

Published in: Kramsch O. and B. Hooper (eds.), 2004, Cross-Border Governance in the European Union, Routledge, pp. 41-55

DE-POLITICISING LABOUR MARKET INDIFFERENCE AND IMMOBILITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION¹

Martin van der Velde and Henk van Houtum²

Some constitutive rules, like exclusive territoriality, are so deeply sedimented or reified that actors no longer think of them as rules at all.

(Ruggie 1998: 873)

It is impossible to live as an outside observer.

(Hillier and Rooksby 2002: 9)

INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of the workers in the European Union are still largely mobile only within their own nationally bounded labour market. In this contribution we wish to zoom in on the governance of cross-border labour mobility in order to understand the non-existence of a borderless and integrated labour market. In particular, the question that we wish to address is: Why is it that people when it comes to cross-border labour mobility in

the European Union are relatively immobile? In scrutinising this issue, this paper wants to contribute to a growing debate on cross-border labour immobility by focusing on the nationally socially constructed attitudes of workers who are supposed to become mobile across national borders, according to the generally accepted goals and policies. In doing so, we will specifically seek attention for the role borders play within the EU as the state-centric confinements or markings of geographical (id)entities.

This chapter continues as follows. In the next section we will first address what we understand as mobility on a cross-border labour market and second why it is that cross-border mobility and its encouragement in the eyes of European policy-makers is so ‘fashionable.’ The third section is dedicated to current explanations and theories for the level of mobility. In the fourth section the question is raised whether being spatially mobile should indeed be accepted as the dominant pattern in the labour market. Could it be possible that immobility is a better paradigm? The final section tries to formulate some governance implications both where it concerns the ongoing academic discussion on mobility and immobility as well as cross-border policies aimed at the strengthening of the integration process within the EU and Europe at large.

EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE OF CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MOBILITY

The EU has a long history in governing spatial labour market mobility across national borders. Already in the Treaty of Rome, the free movement of labour, as a constituent of the common market, was seen as a fundamental right for EU-citizens and as such provided a framework for cross-border labour-mobility (Vandamme 2000: 438). In accord with this right, citizens of the EU should be able to take up jobs *everywhere* within the EU, be it via commuting or migration. The latest step of the European Commission in putting the labour market at work to the benefit of the Member States is the wish to transform the EU-wide labour market into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world (European Commission 2001a). Increasing cross-border mobility is seen as an important instrument in reaching some kind of optimum in the perceived and desired functioning of the labour market in the EU:

The creation of more genuine European labour markets – removing barriers, reducing adjustments costs and skills mismatches – will increase the efficiency of labour markets overall. This would in fact reduce pressures to migrate for those *who do not want to move*, while creating genuine opportunities for those *who do wish to be mobile*.

(European Commission 2001a: 5; emphasis by the authors)

To reach this goal the European Commission in their document 'New European Labour Markets, Open to All, with Access for All' (European Commission 2001a), announced the establishment of a 'High Skilled Task Force'. This *Task Force* was installed with the mandate to identify the main drivers and characteristics of the 'new labour markets', particularly focusing on skills and mobility; to identify the main barriers to further development; and to come up with initiatives leading to 'new labour markets, open to all, with access for all'. In itself the fact that this initiative is still necessary after 45 years of 'freedom of movement' within the European Union is remarkable. The *Task Force* took the position that higher occupational and geographical mobility will contribute to three key principles: ensuring freedom of movement, promoting a knowledge-based society and establishing full employment. It does so by enabling the European economy, employment and labour force to adapt smoothly and efficiently to changing circumstances. With regard to geographical mobility the European Commission comes to the conclusion that it is too low:

... due to a number of factors, including cultural, and in particular linguistic barriers, regulatory barriers, insufficient or complex systems of recognition of skills and competences, and an ageing of the labour force.

(European Commission 2001b: 9)

In order to encourage spatial labour mobility the suggestion of the Task Forces that the barriers caused by these factors should be removed, comes as no surprise. Realising that in the year 2002, almost twenty years after the launching of the Internal Market in the European Union, this 'mantra' might have lost much of its convincing power, they add to this that enhancing and simplifying the information-supply should be pursued as well. In the subsequent 'Commission's Action Plan for Skills and Mobility (European Commission 2002) this is taken as one of the most important new policy-measures. Under the heading of 'Information and Transparency' the following are listed:

- One-stop mobility information site and information on qualification;
- EURES-integration and classification of occupations;
- A mobility information campaign.

