

Borderland. Change and Continuity in the Face of Otherness

On 16–18 September 2021, the tenth jubilee conference of the Committee for Migration Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (KBnM PAN) took place in Gdańsk and Gdynia. It was organised by the Polish Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the University of Gdańsk and the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. The annual conference of the Committee for Migration Research of PAN is the largest scientific event dedicated to migration, which integrates the dispersed and interdisciplinary milieu of Polish researchers and contributes to the dissemination of their scientific achievements. The theme for the 2021 Conference was: “Borderland. Change and Continuity in the Face of Otherness.”

The topic of the conference constitutes an important element of contemporary research on migration and applies to both internal and external movements. The choice of the conference theme was further justified by the site for deliberations. Stretching along the Southern Baltic Coast, the Tri-City metropolitan area (Gdańsk–Sopot–Gdynia) should be considered a borderland for multiple reasons. It is not just the location on Poland’s sea border, the port character of the conurbation, but the history and cultural heritage of the cities and rural areas surrounding it (Kashubia, Kociewie, and Żuławy), with national borders crossing through these lands, migration processes affecting these populations, and ethnic and national interactions leaving a borderland imprint there. Furthermore, Gdańsk’s recognition as an academic centre of border and borderland studies is growing. Multiple units across the city, with the University playing the leading role, engage in studying transformations, the practice of encountering dissimilarity, adaptation, and the inherent change, but also adjust focus to *longue durée* when examining the experience of the autochthons faced with “Otherness.”

For several years, research has been conducted at the University of Gdańsk, which significantly broadens the scope of interpretation of the borderland. These include the Research Lab for Memory Narratives of Borderlands (led by MiłoSława Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk) and the Border Seminar organised on bi-annual bases by Grzegorz Welizarowicz (Department of the American Studies/Border Studies Group at the UG). In 2020, their work has been supported by the establishment of a new International Border Research Centre at the UG (IBSC) led by Anna Mazurkiewicz (www.ibsc.ug.edu.pl). IBSC is an independent research unit fostering and promoting the UG’s international cooperation and interdisciplinary research in humanities and social sciences. Research conducted by current members

of the IBSC represents such fields as border studies (disciplinary history and methods, memory, imagination, hauntology), regional studies (Gdańsk, Pomerania, Baltic Sea region, the Amazon, Southwestern United States, Gulf of Maine, the Caribbean, Basque studies), Indigenous studies (South and North American), migration studies, colonial, post-colonial, and decolonisation studies, history, otherness studies, etc. The centre favors comparative and transdisciplinary approaches and border practice fusing research, art, and pedagogy. It was through the IBSC that the research theme was suggested to the KBnM PAN, with the Research Lab for Memory Narratives of Borderlands and Border Seminar Group providing two keynote speakers for the Conference. It was, however, due to the fruitful cooperation of the Conference Hosts: the Faculty of History of the University of Gdańsk and the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, that the conference was made possible.

Piotr Stepnowski, Rector of the University of Gdańsk, Aleksandra Dulciewicz, Mayor of the City of Gdańsk, and Mieczysław Struk, Marshal of the Pomeranian Voivodeship extended their Honorary Patronage over the proceedings.

