

Conference: Social and Cultural Consequences of Voluntary and Forced Migration

Venue: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland

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(short report by Michał Buchowski & Kamila Grześkowiak)

The conference addressed a highly pertinent issue of the contemporary world, important also for Central and Eastern European societies. No wonder that it attracted well over forty applications, out of which less than half could be accommodated in the conference programme. While Poles and Hungarians were the most numerous contingents, other participants came from Georgia, Russia, Finland, Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, the UK and Israel. Topics included the effects of migration on family structure and kin relations (e.g. impact on children's education), linguistic practices of migrants (and of asylum seekers and their translation problems in courtrooms), the integration of highly skilled professionals on the one hand and unskilled Roma on the other, representations of "the West" as a motivation for migration, and the impulses behind volunteers' assistance to migrants, despite the anti-migrant rhetoric of governments. Anthropological perspectives generated insight at the level of the household, e.g. in decisions concerning care and endemic migration; at the macro level, migrants were sometimes perceived as the equivalent of "failed citizens", the victims of globalization. Continuity and change in the ritual practices of transnational families were scrutinized, as was the erosion of emotional relations, particularly with the so-called euro-orphans (i.e. children left behind by their parents, who often experience stigmatization). Other subjects explored included alienation and nostalgia for pre-migration forms of sociality and life; parenting practices; the bureaucratic practices of the authorities and officials' linguistic hegemony; vicious circles of poverty; local educational institutions unable to harness the experiences of returning pupils; postsocialist aspirations to be cosmopolitan, framed in terms of crypto-colonialism and self-provincialization; class differentiation in migration encounters; stereotypical nomadization of migrant Roma, accentuating their discrimination and systemic segregation while prompting scholars to undertake an "action research"; religious relations between hosts and immigrants; forms and motivations of refugee solidarity; the politicisation of migration and refugees' treatment in "reception centres"; and gender and age differentiation in all of these contexts. The rich ethnographic materials presented were elucidated with the help of a range of conceptual instruments, old and new. This combination of empirical data and conceptual armature generated lively and insightful discussion through two full days.