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NCCR – on the move: A National Center of Competence on the Migration-Mobility Nexus

Gianni D'Amato*

1. Introduction

When people migrate, traditionally they tend to settle at their destination. Scholars have for the most part focused on immigration flows in a way that assumes permanent or long-term settlement. Demographic studies have given us a detailed picture of the immigrant population in Switzerland and how it has changed over time. Migration studies and related fields such as law, sociology, or economics have provided accounts of how the arrival of immigrants affects the resident population (e.g. Berry 2008; Borjas 1999). Some of these works also qualified notions of settlement and destination, and highlighted the diversity of migratory projects when entire life courses are considered (e.g. Faist 2000; Massey et al. 1994).

A changed international environment and adoption of a new legal framework has induced major policy changes in Switzerland during the past decade, notably with the entry of force of the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons and the 2008 Foreign Nationals Act. These changes have affected both markets and society in fundamental ways. Indeed, we argue that immigration has undergone a paradigm shift: from (old) immigration predominately regulated by the state and corporatist agreements – responsive to economic needs – to (new) mobility increasingly regulated by the national and global market. These shifts were clear changes on a continuum we call the migration-mobility nexus. Despite much excellent work on immigration, most research focuses on how immigrants of the first generation and their descendants have succeeded in finding their place in society (Crul and Vermeulen 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993).

More recently, researchers have begun to investigate transnational social ties of immigrants and the issue of circular or temporary mobility, although these studies provide a limited picture. Indeed, none of the existing studies has conducted a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the shift from old immigration to new mobility, the modifications in the regulatory legal and economic framework, and their impact on society. Existing national and international evidence on changed migration patterns has remained disjointed and thus far has failed to provide an overall analysis of the changed situation.

The identified shift has altered power relations between key actors, and made immigration – now different 'fields' of immigration – inherently more complex. Yet, without a detailed understanding of changed immigration patterns and the new regulatory framework, we are left with an inadequate picture of the factors that shape today's society. By consequence, government and society are unable to react to the changed circumstances and face serious challenges to social cohesion, and ultimately these developments may threaten the functioning of the state and society. Fundamental modifications – or shifts – in the regulatory framework at a supranational and national level have provoked conflicts, notably between state regulation and markets, and between regulation, markets and society. It appears that at present there is no coordinated political strategy at government level, and no active planning in the context of the ongoing paradigm shift. Given the serious societal consequences changed immigration patterns may entail, this state is acute. We argue that increased market regulation along with weak state regulation of mobility ultimately result in a legitimacy crisis and a democratic deficit.

This NCCR provides the basis to counter ill-informed policy, false perceptions, and inadequate analysis of the change of immigration patterns and their impact on society. Designed to approach the changed migratory reality from different angles, this project will allow ground-breaking research. Different research projects are combined to address the overall research question: What is the character of

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contemporary immigration patterns – the so-called ‘new’ migration? To do so, the projects draw on the contrast between (old) forms of migration focusing on long-term and permanent settlement on the one hand, and (new) mobility on the other hand, where migration projects are more fluid and changing.

To attain the above mentioned goal, the NCCR research strategy takes into account an important structural condition of the respective academic field: Indeed, migration and mobility research is characterized by a tension between disciplinary academic qualification and the need for interdisciplinary research in order to understand the contemporary realities of migration and mobility (Brettell and Hollifield 2008). This assertion applies all the more to Switzerland, where interdisciplinary networks of migration research have been only slowly developing during the last twenty years (see in detail, the NCCR knowledge transfer strategy on our website). It is exactly one of the main goals of this NCCR to develop such an interdisciplinary field of migration and mobility research in Switzerland.

