

University of Sussex
Sussex Centre for Migration Research

social remittances stand for have multiplied (Boccagni and Decimo 2013), or, as Vari-Lavoisier (2020) puts it, social remittances have become a moving target. Therefore, there is a clear risk that social remittances become a mere catchphrase (Boccagni and Decimo 2013) or ‘a sponge that soaks up anything and everything—sufficiently different from specific financial assets—that migrants remit between the localities of destination and origin

A question of scope: social, non-economic, or intangible remittances?

The first ambiguity relates to the question of what characterises social remittances and makes them distinct from other types of remittances. Is it their socio-cultural content or rather their intangibility? Or is it simply the fact that they are non-monetary? All these different interpretations can be found in the literature, as will be shown. Still, one must go back to Peggy Levitt's original paper on social remittances to understand where they stem from.

In her groundbreaking article, Levitt describes social remittances as 'cultural flows'

quality, i.e., whether tangible or intangible, is usually not discussed. If anything, a reference is made to Levitt's (1998) notion that social remittances are ideas, practices, and social capital. Only Krawatzek and Müller-Funk (2020: 2) take content and quality into account, however, with an emphasis on content. The socio-cultural perspective dissents from Levitt's broader perspective by excluding, for example, the political sphere.

The second perspective, which we dub the *non-economic perspective*, likewise relates to Levitt's conception of social remittances as cultural diffusion. In contrast to the socio-cultural perspective, it primarily emphasises the non-economic content of social remittances.¹ Defined as the antipode to monetary remittances, social remittances are referred to as all 'non-financial transfers' (Grabowska et al. 2017: 1), 'non-financial capital' (Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017: 2789), or 'the other side of financial remittances' (Suksomboon 2008: 463). Similarly, social remittances are often contrasted with economic remittances and portrayed as non-economic (Markley 2011; Montefrio et al. 2014; Reynolds 2008). Like in the socio-cultural perspective, the question of social remittances' quality is subordinate. The non-economic

fin(i)e

Table 1: Four perspectives on the scope of social remittances

The second question of whether social remittances must carry characteristics of the migration destination is more complicated to resolve. The changes migrants might experience during their sojourn are manifold and not exclusively related to adopting aspects characteristic of the migration destination. So, what qualifies them as social remittances? Let us consider an example of a female student who, during her exchange semester, lives outside the parental household for the first time. She is empowered by the experience of enjoying more freedom in her daily life without having acquired features of her host country, such as progressive gender norms. If she now encourages female friends at home to lead more independent lives, is she transferring social remittances? While White (2016) would answer in the affirmative, this is not congruent with Levitt's (1998) understanding of social remittances as a form of cultural diffusion, which presupposes the

destination to origin country.

substantiated by a wide range of analyses (e.g. D'Rozario and Choudhury 2003; Foner et al. 2014).

While it is evident that migration-induced flows of tangible and intangible assets circulate globally and multi-directionally, it is less clear if these circulating flows should all be subsumed under social remittances. To begin with, including transfers from migration origin to migration destination contradicts the very meaning of the word remittance, which stems from the Latin *remittere*, meaning *to send back*. Despite the criticism of the one-directional view, there is almost no research applying a social remittance perspective analysing transfers from migration origin to migration destination.³

Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between these two types of transfers that should not be ignored: even though their outcomes might be the same (for instance, cultural change), the underlying processes are not. The transfer of assets from the migration destination to migrants' places of origin entails the *acquisition*

Subtypes of social remittances: toward a new typology

Social remittances can appear in a whole range of different forms and thematic areas. Examples range from specific knowledge, e.g. on agricultural production techniques (Montefrio et al. 2014), political beliefs (Chauvet and Mercier 2014) and driving habits (Grabowska et al. 2017), to notions of healthcare provision (Levitt and Rajaram 2013) and development ideologies (Agarwala 2016). Yet attempts to systematise the different subtypes of social remittances are scarce and often presented as crude listings rather than well-grounded typologies. Another ambiguity, therefore, concerns the systematisation of different subtypes of social remittances.

In line with the reviewed literature on social and related types of remittances, there are two predominant starting points to systematise social remittances: their form, i.e. how they materialise, and their content. Very few systematise social remittances along their content (see, e.g. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017).⁴ Much more common is the differentiation of forms of social remittances. The most widely used distinctions of forms of social remittances again go back to Levitt (Levitt 1998, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). In her earlier works, she claims that there are three forms of social remittances:

ideas, identities, and social capital are recognised as forms of social remittances. In contrast to Levitt's early works, these forms are unfortunately not defined. Due to these shifts and blurs in Levitt's conception, scholars use very different sets of social remittance forms, as summarised in Table 2 and discussed in the following.