Given the fact that information is accredited with such a crucial role, the Commission seems convinced that removing the above listed blocking effects of borders is not enough to get the people 'on the move'. What is striking when reading these new plans is that the implicit belief in the existence of the mobile worker is still dominant. The plans assume a humankind that is inherently seeking the highest profit possible for his/her labour and will move to no matter where to as long as it pays off, an image

that represents the classical rational economic man, *homo economicus*.

According to this logic, cross-border mobility is assumed to be held back by (market-)imperfections and the lack of transparency and knowledge. As a result, harmonising and synchronising the rules and regulations for workers between the member states in the EU has become a top-priority.

Establishing an EU wide acceptance of job certificates and gearing social securities systems towards each other are clear expressions of the ambition to make the labour market more transparent. However, it is questionable whether market harmonisation is a sufficient measure for workers to become mobile spatially in corporeal terms across the EU. Despite the marketisation and internalisation of labour mobility in the EU, the vast majority of the workers in the European Union are still largely mobile only within its own nationally bounded labour market. The European worker is not 'particularly nomadic' (European Opinion Research Group 2001). Based on their investigation of mobility on the Swedish labour-market, Fischer *et al.* identified '... immobility as a strong and persistent behavioural strategy for the large majority of the population.' (Fischer *et al.* 2000: 32); and in a recent Eurobarometer questionnaire among a representative part of the citizens of the EU, no more than 38 percent of the respondents indicated that they had moved house at least once in the last ten years (European Opinion Research Group 2001). The numbers on cross-border mobility in these findings are almost negligible. Only four percent of the moved respondents

had moved to another country within the European Union (European Opinion Research Group 2001). Another representative figure comes from the Labour Force Survey (Eurostat 2002). From this source comes that 2001 the national labour markets of the countries of the European Union accommodated approximately 8.9 million foreign workers of which a little over 3 million come from other EU-countries. These 3 million foreign workers appeared to account for less than 2 percent of the total active population (Eurostat 2002). Although this share has witnessed a steady increase from 1.6 million in 1983 (Kiehl and Werner 1999), partly because of the entrance of new member states, the general level is clearly still not impressive. It must be said that these figures only refer to migration. Yet, including cross-border commuting does not add much to change the general picture. In 1999 only about 0.2 percent of the total workforce in the EU commutes to other member-countries (European Commission 2001c). Even when we confine our focus to border regions, cross-border commuting is not a major factor. When we define the border region as the NUTS-3 regions (the smallest administrative region for which Eurostat provides statistical data) located immediately at a national border only 1.5 percent of the labour force can be characterized as cross-border commuters. Of a total workforce of 34 million only 500,000 commute to another country (MKW 2001). Despite the policy measures for more information and transparency now

taken, it seems unlikely that this picture of low numbers of cross-border workers is going to change radically in the foreseeable future.

THE MODELLING OF LABOUR MARKETS AND IMMOBILITY

Explanations for the low spatial mobility figures are predominantly sought in fine-tuning the theories that explain mobility. The dominant economic explanation is the one that is usually referred to as the neo-classical school of thought. The central idea in this influential theoretical framework is that an economic 'system' evolves towards a stage of equilibrium between demand and supply of labour. Disequilibria are to be regarded as temporary: these would ultimately be levelled by some kind of mobility. Starting from the assumption of a rational return-maximising economic man (*homo economicus*), wage differences would explain to a great extent the willingness of people to move and consequently the actual migration and commuting reasons. Hence, cross-border mobility of workers is seen to be dependent upon national wage differences. The grounding principle for this theoretical framework was already formulated in the 1880s by Ravenstein (1885, 1889). Since then the models have become more and more complex, and have included notions such as human capital (Sjaastad 1962; Becker 1962), risk and the perception of the chance of achieving improvements (Harris and Tordaro 1970), imperfect knowledge and bounded rationality (Simon 1982). Over time, this has resulted in very sophisticated models that try to do justice to the complex nature of mobility by dealing with macro-

(economic) and micro-factors (individual decision making processes), often resulting in a 'push-pull' model of labour mobility. In these models 'push' stands for the negative factors on the domestic labour market, which may include elements such as low wages or economic hardship, and 'pull' stands for attractive factors on the away market, which may include such elements as higher wages and better working conditions. Although the debate on which elements should be included is sometimes rather intense, all models basically start from the assumption that it is *differences* in the structure and conditions of the labour market between their country of origin and a possible range of countries of destination that make workers move. In addition, there is some agreement that some of the best estimating models in this conventional school of thought are models based on the classic Heckscher-Ohlin-Samuelson (H-O-S) model, which is a model that incorporates the substitution of labour mobility by capital mobility and trade. This model helps to explain why in the case of the EU the economic integration process is predominantly taking place through the mobility of goods and capital, not workers (Straubhaar 2000). The reason that workers are not mobile across the borders of the member states must hence not be sought in some kind of in- and out-migration equilibrium that apparently has been reached, but can, according to the logic of the H-O-S model, largely be explained by a successful economic integration (policy) in the EU. The differences in wealth between the member states in the EU, which could act

as an important push/pull factor for international migration, have decreased to such a level that they hardly act as push- or pull factor anymore (Stark and Taylor 1991; Tassinopolous and Werner 1999). Indeed it seems that trade and capital mobility have substituted for the migration of workers. However, as Straubhaar argues, when compared to existing numbers of labour market migration, despite its estimating power, the H-O-S equilibrium models still structurally overestimate the (potential) mobility of labour and the willingness to move (Straubhaar 2000). Other forces must be at work as well.

For a more inclusive understanding of the persistence of labour immobility we need to have a closer look at the conceptualisation of the labour market used in this school of thought. By using the term market, implicitly the existence of some level of supply and/or demand of labour is presumed, as well as certain (economic) rules that are supposed to guarantee the smooth and optimal operation of this market. This provides an image of a game on a marked-out playground with more or less unchangeable and 'universal', albeit increasingly complex rules, within which a contest is unfolding. In our opinion it is this all too rigid interpretation and operationalisation of the term market in the case of labour mobility that prevents other ways of approaching this theme. We would like to make a plea for the inclusion of the inherent value attached to immobility in the explanation of cross-border

labour mobility in the EU. We believe that models that focus on explaining mobility are not necessarily wrong in their internal logic and reasoning, but they are based on a theoretically biased and socially meagre assumption about human beings. The bias derives from an image of an economic society that is intrinsically and necessarily on its way to equilibrium. In such a system-dominated approach of economics, the labour mobility of people is nothing more than an outcome of the logics of the system, a derivative of the inequity between the international demand and supply of labour in the European Union.

Despite all its logical beauty and internal refinements, the debate on labour market mobility is beginning to resemble the classic scientific trap in which the modellers have forgotten about the dominant modes in actual practice. A European labour market (even when regarding that it is a segmented market) does not exist. It largely consists of nationally constructed and maintained labour markets. When one starts reasoning based on a model of a single European market, what almost inevitably follows then is an overestimation of the potential mobility of workers. This is exactly what has been happening in dominant European policy and academic debates. What has been overestimated and perhaps also overstimulated is the action, the potential and willingness to move; what thereby is drastically underestimated is the non-action. We believe that starting at the other end of

mobility, that is, comprehending the persisting power of international labour immobility, might take us further in understanding and explaining the non-existent cross-border labour market in the European Union.

To begin with, let us start by taking a closer look at the work already done in the field of labour *immobility*. The seminal work of Straubhaar of 1988 laid down a powerful and interesting groundwork for the value of immobility. He suggested that we should concentrate not on the supply of labour per se, nor assume workers to be floating in a societal vacuum, but on the binding power of national societies that made the labour market look inwards rather than outwards. Later, Fischer *et al.* and Straubhaar developed this idea into the 'insiders advantage approach' (Fischer *et al.* 1997; Straubhaar 2000; Fischer *et al.* 2001; see also Tassinopolous and Werner 1999 and Fischer 1999). This approach basically transformed immobility from something irrational and unexplainable into something that could be (bounded) rational as well. In general terms, what this approach does is introduce the location-specificity of labour, meaning that some specific features of the skills and knowledges of workers are not or not easily transferable to other places. These specificities are explicitly tied to the location where the potential migrant/commuter is residing. Economically, this location-specificity functions as 'sunk costs' for the workers involved. Cross-border mobility would only be net-positive if these 'sunk costs' would

be out-valued as well. In this 'insiders advantage approach' immobility is seen as '*... a utility maximizing strategy to a majority of people because the loss of location-specific assets and abilities induced by migration would be too severe and because it is immobility which allows individuals to accumulate insider-advantage*' (Fischer *et al.* 2000: 10; emphasis original). Following upon these prominent attempts to open up the research agenda on immobility, we believe the traditional 'push and pull' approach, in which the 'go'-factors are emphasized, should indeed be extended to include the active decision not to 'become mobile'. What results is a powerful scheme that is much better equipped to account for the dominant reality in transnational labour market issues, that is, immobility of workers.

