

Swiss Network of young Migration Scholars

Annual Report 2015/2016

Summary

In its second year of existence, the Network further solidified its profile. Various projects and activities carried out through the year turned out successfully and will be continued, or serve as a model for future activities. In addition, the executive committee has made efforts to further clarify its role and position within the association and the identity of the association as a whole.

In accordance with our objective to promote content, the association entered a cooperation with the Swiss Refugee Council on a new blog called “Fakten statt Mythen” / “Des faits plutôt que des mythes”. Other projects such as the anthology on “Asylum abuse” and the colloquium on “Vulnerability in the Migration Context” contributed to the development of content.

The association was not only active on a content level, it also carried out social events for its members such as the aperitif after the CDM doctoral seminar, as well as events targeting a larger audience in the “Thinking without Borders” workshop in November 2015.

The aim to further intensify contacts to other stakeholders in the migration (research) field was pursued. Contacts to the NCCR – on the move, CDM, the CUSO droit were maintained and intensified, and new collaborations were set up with the Swiss Refugee Council and the organisers of the Global Negotiations Conference.

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1. Activities

1.1. Association

The second year of our association has been rich in terms of activities and events addressing not only our members but also a wider audience. Furthermore, by concretizing our ambition to contribute to public debates, these activities enabled us to enlarge our network, identify new resources and increase our visibility.

The administrative year started with our second General Assembly on **14th August 2015** in Bern. It was followed by a get-together and a creative discussion between members during which we gathered various ideas of possible activities for the coming year. 13 members of the association were present at the General Assembly.

Since **7th October 2015**, about 20 members of our association have been contributing as authors to the blog “Fakten statt Mythen”, on which a one-page article is published every week to deconstruct an asylum or migration related myth. This project is conducted jointly by the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH/OSAR) and our association. More information is available under the section of the annual report dedicated to this project (1.2.3.).

On **13th November 2015**, we organized an ambitious “grand public” event at the Heitere Fahne in Bern, offering an arena to discuss the impact of borders in society. Under the title “Thinking without Borders”, the event was divided into three sessions for which we invited experts to discuss a topic of their choice with the participants during parallel workshops:

- **The academic session:** Daniel Rezene Mekonnen from the PEN “writers in exile” program and Simon Sontowski from the University of Zurich
- **The activist session:** Salvatore Pittà from the network “Welcome to Europe”, Mario Batkovic (teacher, motivator, musician) and Laavanja Sinnadurai (lawyer, cultural interpreter, mediator)
- **The artistic session:** Jack William (theatre writer and director) and the two members of the collective “Old Masters” Marius Schaffter and Jérôme Stünzi

The workshops were followed by a roundtable moderated by our association member Stefan Schlegel. In addition, the Swiss artist Steff la Cheffe offered a beatbox workshop and the band Pablopolar followed with a charity concert in favor of the group “Gemeinsam für Kobani”. About 70 people attended the event which was held in English and German.

On **24-25 November 2015** the annual doctoral students’ gathering of the Center for Migration Law (CDM) took place in Muntelier-Loewenberg, during which two members of the working group “abuse” (Teresia Gordzielik and Robin Stünzi) presented their concept of the intended anthology and the association offered a closing apéro. For more information about the “Abuse” project see below, 1.2.1. This social event enabled to intensify contacts between members and to reach out to new ones.

An academic workshop was organized by the group “Vulnerability” on **20th May 2016**. More details about this event are available under the section dedicated to this group (1.2.2.).

From **20-22 May 2016**, the board gathered for a retreat in Grindelwald to assess the outcomes of the past two years and define a future strategy for the association. The results of these discussions are summarized in the document attached to this annual report.

Finally, the association contributed to the elaboration of negotiation topics on migration for the “Negotiation Conference” which took place in Bern from **29th June to 1st July 2016**. The goal for this year’s event was to negotiate an international agreement on large movements of refugee during a simulation of the discussions due to take place at the upcoming UN General Assembly. 10 teams representing 10 different countries participated to this exercise.

