This international workshop “Labour Migration and Transnationalism in Europe – contemporary and historical perspectives”, which was held at the Südost-Institut (Institut for Southeast European Studies) in Regensburg, 10–11 December 2010, was organised as part of the research project “Bavaria-Croatia transnational” (University of Regensburg) within the Bavarian Research Network “Migration and Knowledge” (FORMIG). The workshop aimed at discussing transnational social links of labour migrants in post-Second World War Europe, with a focus on migrants from Southeastern and Southern Europe. The discussions revolved around the question of the salience and development of transnational links of migrants, and the viability of the paradigm of transnationalism for different spatial and temporal contexts. These problems also led to the discussion of the impact of emigrants on their (former) home country, of the issue of return migration (as intention and practice), of processes of social exclusion, and of the economic impact of immigration. The presentations covered both contemporary and historical perspectives, and came from different disciplines: anthropology, sociology, history, and economics.

The keynote speeches were delivered by Ulf BRUNNBAUER (University of Regensburg) and Janine DAHINDEN (University of Neuchâtel). In his keynote talk Ulf Brunnbauer highlighted the usefulness of a transnational perspective and its specific epistemology for Balkan history in order to help overcome the predominance of the national perspective, which is still salient in the historiographies of the Balkans. Furthermore, he emphasized that evidence from the Balkans can contribute to the discussion of important issues of migrant transnationalism. He argued that the evidence of the Balkans also shows that migrant transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, as it can already be detected in the 19th century without ignoring the significant changes in the quality of these links after World War Two. Brunnbauer discussed how governments in Southeastern Europe responded to the emergence of transnational social practices by designing policies which were aimed at extending sovereignty across borders, so that the social and political spaces of the nation would coincide. He emphasized the importance of the politics of emigration in shaping of transnational social networks. Brunnbauer further addressed conceptual problems linked to transnationalism. In a region such as the Balkans, where state and nation are not conterminous and the boundaries of the nation are not predicated upon state borders, the concept of “transnational” can subsume national but at the same time cross-border links. The implicit assumption that “transnationality” transcends the nation needs qualification because transnational – in the sense of cross-border – links can actually be a resource for the pursuit of a nationalist agenda. Brunnbauer suggested thinking about alternative terms, such as “transterritorial”, “trans-state”, or “trans-local”.

Janine DAHINDEN linked in her keynote speech the transnational perspective to questions regarding the integration of immigrants. She argued that “until recently, in studies examining settlement processes of migrants in the receiving countries, transnational aspects were either ignored or simply dismissed as “disintegrative.” Dahinden, in contrast, was interested in the connection of assimilation processes and transnational practices. She elaborated on this problem by using a case study of Albanian-speaking migrants from former Yugoslavia (Kosovo) in Switzerland. Dahinden demonstrated how four different transnational formations have evolved and changed dynamically over the years and how they have always been linked to integration in a different way. She argued that transnationalizing integration theory opens
up a series of possibilities such as means of analyzing social structures which, in a globalized environment, produce new conditions for integration. Conversely, she stated that transnational studies could profit from integration theory because the latter was in its essence a theory of social mobility and aimed at understanding social inequality. She concluded that access to resources is important for maintaining transnational links; this is the reason why sometimes only well-integrated people are engaged in long-term transnational practices. Hence, transnationalism is also linked to social inequalities.

Theoretical and empirical methods of researching transnationalism were surveyed in the first panel. Maja POVRZANOVIĆ FRYKMAN (University of Malmö) opened the panel with the question of the analytical usefulness of the transnational paradigm. Her ethnographic research on Croats in Sweden is set on the dynamics of transnational relations on individual and family levels. Povranović Frykman underlined the usefulness of the transnational paradigm for capturing the perceived normality of practices of transnational connection and the related normality of multiple attachments and inclusions. She argued that this paradigm should be combined with multi-sited ethnographic methods in order to follow specific people on their travels while obtaining a sense of commonalities between the varieties of routes and practices on the micro-levels of transnationalism. To illustrate the processes of homing and re-grounding as well as the importance of personal travel and being home at different places, Povranović Frykman presented case studies connecting Sweden, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. She compared refugees and labor migrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sweden. In an epilogue, she presented her new project which will investigate “the transnational life of objects”. One of the main questions of this project is the role of ethnicity for transnational practices.