Traditionally, the KBnM PAN annual conference opens with workshops dedicated to promoting the field and encouraging junior scholars to excel in migration research. On Thursday, 16 September 2021, three methodological workshops for young researchers of migration took place at the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. Two workshops were led by senior migration scholars and members of the KBnM PAN. In the morning was “Migration and Life in the Diaspora – Non-obvious Approaches to Sources” conducted by Joanna Wojdon (University of Wrocław). In the evening, conference attendees had a chance to work with Dariusz Stola (ISP PAN) who instructed participants as to “How and why is it worth studying migrations from the communist period?” Thanks to the expertise of the staff of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, there was also a genealogical workshop led by Łukasz Podlaszewski and Rafał Raczyński. Moreover, the conference participants had an opportunity to visit the temporary exhibition of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia “KLIMAKS.” It looked into relations between man and the natural environment on the example of the emigration of Poles to South America at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The scientific proceedings of the conference were inaugurated the following day. On Friday, 17 September 2021, Janusz Mucha, the Chairman of the KBnM PAN, led the opening plenary session during which the first keynote lecture was delivered. University of Gdańsk Miłosława Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk (Institute of German Philology / Research Lab for Memory Narratives of Borderlands / IBSC, University of Gdańsk) spoke on “Gdańsk as a Borderland: A Space of Cultural Contact – the Goal of Migration – a Transit Station.” This part of the program was followed by the keynote speaker: Carlos Morton of the University of California Santa Barbara, who is also a member of the IBSC UG. His talk was titled “The Tao of Mestizaje: Multiple Borders, Multiple Bridges.” Both plenary events were attended by over 100 participants (in person and online).

The conference program included a plenary session and forty-three thematic sessions organised in seven (at times eight) concurrent panels. The conference was held in a hybrid formula, with 155 people coming to the conference in the Tri-City, and 30, using the MSTEAMS platform to attend remotely. In total, 166 people delivered lectures including migration researchers from all over Poland, but also from the USA, Great Britain, Luxembourg, and Germany.

The Program Committee chaired by Krystyna Slany (Jagiellonian University) selected the following themes for the Conference sessions; economic, structural, legal and cultural aspects of demographic changes caused by migration, migration stereotypes in the borderland areas, multi-ethnicity, memory, experience of diversity, issues including integration of foreigners, internal migrations, presentation of the borderland, and changes and migration in literature, art, theater. The dominant themes within this scope (sessions that included more than one panel) included topics directly related to contemporary challenges in migration research, states' and cities' immigration and integration policies, mobilisation of diasporas and immigrant well-being. The complete program of the conference has been archived online at: <https://kbnmgdansk2021.ug.edu.pl/>

In addition to multi- and inter-disciplinary sessions, the conference program for Friday and Saturday also included a special series of workshops in English with the title "Border Storytelling." The three workshops during the conference were led by Santiago Vaquera-Vasquez, Chicano writer and scholar, and Carlos Morton, Chicano playwright. Coordinated by Grzegorz Welizarowicz, the workshop was designed to be an exercise in creative engagement and border pedagogy using creative writing as part of the classroom work. It consisted of two parts: a) a preliminary discussion of the meanings of the border and strategies of (artistic) approach, and b) a practical task to create a piece, an artwork, or a creative project (for example by engaging the folklore of one's family), a border story, a drawing, a piece of action, a place. The session included a discussion of results and advice about and sources for future study.

On Friday evening, 17 September 2021, there was also a special ad hoc debate devoted to the humanitarian crisis taking place on the Polish-Belarusian border. The debate, which was not included in the original program due to its ad hoc nature, featured: Witold Klaus (Institute of Legal Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences), Karolina Łukasiewicz (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw), Bishop Krzysztof Zadarko, (Chairman of the Polish bishops' council for migration, tourism, and pilgrimages), Maciej Duszczyk (Department of Labor System and Labor Market / Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw), and Janusz Mucha (host, and Chairman of KBnM PAN).

The "Borderland" conference significantly contributed to the promotion of research on migration, with particular attention devoted to broadly defined borderlands. The numerous participation of the committee members, the vast

majority in person, had a very positive effect on young researchers who, representing all the leading academic centres in Poland, joined the conference program in large numbers and were able to make new scientific contacts and extend their networks of colleagues. Thus, the mission of the KBnM PAN – to develop and promote research on migration – was completed with great success. Moreover, the participants of the conference responded ardently to the social demands resulting from the current events – the humanitarian crisis on the border, thus contributing to the strengthening of the relationship between the conducted scientific activity and its influence upon the social environment.

Anna Mazurkiewicz

University of Gdańsk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6599-2755>