

## **Sociological perspectives on international migration in the GCC countries**

### **Convenor**

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### **Summary**

Migration affects people's lives both as migrants and as non-migrants. Different theories, approaches and concepts have been adopted to explain why people migrate and their decision-making process. The literature on international migration is mainly focused on two perspectives. The first emphasizes the causes that push people to migrate in which such a decision is made by individuals on the basis of economic reasons (functionalist approaches). The second focuses on the difference between societies (structural approaches), meaning that international migration is fostered by the existence of unequal 'structural' relationships. However, the distinction between the two approaches is not clear-cut.

In the last few years, the issue of migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has attracted an increasing scholarly interest. Because of historical, political, and socio-economic reasons, migration to the GCC countries is not comparable to migration to the West. Migration to the GCC is regulated and controlled by the sponsorship system. Moreover, the demographic imbalance, which is clearly evident in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, and the segmentation of the local labour market make the differences between migration to the GCC countries and the West more complex and articulated than it might appear.

Migration is a multi-layered and multidimensional process meaning that it relies on a complex set of factors and dynamics that influence its course. It seems that migration process is a 'neutral' term that does not unpack the migration experience, practices and migrants' everyday life in the GCC countries. It underestimates the role of agency in the migration experience. It would thus be important to introduce the notion of 'migration project' to affirm that each individual's migration is characterized by a conscious, concerted and dynamic decision made by (would-be) migrants in accordance with their families and households. However, it does not mean that there is a project established *a priori* but it emphasizes the ability of knowledgeable agents to articulate their migration experience in such a way to deal with the evolution of migration and new circumstances that could take place. At the core of the concept of 'migration project' there is the debate between structure and agency.

Since the 2000s, several studies on international migration have adopted a different sociological perspective in order to overcome the binary opposition between structuralist and functionalist approaches, thus embedding migration in a wider understanding of contemporary society by relating it to social change. In this sense, migration especially to Western countries has been approached by either Giddens's structuration theory or Archer's critical realism. The aim of this panel is to bring together scholars to discuss international

migration in the GCC countries from a sociological perspective thus contributing to understanding the role of structure and agency in migration research.

### **Themes**

Sociological theories of international migration

Methodological approaches to international migration

Evolution and dynamics of international migration in the GCC countries

Class, ethnicity and 'race'

Inclusion and exclusion

Belonging and non-belonging

Citizenship and naturalization

Migration and religion

Fatherhood and motherhood in migration context

Gender and migration

National identity and migration

Political/social implications of migration

Proposals must include a title, an abstract and five keywords.

Abstracts should be between 300 and 400 words.

Accepted languages are English and French (WOCMES working languages).

Proposals must be sent in both Word and PDF formats to organizer(s)

([g.errichiello@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:g.errichiello@lboro.ac.uk)) including the name(s), email and mail addresses.

The deadline for proposals submission is September 30, 2017.

Authors will be notified of acceptance on or before October 20, 2017.

Further information about WOCMES-5 is available at

<http://www.tresculturas.org/wocmes18/>