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Neuchâtel Graduate Conference of Migration and Mobility Studies
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University of Neuchâtel, 1–2 July 2021
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Call for Papers
Deadline for Submission is 15 March 2021

4th Neuchâtel Graduate Conference of Migration and Mobility Studies

University of Neuchâtel, 1 – 2 July 2021

Aim and Scope

The Neuchâtel Graduate Conference is an international graduate conference organized by the nccr – on the move, the Swiss National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) for migration and mobility studies. It provides a stimulating environment in which doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from different universities and research institutions can exchange ideas, establish networks, attend targeted training, and initiate collaborative research.

The 4th edition will take place from 1 to 2 July 2021 as a hybrid event, with the physical event at the University of Neuchâtel and the possibility to attend remotely online. It will gather around 50 researchers in the field of migration and mobility.

Call for Papers: The Future of Mobility and Immobility

The topic of this year will be 'The Future of Mobility and Immobility'. The forms and intensity of migration and mobility have constantly changed over time. After a steady expansion of human flows between the 1990s and the early 2000s, public health measures to contain the outbreak of COVID-19 have put a sudden halt to the mobility of persons, goods and services. With this in mind, we wish to encourage junior researchers to explore alternative scenarios regarding the regulation and the experience of human movement in the years to come. We are not asking researchers to predict the future. Instead, we are inviting them to provide scientifically grounded analysis on how political, economic, technological, and social change may shape mobility, reflecting on longer trends in the social sciences. Will there be continuity? Will there be fundamental changes? We encourage researchers to build upon their expertise on past and present forms of mobility to sketch possible scenarios and identify forward-looking avenues for research on this topic.

Conference Format and Working Groups

To provide participants with the opportunity to either attend the conference in person or to follow it remotely, we foresee this edition as a hybrid event, with the physical element at the University of Neuchâtel. If the sanitary and legal conditions do not allow us to meet face-to-face at that time, we are prepared to offer a fully online event.

As we intend to make room for in-depth discussions and facilitate the finalization of articles for publication in international journals, participants will be invited to remain within the same working group over the two days of the conference. Seven closed groups with a maximum of eight carefully selected participants will be discussing precisely defined topics. Researchers from the nccr – on the move and senior scholars from our International Advisory Board (IAB) will guide the discussions and provide expertise. Falling under the same overarching theme of 'The Future of Mobility and Immobility', the groups will be divided into the following topics:

1) Borders – securitization: For many countries, the first line of defense from the pandemic was the international border separating the domestic from the international arena, thus highlighting the symbolic and material importance of the border as a privileged protective tool of national governments. In parallel, internal mobility across different regions of the same country has also been massively constrained. And while governments have given significant power to the police and the military to enforce the restrictions on mobility, they have increasingly relied on private companies to monitor (and contain) human movement. To be sure, the securitization and privatization of the border are far from being new processes, but these trends may have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This begs the questions: Will the securitization of migration further accelerate as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic? How will surveillance mechanisms evolve in the future and who will have the power to shape them? Will borders be re-erected within nation states?

2) (Non)essential mobilities and unequal migration governance: While mobility restrictions have been among the most common responses adopted by governments to contain the spread of the pandemic, a new moral line of distinction has divided human movement into the "good" and the "bad". The concept of "essential worker" is a case in point, as many of the individuals who were deemed to be essential during the COVID-19 pandemic were migrants. This new distinction turns on its head previous distinctions between privileged "hypermobile" individuals and underprivileged labor migrants. Does this result in more rights for migrant workers? Or will it make room for a further hierarchization of migration policies, whereby

governments increase migration deterrence efforts through physical control, by ensuring only limited interactions with locals, and through reinforced deportation efforts, all the while competing with others to attract "valuable" migrants? And how are the moral boundaries shaped by those who are affected by them, i.e. by migrants themselves? Starting with these questions that have become urgent since the start of the pandemic, this working group aims to explore distinctions and hierarchization in migration law, governance, discourse and experiences. The working group is open for papers that take these questions up in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also more broadly for related work on boundary-making and hierarchization in migration and mobility studies.

3) Normative approaches to migration, mobility and citizenship: Normative approaches around the governance of migration have been traditionally framed around the authority of the state in determining its border and citizenship policies. Recently, this approach was challenged in two ways. First, supra and sub-national authorities asserted themselves as meaningful actors in policy-making (such as the EU and cities). At the same time, private actors became increasingly involved in the regulation of mobility (e.g., flight companies). The COVID-19 pandemic has further strengthened these challenges. Cities have taken initiatives to help irregular immigrants on their territories; in parallel, transportation companies have co-determined the rules of already restricted international migration and mobility. Under these circumstances, we raise the following questions: What does it mean to be a foreign resident in terms of accessing different rights during the pandemic time? Are disparities between foreigner and citizen statuses morally justified? What are the normative limits of private companies in implementing further restrictions on migration and mobility, both at international and national levels (e.g., the requirement to vaccinate)? Should a „health passport" become mandatory for mobility, especially in a world of deep global inequalities?