However, we still see two imperative fallacies in the logic of the insider/outsider scheme. The first is that if the inside/outside logic of this model would be consequently followed, the 'stay'-factors would not only have to take into consideration the keep-factors, like the ones introduced in the 'insider advantage' approach, but also what could be indicated as the *repel*-factors or outsider-disadvantages. By this we understand factors attached to a possible destination region, which prevent workers from going there.

The second fallacy we see is that even such an extended approach, still only takes into account those workers that are consciously involved in a process of decision-making. The decisions are all based on some kind of evaluation of national labour market differences represented in the costs and benefits of staying versus going. Despite the richness of such a rational choice-approach we believe that an approach that is focused on the existence and optimisation of *differences* as a motivation for people to be mobile or immobile fails to sufficiently explain the dominant form of immobility, that is, the non-action, the passiveness of people. In everyday life, most workers do not make a rational costs/benefit-analysis based on some kind of choice of staying at home versus going abroad. To cope with this second fallacy, we would like to make a plea for the inclusion of the threshold of *indifference* in the explanation of labour immobility.

THE THRESHOLD OF INDIFFERENCE

To explain what we mean by the *threshold of indifference* it is necessary to first reflect upon a re-conceptualisation of human rationality. In mainstream neo-classical economics it is suggested that economic agents are best assumed as individual, atomist beings with rational choice preferences and objectives. In view of the presupposed behaviour and preferences, the dominant theories consequently primarily aim at how an allocation of resources leading to a state of equilibrium between economic agents can be

achieved most efficiently. The assumption of *homo economicus* in mainstream economics also implicitly reflects a normative view on human behaviour (Sen 1977). For instance, in their international factor mobility model Facchini and Willman (2001) state, that a country is populated by domestic residents owning and supplying one type of factor, *e.g.* labour. In a footnote on this postulation they note that: 'From a purely technical perspective there is no need to explicitly introduce agents' (Facchini and Willman 2001: 6). Peculiar and even as sinister as it may sound when one reads such a line, it is this assumption that we see as illustrative of the underlying and often implicit notion in the debate on borders and cross-border mobility in mainstream economics. Leaving out the role of agents 'for technical reasons' assumes that agents are autonomous, rational and predictable in their behaviour, thereby neglecting the social and psychological limitations of this economic rationality. The assumptions of the intentions of human beings of rational-choice economic theory have been subjected to much criticism from various quarters of social studies. The dominant assumption on rationality in economics is increasingly regarded as untenable (Nooteboom 1992). Its power is based on an old-fashioned epistemology of exogenous preferences and unworldly human psychology. Much of the critique is focused on this restrictively defined and deterministic image of human behaviour in economic traffic. Economic actors do not behave as atomized individuals outside a social context; their

behaviour is no *deus ex machina*. According to Taylor, a theory in which human beings are 'atomized', that is, free at will and (boundedly) rational, denies the requirement of a complex and integrated society that is able to support and promote this freedom and individualism (Taylor 1992).

Freedom requires a certain understanding of the self, and this understanding, this identity, is for a large part defined through the interaction with others or through the habitual practices of a society (Van Houtum 1998,1999). What we suggest here is a social contextualisation of the rationality of agents. For, an important question is why do people not migrate or move their 'human capital' massively around the globe? Is that merely a matter of economic calculation or is the non-mobility strictly economically spoken non-rational, but maybe socially rational? Our contention here is that the importance of the social construction of human rationality is underestimated. Hence, we think that critical economic scholars who are pleading for the incorporation of the social in economics, addressed via topics like embeddedness (*e.g.*, Granovetter 1985; Hodgson 1988), trust (*e.g.*, Fukuyama 1995; Hosmer 1995) and 'untraded interdependencies' (Storper 1997), have a point. Human beings are associational creatures, both consciously and unconsciously so. There is no such faculty as pure reason that functions apart from the individual as a detached, objective and dispassionate observer. Therefore we see it necessary to encompass a broader sociologically and geographically

inspired vision on the power that spatial belonging (still) has in the analysis of labour (im)mobility.