In phase I (2014-17) we are conducting 17, predominantly disciplinary research projects, which should fuel each other. As a result of such cross-fertilization, common research questions combining different disciplinary perspectives might arise. Yet, rigid standards or top-down measures imposing interdisciplinarity imply a risk of exposing the fellows and project leaders to a structural dilemma and spoiling their motivation. Therefore our adopted research strategy aims at striking a pragmatic balance between disciplinary interests and the autonomy of the individual projects (IPs/“Teilprojekte”), on the one hand, and the interdisciplinary nature of the research horizon, on the other hand (Weingart and Padberg 2014). The NCCR research structure and research integration efforts, as described below, take into account this structural tension.

2. Research Structure

The research structure lays out two levels for analyzing the migration-mobility nexus. First, all of the selected IPs tackle assumed new and understudied migratory realities and phenomena (such as migration of the highly skilled or circular and undocumented migration). Second, the combination of the IPs coming from different academic disciplines offers a unique added scientific value, in that it allows us to grasp the interplay of multilevel legal orders, market drivers and societal dynamics of migration and mobility. By combining these two levels we will conduct a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of the case study “Switzerland”.

Since the actual takeoff of the NCCR in October 2014, the research structure has been consolidated in constant negotiations with the fellows and project leaders. At the level of the IPs, the research teams have elaborated their research outlines and – in some cases – have differentiated their IP into sub-projects. In the course of the discussions across projects, which have taken place so far, intersections and synergies between IPs have been identified. In this vein, we would in particular mention the transversal character of two projects, IP1_INVENTORY and IP2_IMPACT. These two projects have worked on improving methods and data in measuring and analyzing migration flows and migration-related phenomena to, from, and within Switzerland. The longitudinal data set has been developed in close cooperation with IP9_LM-EFFECT and IP12_INTL-STUDENTS as well as with the support of the NCCR Data Manager. The longitudinal data finally be made available to all IPs, so that they compare their research findings with up-to-date statistical information.

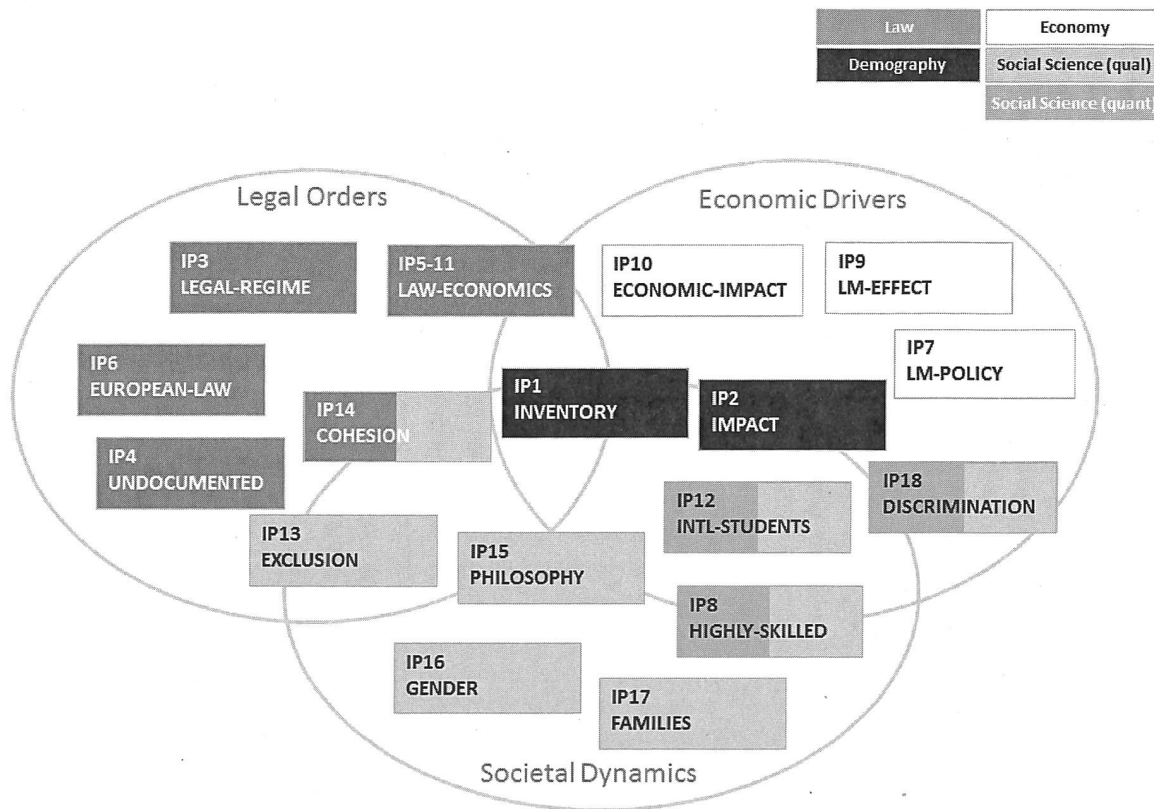
This graphical representation of the NCCR research structure brings to the fore the disciplinary logic of (Swiss) migration studies, which is indeed a result of the prevailing nation state perspective (Favell 2008). Yet, it also points to the emergence of important intersections of scientific disciplines and of functional systems. Some IPs are specifically positioned at these intersections: Due to their research questions, their theoretical and methodological approaches as well as their team characteristics.

