

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF – LiU
Conference Title:	Home Migration and the City: New Narratives, New Methodologies
Dates:	6 – 10 August 2010
Chair:	Dr. Ayona Datta; Dr. Kathy Burrell (non attending)
Rapporteur:	Prof. Helena Buescu

General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

The scientific area is at the edge of contemporary research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and has obviously attracted a lot of proposals (250, I have been told). The 47 participants chosen (from which 14 posters) represent several different sub-areas within the Humanities, and the conference has had a truly multidisciplinary profile, from anthropology to the arts, from literature to psychology or sociology. It was a very exciting atmosphere, from this point of view. Being a rapporteur for the ESF for the first time, I am not sure whether the 7 minute presentation at the beginning really covers ESF aims, and creates in the participants a full awareness of ESF role. Perhaps an additional setting (e.g. a lunch/dinner with the organizers plus the main speakers) would bring some more visibility to the role of ESF in these conferences. I have tried to informally explain to the participants the setting, but I was reporting to the ESF in the first place...

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The general scientific quality of the presentations was quite good, and truly made justice to ESF investment. However, the number of sessions in the daily timetable was to my view excessive in at least 2 days, and implied that 1) by the end of the day, people were clearly feeling tired, and not as eager to participate as in a less tight format 2) discussion was somewhat limited in some sessions, however always quite lively.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information? Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

Part of my answers to these questions is already given before. The atmosphere was conducive to an easy exchange of information, but time did not always make it possible. If we take into consideration that meals were also taken together, I can understand some of the participants' comments that I have heard, that they needed some more "informal" space and time to interact.

Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants? Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

Unlike some other such events, this conference had a predominance of what may be considered young participants (people in the early part of their career). While this may indicate that the field is open to future research and interests, I feel that the inclusion of some more senior participants might be conducive to greater integration of the field in an institutional framework. As to the balance between national (and regional) groups is concerned, I feel that this conference has had a really wide scope, and made justice to its theme.

Outlook and Future Developments

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference? (How) could the conference outcomes be utilized further? Are there suitable (ESF) programmes or instruments to further the work of the conference?

It might have been expected that some possibilities of new collaborations were opened by this research conference. However, I am not sure whether this will in fact happen, due to the majority of very young scholars (several did not even start their PhD): even if a will to do so exists, there is (I think) a certain lack of institutional presence, which may

hinder it. In the last day, a possibility of further collaboration manifested itself through the consultation of a senior speaker (responsible for one of the best interventions) in view of future activities within ESF instruments. In view of the establishment of a RNP on "Villages", an Exploratory Workshop on this subject may be object of a proposal. Still a way of generating further outcomes of this conference, I think, might be a publication of its results, in a peer-review mode. Perhaps the existence of the journal *Open House International*, one issue of which, on this theme, was edited by the Chair conference, might offer the perfect setting for such publication. But a separate volume might also be considered. I also think that a RNP (Research Networking Programme), within the ESF instruments, would offer a very good framework for future work. But again the fact that there seemed to be a lack of senior participants involved might hinder such a development, from the institutional point of view.

Follow-up

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

See my previous comments. Some participants expressed their interest in applying for one or the other instrument of ESF, such as Exploratory Workshops or Research Conferences, in the near future, but not necessarily as an immediate development of this research conference itself.

Organisation and Infrastructure

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference? Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

Regarding administration and support, everything was just fine, and all the participants were indeed happy with the kind of administrative support offered by the ESF Unit. But there were significant drawbacks expressed in what the choice of the hotel is concerned, which I personally adhere to. There was a sense of a closed atmosphere, offering no moments or possibilities of relaxation – and these are also a central part of planning a conference, and very often a condition for their success. People felt a bit "trapped" within the perimeter of a hotel outside the city, with no time to go outside (but on Sunday afternoon) or even take a walk in the city, or the University. It is important, I think, that a partnership between the ESF and an University is visible as such. But the visibility of the University of Linköping was none, and therefore many participants felt like this was just a conference taking place at the premises of a hotel, and not really an "institutionally" and academically significant conference. Catering was great, and everyone was totally satisfied with that too.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

While I have some doubts about the venue as well as the balance between senior and young researchers (as both have scientific implications), I consider that the conference was successful in the quality of the presentations and the interest of the discussions it fostered (although these might have been more lengthy). Participants in general recognized that the topic chosen offered them a setting to speak about their own work, and connect with that of other researchers, in Europe as well as other regions. Multidisciplinarity and therefore the scientific dialogue across different disciplines were definitely success factors in the conference.

I personally think that the organizing committee should also have a greater balance between young and senior researchers. Here we had two young researchers, and since one of them was unable to be present, perhaps there was a lack of sense of "leadership". I feel that this is an important question since one of the aims of a Research Conference is to foster future activities and a sense of networking, one way or the other. A suggestion might be to invite a balance between young and senior researchers in the organizing committee itself, from the very start (call for submissions). Also, a major care should be the kind of participation that is to be expected from invited speakers. There is an important role as active participants throughout the entire conference, and this should be made clearer to everybody, so as to foster their interaction with other participants. It was not necessarily the case with some of the guest speakers, unfortunately.

Helena Buescu (rapporteur)
August 15, 2010

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences