was achieved at the cost of a thoroughgoing process of community disarticulation. The

uncertainties surrounding the ultimate fate of this mining project have ceaselessly eroded local-level solidarities and have rendered meaningful community action powerless. To quote Ted Downing (1996), people have managed to persist physically and some of them even to prosper, “but the community that was is no more” (1996: 34).

At the same time, the paper on Roşia Montană showed that the IRR model is sufficiently flexible to be adapted to contexts quite different from those for which it was initially developed, that is large infrastructural projects funded by the World Bank or regional development Banks. In the case of the Roşia Montană project, from which the International Finance Corporation (the private lending arm of the World Bank) withdrew after initial negotiations with the project developers in 2002, the IRR model still demonstrated its utility. Even if in this case the impoverishment risks were greatly minimized due to a favorable context in which property owners could negotiate, to some extent, their compensation packages, the model retains its usefulness by keeping researchers alert to the surreptitious effects of displacement (for example marginalization or social disarticulation) or its long-term and, as yet, unknown risks for those who still refuse to move from Roşia Montană but may eventually be forced to do so (landlessness or joblessness).

It may be argued that displacement and resettlement research is an area of development studies in which cumulative knowledge is possible and, furthermore, it is actually happening. Being quite close to a Kuhnian “normal science” scenario, the remaining papers in The Hague resettlement conference, as well as the titles of the sessions themselves, all suggest that a variety of case studies and micro or macro analyses can be conducted within a unitary framework, articulated around the major risk categories identified in the IRR model. Within this broad framework, participants at the Hague conference tackled various aspects of the resettlement problematic. Some of them looked at projects involving extractive industries. For example, Chansouk Insouvanh painted in vivid strokes the deleterious consequences of a mining project in Laos while Latha Ravindran and Biresh Sahoo used a linear programming method to evaluate the effects of a coal mining project in Orissa, India. A larger number dealt with hydropower projects. Chiara Mariotti focused on the Polavaram dam in Andhra Pradesh, India, as a case of “adverse incorporation” while Brooke Wilmsen used the case of the Three Gorges dam to point out specific strengths and weaknesses of Chinese policy and practice in the area of resettlement.

More theoretical or policy-oriented papers were similarly inspired by the impoverishment risks model, whether in its diagnostic-explanatory or predictive and planning functions (Cernea 1997), even if not in explicit terms. For example, Michaela Bergmann, senior advisor at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), reported on the experience of EBRD in incorporating the World Bank’s policies in developing its own 2008 Environmental and Social Policy.

On the other hand, using the case of a natural gas extraction project in West Papua, Indonesia, Susanna Price shows how the IRR model has been used during the project preparation stage as a predictive and planning tool to address each of the eight impoverishment risks as part of the Land Acquisition and Resettlement Plan. The Price paper brought into broad public discussion, for the first time, a remarkable case of a private sector project launched by a large transnational European corporation in an isolated part of Indonesia. Price underscored that the IRR model was used as a key guide, not only for identifying the likely risks caused by the project for the population to be displaced but also, most importantly, for methodically planning counter-risks and reconstruction measures incorporated in the same project. This was designed to ensure “resettlement with development” – that is, the *improvement*, rather than the mere restoration, of the living standards and income levels of those affected compared to their pre-project situation, both for those displaced and for their host villagers. Price made a key point that while many comparable projects end up impoverishing the adversely affected and displaced people, this LNG project demonstrated that the opposite result is achievable. Due to the deliberate application of the counter-risks strategies suggested in the IRR model itself, the planners developed a detailed plan (2006<sup>5</sup>) specifying well defined project activities for recognizing and compensating traditional resource rights; for housing reconstruction; for equipping the new villages with water, electricity and other services; for creating adequate health care and other social amenities; for developing new productive land; and, not least, for ensuring adequate access for the resettled villagers to new income generating opportunities. Such positive examples are still rare in international practice. Price’s paper had the merit to convincingly demonstrate that infrastructure projects should not succumb to the impoverishment risks inherent in DFDR, but have the responsibility and the means to provide redress and, beyond that, developmental solutions – and to finance them adequately from project funds.

Altogether, the Conference illustrated once again how the conceptual and analytical apparatus introduced for the first time less than two decades ago by the IRR model, and particularly its key-concepts of “impoverishment” and “imposed risk”, have by now transformed the lexicon of the international resettlement literature and of the public debate about development-caused displacement.

Finally, the participants at the conference were very diverse, bridging the academic, professional and activist spheres. Doctoral students were fortunate to receive feed-back from senior colleagues. The latter, in turn, benefited from the intensive research experience of scholars who had devoted significant periods of their professional lives to the study of one or several cases of development-induced displacement and resettlement. Representatives of civil society groups and NGOs were able to convey their insights into the “struggles on the ground”, while at the

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.adb.org/Documents/Resettlement\\_Plans/INO/38919-01-PS-RP.pdf](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Resettlement_Plans/INO/38919-01-PS-RP.pdf)



same time becoming more familiar with the broader contexts in which their “causes” were located.

It is worth mentioning that the conference was also an occasion to celebrate the anniversary of 30 years from the adoption of the first ever international policy on involuntary population resettlement by the World Bank, which has exercised internationally an enormous positive effect toward improving resettlement operation worldwide throughout the last three decades. Maninder Gill, an Indian sociologist who is the current chairman of the “Social Practice Group” of the World Bank, presented a special paper at the opening of the conference, outlining the revolutionary content and the far-reaching impacts of that policy, as well as Cernea’s role in authoring it and in overseeing its Bankwide implementation for many years. It was a matter of pride to learn that a Romanian-American sociologist, Michael Cernea, who had only shortly before joined the World Bank as its first in-house sociologist, was the social scientist who initiated, drafted and proposed for adoption by the Bank’s management that new set of policy guidelines, which dramatically changed the way in which such operations have been subsequently carried out by the World Bank itself, and by many agencies and governments throughout the world, which replicated that policy.

Overall, the Hague resettlement conference was a noteworthy moment in the history of the resettlement community. New professional contacts were forged and older ones were renewed, insights and cases lingered on in the memory of the participants, nurturing the next wave of research and writing in this field. The conference also offered space for informal meetings which were probably as interesting and productive as the formal ones. One of these less formal meetings, kindly initiated by Professor Cernea, was that of the Romanian participants at the Hague conference, reuniting doctoral students in sociology and economics and researchers, living in Finland, the United States, and Romania.

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<sup>6</sup> This article was re-published in *Revista română de sociologie [Romanian Review of Sociology]*, new series, XIX (1–2): 3–35 (2008). Page numbers in the body of the above article refer to the Romanian version.

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