

Session #26: „Roundtable discussion: Methodologies in researching migration in local contexts”

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Scope of the session

What?

- **Bridging the knowledge gap:** overcoming the lack of attention paid to methodologies for studying migration across large cities, medium-sized towns, and small localities.
- **Addressing local data challenges:** tackling specific difficulties in local-level analysis, such as data fragmentation, data incompleteness, and the obstacles to obtaining comparative data.
- **Multidisciplinary approaches:** incorporating qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method insights from political science, sociology, economics, and anthropology, etc.
- **Future directions:** exploring collaborative work on the planned publication, *“Migration and Localities: A Research Methods Handbook”*.

How?

- Presentations – a brief overview of a **selected research method** applied in local contexts:
 - **Challenges encountered** during the research process.
 - **Solutions used** to navigate these difficulties.
 - **Lessons learnt** and/or potential follow-ups for future research.

Surveying interethnic relations at the neighbourhood level

Method

Survey of **natives and migrants** at the neighbourhood level in European metropolises (*example: GEITONIES project*).

Sampling frame: prepared based on the **inventory of addresses** (with information of the buildings type) → comparative design.

Sample sizes: 200-300 hundred.

Mode of interview: PAPI/CAPI.

Challenges

- Preparation of the sampling frame **time consuming** and **costly**.
- Difficulty in **matching local-level administrative data** with the neighbourhood level.

Solutions

- Engagement of **students**.
- Engagement of **local actors** (especially to identify migrant groups).
- Usage of **higher-level administrative data** and **multilevel modelling**.

Lessons learnt

Conducting **internationally comparable** surveys at the local level requires **innovative methods of sampling** in order to include contexts where registry data are insufficient.

We used QCA for typology building, bc

- Systematic comparison
- Making sense of complex cases
- Utilizing different, heterogeneous data sources

Challenges:

- (1) lack of recent, comparable data (to assess segregation, discrimination, educational disparities, different definition of 'migrant' across cases)
- (2) Too many conditions for 16 cases

Asya Pisarevskaya
Peter Scholten

Cities of Migration

Understanding the diversity of urban
diversities in Europe

IMISCOE

OPEN ACCESS



Surveying citizens of local communities exposed to the Perpetual Refugee Crisis in Italy

- Classification of communities: **Arrival, Reception, Escape**
- Empirical focus on medium-small towns (< 20,000 inhabitants)

Challenge 1: No administrative database on arrivals and escapes

Solution 1: Text analysis of $\approx 30,000$ local news articles 2014-2024 (Factiva)

- Online survey administered by survey company to a representative sample of 5,000 respondents oversampling Arrival, Reception, and Escape communities

Challenge 2: Communities with and without a reception center differ

Solution 2: Propensity-score matching based on demographic & economic factors, local services, social capital, political leaning, empty buildings, Mafia presence...ARE WE MISSING SOMETHING?

Challenge 3: Arrival and Escape beyond the control of local/national authorities: geographical factors prevail → harder to predict. WHAT IS A GOOD COUNTERFACTUAL HERE?

RESEARCHING MIGRATION IN LOCAL CONTEXTS

A RELATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

CENTRAL QUESTION

How are immigrants incorporated into local political communities, and what institutions make that possible?



CHALLENGES



Beyond the nation-state
Migration scholarship often focuses on federal policies.



Cities are not monoliths
Many actors with different priorities, interests, and capacities.



Key processes are often hidden
Relationships and networks operate behind the scenes and are hard to observe.



RESEARCH APPROACH

Local-level focus on institutions and governance.



GOVERNMENT
AGENCIES



NONPROFITS &
ADVOCACY



IMMIGRANT
COMMUNITIES



Qualitative & comparative methods:
Interviews, archival research, organizational analysis, and case studies.



KEY LESSONS



Institutions matter
Incorporation is an organizational and institutional process.



Relationships matter
Outcomes depend on partnerships between state and civil society.



Cities matter
Membership, belonging, and citizenship are actively negotiated locally.



Future directions
Comparative research across cities, states, and countries.



Els de Graauw

Baruch College and
CUNY Graduate Center

Cities are not just sites where national policies are implemented—they are places where belonging is produced.