4) Family spatial configurations in a new mobility framework: During the Covid-19 pandemic, mobility restrictions have impacted populations. Families, especially those with transnational ties, are suffering some of the harshest consequences of borders closure – not only at the national level, but also across municipalities and regions, as subnational governments restricted mobility, impeding families to be reunited. While being with their family is a basic human right, family members are separated without, or at least fewer means of, mobility. For example, Swiss residents with a third-country national partner had to wait for several months to be reunited after the lockdown. Even now, they can visit their partner only under certain conditions. During Christmas time, Portuguese families,

one of the most represented foreign communities in Switzerland, were uncertain to see their family living abroad without being forced to be quarantined at their arrival back in Switzerland. Will these restrictions modify the family strategies of (migrant/mobile) populations? Will families be less transnational, choosing to live in the same country or even in the same city to be able to reunite more easily? What will be the new (mobility) strategies to avoid being physically separated from each other?

5) Social protection for mobile populations: The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been followed by an economic and social crisis of extraordinary dimension. The IMF expects that 170 countries will experience negative per capita income growth in 2021. This will have dramatic consequences for mobile populations. Migrants often have precarious labor conditions and irregular situations that place them first on the list to suffer job loss without any compensation. Most welfare regimes require residence rights and labor market contracts to access social and labor protection measures. Besides, in times of financial strain, welfare chauvinist attitudes are likely to be reinforced. How are governments protecting mobile populations during (and after) the COVID-19 pandemic? Are they taking exceptional measures? Can we observe public opinion shifts regarding deservingness? This working group aims to address these questions. We accept papers that investigate the welfare-migration nexus in times of (and post) COVID-19 pandemic. The objective is to analyze the policy measures that were (or were not) put in place by governments to alleviate the situation of the most vulnerable groups.

6) The future of asylum: In the last thirty years, the number of displaced people has doubled and surpassed 80 million. This evolution has not only caused a stark rise of asylum applications and challenged host states in all world regions, but also initiated a politicization and securitization of refugees as well as a technologization and acceleration of asylum procedures. Paradoxically, the number of states that introduced national asylum frameworks recognizing the right to seek asylum has increased, but so have the policies that aim to reduce states' responsibility. Academics have thereby mostly focused on restrictive policies that have been introduced by countries of the Global North, even though most of the displaced persons are hosted by countries of the Global South. Questions concerning the past and present of asylum may be addressed in the working group to attempt at sketching a future for the asylum process: Will we witness the end of asylum or the end of the deterrence paradigm? How will the asylum policies and practices in countries of the Global South evolve? What will be the future of the growing numbers of rejected asylum seekers who are neither accepted by host states nor returned to their home countries?

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7) Strategies of individuals (on the move) to cope with external shocks: The COVID-19 pandemic brought social inequalities to the fore, drawing attention to intersectional and structural disadvantage. While in a way we are all in this together, in a lot of other ways, we are not. Intersectionality depicts how power and inequality are structured differently for groups, based on their diverse interlocking demographics (e.g., class, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexuality, etc.). How do essential service workers deal with the risk of having to move to go to work daily instead of staying at home, as far away as possible from a possible infection? How do non-essential service workers deal with the privilege of being able to work from home, while being more exposed to domestic violence? How do children succeed at school, when home-schooling might prove to be difficult, if internet connection is unreliable, and/or if parents are out of the house for work? How do individuals (on the move) react to fast-changing daily routines and structures, and how do they deal with the rise in depression rates? We look for proposals dealing with individuals' responses to the pandemic and its governance at the micro-level, that is, strategies implemented by individuals on the move to cope with external shocks. How do immigrants, refugees, and their descendants respond to and navigate (multiple) disadvantages in the face of a pandemic? How do they react to and deal with changing public attitudes? What do we know about immigrants' agency and resilience in uncertain times, such as a pandemic? And what can we learn for the future, dealing with intersectional and structural disadvantage outside the setting of a pandemic?

Best Paper Award

The Neuchâtel Graduate Conference of Migration and Mobility Studies offers a prize of CHF 500 for the best paper to be submitted and presented at the conference.

Submission Procedure

Deadline for submission is 15 March 2021

Paper proposals should include the working group title you wish to propose, an abstract (max. 250 words), a list of up to five keywords, the name and affiliation of the presenter. Co-authored papers and papers at different stages of advancement are welcome.

Paper proposals must be submitted via this form by Monday, 15 March 2021. Applicants will be informed by 30 March 2021. For any questions, please contact Robin Stünzi, Scientific Officer, by email at robin.stunzi@unine.ch.

There is no participation fee. To encourage participation from all universities, the nccr – on the move will provide funding opportunities up to CHF 400. Funding for the Neuchâtel Graduate Conference of Migration and Mobility Studies is specifically designed for international graduate students traveling from far or without mobility funding. Please contact Robin Stünzi, the Scientific Officer, to check your eligibility and apply for funding.