The activities of the association were realized thanks to the support of our members and of voluntary external contributions. Financial support was given by our members (annual membership fees) and by donations from the NCCR On the Move, Amnesty International, the Centre for Migration Law and anonymous participants who added to the “Thinking without Borders” collect.

1.2. Projects and Working Groups

Right after the creation of the association, two already existing working groups were incorporated into the association; one on “Abuse in the Field of Asylum” and another one on “Vulnerability”. These two groups are run by members of the newly created association and consist of association members as well as other doctoral students from Swiss universities. A third working group was launched after the first get-together in February 2015, the “Ciné-Migration”, but remained inactive during the reporting period. In addition a new collaborative project “Fakten statt Mythen” was started.

1.2.1. “Abuse”

In 2015-2016, the working group “Abuse” has moved forward with the project of a collective publication addressing the notion and role of abuse in the sphere of asylum. The project was presented to doctoral students, researchers, professors and experts during the CDM doctoral seminar in 2015. The constructive feedbacks were included in the final concept paper that was sent out to several publishers. Discussions are ongoing with a publisher that has expressed interest in the project. In addition to the publication, it was decided that each author would present and discuss his or her contribution during a workshop held a few months before the submission deadline. A call for contributions was sent out in April 2016, generating few, but interesting, proposals. In addition to the authors already identified, there is now sufficient content to proceed, and the group will organize a follow-up meeting.

1.2.2. “Vulnerability”

The working group on “Vulnerability” organised a colloquium “Between Autonomy and Vulnerability: Perspectives on Migration” on 20 May 2016 at the University of Neuchâtel. The colloquium received funding by the CUSO-Droit and the Centre for Migration Law CDM and may be considered a success with around 20 young researchers from different institutions from Switzerland and abroad participating. The organizing committee achieved to invite Prof. Thomas Spijkerboer from the Free University of Amsterdam, Prof. Judith Wittenbach from the University of Bern and Prof. Christin Achermann from the University of Neuchâtel to participate as experts to the colloquium. The day started with a welcome note by Prof. Christin Achermann and a keynote lecture by Prof. Spijkerboer. After that, three panels with presentations by the participating young researchers took place, each of them dedicated to a specific aspect of vulnerability: the notion of vulnerability and its use in the asylum context, the production and construction of vulnerabiliti(es) and its effects, and the interdependence between vulnerability and autonomy as well as other concepts such as marginality, precarity and resilience. The presentations were both based on case studies as well as on rather conceptual analyses.

1.2.3. “Fakten statt Mythen - Des faits plutôt que des mythes”

In collaboration with the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH/OSAR) a blog-project started on the 7th October 2015, with the ambition to deconstruct and rectify a public myth about asylum in a short article and in non-academic language. The articles are published every Wednesday on the website of the Swiss Refugee Council (www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/fakten-statt-mythen). By end of August 2016, 46 articles have been published. Besides the 13 authors from the Swiss Refugee Council, about 20 members of the Swiss Network of Young Migration Scholars already contributed to this project and wrote various articles. The feedback on social media and among the public is very positive and promising.

1.3. Executive Committee Responsibilities and Activities

As the executive body of the association, the executive committee was responsible for various formal aspects regarding the running of the association. The board met every two months in person and via skype to discuss and decide on formal and substantive issues. Responsibilities within the board were divided as follows:

Chairperson	Nula Frei
Finances	Sascha Finger and Nula Frei
Website	Anne-Cécile Leyvraz, Anne Kneer
Internal communication	Teresia Gordzielik

Twitter	Robin Stünzi (in charge, Twitter shift), Nula Frei, Stephanie Motz and Teresia Gordzielik (Twitter shifts)
Working group “Vulnerability”	Nula Frei, Nesa Zimmermann (external)
Working group “Abuse”	Anne-Cécile Leyvraz, Teresia Gordzielik (until April 2016)
Contact blog project “Fakten statt Mythen”	Anne Kneer, Nula Frei

Anne Kneer was elected new board member at the last general assembly in August 2015 and took up responsibilities immediately thereafter.

