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This collection contains the papers of the Fellows from the *Pontica Magna* and the *Gerda Henkel* Fellowship Programs. Both are aimed at researchers from Eastern Europe: the first focuses primarily on the Black Sea region, the second on the countries of the former Soviet Union.

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SEASONAL MIGRATION AS LOCAL PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: HISTORICAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN RURAL SOVIET TRANSCARPATHIA (1940S–1960S)

Abstract

Transnational labor migration from the western border regions of Ukraine is often explained by macro-economic factors: the unemployment that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and generally low wages. In this paper I argue for a more complex, culturally informed and historicized understanding of labor migration. I show that in Transcarpathia, labor migration has a history of at least one to one and a half centuries, from the second half of the 19th century to this day. I especially focus on the “translation” of the local traditionalized practices of mobility into the Soviet system in the late 1940s and early 1950s, following Transcarpathia’s annexation by the USSR. Understanding seasonal migration as a historically shaped competence of local communities and conceptually framing it in terms of “local practical knowledge” and “cultural reserve” allows to question the deterministic impact of macro-political factors and instead pay due attention to the grassroots knowledge and agency.

Keywords: Transcarpathia, seasonal labor migration, Soviet Union, Ukraine

Introduction

Since Ukraine gained independence and opened its borders for international movement, the population of Transcarpathia,¹ a mountainous border region in the west of Ukraine, became actively involved in transnational labor migration. In the 1990s, Transcarpathians searched for jobs in the neighboring countries to the west from the border—in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, while some also kept migrating eastward—to other regions in Ukraine, and to Russia. In the early 2000s, the list of migrant workers’ destinations extended further to the west,

as they started exploring job opportunities in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece.² Scholars emphasize economic factors when explaining the upsurge in labor migration from Transcarpathia, in particular the rise in unemployment in the region during the economic crisis that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union and low wages in the existing workplaces, combined with the legalization of the border crossing.³ In this paper, I will show that labor migration was not a spontaneous response to changes in labor market during the recent period of politico-economic “transitions”, but that this social phenomenon had a consistent history in Transcarpathia, starting at least from the late 19th century. I argue that Transcarpathia’s rural population’s involvement in a variety of migration practices in Austria-Hungary and during the interwar period informed the shaping of a local knowledge that was mobilized when facing Sovietization in the late 1940s. During the Soviet period, the practice of seasonal migration did not cease to exist, on the contrary, it thrived despite the official administrative restrictions on internal mobility.

Scholars who study labor migration in the former Soviet spaces tend to either ignore or deny the existence of seasonal labor migration in the USSR after Stalin’s rise to power. It is maintained that the specific political and legal environment of the Soviet Union prevented individuals, especially members of collective farms, to move freely around the country, as they were not entitled to internal passports until 1974. In such a restrictive setting, how could independent decisions about the directions of labor migration and choices of the place of employment be made? Moreover, how could labor migration exist in the form of a self-organized enterprise that would involve large groups of people? In the Imperial Russia, labor migration, or “*otkhodnichestvo*”, was an economic practice aimed at supplementing rural subsistence farming with additional income earned, primarily, in the cities.⁴ The passport system introduced in 1932 had allegedly curbed rural out-migration, severing autonomous mobility for the part of population that was traditionally engaged in *otkhod*—the majority of rural inhabitants – therefore rendering the very possibility of maintaining the practice of seasonal migration unviable.⁵

However, in practice, the absence of a passport did not always mean an absolute ban on movement. As western scholars have shown back in the 1980s, the passport and residence permit system (passport/*propiska* system), put in place by the Soviet authorities to manage population and facilitate labor planning, was not, in fact, a real obstacle to migration.⁶ The increasing pressure of labor shortages, combined with a prolific

culture of informality, allowed for various schemes to circumvent the administrative restrictions on mobility.⁷ The rural out-migration was also much less affected than the Soviet policy makers assumed it would be.⁸ The uninterrupted movement of seasonal workers during late Soviet socialism around the vast territories of the country also testifies to the limits of administrative control over mobility.

Without downplaying the importance of economic factors, I argue for a more complex perspective on seasonal migration. In particular, I want to bring to the fore the culturally embedded local practical knowledge of seasonal migration, and emphasize its historical importance for the rural communities of Transcarpathia. Local practical knowledge, a concept forged by James Scott, refers to certain social groups' "from below", cultural competences that predate more technically advanced forms of economy advocated by "high modernist" states, such as the Soviet Union.⁹ When discussing the role of transhumance in the economic adaptation strategies of the communities of the Georgian highland region Tusheti to economic disruptions like collectivization or post-socialist transformations, Florian Mühlfried suggested the concept "appropriation culture" that captures the idea that "...in times of radical political change, the populations are able to transform breaks into continuities by applying culturally developed micro-techniques."¹⁰ He claims that spatial mobility has especially valuable potential for the "appropriation culture". Mühlfried also uses the concept of "cultural reserve", which he does not develop, but which I see as theoretically productive if used in tandem with Scott's idea of "local practical knowledge". The concept of "cultural reserve", understood as historically transmitted competence in social practices, such as labor migration, helps to question the deterministic impact of macro-political factors and instead pay due attention to the grassroots knowledge and agency.

I argue that seasonal migration was an instance of local practical knowledge and a "cultural reserve", which was proactively mobilized by the Transcarpathian population as an adaptive response to a crisis (such as collectivization) and an "appropriation of ... new (physical and social) spaces".¹¹ I also make use of the concept of "translation" to emphasize that the adaptation process was dynamic, creative and reflexive. Thus, in what follows I will trace the translation of pre-Soviet seasonal migration practices of Transcarpathian peasants into the Soviet system using sources from the Ukrainian central and local archives and oral interviews with seasonal workers who were working in forestry and agriculture during

the late 1950s and up to the 1990s. I will show that state policies and initiatives “from below” overlapped in the process of creation of a certain type of seasonal worker—the Soviet *zarobitshchany* (literally—the one who leaves his home for earnings).

Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak Periods

The historical region of Carpathian Rus', a part of the Hungarian Kingdom, was overwhelmingly rural. There was limited potential for the development of local industries, and the region's inhabitants supported themselves by subsistence farming and animal husbandry. The 19th century ethnographers used to lament the poverty and overall “backwardness” of Carpathian Rus', and this narrative was later reproduced by the Soviet Marxist historians who sought to emphasize the colonial oppression of the ethnically Slavic Carpatho-Rusyn population by Magyar and Austrian elites. Indeed, the Hungarian Kingdom itself, together with Austrian Galicia, were the least industrialized parts of the Habsburg Dual Monarchy,¹² and within this context the Carpathian Rus' was even more “peripheral” and disadvantaged. Even though in the late 19th century Austrian and Hungarian governments made some effort to incentivize industrialization by encouraging private investors to open more enterprises in the region, it did not result in a significant growth of the number of jobs. In the beginning of the 20th century, the salt mines, traditional for the local economy since the Middle Ages, the scanty metallurgy and metalwork plants, as well as forestry enterprises, sawmills and lumber-dependent chemical plants, and some smaller industries, provided stable employment for only 15,600 workers. Together with a similar amount of part-time workers they made only 12 percent of the region's total workforce.¹³ More than half of the industrial enterprises of the region were located in large cities and towns.¹⁴ This meant that the available jobs were not nearly sufficient to provide the majority of locals with an alternative to subsistence farming.

At the same time, seasonal or temporary workers were in higher demand than permanent employees.¹⁵ Transport networks were expanding and they therefore attracted local construction workers. The biggest lumber industry in the region was dependent on the season, and this conditioned the fluctuating demand for workers throughout the year. Moreover, lumbermen and construction workers from Carpathian Rus' were eager to travel further away from home and work in Galicia, Bukovina, Transylvania, and other

parts of the Hungarian Kingdom.¹⁶ In the 1870–1880s, the yearly number of workers employed in logging and rafting reached 20,000–30,000.¹⁷ In 1890, in the four counties that constituted Carpathian Rus', there were almost 60,000 seasonal workers.¹⁸

Migration for agricultural works had intensified after 1848. It was accumulating further force throughout the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Within and outside of the region, in the more agriculturally productive Hungarian plain, on the medium-sized and large manors additional workers were required each year for planting and especially harvesting seasons. Susan Zimmermann refers to the two-volume publication on Hungarian peasantry, edited by István Szabó and published in 1965, specifically relying on the chapter written by Zoltán Sárközi when describing the organization of labor of *summás* (seasonal workers) in the years between 1848 and the beginning of World War I:

The *summás* workers often worked for a lump sum or were paid monthly; at times accomplishment-related elements, and so on, were added. *Summás* work was organized as 'gang' labor, often building on ties between families and relatives with contracts signed well in advance, by the always male leader. Over time, recruitment could also take on a more commercialized character, involving independent professionals.¹⁹

At the beginning of the twentieth century the recruitment of agricultural workers was institutionalized. Local administrations were mediating between the workers in rural districts and Hungarian landlords by organizing annual drafts on the basis of the filed requests. In the first decade of the 20th century, the number of contracted workers grew annually.²⁰ Each year these intermediaries recruited and directed large cohorts of contracted laborers from Carpathian Rus' to the state and private farms in Hungary. In 1905 this agency alone hired 7,158 workers, in 1906—11,550, in 1907—10,782, in 1910—5,090.²¹ The preliminary contracts for summer work were made with the peasants during winter. In 1913, the demand for workers allegedly grew so much that the local administration had to inform some employers that they would not be able to hire agricultural workers for the upcoming year because the available ones were already booked earlier that autumn.²²

Seasonal workers accepted payment both in money and in kind. For instance, in Ung county (one of the four counties of the Carpathian Rus'), a worker received 32 kronen, 62 measures of grains, 2 kilos of salt and 8 litres

of palinka for his work from the 15th of May until the end of September.²³ Mowers used to receive a set percentage of hay, which varied from county to county, as well as daily food.²⁴ In 1901, a Hungarian landlord from Nitra county hired 80 workers from the Carpathian Rus' to crop 497 holds of land (\approx 214.5 ha). For their work they received 6 kronen from a hold,²⁵ and also grains, 160 kronen for palinka, 20 kronen for vinegar and 160 kronen for other food stuffs.²⁶ Following Sárközi, Zimmermann maintains that contracts with *summás* were written in great detail, specifying the number of workers, wages and supplements, but also revealing that gender and age played an important part in assessing the value of workers' labor and needs – women, sometimes together with children, used to be labelled "halfhands" and were entitled only to a portion of what men earned, for instance, "a half-allotment of wine and a reduced allotment of food."²⁷

By the 1890s, *summás*' impact on local economic and social relations became noticeable. They created pressure on the agrarian workforce in the places of destination, leading to an increase in demand for more unpaid labor performed by local workers, and were used by the employers to break harvest strikes.²⁸ In their home localities, seasonal workers provoked the rise of pay rates for agricultural hired labor by deserting Carpathian Rus' for other Hungarian counties, where the payment for similar work was higher.²⁹ Coupled with transatlantic migration, seasonal outflow of workers added to local demand.