Sticking closely to Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2013), Vari-Lavoisier (2020: 125) divides social remittances into 'knowledge and know-how, ideas and practices'. Unfortunately, she does not provide clear definitions of these terms. Grabowska et al. (2017) base their considerations on the famous diffusion theory of Rogers (2003), claiming that the social remittance transfer process resembles the diffusion of an innovation. Using Rogers' categorisation of innovations, they differentiate between ideas, defined as 'node[s] of conceptual thoughts'; practices, understood as 'style[s] of acting'; and objects, defined as 'material item[s] which can gain social meaning' (Grabowska et al. 2017: 21–22). They prefer these three forms to those used by Levitt (1998) not only because they believe them to be easier to operationalise but also because they are convinced that normative constructs and social capital are only formed at a later stage based on the ideas that are transferred. Nowicka and Šerbedžija (2016) finally differentiate ideas, goods, and money as forms of social remittances.

Similar forms are suggested in the closely related field of political remittances. Goldring (2004: 805), for instance, defines political remittances as 'political identities, demands, and practices' whereas Krawatzek and Müller-Funk (2020) conceptualise them as principles, vocabulary, and practices. Political principles are defined as political norms, ideas, and perceptions, political vocabulary as 'political terms, symbols and slogans', and political practices as 'knowledge about patterns of civil and political participation' (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2020: 8).

Ivlevs (2021: 48) differentiates the migration-driven diffusion of 'pro-environmental awareness, values and, ultimately, behaviour' in his study on the impact of emigration on pro-environmental behaviour in origin countries. The term awareness is in some parts replaced by knowledge or informedness. The term value is used interchangeably with the terms norm and belief, pointing to the normative character Ivlevs ascribes to this form. Finally, Paarlberg (2022) includes criminal activities, norms, and identities in his concept of criminal remittances.

Table 2: Forms of social and related types of remittances suggested in the literature

	Practices	Normative Structures	Ideas	Knowledge	Identities	Social Capital	Other
Levitt (1998)	✓ (Also, behaviours)	✓	[✓]	-	[✓]	✓	-
Levitt (2001)	✓ (Also, behaviours)	✓	[✓]	-	-	✓	-
Levitt & Lamba-Nieves (2011)	✓	✓ (Norms)	-	-	✓	✓	-
Levitt & Lamba-Nieves (2013)	✓	-	✓	✓ (Know-how)	-	-	-
Levitt & Rajaram (2013)	✓	-	✓	✓ (Know-how)	-	-	-
Boccagni, Lafleur & Levitt (2016)	✓ (Also, behaviours and skills)	✓					

Several aspects stand out from the summary of previous typifications. First and foremost, it is evident that the typologies developed over time vary in many aspects. Overall, we identified around 20 terms used in the literature to describe different forms of social and related types of remittances. This mirrors how the initial idea of social remittances has unravelled. When we cluster the various terms as in Table 2, six forms remain that were mentioned more than twice. Out of the six, four appear more frequently, so there seems to be a consensus about their importance. These four most relevant forms are (1) practices, (2) normative structures, (3) ideas, and (4) knowledge. While practices are mentioned 13 times, normative structures and ideas appear nine, and knowledge six times in the papers we reviewed. These four core forms constitute the starting point of the following discussion on how social remittances can best be typified.

To begin with, we would like to draw attention to the fundamental distinction between two primary forms of intangible assets that evolve around individuals' actions (practices) and thoughts (ideas). All forms o

are the better choice for conceptualisation. As evident from Table 2, many authors prefer a distinction between normative structures and knowledge. This is in line with the literature, which points out that normative structures and knowledge differ substantially regarding their transfer processes: a central finding of acculturation research is that values and attitudes are particularly resistant to change as they question deeply rooted parts of a person's identity (Berry 2017; Schwartz et al. 2015; Ward et al. 2001). Similarly, Levitt (1998) notes that values and norms (the main forms of normative structures) are harder to transfer than knowledge. Therefore, we suggest sticking to the two distinct forms of normative structures and knowledge, while the term idea remains valid as a superordinate but rather fuzzy notion of the two.

The remaining forms discussed in the following are identity, social capital, objects, and money. *Identity* appears five times in the literature we reviewed. In psychology, identity is defined as 'the totality of one's self-construal' (Weinreich and Saunderson 2003: 26). The term is hence a highly complex and subjective construct describing who we think we are regarding a myriad of factors such as gender, ethnicity, occupation, etc. It is a product of relatively stable biological factors and the experiences we make during our life (Weinreich and Saunderson 2003). In this sense, identity can undoubtedly change during a stay abroad. However, we would argue that identity, as a composite construct which is inherently linked to a person, rather changes as a consequence of the acquisition of social remittances instead of being a form of social remittances.