The Contextual 'Rationality' of Belonging

The principle of situated (socio-)spatial belonging, the longing to be a member of a spatial (id)entity, must primarily be understood as a collectively constructed imagination, a socially produced belief in a common destiny and/or origin, as Anderson famously has argued (1983). The urge people express and perform to belong, to create (and defend) their 'own space', to separate, to differentiate and to demarcate is understood here as socially constructed (see also Paasi 1996). Shared values, norms and knowledge produce a kind of internalized, normalized and compliant everyday practices (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu 2002; De Certeau 1994, Foucault 1991). This is not to say that individual actors necessarily uncritically agree with the practical make-up of these values, norms and knowledge in society. Yet, much internalisation and habitual compliance to societal norms and rules occurs in the absence of manifest obligation or violence. Rather, these values, norms and knowledge attain a taken-for-granted quality. This should be seen as a non-natural, socially acquired, dispositional set of characteristics that are the product of social conditions (Bourdieu 2002). This forms, in the words of Paasi, 'a structure of expectations' that routinises everyday life (Paasi 1996). These structures

may be partially or totally common to those who have been the product of similar social conditions (Bourdieu 2002). Social relations among actors are both structured by, and in turn, contribute to the structuring of power (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu 2002). This is the basis of Bourdieu's theory of habitus (see also Hillier and Rooksby 2002). In his well-known convoluted style Bourdieu defines *habitus* as follows:

... a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations.

(Bourdieu 1990: 53)

The social (re)production of the nation, so significant still in our era, is a vivid and real representation and possible implication of the power of the bordered and bordering *habitus* of people. The nation (still) functions as an intuitive structure, a practical reaction, an embodied, as well as cognitive sense of place. It is this structuring power of the national *habitus* that (still) contextualizes human rationality. It creates a mental distance towards the Other side of the socially constructed border (see Van Houtum 1999). By this is meant that the national borders are designed to and still function as a performance, or a display, of a fictitious yet for many appealingly easing purity of, We Here, and Them There. National borders produce an imagined

mental nearness to the members of one's nation and an exclusion of and mental distance to non-members, the 'strangers.' This is not to say that the belief in and compliant subjectification to the nation is the same for everyone, but it is fruitless to deny the still prevailing power of the construct of the nation in our daily lives (Van der Velde and Van Houtum 2002). Apparently, national borders (still) must be seen as one of the most dominant practical territorial efforts of social distancing, of gaining control in order to achieve comfort, *ease* in one's daily life (Van Houtum 2000, 2003). Through this mechanism of distancing national borders are instrumentalized to construct a social focal point, a selection of social priorities. The nation is produced to create a space of legitimate withdrawal. Indifference, in the sense of absence, emptiness, makes a difference in space, that often has the effect of a conservative power (see also Strüver 2002; Strüver forthcoming): that what is beyond the constructed differentiating border of comfort (*difference*) is socially made legitimate to be neglected (*indifference*) (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002; Van Houtum 2003). The intrinsic implication of such bordering attempts is that the labour market across the border may be physically near, but is perceived as distant and interpreted as there, not here, the 'Other side.' Such reasoning is in sharp contrast with the majority of the literature dealing with migratory and commuting movements on a micro-level who is considering actors that have entered already some kind of decision phase. Here the decision to stay

or go is put in a perspective of some kind of cost-benefit analysis with a threshold that has to be exceeded in order to become mobile. As argued above, these approaches run the risk then of overestimating the willingness of workers to move (e.g., de Gijssel *et al.* 1999; Janssen 2000). The activation of seeking labour across the state borders could in theory be triggered by a sizeable gap between the levels of income or amount of employment in another country. But the existence of such a gap may be something that is unknown for the worker, because of a lack of transparency and information and/or, what we address here, because of a certain state of nationally induced mental rigidity (Van der Velde 1999). This latter idea runs counter to the above described Cartesian worldview of human action which has found its present translator in the rational agent in mainstream economics, the *homo economicus* (Bourdieu 2002). The nationally habituated indifference, leads to, what we would like to refer to, a *threshold of indifference* in cross-border labour market mobility (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: The threshold of indifference