The sociologist Gabriele CAPPAI (University of Bayreuth), who does extensive research on Italian migrants (mainly from Sardinia) in different parts in the world, suggested considering transnationalism as a “mental activity”. Migrants “cross” national borders even when they do not move in space. Cappai called this phenomenon “cognitive transnationalism”. He argued that, while physical movement in space of migrants across national borders is actually rather limited in terms of frequency, migrants in their every-day-life constantly compare phenomena, situations and processes of the destination country and of the “home” country. Migrants experience the host society on the background of their experiences in their home country. From his empirical research, Cappai presented examples of “cognitive transnationalism” and of typical comparisons as made by migrants (e.g. of the educational or health care systems in the two countries). Cappai concluded that in most cases this comparison results in a critical disposition towards “home”, but that it also can motivate efforts to improve things back home.

Christopher MOLNAR (Indiana University, Bloomington) stressed that transnational theories of immigration often neglect the significance of geography for the construction and maintenance of transnational networks. He argued that Yugoslav migration to West Germany, and particularly to Southern Germany, provides an example of the salience of geography for the shaping of immigrants’ transnational experiences. The geographical proximity of Yugoslavia – especially Croatia and Slovenia, where many Gastarbeiter came from – and southern Germany (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg as states with large numbers of Yugoslav workers) allowed Yugoslavian immigrants to construct particularly dense
transnational networks. Their intensity was also visible in the frequency with which they established “transnational families”, i.e. families in which one part lived in Germany and another in Yugoslavia. This phenomenon was much more frequent among Yugoslav migrants than among any other migrant group in Germany. Pendler-migration was another consequence of the combination of geographic proximity and the maintenance of close social relations at “home.” These transnational networks helped many refugees during the wars in the 1990s to come to Germany.

Susanne BECKER (University of Frankfurt) shared results from her research on the second generation of Turkish immigrants in Germany and their transnational links. She asked for the salience of transnational practices for people who have not migrated. Becker called for an extension of the concept of transnationalism to include not only physical cross-border relations but also imaginary ones, such as mental references to Turkey, in her case study. Highlighting different practices of producing transnational spaces between Germany and Turkey, Becker concluded by pointing out three dimensions of transnationalism: firstly, transnationalism through physical border crossings by the subject in question; secondly, transnationalism due to physical border crossings by others; thirdly, transnationalism without physical border crossing by the distribution of information and the consumption of transnational media. She produced empirical examples for each of these dimensions. The “imaginary” transnationalism, Becker argued, was also a result of the fact that even though born in Germany and German citizens, people whose parents are Turkish are labeled Turks in Germany.

The second panel focused on various cases of labour migration in post-war Europe and the impact of transnational practices of these migrant groups. The panel was opened by Robert PICHLER (University of Graz) who presented the migration history of a family from the Albanian village of Velestha in the Republic of Macedonia. He focused on two different generations (father and son) in order to compare expectations and results of migration. The case study gave insights into the complex decision-making processes revolving around the question of labor migration, the cultural and material transfers engendered by migration and the changing opportunities of migration. While the father, who left for Austria in the 1960s without knowing much about the country of destination, gained status and prestige through migration, his son considers migration a failure because his high expectations – much higher than those of his father – were not met. The son’s self-appreciation suffers from the fact that his native village is home to many successful migrants, who are ostentatiously displaying their wealth. Pichler outlined the also impact of the social and political circumstances in Macedonia and Austria on migrant expectations and opportunities.