Social capital is furthermore mentioned four times in the conceptualisations we reviewed. To begin with, the term is problematic as it is fuzzy, and researchers have defined it very differently. More importantly, as Nowicka and Šerbedžija (2016) argue, social capital does not blend s2003)t froubt impor rss

of tangible and intangible remittances which goes against an inclusion of objects/goods as forms of social remittances. The same applies to money, as used by Nowicka and Šerbedžija (2016).

An enhanced concept of (in)formal remittances

transmission of intangible assets arising solely from personal experiences unrelated to the migration destination. Moreover, we would like to note that the lessons of segmented assimilation theory are essential: migrants do not integrate into the totality of the destination society as such but into different segments of it (Portes and Zhou 1993). The potential intangible remittances migrants adopt and transfer depend strongly on the segment of society that they mainly interact with. Concerning the spatial dimension of intangible remittances, we propose a narrow understanding that excludes transfers flowing from migration origin to migration destination as these follow different processes and should hence be analysed separately. We consciously speak of migration destination and origin instead of destination and origin country to take account of remittances induced by internal migration.

In line with earlier works (Levitt 1998; Rother 2016), we would like to emphasise that intangible remittances are, of course, neither positive nor negative but essentially value-neutral. Their nature is volatile – their meaning can change easily. They are often merged with existing ideas or practices and adapted to the local context (Levitt 1998). All stages of the transfer process (acquisition, transmission, and impact) can happen as an act of conscious agency but also unconsciously (Suksomboon 2008).

Having delineated what intangible remittances comprise, we now proceed with our typology of intangible remittances. It differentiates subtypes of intangible remittances along two dimensions: form and content. This results in a fine-grained set of subtypes, as illustrated in Table 3. Following the arguments set out earlier, we first differentiate three forms of intangible remittances: knowledge, normative structures, and practices. To ensure coherence and analytical clarity, we, in contrast to Levitt and other conceptions, exclude identity and social capital. We keep the simple but fundamental distinction between passing on ideas and practices and further differentiate ideas into the forms of knowledge and normative structures.

Knowledge usually refers to what is known or to a justified true belief. Remittances passed on as ideas in the form of knowledge are therefore usually objective, non-judgmental, and refer to the question of *what is*. Normative structures are judgmental concepts referring to the question of *what ought to be* (see Levitt 1998). Remittances in the form of normative structures thus correspond to subjective perceptions and expectations and include, among other things, values, beliefs, and norms.⁶ Under practices, we understand all transferred patterns of behaviour, such as habits of eating or dressing, patterns of political participation, or religious

⁶ The terms norms and normative structures are not synonyms. Whereas norms are prevailing codes of conduct regarding the behaviour of the members of a certain group (Lapinski and Rimal (2005), normative structures refer to a broader concept and include e.g. values, attitudes, beliefs and other forms of normative, subjective understandings and expectations.

practices. While some practices, such as eating and dressing habits, might be easily transferred, others that involve changes in patterns learned over a long time might need more time and effort to transfer (Berry 2017).

While emp(r)3 (s)-1 (y)-4 (n (r)3 (ns(y(.52 0[s Td(.29 -0.0539 Tw 0.2 0 Td[(g TD[(ot)-2

Table 3: A typology of intangible remittances with examples

	Content-Related Subtypes			
	Economic	Environmental	Political	Socio-cultural
	Relate to trade, industry, or money	Relate to the environment in which people, animals, and plants live	Relate to the activities of the government, members of law-making organisations, or people who try to influence the way of thinking	

Although we believe that distinguishing between tangible and intangible remittances provides many advantages, it must be kept in mind that, in practice, both are closely interlinked. A migrant might, for instance, combine monetary remittances for helping relatives set up a business at home with advice on conducting that business based on knowledge she gained abroad. Tangible and intangible remittances thus often go hand-in-hand with each other, reinforce each other or work as an implicit vehicle of each other. The same applies to their subtypes: the boundaries between them will not always be clear-cut, and scholars might be confronted with hybrids in some cases. Working attitudes, for instance, might, depending on the research perspective, equally be categorised as intangible socio-cultural or as intangible economic remittances. Hence, for every research question, it is necessary to thoroughly reflect on the perspective from which the research object is analysed.