The research integration in the NCCR aims at mobilizing these intersectional fields and providing a framework for the emergence of new, not-yet-represented, connections between IPs. Such connections may appear and shall be fostered at the level of empirical analysis, theoretical reflection as well as methodological expertise.

3. Research Integration

The NCCR research integration activities have been strongly influenced by the afore mentioned tension between the need for disciplinary qualification and the interdisciplinary nature of the scientific objectives proper to this NCCR.

The research activities in the first year focused primarily on consolidating and adapting the IP outlines to the scientific expertise and characteristics of the research teams. For the purpose of research integration, NCCR working groups have been established, in which discussions and activities are taking place across the IPs. The main output of the workshop was the identification of future fields of collabora-



Key to Figure

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| IP1_inventory | Inventory of individual statistical data on migration to, from and within Switzerland in a post-census world |
| IP2_impact | Mapping the demographics of the new forms of mobility and measuring their socio-economic impact |
| IP3_legal-regime | From 'traditional' to 'new' migration: Challenges to the international legal migration regime |
| IP4_undocumented | New wine in old skins? Containing "new" migration with traditional approaches – the example of undocumented immigrants in Switzerland |
| IP5-11_LAW-ECONOMICS | The law and economics of migration policy |
| IP6_european-law | The emergence of a European law on foreigners |
| IP7_lm-policy | Integration through active labor market policy |
| IP8_highly-skilled | The mobility of the highly skilled towards Switzerland |
| IP9_lm-effect | Labor market effects and the political economy of 'new' migration to Switzerland |
| IP10_ECONOMIC-IMPACT | The economic impact of new migration and integration issues |
| IP12_intl-students | International student mobility between the South and the North |
| IP13_exclusion | Restricting immigration: Practices, experiences and resistance |
| IP14_COHESION | Unity and diversity in cohesion: The concept of integration in a changing world |
| IP15_philosophy | Citizenship and immigration: An empirical and normative analysis of Swiss philosophy of integration |
| IP16_gender | Gender as boundary marker in migration and mobility: Case studies from Switzerland |
| IP17_families | "New migration" and new forms of integration: Families in geographical itinerancy |
| IP18_discrimination | Discrimination as an obstacle to social cohesion |

tion. Since then the fellows and Project Leaders have institutionalized their collaboration in six working groups.

Three of these working groups deal with concrete research topics that are addressed in more than one IP, namely the working groups "Integration – Exclusion – Social Cohesion", "Labor Market and Migration" and "Rights of Migrants". Two other working groups, "Statistical Data" and "Qualitative Research",

deal with methodological questions, whereas the sixth working group "Migration and Direct Democracy" has been reflecting on opportunities and obstacles to knowledge transfer in direct democratic Switzerland.

As similar NCCRs and experiences of the *Collegium Helveticum* have shown, collaborative face-to-face spaces are crucial for fostering intra- and interdisciplinary debates and outputs. NCCR working

groups offer thus an informal and familiar space for understanding how other IPs and disciplines study migration and mobility. They provide a framework for stimulating intellectual exchanges, and they can draw on NCCR funds to develop collaborative initiatives. The working groups can invite discussants and guest researchers to their sessions, and they can – as all members of the NCCR do – apply for funding to organize NCCR Thematic Workshop).

In the spring term 2015, the working groups have been meeting several times in the framework of the Friday Sessions at the University of Neuchâtel. These Friday Sessions provide space to the fellows for pursuing their academic debates, developing inter-project collaborations as well as forging a social network of young migration and mobility scholars.

The working groups and Friday Sessions constitute the intellectual and social fundament, based on which more permanent forms of cooperation, such as work packages or clusters could be created within the NCCR in the coming years. Every year, the Autumn Retreat will be used to further institutionalize the activities and debates led hitherto in the working groups, as well as to get input from the Project Leaders and the members of the International Advisory Board (for the composition, see our website). The following concrete activities have been launched in the NCCR working groups so far.

3.1. NCCR Working Group on Integration – Exclusion – Social Cohesion

Integration has become one of the main political rationales for governing migration and nation building in Switzerland. Yet, the term is neither theoretically, nor politically, nor legally clearly conceptualized (Piñeiro et al. 2009). The working group pursues the goal of theoretically and empirically analyzing the Swiss integration dispositive and identifying its effects on social exclusion and its implications for social cohesion from an interdisciplinary perspective.

3.2. NCCR Working Group on Labor Market and Migration

Labor market is one of the classical and important fields of migration research for economists and social scientists. As the demand of Swiss economy for labor is one of the main drivers for migration and mobility, it has been identified as a key area of interest within the NCCR. The working group aims at discussing empirical results and methodological innovations and it fosters a cross-disciplinary exchange. The debates and collaborations within the working group have taken the shape of a colloquium, in which PostDocs, doctoral students and Project Leaders present their

work in progress and receive qualified feedback from the members of the group as well as external experts.

3.3. NCCR Working Group on Rights of Migrants

The participants of this working group discuss crucial questions pertaining to the rights of migrants in Switzerland. On the one hand they discuss different legal regimes governing migration, such as European migration law, asylum law or human rights law. On the other hand they discuss the fragmented legal framework addressing social phenomena such as undocumented migration, third-country nationals or integration. The group of predominantly legal scholars aims to lay the ground for a comprehensive, normative understanding of how the different levels of governance regulate migration and mobility towards and within Switzerland. From an interdisciplinary perspective, NCCR legal scholars inform the members of the other research teams on local, national, regional or international legal frameworks dealing with migration. The social scientists, in return, provide empirical knowledge and theoretical approaches. This first step should give rise to further collaborations in the future.

3.4. NCCR Working Group on Statistical Data

Register micro-data offers a new statistical approach to studying migration in Switzerland. The data assembled in this manner connects the interests of several IPs. In a first step, the working group discussed and organized the practical use and management of the new longitudinal, individual data with Philippe Wanner (Deputy Director and Project Leader IP1_INVENTORY and IP2_IMPACT). Based on the experiences collected hitherto and on a regular exchange with international experts, the working group will discuss their results and further methodological innovation for Swiss statistics.

3.5. NCCR Working Group on Qualitative Research

This working group fosters collaboration between the NCCR research teams working with qualitative data. It discusses methodological and theoretical strategies for doing qualitative research against the backdrop of politically constructed categories such as “migration”, “integration”, “cohesion”, “highly qualified”, and others. In addition, it offers a platform for discussing possible collective analyses of qualitative material. Finally, it offers a space for reflecting on the ethical challenges to qualitative research, which arise in the context of migration and mobility studies.