Under the Czechoslovak government (1919–1939), centralized recruitment of seasonal workers was also set in place. In the beginning of the 1920s, three employment offices were established in the cities of Uzhhorod, Mukachevo and Khust.³⁰ They were functioning under the supervision of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Agriculture and the central office of seasonal labor in Prague. Until 1939, these institutions facilitated the drafting seasonal workers for agriculture and forestry within and outside of Czechoslovakia.³¹ In 1939–1944, when the territory of Carpathian Rus' was under Hungarian occupation, legal institutions functioned to supervise contracts between local agricultural seasonal labor and Hungarian employers.³² Forestry enterprises also continued employing seasonal workers.³³

Through seasonal labor migration, economic connections were set in place which supported the local family households in Carpathian Rus'. The payment that migrants received in money and in kind were no small contribution. With their earnings they supported the households they left behind, and, in turn, benefited from the families' farming activities in which they themselves might or might not have participated. The

time of their yearly leave did not exceed several months and, as the 19th century ethnographer Iurii Zhatkovych observed, seasonal migrants tried to postpone their moment of departure until they had finished their work in their fields to return in time for their own harvest.³⁴ Even when their absence from home was prolonged and they had to miss collective agricultural work on their own land, it did not sever their ties with the farm as they economically depended on their families. The economic interdependence between migrating and non-migrating family members, forged by seasonal migration, informed the adjustment to the idea of temporarily split families. The large number of Transcarpathian peasants engaged in seasonal migration suggested that this arrangement, which emerged as a local communities' response to the unsustainability of small-hold farming, hereditary land partitioning against the backdrop of land hunger experienced by the peasantry,³⁵ and scarce jobs in local industries, gained wide acceptance.

Thus, in the late nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century seasonal migration firmly entered the economic and social life of Transcarpathian peasants. During almost one hundred years between 1848 and Transcarpathia's inclusion into the borders of the Ukrainian SSR, seasonal migration had become a habitual local practice that not only supported the peasants economically, but was also integrated into the social life of communities.

Soviet Migration Policies during Post-war Reconstruction

The establishment of the Soviet rule over Transcarpathia in the aftermath of World War II brought drastic transformations to the local economic and social life. The radical restructuring of agriculture through collectivization irrevocably disrupted the lives of local peasantry. With regards to migration, the arrival of Soviet rule was accompanied by ideas of population redistribution and management. After World War II, in the context of post-war economic devastation and the need for reconstruction, these ideas gained reinvigorated validity and were taken as a basis for governmental policies directed at various regions of the country depending on their perceived economic significance. State-led migration was put to service of economic recovery. It was supposed to ensure a steady inflow of workers to the areas and enterprises where they were most needed.

The idea that ethnic groups, families and individuals could and should be mobilized and, if deemed necessary, spatially relocated in order to achieve economic goals, was at the core of the state-led migration policies crafted for overwhelmingly rural Western Ukraine and Transcarpathia. With regular drafts of workers for various Soviet industries and rural population resettlement campaigns, the post-war migration policies introduced new directions in migration. In the immediate post-war years, labor recruitment was often accompanied by coercion. At the same time, previously known migration routes and channels of economic support through labor migration were permanently interrupted when the international borders were demarcated and sealed.

Shortly after the war Soviet authorities embarked on a full-fledged mobilization of the local population to participate in the project of post-war economic reconstruction. The state's vision of the effective use of these regions' labor reserves was quite specific. While the local economies were being restored and the collective farms either rebuilt or established from scratch, western regions of Ukraine, and among them Transcarpathia, were approached as possessing significant labor reserves in the form of "surplus" population in the rural areas. The agricultural initiatives of the late 1940s–1950s created a demand for large numbers of agricultural workers, so the Soviet state came up with the resettlement program that was mainly oriented towards utilizing the labor reserves of these "overpopulated" rural regions.

The main direction for resettlement within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR) were its Southern oblasts, which suffered from depopulation that resulted from deportations and human losses in the war, but which by the early 1950s became a site of active agricultural development reinforced by the construction of irrigation systems. A centralized campaign of peasant resettlement, which was supposed to augment the human reserves of this economically prioritized region, was launched in the summer of 1949. Soviet discussions about agrarian "overpopulation", which dated back to the 1920s and 1930s, generated a perspective that resettlement was an efficient measure to solve the problem of "overpopulation" and at the same time develop natural resources and build industries in the sparsely populated regions of the Soviet Union.³⁶ In the late 1945, 77.2 per cent of the estimated total of 791,9 thousands of Transcarpathia's population were peasants.³⁷ At the same time, only slightly over 20 percent of the regions' land was suitable for agricultural cultivation, while almost half of its territory was covered with forests. From

the outset of the resettlement campaign, the conclusions about whether a region was overpopulated were based on a schematic calculation of the ratio between the available arable lands and the number of able-bodied workers. With the ratio of 0.91 ha per able-bodied person, Transcarpathia was at the top of the list of Ukrainian “overpopulated” regions.³⁸ Thus, western regions of Ukraine were assigned an important part in the Soviet authorities’ aspirations regarding the replenishing of the regions and territories that were lacking in labor power.³⁹

Another Soviet labor mobilization policy was known as organized recruitment of workers (*orgnabor*). The Soviet central planning agencies drafted plan targets for selected industries and plants, and then regional and district offices sought to meet those targets by allocating or relocating workers from around the USSR. As Western Ukrainian oblasts and Transcarpathia fell under the Soviet rule, they, like other Ukrainian oblasts, were assigned quotas for drafting youth for professional training and workers for the mining industries in Donbas, a vital region for the Soviet post-war industrial reconstruction.⁴⁰ Since the founding of the agency in 1931, organized recruitment was focused on facilitating contracts between enterprises and the residents of the rural areas which were assessed as having labor surpluses. The *orgnabor* system continued recruiting workers long after the reconstruction goals were achieved, although the numbers of the recruits were steadily diminishing over time together with its part in labor recruitment in the USSR.