Irene Ponzio

Challenges

- The tendency to impose predetermined categories when asking research participants about migration
- The under-representation of people with anti-migrant attitudes

Solutions used

To focus on urban change rather than on migration itself, allowing migration-related issues and categories to emerge spontaneously

EU-funded comparative research projects

- Concordia Discors (ethnography, semi-structured interviews, survey, participatory methodologies – Neighbourhood Forum)
- Horizon2020 Whole-COMM (participatory methodologies - walking tours)

Results

Ethnic belonging and cleavages emerged as:

- less relevant than we had expected
- less salient than in the migration-focused interviews

A significant number of participants held negative views of migrants

Lessons learnt

Stop asking about migration when investigating it!

RESEARCHING MIGRATION IN CEE CITIES

Key Challenges

- **Data availability:** As new immigrant destinations, CEE cities lack systematic, comprehensive, and comparative data on migrant populations & migration governance..
- **Partial and fragmented data on migrant populations, from different records:** in some countries, estimates of the migrant population can be built from public records of resident permit data, social security, resident registries, survey data, etc. The records often omit some migrant populations.
- **Understanding existing data:** with the fragmented data on migrant populations, making total estimates and/or understanding existing policies requires deep contextual knowledge.

Key Solutions Used

- **Local expert approach:** engaging migration scholars living in and studying the cities can help estimate migrant populations; these experts have deep contextual knowledge of existing records, immigrant populations in the cities, and policy responses.
- **Community collaborative approach:** Engaging other local stakeholders to help with migration population estimates/ understanding specific local immigrant populations can be helpful; the stakeholders include representatives of local administration, civil society, and immigrant communities.
- **Developing indices:** Engaging local experts to assess local policies through, e.g., specialized frameworks like the CEE Local Migrant Governance Index (CEELMiG).

Lessons & Follow-ups

- **Relying on local migration scholars and stakeholders:** help understand existing databases, build migrant estimates, and understand policy responses.
- **Beyond Western Models:** through researching migration in cities with less developed migrant data, we can produce knowledge that challenges Western-centric methodologies.
- **Future Scope:** Reflect on how to research NID AND established immigrant destinations in a comparative way.

When a worksite becomes a migration locality

Applied mixed-method research in a medium-sized industrial city – Michał Nowosielski

Method – Mixed-method study of temporary labour migration in a local context shaped by a large industrial investment:

- **desk research** on the local socio-economic, demographic and migration context
- **media analysis**: national, regional, local and social media
- **CATI survey** with local residents
- **survey among migrant workers**
- **semi-structured interviews** with local stakeholders
- **observation** of workers' accommodation and everyday infrastructure

Challenges

- **distrust** among respondents, including migrant workers and local representatives of the investor
- **physical access** to migrant workers did not automatically translate into research access: response to distributed survey links and QR codes was low, and many were reluctant to speak in a controlled work/accommodation environment
- difficult access to **local political elites**
- distinguishing between **formal responsibilities** and local perceptions of responsibility
- **contractual confidentiality** limiting the public presentation of case-specific findings

Solutions used

- **triangulation** of workers', residents' and stakeholders' perspectives
- shift from passive online recruitment to more **active fieldwork strategies** (**CAWI** in shopping centres and other local public spaces)
- use of personal and **professional networks** to reach local elites
- combining survey data with interviews, media analysis and observation
- **anonymising the case** and focusing on methodological lessons rather than empirical details

Lessons learnt

Research access is not the same as physical access. Even when migrant workers are spatially concentrated, trust, dependency relations and controlled infrastructures may strongly limit participation.

Local migration **research should move beyond the municipality as the default unit of analysis.** In cases of temporary labour migration, “the local” may be produced by **worksites, accommodation regimes, recruitment chains, subcontracting relations, local institutions, media narratives and everyday encounters.**

Note: The case is anonymised due to contractual obligations.

Local elites survey – From Whole-COMM to Mind-the-NEXUS

- The Whole-COMM experience: LE face-to-face interviews and SNA questionnaire
- Key **challenges**
 - Scarce participation of **hard-to-reach LE** (i.e. anti-immigration groups and politicians)
 - Different **organizational perspectives** (politicians, bureaucrats + NGOs)

Solutions: *combining different modes of collecting survey data (online, CATI); experimental strategies (influence of FR politics in rural areas)*

Open caveat: *Is this a good method to survey **policy responses**? Or: what it is a good method for?*