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Migration – Integration – Minorities Since the 17th Century. A European Encyclopaedia¹

Migration, integration, and minorities are a major challenge for Europe's present and future development. Integration and above all assimilation are cultural and social processes that take long and usually last several generations. Therefore it is a mistake to evaluate these phenomena on the basis of present-day experience alone. That only leads to superficiality. It is this point that our Europe-wide research project wants to address.

Our project intends to turn many of the frequently asked research questions upside-down. Until now, it was customary to ask how immigrant groups developed in the host countries until their traces had been dissolved. Thus, most research was focused on studying the development of immigrant groups and not on their disappearance during the process of incorporation into the host society. It is not difficult to imagine what happened: the main objects of migration research were the obstacles preventing the social and cultural process of integration and subsequent assimilation. Most research in this field centered on immigrant groups that remained visible over a long time.

We ask the reverse question: what is the explanation for the fact that similar migrant groups, almost akin to one another, develop differently in similar host societies or similarly in different host societies. Some remained distinct groups for a long time, while other dissolved quickly. Our main research objective is to locate the factors that kept the groups together and those that helped to dissolve and finally annihilate their internal cohesion. We plan to provide answers to this question on the basis of three centuries of European history, presented in our encyclopaedia to be published both in English and in German.

¹ Workshop held at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, March 7–9, and June 21 and 22, 2001 under the auspices of the Otto and Martha Fischbeck Foundation.

The aim of our stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg was to conceptualize the project to which more than 100 authors will contribute. At the beginning, the situation was complicated by the fact that the relevant bibliography and disparate state of the research showed many gaps, in addition to which the individual research data pointed in various directions. Researchers in this field covering many centuries usually have varied backgrounds, writing and speaking a variety of languages and living in various parts of the world. Many of these experts in the field are not aware of one another's existence. For this reason, they never cooperated and they have concentrated on disparate aspects of the history of migration. This situation called for a considerable amount of advisory and coordinating activities. Against this background, we invited a third historian to join the editorial board, Priv.-Doz. Dr. Jochen Oltmer from the Institute for Migrations Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS) of Osnabrück University.

The three editors have received support from an international and interdisciplinary Advisory Board, whose members have already offered ample advice. The composition of the Advisory Board, enables the editors to draw on a wide range of expertise pertaining to various types of questions regarding factual and methodological problems. The members of the Advisory Board provide advice regarding specific research and are able to point to newly formulated questions in the field and possible contributors and to watch over the quality as well as the timeliness of the scholarship of the entries. Last, but not least, in relation to the migratory movement of single countries and regions, the editors rely on the advice of a group of Coordinators regarding entries and the choice of authors, since the project covers so much ground.

The basic concept of the project was refined and enlarged while the editors were in constant touch with members of the Advisory Board as well as with the Coordinators. The two workshops, organized and financed by the Otto und Martha Fischbeck Foundation and the Wissenschaftskolleg and held in March and June 2001, were of particular importance to the progress of the project. Participants from outside Germany included: Kathleen Conzen (Department of History, University of Chicago), Nicolas Canny (Department of History, National University of Ireland, Galway), Jan Lucassen (International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam) and Leo Lucassen (Department of History, Amsterdam). German participants included: Matthias Asche (Department of History, University of Tübingen), Carl Bethke (Institute for Eastern European Studies,

Free University, Berlin), Stefi Jersch-Wenzel (Academy of Sciences and Arts, Berlin-Brandenburg), Rolf Lindner (Institute for European Social Anthropology, Humboldt University, Berlin), and Rainer Münz (Population Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin)

During the intensive discussions at the two workshops, the main concerns were: a) to arrive at a workable conceptualization of the entire project, b) to discuss and finalize lists of migratory groups that warrant an entry, first at the national or regional level and second at the European level, and c) to find experts in the respective fields willing to write the entries. After some creative mishaps, all this resulted in a satisfactory concept that could also be used as the basis for grant applications. These applications met with full success. Both the Thyssen Foundation (Germany) as well as the Population, Migration and the Environment Foundation (Switzerland) agreed to subsidize the project. At this moment, the lists of migratory groups and of the names of possible contributors are still being refined and will be completed at the end of 2001. Then the authors will be invited to write the entries for the encyclopaedia.

The writing and editing of most entries will be done during the second phase of the project, following the first phase of conceptualizing of the encyclopaedia. During this second phase, lasting the academic year 2001/2002, several workshops accompanying the editorial activities are planned both in the Netherlands and in Germany. A concluding third phase will follow in the academic year 2002/2003, when the editors hope to get together again for an extensive period at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Research (NIAS) at Wassenaar, situated between The Hague and Leiden. During that year, the editors will concentrate in close cooperation on editing and complementing the collection of entries, as well as on writing entries that have been found to be essential for the encyclopaedia during the second phase of the project and whose relevance was not clear immediately.

During the stay at the NIAS, the editors plan to invite colleagues with expertise in specialized geographical or thematic issues as well as members of the Advisory Board and Coordinators, both during workshops and on an individual basis, for consulting as well as evaluating purposes. In presenting the results of the whole project, we hope to win the cooperative support of both the Wissenschaftskolleg and the NIAS in organizing an international and interdisciplinary conference with experts in the field as well as generalists. This conference will aim at evaluating the methods and results of our efforts as well as open perspectives for follow-up projects.