Seasonal Forestry Workers in the 1940s–1960s

While state-led, “from above” migration regimes (resettlement campaign and organized recruitment) are well documented, until the second half of the 1950s there is virtually no mentioning of seasonal labor migration from Transcarpathia. This is a telling omission. It reflects the post-war Soviet state’s simplified vision of society as manageable and predictable in its responses to governmental policies. Collections at the state archives reflect this vision, representing predominantly the intentions and operations of the state and its bureaucratic apparatuses via plans, reports on recruiting and transportation, settlement and reception in the places of destination. While these sources allow to some extent to reconstruct actions and motivations of the actors involved, including those of drafted workers and resettled peasants, these documents deny,

however, access to social groups that are not perceived as significant or important, and whose presence, therefore, is not reflected in the state-produced documentation.

In the 1950s, Transcarpathian seasonal workers constitute such an “invisible” group, their practices and economic life being, in Scott’s terms, “illegible” to the state. Regarding collectivization, a radical state offensive onto peasantry, Scott observed that “the officials who directed this massive change ... were operating in relative ignorance of the ecological, social, and economic arrangements that underwrote the rural economy. They were flying blind”.⁴¹ This started changing in the mid-1960s, a point in the Soviet history that signified a paradigmatic shift in the authorities’ approach to population management in the face of economic challenges, the accumulation of statistical data, and expert sociological knowledge.

Despite the scarcity of the archival sources on the peasants’ seasonal movements in the 1950s, I argue that historical continuity of seasonal migration from Transcarpathia was not disrupted by collectivization. Oral histories provide some evidence that this pre-Soviet practice was revived shortly after the region was annexed by the USSR. Seasonal migrants whom I interviewed during my field trips to Transcarpathia in 2014–2019 and who started their own migration endeavors in mid- to late 1950s, acknowledged that the previous generation, which is no longer around to share their memories, also explored the possibilities for short-term work around the Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet Union. Just like before World War II, they assembled work teams and traveled away from their region to find temporary jobs.

Unlike late Habsburg Hungary and interwar Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union did not have a unified institution specifically dedicated to contracting seasonal workers. These functions were divided between different ministries and agencies. Recruitment of seasonal workers into forestry was the most institutionally structured among all the types of seasonal employment. It was conducted through *orgnabor* system. Through its republican branch, Ukrainian *orgnabor* offices enlisted and sent thousands of lumbermen to the enterprises chosen by the central office of State Planning Committee of the Soviet Union (Gosplan) in Moscow. The agency ensured signing the contracts and was responsible for the transportation of the workers to the place of work.

During the period of the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1946–1950), which was primarily directed at the post-war reconstruction of the Soviet economy, organized recruitment of permanent and seasonal forestry workers inside

the Ukrainian SSR was conducted exclusively for the internal needs of the republic. In the late 1940s, in Transcarpathia and in the USSR in general, forestry was still largely relying on seasonal manual labor and animal-drawn transport, which was also operated by seasonal workers. In January 1947, the Council of Ministers of the USSR sent a telegram signed by Joseph Stalin to the Council of Ministers in Kyiv. The telegram contained criticism regarding the nonfulfillment of the delivery plans of timber by Ukraine, and stated that the reason for that was the insufficiency of seasonal workers in particular.⁴² According to the telegram, at the beginning of 1947 the Ukrainian forestry was operated by 12,892 seasonal workers, roughly one third of the labor force envisioned by the plans.⁴³ However, according to Vasyl' Mishchany, the gradual mechanization of labor and infrastructural changes within the industry led to lowering the number of seasonal workers in Transcarpathian forestry to 15 percent by 1950.⁴⁴

The regional offices of *orgnabor* were established in Transcarpathia and other oblasts of Western Ukraine in 1950.⁴⁵ In the preceding years the recruiters (*verbovshchiki*) delegated by various ministries, enterprises and farms arrived to these regions and searched for volunteers without the support of locally based labor recruitment agency.⁴⁶ Thanks to the records of these regional *orgnabor* centers, it is now easier to trace the recruitment into forestry in any given region and in the Ukrainian SSR in general.

By the end of the 1950s, the majority of Soviet timber harvesting was relocated to the North of the European part of the Soviet Union, as well as the Urals, Siberia, Karelia and the Far East. Labor drafting was mirroring this trend already in the early 1950s. In 1952, the Soviet government demanded of the Ukrainian authorities to send 35,930 workers to the forestry enterprises outside of the republic, but only 21,372 workers signed contracts.⁴⁷ The following year the quotas increased to 58,695 permanent workers and additional 18,500 seasonal workers.⁴⁸ With great difficulty, the *orgnabor* recruiters managed to enlist 42,506 permanent and 15,895 seasonal workers from the Ukrainian SSR.⁴⁹ The vast majority were sent to the timber enterprises outside of Ukraine.⁵⁰ In 1954, the quotas for seasonal workers in forestry reached the record 49,200, but by early December that year *orgnabor* managed to satisfy this request only by 62.7 percent.⁵¹

Thus, in the early 1950s, the official direction of managed labor migration of Ukrainian forestry workers shifted towards a number of wood-producing areas in Russia, and this direction remained steady for decades to come. Official and unofficial agents recruited rural residents from Ukraine to work at the forestry enterprises in the Arkhangelsk

region, Karelia, Siberia and the Far East. The *orgnabor* system, however, very soon fell out of favor among the potential volunteers. The receiving enterprises more often than not failed to provide satisfactory conditions of life and work, and the disappointed workers blamed the recruitment agency, as it was the one making promises in the first place. They wrote letters of complaints to the central, republican and regional Soviet and party organization and also to their relatives, in which they described the miserable circumstances they had to face. Many enterprises did not have facilities to accommodate *orgnabor* workers at all, so they were placed in “damp dugouts”.⁵² Some waited to be picked up at the train stations for many days, others were freezing for two months in harsh Siberian temperatures before they received workwear, yet others had to share beds and live without electricity.⁵³ The workers were often badly paid.⁵⁴ It is not surprising then that in spite of the authorities’ wishes, on average only 5–10 percent of the workers who signed contracts with the Siberian forestry enterprises through *orgnabor* remained in permanent positions.