<i>Cross-border labour market</i> <i>passiveness</i>	Indifference-factor		
<i>Threshold of indifference</i>			
<i>Cross-border labour market</i> <i>activeness</i>	Stay	Keep-factor	Repel-factor
	Go	Push-factor	Pull-factor
		Home	Away

What this scheme tries to elucidate are the spatial 'dynamics' of which one of the possible outcomes is mobility on the labour market. The vast majority of workers in the EU are indifferent about the cross-border labour possibilities, symbolized by the top box of this scheme. First of all because a decision to leave a certain job-position is not made frequently; a second reason being that, if someone decides to take up another job (in other words to become *occupationally* mobile), this does not automatically imply some kind of cross-border *spatial* mobility. In the context of this contribution, in which we focus upon cross-border spatial mobility, the 'Other place', the 'There' across the border might be 'non-existent' in the mindset and therefore not included in the decision process at all. In general terms if there is no active attitude to make and value difference there will be no active decision-making with regard to that specific place.

When the majority of the actors never surpass the threshold of indifference, only a small group will 'enter' the bottom part of the scheme, the active attitude part. This latter part symbolizes what is usually called 'rational' decision-making. Based on an evaluation of the characteristics and opportunities of the present (*home*) and a possible new location (*away*), a decision is made to become mobile (*go*) or stay put (*stay*). What this 'model' emphasizes is, certainly if we realize that so few workers are mobile (2 out of every 100 are transnational migrants and only 2 out of every 1000 cross-border commuters), that being immobile is the rule and mobility is the aberration.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What we bring forward in this chapter is that cross-border labour immobility is not so much a rational or irrational choice. To a large extent, it escapes such a strict economic choice-reasoning. Not-commuting or not-migrating across a border is not merely a matter of failing to recognize opportunities because of existing differences, but must rather be considered as a matter of *indifference* towards the 'Other side', the 'market' across the border; certainly not as some kind of 'cheap' or irrational sentiment. Hence, spatial job-immobility rather than mobility must be understood as the dominant spatial practice of people. The dominant rational choice-based view of the labour market is not doing justice to what is the dominant practice: 'non-playing'.

Feelings towards 'Them' and 'Us' and consequent practices or non-practices are crucial in understanding the attitude towards labour mobility. In this sense borders play an important role as socially constructed frameworks of familiar habituated locales where possibilities on the 'Other side' are for most people of no importance in the decision to get mobile on the labour market. With respect to a durable place of work, the nation is often still conservatively and defensively incorporated in our minds, in our bodies, it is our practical logic, our *modus operandi*. We (still) act according to this structure and hence we tend to reproduce this structure (Bourdieu 2002). The importance of transparency of (nationally differing) rules and harmonisation on the labour market, one of the essential focus-points within the European Union, is put in a different perspective. Rules' transparency and harmonisation then may be important but certainly not sufficient to change the attitude on cross-border mobility.

We support the already existing tendency to extend the set of variables important for the outcome of an active decision process to include and elaborate 'stay'-factors. There are already some scholars that explicitly take into account (non-economic) factors that cause immobility as a result of a decision not to move. These efforts are certainly contributing to a further understanding of labour mobility. But what might be even more important is the recognition that only very few people are entering the phase where a

decision with regard to the 'Other side' is made. For an in-depth understanding of mobility, we plea for a renewed thinking on the concept of immobility that may contribute to fully comprehend the role of the indifference-factor in labour *immobility*.

It can be ascertained that over the past decade or so in the EU, despite, or maybe even because of the urge that is felt to integrate, the national political sensitivity and inclination towards and practices of bordering, have been put more fiercely on the agenda. National governments are in a process of encouraging nationalism, when strategically promoting their (id)entity. When put in the perspective of supply and demand on the labour market, this promotion is among others aimed at attracting possible employees, which could resolve the bottleneck of the postulated mismatch between demand and supply at the labour market. One of the goals of stimulating labour mobility in the EU is a better performing and functioning labour market. In the process of cheering one's own nation, however, the national worker is immersed in a sea of nationalistic rhetoric, which might cause an even greater indifference with regard to the difference over There and of the Other. National (and regional) policies aiming at increasing mobility could result in exactly the opposite. This is not to say that individual actors necessarily uncritically agree with the discursive make-up of society. Yet, by publicly accepting the political emphasis and importance of (new)

