

ADAM BULANDRA

The local dimension of children's migrations and its impact on EU integration policy. Cracow, 4–5th December, 2020

The conference on “Local dimension of children’s migrations and its impact on EU integration policy” had been planned to be held in Cracow, Poland as the second international conference organized within the MiCREATE project (Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe). The first was organized in Barcelona on 24th and 25th of October 2019 under the title “Migrant Children’s Integration and Education in Europe. Approaches, Methodologies and Policies”. It became an introduction to research in child-centered scientific projects focused on migration, integration, social cohesion and diversity across Europe. Fourteen months later it was time to share the first results and findings of the research and share it in the context of the European Union’s policy on the integration of migrants and migrant children.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed by the Polish government that has prohibited live events, the international conference was an exclusively online event. It, however, provided opportunity to listen to speeches and discuss with over 35 academics from Poland, Spain, Slovenia, Austria, Denmark, Romania, the United Kingdom, Italy and Belgium but also from non-European countries such as Brazil and Zimbabwe. Participants were divided into seven thematic panels, including: integration problems and challenges from migrant children’s perspectives, best practices regarding the integration and education of migrant children, as well as an overview of the impact of Covid-19 national and supranational restrictions on the education of migrant children and the well-being and social situation of refugee children and children seeking asylum.

The research consortium within the MiCREATE project encouraged people to send papers which elaborated and explored both theoretical and practical problems of migrant children’s integration in local, European communities. The conference focused on child-centered approaches in recent migration studies, innovations in education which could stimulate the effective integration of migrant children or children in transition, including

distance learning in the context of pandemics or ways to anchor and adapt children in this new environment. Three ongoing Horizon 2020 projects on child migration have been represented in conference presentations.

The conference was organized by the Interkulturalni PL Association together with the project's partners and the City of Cracow (Commune of Cracow). It was opened by the deputy Mayor of Cracow Professor Janusz Kulig who made a short introduction reminding everyone that Cracow adopted a comprehensive integration strategy for foreigners living in the city in 2016. This led to the conclusion that such initiatives are very important for the local community to grow tolerance and strengthen intercultural bonds among people and as such are treated as the most valuable asset for the local government. It enables to grow city social capital and make it friendly for investors and a desirable place for settlement.

The keynote speech was presented by Dr Urszula Markowska-Manista entitled "Children and Migration – Contemporary Dilemmas, Crises and Challenges of Policies, Research and Praxis".

This lecture showed that apart from barrage of media information, NGO reports, and academic research, we are subjected to, there are no new topics in this area that do not repeat to us what has already been said, studied, and published. Yet there are still blank spots, crises and understatements. Child migration as a process that marks the lives of both adults and children demands constant reflection and a new, reliable interpretation of the reality in which children as migrants and societies call the hosts' function. Migration, and especially refugeeism, is usually triggered by situations that are more difficult to face than those encountered by adults and children at the next stage of their journey, in refugee camps, in the new country of residence. Migration usually stigmatises and forces one into submission. This important factor led our main lecturer that narration used in the research within the children studies shall be strip out of neo-colonialism and patriarchalism.

This approach was followed by the vow of establishing new paradigms in research represented among others by the lecture of Rachele Antonini from University of Bologna, who developed a practical dimension of the whole child approach combined with PAR research and bottom-up methodology. The presentation of outcomes of projects following such new patterns of research were also revealed in other presentations such as Shannon Damery's presentation of the Child Up Horizon 2020 project led by the University of Turin, Søren Sindberg Jensen's and Peter Hobel's case study on social anchoring reconsidered from a child-centered perspective, including also a best

practices presentation visible in Fernando Hernández's, Maria Domingo-Coscollola's and Juana M. Sancho-Gil's lecture on facilitated school culture transformation.

The discussion over the best practices in the formal and non-formal education was one of the main themes of the conference. Paula Lozano Mulet, Silvia de Riba, Paula Estalayo Bielsa and Marina Riera Retamero from the University of Barcelona were seeking integration boosts in the educational environment in cosmopolitan curriculum. As they had convinced, decolonial perspectives have remarked the need of reconfiguring euro-centric curriculums in order to embrace broader perspectives of the world. Others were seeking a key to better and more inclusive education in rising competences of teachers. This narration were present in the lectures of Monika Skura and Ewa Sowa-Behtane. The art-based methods seen as a turn to more universal language were discussed by Laura Malinverni, Paula Lozano-Mulet, Judit On-sès-Segarra and Miguel Stuardo-Concha from the University of Barcelona. Some particular presentations focused on non-obvious relations between certain stakeholders, such as Nettie Boivin's lecture on intergenerational multimodal story telling or Joanna Durlik's review of the teachers involvement in intercultural educational practices.

Some presentations were dedicated to the so call "dark sides" of the integration realm. Racism, ethnic exclusion, precariat, patriarchalism, peer violence and power inequalities were addressed in the speeches of Gro Hellesdatter Jacobsen from the University of Southern Denmark. Mira Liepold, Stella Wolter, Alev Cakir and Birgit Sauer provided an interesting analysis of refugees' treatment in Austria (University of Vienna), Anastasia Pylypenko presented an overview on Roma children treatment in Wrocław and the concept of the othering was conferred by Anke Piekut.

One of the conference panels was also dedicated to Covid-19 pandemic impact on integration of children with migration background. Very interesting speeches emphasized the vulnerabilities related to migrant children which may deteriorate their school performance during the epidemic. We were able to get familiar with the Brazilian perspective presented by Lucas Rech da Silva, Slovenian daily challenges presented by Lucija Dežan, Zorana Medarić, Barbara Gornik and Mateja Sedmak, the United Kingdom's perspective shown by Aleksandra Szymczyk and Shoba Arun from Manchester Metropolitan University and very interesting narratives about Roma children experiences presented by Damir Josipović and Cătălin Berescu.

A quite unique and challenging perspective was conferred by Shepherd

Mutsvara on inclusion and exclusion processes driven within the Zimbabwean diaspora, which prompted a vivid discussion among conference participants, and on abjection practices in Spanish schools reported by Fernando Hernández-Hernández and Juana M. Sancho-Gil.

The conference was well attended with approximately three hundred participants in total and at least fifty present at each panel. The conference language was English.

It was organized as part of the Horizon 2020 MiCREATE project which starts from the position that the existing social and political order does not offer enough autonomous space where children can independently speak for themselves. The aim of the project is to create 'a space' where migrant children of all ages are able to communicate and share their experiences after arriving or being brought up in the receiving societies. The proposed project embarks on a mission to gather their stories in order to support their needs and aspirations when it comes to their integration into the 'majority' societies, with the aim of making heard the voices of the least powerful members of our communities, as an argument and factor for change.

Stemming from the need to revisit existing integration policies, the research project aims at comprehensive examination of contemporary integration processes of migrant children in order to empower them. The project is problem-driven and exploratory at the same time. Its exploratory part mainly concerns the child-centred approach in order to understand integration challenges, migrant needs and their well-being. However, the findings of the open-ended exploratory research will be used in an explicitly problem driven way with an aim to stimulate migrant inclusion, to empower migrants and build their skills already within the (participatory) research.

The conference in Cracow proved to be one of the most important events dedicated to children studies opening a broad new agenda of possible fields and directions of scientific exploration. For the very first time it also brought the child-perspective agenda into the top discussion between researchers from the major academic institutions in Europe.