

In motion: movements, crossings and transfers in Turkey

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The final event of the Divisions, Connections and Movements: Rethinking Regionality research programme, funded by the British Academy and organised by the British Institute at Ankara in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute of Higher Education (NiHA), was the workshop ‘In motion: movements, crossings and transfers in Turkey, from prehistoric heartlands to modern nation-state’. The event took place over two days in late September 2014 in the NiHA conference room (the full programme and abstracts of presentations are available at www.inmotionworkshop2014.wordpress.com)

The workshop could not have been timelier for stimulating vibrant discussions, since 2014 has been a year in which issues of population mobility have been high on the agenda in Turkey and the wider region. Not only has the crisis in Syria resulted in one of the world’s largest cross-border refugee movements of recent decades, but a new law on ‘foreigners and international protection’ has also been recently introduced in Turkey (law no. 6458) and is currently in its first stages of implementation. Beyond introducing several new provisions, the law also codifies for the first time a large number of laws and decrees regarding the regulation of movement in Turkey.



Refugees from Syria queue for food distribution in Suruç, southeastern Turkey. Photo by Leonidas Karakatsanis.

Stimulated by these developments, the workshop organising committee aimed the focus of this event on the experiences and the effects of different types of mobility. In the preceding two events of the project the focus had been on the media facilitating or obstructing movement (i.e. borders and roads), but movement itself was the theme of this workshop. The topic was studied from an agent-based or subject-based approach. In other words, there were two main questions that the papers presented at the workshop successfully addressed and which the discussants and audience debated vibrantly. The first concentrated on how mobility, immigration and the

transience of forced movement was or is experienced by those ‘in motion’; the second questioned the possible effects of the movement of people, things and ideas – or the regulation of such movements – on communities and societies.

As for the previous events within this research programme, the aim was to juxtapose such experiences and effects in a *long-durée* perspective and to explore patterns of behaviours that might persist from prehistoric times until today, due either to the universality of the phenomenon under study or to regional and geographical characteristics. Several of the case studies presented during the two days of the workshop enriched the participants’ understanding of a variety of such diachronic patterns: the parallel efforts of immigrant communities to preserve their cultural identities and also to belong and adjust to their new setting; the role of the mobility of individuals in the dissemination of ideas and ideologies; the clash of interpretations between travellers’ accounts and local knowledge.

The agenda for the first day of the workshop covered a vast timespan and ranged from questions about the causes of migration to the ancient site of Kerkenes in Phrygian times and the movement of craftsmen from Nicomedia to the wider Mediterranean, to itineraries of intellectuals and ideas that became political catalysts during the era of emerging nation-states in the late Ottoman period. The second day was devoted to themes such as the shifting regimes of movement control in the Bosphorus during the early 20th century, the shifting concept of the ‘home’ in Alevi immigrant communities and an analysis of the effects of the implementation of the new immigration law in Turkey today. Furthermore, comparative studies were presented juxtaposing the contemporary experiences of immigrant and minority ethnic groups in Turkey, and the different attitudes to the refugee phenomenon in two Turkish cities.

The closing panel took the form of a round table discussion in which organisers, discussants and participants shared ideas and comments. This gave, firstly, the opportunity to reflect creatively on the juxtaposition of the different disciplinary methodologies, case studies and sources presented. Suggestions were made for new trajectories of research to be followed or included in further explorations of the phenomena noted (gender perspectives, the role of the circulation of art in the experience of mobility). Some of the themes that had circulated constantly during the two days’ of sessions stimulated a vibrant debate with a rich exchange of ideas: the question of the conditions that constitute a community as ‘diasporic’ and the dilemma of whether Turkey is changing from a transit to a recipient country in terms of immigration.

As all who participated agreed, the points raised and discussed in depth during the two days of the workshop moved the current debate on mobility forward and stimulated ideas that will be explored further in the consequent publication of the papers.