Historian Grazia PRONTERA (University of Salzburg) delineated Italian migration patterns to the Federal Republic of Germany in the postwar years focusing on Wolfsburg, where Volkswagen recruited many workers from Italy; as a result, Wolfsburg hosts one of the largest Italian communities in Germany. She divided the migratory process into three distinct phases: leaving, staying abroad, returning to the country of origin or choosing to live permanently abroad. Prontera emphasized that migrants are continuously redefining their own identity which fluctuates between the local, regional, national and transnational depending on the context and conditions in which they find themselves. These conditions also affect the gradual change of their life values. She argued that through the analysis of narrative interviews it was
possible to understand how important choices, such as the decision to leave Italy, return to Italy, or stay in Germany, are connected with changing living conditions and patterns of identification during the migration process. As for the Italian migrants Prontera concluded that many of them do not really feel accepted in Germany. Still, many want to stay in Germany and consequently develop a form of “hybrid” identity mixing value elements of their native and the local cultures.

Ida LULIĆ (University of Regensburg) discussed the economic effects of immigration concentrating of the impact on wage levels; this is also a politically sensitive issue because opposition to immigration is often substantiated by the claim that immigrants put a downward pressure on wages for the native population. Lulić began by giving an overview of different economic models for the analysis of the causes and patterns of labor migration and its effects. She pointed out that the economic theories of migration consider wage differentials between sending and receiving countries as one of the most important factors influencing individual and collective migration decisions. As for the impact of immigration on the local labor market, there are relatively effects on wage levels and labor supply.

Causes and Effects of Return Migration was the central theme of the third and final panel. Jasna ČAPO ŽMEGAČ (Institute of Ethnology, Zagreb), who has intensely studied migrants from Croatia in Bavaria, began with the statement that there is no “natural” return. Migrant return is the result of a long-lasting, multifaceted, and complex process of decision making, which involves the romanticisation of “home” and pragmatic weighing of opportunities. Čapo Žmegač presented different stages in the development of the wish to return among labor migrants from Yugoslavia and she also discussed the effects on return of the policies of Yugoslavia and Croatia, respectively, as well as of Germany. Many migrants postponed their eventual return and often rather engaged in trans-localism living “here” and “there” at the same time. She argued that migrants have kept two households in two different geographic places located in different states which led to the creation of a single social space that spanned different localities in two or more nation-states. Migrants often developed a “doubling home desire.” Čapo Žmegač argued that the process of return, in order to be understood, needs to be set against particular stages in the individual and family life-course and their dynamics, the entire migration history of the individual and the family, as well as the changing meso- and macro-structural conditions. Finally, she suggested looking on return as an act of migration in its own right.

Karolina NOVINŠĆAK (University of Regensburg) presented some preliminary findings of the ongoing FORMIG research project “Bavaria-Croatia transnational” and her PhD research. She elaborated on case studies and preliminary hypotheses extracted from life-narrative interviews focusing on the ways migrants and their descendents conceptualize return. Novinšćak stated that “return” was a recurring topic in the life-narratives she had conducted so far, both of the first and the second generation. In her paper she concentrated on the meaning and impact of “return” for the emergence and development of the transnationalism of the “second generation”, i.e. the descendents of former labour migrants from Croatia. She stressed that, in contrast to their parents, the members of the second generation develop new forms of transnational linkages such as virtual social networks; in many cases these practices are also supposed to facilitate their eventual “return,” namely the relocation to Croatia. Thus, return (real or imaginary) is a multi-stage process. Novinšćak concluded that the life-course
approach, with its sensitivity for networks and cohorts, is very useful for examining transnational practices.

The historian Sara BERNARD (University of Regensburg) presented a part of her ongoing PhD project about the impact of Gastarbeiter migration and the Gastarbeiters’ return on Serbia. In her presentation she focused on the process of return migration and the role of state policies to facilitate the return. Her analysis addressed three levels: the Yugoslav authorities, the Yugoslav media, and the migrants and returnees as actors. Bernard offered a periodisation of return-migration of Yugoslav labor migrants during Yugoslav times with three distinct phases: 1970–75, when the state paid little attention to return assuming that the Gastarbeiter would return anyway; 1975–83, when the state set in place-specific administrative procedures fearing a wave of spontaneous return (after Western Europe had stopped labor recruitment from Yugoslavia); and 1983–91, when the Yugoslav government gave the support for return migration of “its” migrants dependent on financial aid from the destination countries. Bernard concluded by highlighting the different actors involved in return migration, from individuals to state, which makes return migration an extraordinarily complicated phenomenon.

