

Migrations 2010

Migrations is the name of a team of researchers working at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno. It is also the title of a pair of conferences that have been organised by the team, the second of which, subtitled Knowledge, Production, Policymaking, was held on 24–26 June 2010 in Telč.

The key question this year was – what types of migrations are discursively produced as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ social processes and how are various discursive fields dissolved within this process of production? Migration is viewed as an interplay of multiple actors, institutions, and social processes. Understanding migration requires reflecting on the production of knowledge – by society as well as social scientists – as this knowledge constructs our social reality, which in turn shapes our knowledge.

Accordingly, the second year of the conference introduced a number of challenges to the reflection on social-science methodologies. Endre Sik discussed migration potential research and showed that most fieldwork research on migration potential was done in the ‘East’, as though no migration potential existed in the ‘West’. His explanation for this is the fear-driven nature of migration potential research, which also means that migration potential in the ‘West’ is not seen as a problem.

Czaba Szaló linked the discussion to methodological nationalism in his presentation of the concept of denationalisation. This concept derives from the view that the categories of the current critique of methodological nationalism have become trapped in the search for cultural dynamics and social formations that go beyond the frame of the nation-state. One of the examples Szaló gave of this is the practice of bordering, which in fact leads to the denationalisation of national territory and of state agendas or citizenship. Although

the institutions involved in this process are formally national, their logic is de-national.

Another thematic section of the conference was the view of migration ‘from the top’. Speakers presented papers exploring the role played by national and international or supranational institutions.

Heikki Kerkkänen used Foucault’s concept of governmentality to analyse the political organisation of differences in Finland as a chain of individual, collective, and institutional agents’ reactions to the prevailing structural context, changes to them, and the activities of others, and to examine immigration and immigrant policies as fields of the organisation of differences that mutually influence each other.

The role of the EU in managing migration was explored by Emilia Modellmog-Anweiler. She showed how the two concepts of ‘migration’ and ‘mobility’ arose to distinguish the potentially threatening ‘migration’ of third-country nationals from the ‘mobility’ of EU nationals, which is perceived as a key factor in a dynamic economy. According to Modellmog-Anweiler, this dichotomy is the primary source of the schizophrenia in EU migration politics, which promotes security and freedom at the same time.

Marek Čaněk’s paper focused on the role of different institutions in construing migrant workers and their role in certain localities in the Czech Republic. He dealt with the diverse logic of different institutions operating within the framework of the competition state. He showed the mismatch between the ‘imagined’ competition state, characterised by a knowledge-based economy, and the ‘real’ state, based on cheap labour.

The third thematic section was devoted to what could be viewed as the flipside of the coin – the ‘view from the bottom’.

Stephen Alomes focused on Australia. He showed how, despite the country’s traditionally multicultural nature, Australia’s

multicultural policy has become fear-driven and nationalist, and how, under these conditions, notwithstanding the nature of this policy, integration and multiculturalism is working 'on the street, in everyday discourse, in the era of materialism and consumer culture.

A case study of the everyday interactions between the police and labour migrants in Tatarstan, Russia, provided interesting insight into how institutional rules can be transformed in everyday practice. Ekaterina Khodzhaeva aimed to clarify the forms, aims, and social context of everyday interactions between the police and ethnic minorities. Even though there were no institutional directions to do so, the police treated migrants differently based on their (ethnic) appearance. Their interpretations of legislation in everyday practice led to two different strategies according to their origin – mutually beneficial cooperation, or punitive sanctions.

Stefan Rother examined the role of civil society in the global governance of migration. Does it have a future? According to Rother, civil society's global involvement in migration issues was made possible as a result of the 'new development mantra' promoted by global institutions such as the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations. He used the example of the Global Forum on Migration and Development to explore the possibilities and internal contradictions of this involvement/phenomenon.

The conference brought together a variety of perspectives from which migration can be explored. It demonstrated how necessary it is to perceive migration not as a social phenomenon separate from our everyday reality, but as something we are all a part of at some stage in our lives.

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