For the first time, the board went on a weekend retreat in Grindelwald in May 2016 to discuss the future and vision of the network as well as finances, publicity and ways to get members more actively involved in projects. All charges were paid by board members themselves.

The board deepened the collaboration with the two research institutions, the National Center for Competence in Research – On the move (NCCR – on the move) and the Center for Migration Law (CDM). It also reached out for a collaboration with the Conference of Swiss Western Universities (CUSO) on the colloquium on “Vulnerability and autonomy in migration” (see activities of the project group “Vulnerability”, 1.2.2.).

Board members initiated the blog project “Fakten statt Mythen” together with the Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR), and are now involved in the management and running of the blog together with collaborators of OSAR. This project has inherently led to a close collaboration with OSAR.

The board was concerned with the progress of the other working groups. At the same time the board informed interested persons and new members about the work within the association and next steps to get involved into projects.

Further, the board continued to develop the association’s website. It finally decided on the reconstruction of the website and has taken steps to create and fill the new site with content. Board members were also in charge of maintaining the Twitter account.

Last but not least, the board prepared the meeting and get-together at the CDM doctoral seminar in November 2015, it organized the workshop “Thinking without borders” in November 2016 and the General Assembly.

2. Some Facts and Figures on...

2.1. Members

The association continued to grow in 2015/2016 and consists of 36 members as of 31 July 2016. Members are PhD students, post-doc researchers and one associate professor. They come from different universities such as Geneva, Neuchâtel, Fribourg, Lucerne, Berne, Zurich or St. Gallen, different disciplines such as law, anthropology, sociology, geography or history and three different language regions of Switzerland.

A number of members are organized in the three working groups with six members participating in the project "Abuse", seven members participating in the project "Vulnerability" and 12 members regularly participating as authors in the blog project "Fakten statt Mythen".

With the objective of promoting members' research activities and thereby creating better visibility and transparency of their activities as well as of those of the association, each interested member provided a member profile on our website.

2.2. Finances

in CHF	expenses	revenues
Bank expenses	20.95	
Get-together Doctoral seminar	226.00	
Thinking without borders	1265.90	
Website	87.00	
Private donation by a member		57.00
Donation Amnesty International		500.00
Donation NCCR on the move		1000.00
Donation Université de Neuchâtel		250.00
Membership fees		1080.00
Total revenues and expenses	1599.85	2887.00
Surplus of revenues or expenses		616.30

The association is in funds of CHF 2070.45 as of end of August 2016.

3. Outlook

In its upcoming third year, the Network will stay committed to its aim of providing a platform for exchange and networking for its members and will therefore continue to organise gatherings and social events. Other events for our members and/or events that are open to a broader public will also be organized.

Aiming to function as a public resource on migration studies, the Network will continue its content-related projects “Fakten statt Mythen” and “Asylum Abuse”. There is also a will to re-animate the project “Cinemigration” after successful events in 2015, with the ambition to carry out movie screenings in different cities of Switzerland. The Network will also stay open to new projects and collaborations, and has reserved a major part of its budget to collaborative project proposals which can be submitted by any member of the association.

On an external level, the Executive Committee will continue its efforts to develop clearer communication. Apart from reforming the website, a process that has already been started, we will also undertake to increase and re-focus our social media presence and find a way to increase the internal communication with and between the members and the Executive Committee.

On an external level, the cooperation with stakeholders in the Swiss migration research field such as NCCR – on the move, CDM, the Swiss Refugee Council and CUSO droit will be upheld and new partners are continually sought. Furthermore, the Executive Committee will take up efforts to increase fundraising.

In sum, the coming year will serve to further strengthen the profile of the association. Its abundance of good ideas for further projects and activities and will ensure a continued work with esprit, motivation and energy.

Bern, August 31, 2016