An integrated (intangible) remittance framework

With this approach to intangible remittances set, we finally integrate it into an encompassing conception of remittances. Remittances are still usually understood as monetary remittances, while other types of remittances play a minor role. We offer a conception of remittances that equally considers tangible and intangible remittances. In line with our understanding of intangible remittances, we suggest subdividing tangible remittances into the same thematic subtypes. Examples could be country-specific clothes and food (tangible socio-cultural remittances) or a solar collector (tangible environmental remittances). In line with the preceding thoughts, we suggest the following definitions:

- *Remittances* are the sum of tangible and intangible assets migrants acquire at their migration destination and transfer to their migration origin. They can carry economic, environmental, political, or socio-cultural content.
- *Tangible remittances* comprise transferred money and goods, while *intangible remittances* are the knowledge, normative structures and practices migrants acquire at the migration destination and transfer to their migration origin. Intangible remittances reflect the (perceived) differences between the core characteristics of the migration destination and the migration origin or any of their segments.

The resulting overarching conception of remittances with tangible and intangible remittances as key types is illustrated in Figure 1.

Boccagni, P. and Decimo, F. (2013) Mapping social remittances. *Migration Letters*

- Isaakyan, I. and Triandafyllidou, A. (2017) 'Sending so much more than money': exploring social remittances and transnational mobility. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(15): 2787–2805.
- Ivlevs, A. (2021) Does emigration affect pro-environmental behaviour back home? A long-term, local-level perspective. *Kyklos* 74(1): 48–76.
- Kapur, D. (2004) *Remittances: The New Development Mantra?*. New York, Geneva: United Nations, G-24 Discussion Paper 29
- Karolak, M. (2016) From potential to actual social remittances? Exploring how Polish return migrants cope with difficult employment conditions. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 5(2): 21–39.
- King, R. and Skeldon, R. (2010) 'Mind the Gap!' Integrating approaches to internal and international migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(10): 1619–1646.
- Krawatzek, F. and Müller-Funk, L. (2020) Two centuries of flows between 'here' and 'there': political remittances and their transformative potential. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(6): 1003–1024.
- Kubal, A. (2015) Legal consciousness as a form of social remittance? Studying return migrants' everyday practices of legality in Ukraine. *Migration Studies* 3(1): 68–88.

KunzStudi/PKunzStunz

Lapinski, M. K. and Rimal, R. N. (2005) An explication of social norms. *Communication Theory* 15(2): 127–147.

Levitt, P. (1998) Social remittances: migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion. *International Migration Review* 32(4): 926–948.

Levitt, P. (2001) *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Levitt, P. and Lamba-Nieves, D. (2011) Social remittances revisited. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37(1): 1–22.

Levitt, P. and Lamba-Nieves, D. (2013) Rethinking social remittances and the migration-development nexus from the perspective of time. *Migration Letters* 10(1): 11–22.

Levitt, P. and Rajaram, N. (2013) Moving toward reform? Mobility, health, and development in the context of neoliberalism. *Migration Studies* 1(3): 338–362.

Markley, E. (2011) Social remittances and social capital: values and practices of transnational social space. *Calitatea Vieții* 22(4): 365–378.

Mata-Codesal, D. (2011) *Material and Social Remittances in Highland Ecuador*. Brighton: University of Sussex, PhD thesis in Migration Studies.

Mobrand, E. (2012) Reverse remittances: internal migration and rural-to-urban migration in the Philippines. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38(1): 1–22.

Paarlberg, M. EMC 400ter / T1.39ter

- Stark, O., Taylor, J. E. and Yitzhaki, S. (1986) Remittances and inequality. *The Economic Journal* 96(383): 722–740.
- Suksomboon, P. (2008) Remittances and ‘social remittances’: their impact on livelihoods of Thai women in the Netherlands and non-migrants in Thailand. *Gender, Technology and Development* 12(3): 461–482.
- Tabar, P. (2014) ‘Political remittances’: the case of Lebanese expatriates voting in national elections. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35(4): 442–460.
- Vari-Lavoisier, I. (2020) Social remittances, in T. Bastia & R. Skeldon (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development*. London, New York: Routledge, 125–135.
- Ward, C. A., Bochner, S., Furnham, A. and Furnham, A. C. (2001) *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. Hove: Routledge, 2nd edition.
- Weinreich, P. and Saunderson, W. (2003) *Analysing Identity: Cross-Cultural, Societal, and Clinical Contexts*. London and New York: Routledge.
- White, A. (2016) Social remittances and migration (sub-)cultures in contemporary Poland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 5(2): 63–80.