These and many other distressing stories, told in letters and in person, had a critical effect. Already in 1953, *orgnabor* officials reported that the recruits who broke their contracts with the northern forestry enterprises and returned home “t[old] about the workers’ condition at the logging enterprises, and it is the reason why kolkhoz members and non-working city population refuse to sign contracts and work in forestry. In the Ukrainian oblasts, the refusal to work in forestry acquired mass scales”.⁵⁵ Because of bad publicity and frequent changes in drafting destinations and increases in quotas for forestry in this period, *orgnabor* was failing even in the “overpopulated” regions. In Transcarpathia, for instance, by October 1953 the *orgnabor* yearly plan was fulfilled by only 41.7 percent, while the region possessed significant labor reserves.⁵⁶ It was not much that *orgnabor* officials could do, so the plans remained unfulfilled, and the heads of some recently created regional departments of *orgnabor* were released from their duties.⁵⁷

Given its reputation, *orgnabor* was treated with mistrust by workers and enterprise managers alike. And yet, Ukraine continued receiving labor recruitment plans for Russian forestry, while constantly struggling to keep up. In the 1960s, the Ukrainian quotas decreased compared to the previous decade—they could amount to 15–20,000 workers depending on the year, including both permanent (one year or longer) and seasonal (up to six months) contracts.⁵⁸ Within these plans, Transcarpathia usually had a share of around 3,500 workers.

At the same time, as statistical surveys undertaken in the mid-1960s revealed, a large number of people from Transcarpathia were migrating for earning, but sidestepping *orgnabor*. In 1966, there were over 66,000 seasonal workers in Transcarpathia. This number comprised both “organized” and “unorganized”, self-managed migration, and the number of independent workers was 12 times higher.⁵⁹ According to A. I. Bereziuk, around 12,000 of these seasonal workers were labor migrants in forestry.⁶⁰ These numbers suggest that workers in Transcarpathia were very responsive to the opportunities of seasonal work, but reluctant to make contracts through the system of organized recruitment. They preferred to make contracts directly with the managers of forestry enterprises, as in this way they could negotiate over pay rates and work conditions.⁶¹

In effect, by the mid-1960s, mobile woodcutting brigades from Transcarpathia migrated to nearly 30 forest areas outside their native region.⁶² It is clear from the interviews and the official data that by this time *orgnabor*'s role in locating places for seasonal work was insignificant. People started relying on personal connections and word of mouth when searching for better options of employment and pay. The informal component of job search was so strong that it influenced the “specialization” profile of entire villages. For instance, the residents of Krychevo village in Tiachiv raion of Transcarpathia, one of my two fieldwork locations, predominantly specialized in timber rafting. By contrast, seasonal workers from Keretski village in Svaliava raion were overwhelmingly involved in felling.

The survey from 1966 also showed that in comparison with other Ukrainian oblasts, the population of Transcarpathia was the most active in seasonal labor migration of various types—there were agricultural workers, construction workers and lumbermen in the region. Given the discrepancy in the number of seasonal workers, it was hardly *orgnabor* that set in motion seasonal migration from Transcarpathian villages. Should *orgnabor* have had a decisive influence, the trend of migration, managed or independent, to the northern forestry enterprises would have appeared in other Ukrainian regions too, since at times forestry workers were drafted simultaneously in 20 Ukrainian oblasts.⁶³ Rather, it was a strong tradition of labor migration in pre-Soviet Transcarpathia, paired with the lack of employment options in the region in the 1940s-1960s that informed the enthusiastic acceptance of opportunities of seasonal work in the Soviet context. The local knowledge of seasonal crafts and the historically shaped acceptance of the concession that such life required was Transcarpathian

rural populations' "cultural reserve", which they introduced into a new economic and political environment of the Soviet state.

And yet, organized recruitment played its part in laying routes for migrants in this early stage of "translation" of the practices of seasonal work into Soviet context. The workers who returned home from the Russian forestry enterprises, regardless of whether they had good or (more likely) bad experiences, became familiar with the geographical locations of forestry enterprises; they acquired insiders' knowledge of the functioning of the industry, awareness of the labor shortages in forestry, immediate knowledge of labor practices; they had new skills, and possibly even established contacts with potential employers. Thus, *orgnabor* recruits from Transcarpathia could have explored the initial directions and set the stage for independent seasonal migrants in forestry, which was slowly becoming a profitable, if physically taxing and risky, enterprise.

Seasonal Workers in Agriculture, 1950s–1970s

In contrast to the well-regulated, if marginally effective, recruitment of seasonal workers for forestry, hiring of seasonal help for agricultural works in the late Soviet Union did not have such an institutional backing as *orgnabor*. As agriculture recovered, though, it was clear that seasonal workers were needed at many collective and state farms in the south and east of Ukraine, since resettlement did not entirely solve the issue of labor shortages. In fact, in the mid-1950s, the state started assisting the collective farms that were short of manpower in employing additional workers for the harvesting period.⁶⁴ Based on the requests of regional Soviet and party organs, the Council of Ministers of Ukraine issued decrees that allowed farms in certain regions of Ukraine to hire seasonal help. These decrees also specified the number of workers allowed for hiring and the oblasts in which seasonal help ought to have been enlisted. For example, in the summer of 1956, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR issued a decree that allowed the farms in Kherson, Kharkiv and Voroshylovhrad to hire a total of 10,000 seasonal workers in Transcarpathia alone to do harvesting.⁶⁵ These farms, however, were entirely responsible for finding the workers and signing contracts with them. Supplying agriculture with seasonal labor was not considered by the Soviet authorities as crucial a task as delivering workers to industry, so the

apparatus of *orgnabor*, which was notoriously short on staff, was spared from dealing with seasonal workers for agriculture.