national and (regional) identities in an evermore-integrating European Union, the There might become less important and the habitualisation of the Here becomes more important, where it concerns individual decision making processes. Hence, policies of national (and regional) governments may very well have an unintended counter-effect where it concerns the goals of overarching EU-policies. Therefore, it is not a further politicising of the European harmonisation of presented and performed differences from which we expect the highest results in terms of cross-border labour mobility, but a de-nationalisation, and especially a de-politicisation of the issue of labour-market differences on the national (and regional) level. It is precisely because of the national emphasis on differences, i.e., by underlining the national and regional advantages compared to other places, and stressing national cultural differences that locals are encouraged and legitimised to neglect other places in favour of their home-place. We help to the produce differences and thereby the indifferences, in the sense of mental distances, ourselves. For a true border-transgressing European labour market to perform more effectively, we need to revision our nationalistic difference politics. Policies aiming at encouraging mobility should not stress the specificity of the home region, but first of all be aimed at opening up national confinements and at downplaying performative national differences. Borders are more than performative lines of differences, more than dark ends of the Here-land, and more than representations of the

either/or politics. Borders are also metaphors of the crossing, the de-fencing, the el(ev)ation, the expectation, the amalgamation, the and, the additional. We aim and hope for such a transient labour politics. More than political bridges, a politics based on harmonising differences, we need truly open mental doors, to overcome the self-constructed gap.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities*, New York, Verso.
- Becker, G. (1962) 'Investment in human capital: a theoretical analysis', *The Journal of Political Economy* 70 (Issue 5 Part 2: Investment in Human Beings): 9-49.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) 'Droit et passé-droit, Le champ des pouvoirs territoriaux et la mise en oeuvre des règlements', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 81/82: 86-96.
- (2002) 'Habitus', in J. Hillier and E. Rooksby (eds) *Habitus, a sense of place*, London: Ashgate.
- Campbell, D. (1994) 'Foreign investment, labour immobility and the quality of employment', *International Labour Review* 133: 185-204.
- de Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

European Commission (2001a) *New European labour markets, open to all, with access for all*. Available HTTP: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2001/com2001_0116en01.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2003).

— (2001b), *High level task force on skills and mobility, final report*. Available HTTP: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2001/dec/taskforce2001_en.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2003).

— (2001c) *Employment in Europe 2001: Recent Trends and Prospects*. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

— (2002) *Commission's action plan for skills and mobility*, Available HTTP: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2002/com2002_0072en01.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2003).

European Opinion Research Group (2001) *The social situation in the European Union*. Available HTTP: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/ebs_148_en.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2003).

Eurostat (2002) *Labour force survey: results 2001*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Facchini, G. and Willmann, G. (2001) *The political economy of international factor mobility*, SIEPR Discussion Paper No. 00-20, Stanford: Stanford University. Available HTTP: <<http://siepr.stanford.edu/papers/pdf/00-20.pdf>> (accessed 14 July 2003).

- Fischer, P. (1999) *On the Economics of Immobility: Regional Developments and Migration in the Age of Globalisation*. Bern: Haupt.
- Fischer, P., Holm, E., Malmberg, G. and Straubhaar, T. (2000) *Why do people stay? Insider advantages and immobility* (HWWA Discussion Paper 112), Hamburg: HWWA.
- Fischer, P., Martin, R. and Straubhaar, T. (1997) 'Why do people go or stay?', in T. Hamar, G. Borchmann, K. Tamas and T. Faist (eds) *International Migration, Immobility and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford: Berg.
- Foucault, M. (1991) 'Governmentality', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Fukuyama, F. (1995) *Trust : The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press.
- Gijssels, P. de, Janssen, M., Wenzel, H.-J. and Woltering, M. (eds) (1999) *Understanding European Cross-border Labour Markets*, Marburg: Metropolis.
- Granovetter, M. (1985) 'Economic action and social structure: a theory of embeddedness', *American Journal of Sociology*, 91: 481-510.
- Harris, J. and Todaro, M. (1970) 'Migration, unemployment and development: a two-sector analysis', *The American Economic Review* 60: 126-142.