3.6. NCCR Working Group on Migration and Direct Democracy

In two ways, Swiss migration politics has been influenced by direct democracy. On the one hand, direct

democratic tools and arguments have been used since the beginning of the 20th century to spur anti-immigrant politics and to bypass constitutionalism and international law (Skenderovic and D'Amato 2008). On the other hand, the Swiss claim to an exceptional democratic model has to grasp with the reality of a federal state, in which the hurdles to naturalization are high and the foreign population is on the increase, reaching almost 24% at the time of writing.

The working group serves as a platform for investigating the political, legal and historical entanglements between migration and direct democracy. But, it also facilitates a reflection on the interplay between academic research, political debate and knowledge transfer in the highly politicized debate on migration. Its activities reflect the need and a vivid interest in developing an academic culture of responsibility and a political culture, which acknowledges constitutionalism and human rights as a foundation of Swiss democracy. The debates in this group familiarize the fellows from abroad, which make up about one third of the NCCR fellows, with Swiss politics.

4. Scientific Added Value and Achievements

As we have only begun our collaborative work, the main scientific output so far has taken place at the structural level. It is to our mind an important achievement that the IPs have consolidated their research outlines and have begun their research. At the level of research integration, the working groups have been institutionalized, and a number of them have launched their first activities. The structural measures represent an important precondition for the research integration efforts, which we seek to pursue in Years 2, 3 and 4. Taking into account the structure of the field, the set-up of the NCCR and the discussions we have led with fellows and Project Leaders, it is important to highlight that the collaboration within the NCCR will deepen, once the research conducted in the IPs has fully taken off.

A further, important added scientific value of this first year has been the production of the longitudinal, individual data set, which serves as a basis to a number of projects. Moreover, we have been able to establish working relations with the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, a contractual key partner of our NCCR. The involved IPs can now access the different data they need and refine their research design accordingly. In addition, a survey on migration of highly skilled people to Switzerland should be put in place in Year 2. This survey is both scientifically and politically important, since there is neither sufficient census nor micro-data available on the situation of

highly skilled migrants in Switzerland. This survey will further provide customized data for the IPs working on highly qualified migrants.

Lastly, the Annual Conference of the nccr – on the move convened together with IMISCOE, Europe's largest research network on migration, in June 2015 in Geneva has been a key concern for all members of our network. Many fellows and Project Leaders have presented their work in different panels and workshops and therefore gain opportunities to discuss their texts in an interdisciplinary and international context.

5. Conclusion

In many ways, Switzerland offers an interesting perspective for the analyzing changing migration regimes in Europe. One could argue, that the Swiss case offers a very telling "case" to understand how contemporary migration regimes are negotiating the contradictions between legitimate nation building, economic growth, social welfare, international relations and human rights concerns, as all these aspects of migration regime are salient in Switzerland.

Switzerland has been relying on migration for economic growth since the 19th century and even earlier. Switzerland had an average share of foreigners in the whole population of more than 10% throughout the 20th century and even more than 20% in the last two decades. With such a high immigration rate it differed from most European country and could be called an untypical immigration country (compared to the USA or Australia). At the same time, Switzerland had been putting in place a restrictive framework for regulating residency and naturalization of migrants since World War I. After World War II Switzerland was a liberal forerunner and pioneer in the establishment of the "guest-worker-system". As a result of the direct democratic political system the population holds a strong veto-power within political decision-making system, which has been used to voice anti-immigrant sentiments in the public arena, as this was the case with the Schwarzenbach movement from the late 1960s onwards, earlier than elsewhere in Europe. Switzerland has therefore been and still is one of the frontrunners in the development of right-wing populism in Europe.

Finally, the specific political situation of Switzerland as a non EU member state, sheds light on how nation states and their citizens negotiate processes of multi-level governance in the context of the European Union and other international organizations. Especially, as Switzerland is host of many international humanitarian organizations, its restrictive regula-

tions towards immigrants demand a particular discourse of justification.

All these reasons lay groundwork for international comparison, a future goal of this NCCR in the preparation of phase II. ■

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