The decree also specified pay rates for seasonal workers. The workers were paid by workdays, like regular collective farmers, but their payment was guaranteed regardless of the pay rates of the collective farms at which they worked—they were to receive 2 kilograms of wheat and 4 rubles per workday. In case the workday rates in kind were higher at a collective farm than the ones envisioned by the decree, the workers should have been paid according to the rates of the farm.⁶⁶

The archival sources suggest that Transcarpathian peasants showed significantly stronger interest in opportunities in seasonal work than in permanent resettlement. In 1953, following a similar governmental decree, 3,500 collective farmers from Transcarpathia were enlisted to help with the harvesting in other regions of Ukraine.⁶⁷ The following year, seasonal migration was mentioned at a republican meeting of the Department of Resettlement and Evacuation of the Ukrainian SSR as a disturbing fact that was interfering with the resettlement campaign: "...they [Transcarpathian collective farm members, or *kolkhozniks*] leave for three months, earn a lot of wheat and provide a year supply of bread for the family. It is very difficult to convince these people [to resettle]".⁶⁸

In the mid-1960s, more than half of all seasonal workers from Transcarpathia worked in agriculture. The agricultural seasonal workers' wages were certainly welcome, but the in-kind bonuses were arguably the most lucrative part of this particular deal. In three to five months of seasonal labor, migrants earned more in-kind produce than their colleagues earned in a year while working for local collective farms. While earning similar amounts of grains locally was impossible due to the limited capacity of Transcarpathian farms, and considering that there was no official fodder market open for individual consumers, the in-kind bonuses were indispensable for rural dwellers who kept livestock. Their wheat bonuses provided the necessary fodder for their cattle, and increased the possibilities for sustaining and enlarging local individual farming, despite the constraints of the Soviet legal framework.

The gap between what one could earn as a *kolkhoz* member and as a seasonal worker meant that *kolkhozniks* had little incentive, if at all, to work for their collective farms. The flaws of Soviet agricultural management were prominent in Transcarpathia: given the seasonal fluctuations in labor demand, 55 percent of working-age *kolkhozniks* were left uninvolved in collective farms' activities during the winter months,⁶⁹

while the delays in wage payments further discouraged them from active participation in the collective households.⁷⁰ However, being a member of a collective farm brought a number of benefits, which rural dwellers were not willing to lose, such as the right to keep a private plot, and tax breaks. Therefore, they did not abandon *kolkhozes*, but instead avoided investing too much effort in them. Transcarpathia was a republican leader in the number of collective farmers who did not deliver the minimum number of workdays. In 1965, 22,600 local *kolkhozniks* did not participate in agricultural production at all.⁷¹ This tendency triggered the vicious circle of shortages, which meant that some collective farms were forced to employ seasonal help to compensate for the local workers who simply refused to turn up.⁷² Such manifestations of “non-rational labor organization” became a systematic problem of the Soviet labor process in agriculture, which was only exacerbated with time.

The majority of Transcarpathia’s migrants were departing from the rural areas.⁷³ It is here, thus, where reliance on seasonal earning has modified the lives of the communities the most. The strong preference for seasonal occupation⁷⁴ was frequently combined with higher-than-average dedication to private plot tending on behalf of the non-migrating family members, and lower than average participation in *kolkhoz* economy. In Transcarpathia, the number of people found to be involved in private household and individual farming was the highest in the Ukrainian SSR. While in Ukraine the number of non-working people was at 13.9 percent in 1968, in Transcarpathia it was 34 percent, and in some districts, it reached 44 percent.⁷⁵ Only 26.8 percent of the Transcarpathian working-age rural population was involved in agriculture in 1965.⁷⁶ Yet, it was not only that the local agricultural sector was unable to absorb all the countryside work force—the argument that was usually presented as a proof of “overpopulation” in Transcarpathia. More importantly, the low wages made employment at collective farms unattractive and uneconomical in comparison with the earnings in money and in kind that seasonal migration made possible. Similar to pre-Soviet times, earnings from seasonal work complemented individual farming.

The rates of Transcarpathian peasants’ involvement in seasonal migration suggested that it was an important component of the region’s economy and an enterprise pursued by men and women alike. According to the survey taken in 1974, 23 percent of 42,700 Transcarpathian seasonal workers were women.⁷⁷ In agriculture women workers were most welcome. In the beginning of 1960s, it became illegal to hire women for

works in forestry, and even earlier forestry enterprises were reluctant to accept female *orgnabor* recruits or workers with families.⁷⁸ Women from Transcarpathia were sometimes employed as cooks by the migrant forestry brigades from their villages. In agriculture, on the contrary, women's participation was prominent, and it was often women who acted in the capacity of work team leaders who made contracts with farm managers.

The crisis of the Soviet agriculture further sharpened in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, when rural out-migration, combined with decrease in birth rates, deprived Ukrainian farms of kolkhoz workers. Labor shortages became ever more pressing. By the end of the 1970s, over 90 percent of the Ukrainian rural districts experienced yearly labor shortages of over 1.5 million workers.⁷⁹ As the decades of failed attempts to instigate change from above have shown, there was no structural solution to seasonal labor. In the late 1980s, the harvest labor demand across the Soviet Union grew by five million workers, as compared to the average yearly demand.⁸⁰ Hiring seasonal help was one of the options to alleviate the situation. The farm managers notoriously broke the rules and regulations by admitting workers without proper permits and by agreeing to much higher rates than those recommended by the Soviet laws. With cheap transport and the farm managers turning a blind eye to the administrative requirements for workers to have a passport or a local registration, the movement and employment was easy for those who were willing to spend several months working intensively away from home. Seasonal employment, which usually included some forms of informal bargaining, became a profitable endeavor, whether the workers received their payments in money or in kind.