- Hillier, J. and Rooksby, E. (eds) (2002) *Habitus, a Sense of Place*, London: Ashgate.
- Hodgson, G.M. (1988) *Economics and Institutions: A Manifesto for a Modern Institutional Economics*, Oxford: Opus.
- Hosmer, L.T. (1995) 'Trust - the connecting link between organizational theory and philosophical ethics', *Academy of Management Review*, 20: 379-403.
- Janssen, M. (2000) *Mobilität und regional-ökonomisches Entwicklungspotenzial: höherqualifizierte Arbeitnehmer und Existenzgründer aus der deutsch-niederländische Grenzregion*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Kiehl, M. and Werner, H. (1999) *The labour market situation of EU and of third country nationals in the European Union* (IAB Labour Market Research Topics 32), Neurenberg: IAB.
- MKW (2001) *Scientific report on the mobility of cross-border workers within the EEA*, München: MKW.
- Nooteboom, B. (1992) 'A post-modern philosophy of markets', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 22: 53-76.
- Paasi, A. (1996) *Territories, Boundaries, and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

- Ravenstein, E. (1885) 'The laws of migration', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 48: 167-235.
- Ravenstein, E. (1889) 'The laws of migration', *Journal of the Statistical Society* 52: 241-305.
- Ruggie, J.G. (1998) 'What makes the world hang together? Neo-utilitarianism and the social constructivist challenge', *International Organization*, 52: 855-886.
- Sen, A. (1977) 'Rational fools: a critique of the behavioural foundations of economic theory', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 7: 317-344.
- Simon, H. A. (1982). *Models of Bounded Rationality: Behavioral Economics and Business Organization*, vol. 2, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sjaastad, L. (1962) 'The costs and returns of human migration', *The Journal of Political Economy* 70 (Issue 5 Part 2: Investment in Human Beings): 80-93.
- Stark, O. and Taylor, E. (1991) 'Migration incentives, migration types: the role of relative deprivation', *The Economic Journal* 101: 1163-1178.
- Storper, M. (1997) *The Regional World: Territorial Development in a Global Economy*, New York: The Guilford Press.
- Straubhaar, T. (1988) *On the Economics of International Labour Migration*, Bern: Haupt.

- (2000) *International Migration, gehen oder bleiben: wieso gehen Wenige und bleiben die Meisten?* (HWWA Discussion Paper 111), Hamburg: HWWA.
- Strüver, A. (2002) 'Significant insignificance: boundaries in a borderless European Union – deconstructing the Dutch-German transnational labour market' *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 17 (1): 21-36.
- (forthcoming) 'Bor(der)ing stories: spaces of absence along the Dutch-German border' in H. van Houtum, O. Kramsch and W. Zierhofer (eds) *Bordering Space*, Ashgate: Aldershot.
- Tassinopoulos, A. and Werner, H. (1999) *To move or not to move: migration in the European Union* (IAB Labour Market Research Topics 35), Neurenberg: IAB.
- Taylor, C. (1992) 'Atomism', in S. Avineri and A. de-Shalit (eds) *Communitarianism and Individualism* (Oxford readings in politics and government), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vandamme, F. (2000) 'Labour mobility within the European Union: findings, stakes and prospects', *International Labour Review* 139: 437-455.
- Van Houtum, H. (1998) *The Development of Cross-border Economic Relations, a Theoretical and Empirical Study of the Influence of the State Border on the Development of Cross-border Economic Relations*

Between Firms in Border Regions of the Netherlands and Belgium,

Tilburg: CentER.

—— (1999) 'Mental distance and internationalisation', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 90: 329-335.

—— (2000) 'An overview of European geographical research on borders and border regions', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 15: 57-83.

—— (2003) 'Borders of comfort', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 12: 37-58.

Van Houtum H., and van Naerssen, T. (2002) 'Bordering, ordering, othering', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 93: 125-136.

Van der Velde, M. (1999) *Search behaviour on a cross-border labour market: the case of the Dutch-German Euregio Rijn–Waal* (Nijmeegse Geografische Papers 6), Nijmegen, Vakgroep Sociale Geografie.

Van der Velde, M. and H. van Houtum (eds) (2002) *Borders, Regions and People*, London: Pion.

¹ This is an extended version of a text that has been published earlier in TESSG, Issue 5, December 2003: The power of cross-border labour market immobility, Henk van Houtum and Martin van der Velde.

² We thank the participants of the HWWA Workshop 'Border Regions: Frontiers in Economic Research, Practical Experiences and Political Perspectives', held in Hamburg, June 16-18, 2002, for the opportunity to present an earlier version of this paper and their

helpful comments. We would also like to thank the referees for their constructive and inspiring critical remarks on earlier versions of this contribution.