

RN35 at the 14th ESA Conference in Manchester 20-23 August 2019

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The 14th ESA Conference took place from August 20 to 23 in Manchester. Research Network 35 “Sociology of Migration” played an active role at this conference: we organized a semi-plenary session, 27 thematic sessions and six joint sessions with other research networks. Thus, a total of 129 papers were presented within the framework of the Research Network 35.

The sessions varied in their methodological and theoretical approaches and covered many diverse issues in the field of migration research. During the sessions, young researchers and established scholars had the opportunity to present and discuss their projects as well as to get in contact.

The Manchester conference was an opportunity to tighten the cooperation of RN 35 with other Research Networks. A stream of joint sessions was organized with RN13 “Sociology of Families and Intimate Lives” under the heading of “Relatives at a Distance: Doing Family Across Borders”, with 10 paper presentations. A second joint session was organized together with RN37 “Urban Sociology” on the theme of “Migration and the City: Urban Spaces and Reordering of Borders, Boundaries, and Belonging in Contemporary Europe”, with 12 papers presented at the conference. Of particular importance for our Research Network was the Semi-Plenary we organized on the “Contested Boundaries of Humanitarianism” for which we received well beyond 20 high-quality submissions. The eventual selection of talks by Julia Dahlvik and Dimitris Parsanoglou proved to be both topical and engaging.

The topics of the sessions ranged from “Methodological Frontiers: Researching Migration in the Digital Era”, “Contested Politics of Migration”, “Migration, Education and Inequalities”, “Migration and Integration Reconsidered”, “Re-thinking Migration – Conceptual Challenges and Innovative Perspectives” to “The Local Production of Borders” and “Borders and Boundaries”.

Presentations and discussions of course mirrored current dynamics in the context of European migration orders as well as other salient issues linked to them. Brexit was a much-discussed topic, as was the deadly border in the Mediterranean or the situation of refugees in Europe. Conceptually, the focus on these issues was much more on how migration affected local structures and institution. Research projects that were put up for discussion, often were of a qualitative design in order to include field observation in the analysis.

In the face of these dynamics, the articulation of borders and mobilities in current migration orders was an intensely debated issue. Sessions dedicated to the themes of “Local borders” and of “Border and Boundaries” dealt with bordering practices in geographical border areas, in detention centres and in the everyday lives of migrants and citizens. They gave ample evidence of the multiple mechanism of inclusion and exclusion that increasingly concern contemporary European societies.

Another point to notice about our Manchester programme was the high number of presentations on the subject of migration and education, which covered many facets: national educational contexts and their symbolic boundary-making in relation to students with migration experience, overwhelmed institutions in the face of flight and migration, or education as a crucial factor for access to resources. The focus was more on national

concepts, on discourses, on questions of integration and their connection with the perspective of the individual. After all, educational contexts within migration research very much bring to the fore attitudes, orders of belonging as well as public discourses on integration.

Finally, methodological questions played an important role throughout our conference programme. Dedicated sessions on methods discussed digital data methods from different angles, including the use of Facebook or Twitter as a survey tool as well as the misuse of data driven politics. Participants in these sessions also critically scrutinized the resurgence of identity politics and the necessity of the category “identity” in migration research. In general, a range of methodological questions were critically reflected upon and put up for discussion. Methodology emerged as a key issue we aim at pursuing further in the future of the research network.