The sociologist Sonja HAUG (University for Applied Sciences Regensburg) focused on the role of social networks and social capital in the whole migration process. Her presentation was mainly based on sociological surveys of Italian migrants (a migrant group with an initially very high initial rate of return). She argued that social networks in the country of origin operate as a constraint to migration, whereas social capital of an individual in a country abroad can be a strong pull factor of migration, reducing its high costs. Thus, locally specific social capital, is an important factor in individual and collective emigration (and return) decisions. Conclusively, the meso-level of social organizations, i.e. networks, is of utmost importance to understand the migration process. Yet, family ties are also of great importance, not least because they can become the link which holds cross-border networks together. Haug also discussed research problems. There is, for example, no elaborated method to collect data on social networks of migrants at reasonable costs. She concluded by stressing her hope that the different migration systems in Europe will once be researched by similar methods based on interviews in the country of origin and of destination.

The workshop offered an opportunity to discuss the implications of transnationalism for states, societies and individuals in a comparative and interdisciplinary way. It brought together scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds and country expertise which helped to give it a comparative edge. Therefore, the workshop was evidence to the fact that the dynamics and the morphology of transnationalism could best be understood by interdisciplinary exchange. The discussions not only revealed shortcomings of the transnational paradigm, but also suggested possible innovative extensions, such as the concept of “imaginary” or “cognitive” transnationalism or the “transnational life of objects.” What it made clear, though, was that even if transnationalism is often not the best category to describe actual migrant practices, it is still a very useful, critical epistemological perspective.

Report by Karolina Novinščak and Ulf Brunnbauer
International workshop “Labour Migration and Transnationalism in Europe – contemporary and historical perspectives”

Programme
Organizer: University of Regensburg, Chair of Southeast and East European History.
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Friday, 10th December 2010

Opening (Karolina Novinšćak, Ulf Brunnbauer)
Keynotes lectures:
Janine DAHINDEN: Transnationalism, integration and social inequalities: The case of albanian speaking migrants
Ulf BRUNNBAUER: Labor Migration and Transnationalism in the Balkans from a Historical Perspective

Saturday, 11th December 2010

PANEL 1: Researching Transnationalism
Maja POVRZANOVIĆ FRYKMAN: Why is the transnational paradigm useful? Considerations based on ethnographic research among the Croats in Sweden
Gabriele CAPPAl: Cognitive Transnationalism.
Researching migration through qualitative Methods
Christopher MOLNAR: “Building Bridges to the Homeland.” The Transnational Experience of Yugoslav Guest-Workers in Germany
Susanne BECKER: Three dimensions of Transnationalism and their conceptual framework

PANEL 2: Experiences of Labour Migration in Post-War Europe
Robert PICHLER: Labour Migration from an Albanian Village in Macedonia: Comparing opportunities, expectations and activities of migrants from two generations
Grazia PRONTERA: “Work in Germany, Family in Italy.” The everyday life of Italian workers in Wolfsburg in the 1960s and 1970s
Ida LULIĆ: Economic models of migration

PANEL 3: Causes and Effects of Return Migration
Jasna ČAPO ŽMEGAČ: "Will I be listening to frogs croaking?" Translocalism as an alternative to migrant return
Karolina NOVINŠĆAK: Transnationalism and the meaning of “return” in the life narratives of the “second generation” with German-Croatian migratory background
Sara BERNARD: The return of Yugoslav Gastarbeiters Home: a periodization
Sonja HAUG: Migration and Return Migration: the Case of Italian Migrants in Germany

GENERAL DISCUSSION