The post-Khrushchev decades of late Soviet socialism were marked by a re-evaluation of the state's approach to population management. Economic challenges of rural out-migration, uneven regional development, and the lack of desired outcomes from the state migration policies resulted in the realization that the instruments of governing should be changed. In order to govern more effectively, the authorities wanted to know more about the country's population – something that had not been a priority during Stalin's or even Khrushchev's rule. Migration became one of the points of state interest and a strand of intensive academic research. In the new discourse, forged by the combined efforts of scientists and the Party, seasonal migration was an undesirable, ideologically and economically suspicious phenomenon, which had to be limited and put under administrative control. It was proclaimed destructive for the economies of

the regions of departure, since it allegedly diverted people from permanent jobs and disrupted the state's production plans. However, state measures failed to curb or put seasonal migration entirely under control, since it became entrenched in both local and all-union economies. Seasonal migration became an indispensable condition for the Soviet economic system to function. And, as I have shown, Transcarpathian rural dwellers filled this niche *en masse*.

Conclusions

In this paper I argue for a cultural history of seasonal labor migration in the Soviet context. I suggest that seasonal migration could be understood as a cultural reserve, shaped historically, that was mobilized by local rural dwellers as a response to the external economic demands and internal economic needs. Seasonal migration played a role as an adaptation practice when Transcarpathian peasantry faced yet another historical challenge—political and economic transformations that altered their lives in ways no other reform did before. The Soviet state arrived to Transcarpathia with its own blueprints for principles of social and economic organization, which it started implementing shortly after securing its power over the region. However, Transcarpathia's cultural background informed the ways in which peasants reacted to the rapid changes, and from where they borrowed the tactics that made socialism livable for them.

Seasonal migration's "success" in the region was a combined outcome of economic and cultural circumstances. The know-how of informal self-organization and teamwork combined with the Soviet structural propensity to labor shortages and the lack of satisfactory job options in the region strengthened the inclination of Transcarpathian rural dwellers to favor the option of seasonal employment, as they were weighing comparatively high earnings over the precarious nature of seasonal work and the insecurities of informal employment. As earnings in money and in kind were flowing regularly into the region, seasonal migration continued to be an important part of the economy of the local households and the region in general until the dissolution of the Soviet Union and after.

NOTES

- 1 The region used to have many names in different historical periods and languages, but I use the commonly accepted term Transcarpathia for the Soviet period and the period of Ukrainian independence, and Carpathian Rus' for the periods when the region was a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire and Czechoslovakia.
- 2 Oksana Kychak, *Trudova mihratsiia ukraiintsiv Zakarpattia na pochatku XXI stolittia ta ii kul'turno-pobutovi naslidky* (Uzhhorod, Hrazhda, 2012), 69.
- 3 Kychak, 73–74; V. P. Miklovda, M. I. Pitiulych, "Trudova mihratsiia naselennia Zakarpattia v umovakh pohlyblennia ievrointehratsiinykh ptotsesiv", *Sotsial'no-ekonomichni problem suchasnoho periodu Ukrainy*, no. 3 (2013): 325.
- 4 On *otkhodnichestvo* in Imperial Russia see: Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics: Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861–1905* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).
- 5 Iu. M. Plusnin, A. A. Pozanenko, N. N. Zhydekovich, "Otkhodnichestvo kak novyi factor obshchestvennoi zhizni", *Mir Rossii*, no. 1 (2015): 42.
- 6 See R. A. Lewis and R. H. Rowlands, *Population Redistribution in the USSR: Its Impact on Society, 1877–1977* (New York: Praeger, 1979); Peter Grandstaff, *Interregional Migration in the USSR: Economic Aspects, 1959–1970* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1980); Basile Kerblay, *Modern Soviet Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 223; Cynthia Buckley, "The Myth of Managed Migration", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 1995, 896-916.
- 7 Buckley, "The Myth of Managed Migration", 905.
- 8 Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Great Departure. Rural-Urban Migration in the Soviet Union, 1929-1933," in William G. Rosenberg & Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds, *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization* (Bloomington, 1993), 15-40.
- 9 James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).
- 10 Florian Mühlfried, "Did Communism Matter? Settlement Policies from Above and Below in Highland Georgia", in Tsitsishvili, Nino (ed.), *Cultural Paradigms and Political Change in Caucasus*, Sarbrücken, Lambert, 2010, 190.
- 11 Mühlfried, "Did Communism Matter?", 190.
- 12 Paul Robert Magocsi, *With Their Backs to the Mountains: A History of Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyns* (Central European University Press, 2015), 144.
- 13 Magocsi, *With Their Backs to the Mountains*, 148.
- 14 *Narysy istorii Zakarpattia*, Vol. 1, I. Grynchak, ed. (Uzhhorod, 1993), 322.
- 15 In order to keep this paper focused on short-distance migration, I intentionally omit the large-scale pre-World War I wave of transatlantic migration to

- the Northern America from Aurstia-Hungary and Western Europe, which Carpatho-Rusyn peasants from Transcarpathia also joined.
- 16 *Narysy istorii Zakarpattia*, 330.
- 17 M. P. Tyvodar, *Etnografiiia Zakarpattia: istoryko-etnografichni narys* (Uzhhorod: Hrazhda, 2011), 149.
- 18 *Narysy istorii Zakarpattia*, 300.
- 19 Susan Zimmermann, "The agrarian working class put somewhat centre stage: an often-neglected group of workers in the historiography of labor in state-socialist Hungary," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25:1 (2018), 84.
- 20 *Narysy istorii Zakarpattia*, 330.
- 21 V. I. Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo na pochatku XX stolittia (1900-1919)* (Lviv: Vydavnytstvo un-tu, 1973), 80.
- 22 Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 78.
- 23 Il'ko, 74.
- 24 Il'ko, 75.
- 25 Hold – Hungarian unit of area measurement. 1 hold = 0.57 ha =1.0665 acre.
- 26 Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 76.
- 27 Zimmermann, "The agrarian working class put somewhat centre stage," 84.
- 28 Zimmermann, 85.
- 29 Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 81.
- 30 I use the Ukrainian version of the cities' names.
- 31 *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zakarpats'koi oblasti. Putivnyk. Tom 1. Fondy doradians'koho period* (Uzhhorod, 2018), 321. The collections of documents pertaining to the organization of seasonal labor under Czechoslovak rule, which are housed at the State archive of Zakarpattia oblast', need further examination. This period, not being central to this research and scarcely represented in the available to me secondary literature on seasonal labor, did not, regretfully, receive the attention it deserves.
- 32 *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zakarpats'koi oblasti. Putivnyk*, 462.
- 33 *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zakarpats'koi oblasti. Putivnyk*, 442.
- 34 Yu. Zhatkovych, "Zamitky etnografichni z Ugors'koi Rusy", *Etnografichni zbirnyk* 2 (1896). Accessed 02.07.2021 at <http://litopys.org.ua/rizne/etno02.htm>.
- 35 In 1895, 71.6 percent of land plots in Transcarpathia were smaller than 5,7 hectares. The abolition of serfdom triggered a social diversification of the peasants, but the number of middle-size households (up to 57 hectares) only reached 27.6 percent, while most of the land in the region — over 45 percent of the total size — belonged to the large land owners (less than 1 percent of land holders). See: V. P. Kopchak, S. I. Kopchak, *Naselenie*

- Zakarpat'ya za 100 let: Statistiko-demograficheskoie issledovaniie (L'vov: Vyshcha shkola, 1970), 16.
- 36 Susanne Heim, Ulrike Schaz, *Berechnung und Beschwörung: Überbevölkerung – Kritik einer Debatte* (Berlin 1996), 80.
- 37 State Archive of Zakarpattia oblast (Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zakarpats'koi oblasti – DAZO), fond 4, opys 1, sprava 142, arkush 6.
- 38 Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine (Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady ta upravlinnia Ukrainy – TSDAVOU), f. 4626, op. 1, spr. 125, ark. 15.
- 39 Central and Northern regions of Ukraine were also assigned quotas for agrarian resettlement, but the quotas for western regions were on average higher due to their perceived overpopulation combined with industrial underdevelopment.
- 40 M. A. Alfiorov, "Sotsialistychne zmahannia i zovnishni migratsii nasellennia v Donbas u 1943 – na pochatku 1950-kh rr.: vzaiemovziazok i vzaiemovplyvy", *Visnyk Natsional'noho pedahohichnoho universytetu im. Tarasa Shevchenka*, No. 8 (88) (2015), 5-12; Kateryna Zhbanova, "Orhanizovanyi nabir robotnykiv u vidbudovi Donbasu", *Siverianskyi litopys*, No. 1 (2015), 174-181.
- 41 Scott, 202.
- 42 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 16, ark. 3–5.
- 43 The difficulties in drafting workers were perhaps linked to the famine of 1946–1947, which especially affected Ukraine.
- 44 V. V. Mishchanyn, "Promyslovyi rozvytok Zakarpattia 1944-1950 rr.: Perekhid na sotsialistychnu ekonomiku", *Rusyn*, No. 4 (30) (2012), 115.
- 45 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 56, ark. 57.
- 46 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 16, ark. 147. Before the departments of *orgnabor* were organized at the regional executive committees of western oblasts and some other regions that did not use to have these structural units, the heads of the executive committees of these regions were expected to assist the delegates with the drafting of workers.
- 47 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 63, ark. 22.
- 48 With these quotas, forestry was at the top of the list of industries for which *orgnabor* was hiring workers in 1953. It was followed at a considerable distance by coalmining industry (33,230 workers) and construction (26,680 workers).
- 49 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 63, ark. 30.
- 50 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 63, ark. 70.
- 51 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 96, ark. 91, 113.
- 52 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 92, ark. 131.
- 53 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 75, ark. 77; spr. 96, ark. 131, 137.
- 54 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 96, ark. 115.

- 55 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 74, ark. 62.
- 56 It was assessed that in 1953, 32,130 collective farm members did not deliver the minimum of workdays, and another 14,375 did not contribute to collective farming at all. [TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 75, ark. 110, 55].
- 57 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 75, ark. 30–31.
- 58 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, spr. 349, ark. 31; spr. 357, ark. 17; spr. 766, ark. 101.
- 59 A. I. Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei USSR i puti ieiie uporiadocheniia*, [Dissertation manuscript], (Lvov, 1968), 126.
- 60 Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 184.
- 61 I discussed work contracts between forestry enterprises and Transcarpathian seasonal workers elsewhere. See: Kateryna Burkush. "On the Forest Front: Labor Relations and Seasonal Migration in 1960s–1980s", *Labor History* 59 (2018), 295–315.
- 62 Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 187.
- 63 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 2, spr. 92, ark. 11.
- 64 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, spr. 129, ark. 7.
- 65 DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, spr. 79, ark. 63.
- 66 DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, spr. 79, ark. 61–62.
- 67 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, spr. 208, ark. 175.
- 68 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, spr. 243, ark. 13.
- 69 DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, spr. 213, ark. 20.
- 70 Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 135.
- 71 Bereziuk, 128.
- 72 Bereziuk, 191.
- 73 DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, spr. 213, ark. 20.
- 74 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, spr. 379, ark. 138.
- 75 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, spr. 854, ark. 80.
- 76 Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 126.
- 77 DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, spr. 769, ark. 117.
- 78 DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, spr. 141, ark. 31, spr. 113, ark. 82.
- 79 TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, spr. 1031, ark. 119.
- 80 D. D. Moskvina, *Naseleniie SSSR: voprosy migratsii: ekonomiko-statisticheskii obzor tendentsiy 60-80-kh gg.* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1991), 47.

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