

Introduction: Immigration, Cultural Participation, and New Forms of Solidarity

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This issue of *AmeriQuests* features a selection of papers that were presented at *Immigration, Cultural Participation and New Forms of Political Solidarity: Global Perspectives*, held at l'Université de Liège (Belgium) in September of 2019, a few months before the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic. It was the first event organized by the newly renamed Standing Committee POPADIVCIT (Popular Art, Diversity and Cultural Policies in Post-Migration Urban settings) of the European research Network IMISCOE¹. The board of directors of the network decided in the previous spring to reorganize and rename the standing committees. POPADIVCIT became DIVCULT (Superdiversity, Migration and Cultural Change)².

The objectives of the new Standing Committee are to pursue and expand the work of the POPADIVCIT. It was founded in 2010 to better understand the relevance of the arts in the theoretical and policy debates about immigrant incorporation and diversity in immigration and post-migration cities. This was a relatively neglected research field in migration studies at the time. POPADIVCIT focussed on four domains: local artistic actors, activities and institutions; local cultural and incorporation policies; social relations and interactions between all of the stakeholders in the field as well as with the respective audiences; and artistic activities as forms of political participation and mobilisation (including identity formation and negotiation). These domains constituted the general framework in which the researchers involved developed theoretically grounded empirical research, organised workshops and conferences and prepared joint publications.

Over the last years, artistic activities have found increasing interest among migration researchers because they prove to be a means of moving beyond ethnic differences towards narratives of identity and belonging that are more apt to capture the current post-migrant reality in many cities and countries. The Standing Committee DIVCULT has therefore decided to continue its work with a view to answering the following two questions: how are artistic and cultural activities and institutions changing in migration and post-migration superdiverse societies, and how do these activities contribute to spreading narratives that more aptly describe these new realities. It also planned to expand and enlarge its focus in three ways:

- While POPADIVCIT mainly worked on arts and more specifically on music, literature, cinema and theatre. DIVCULT has enlarged its scope to include other artistic forms as well as culture defined in a broader sense such as sports, fashion, clothing, design, food, leisure, etc.
- The multidisciplinary character of POPADIVCIT covered sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, policy studies and political science. One of the objectives of DIVCULT is to include economists and lawyers in the debates on superdiversity, migration, and cultural change.
- DIVCULT aims at engaging more actively in methodological development by continuing previous initiatives in visual studies and participatory arts-based research.

The first concrete activity of the new Standing Committee was this conference, the main objective of which was to focus on the cultural and artistic participation of migrants and descendants of migrants

¹ www.imiscoe.org.

² <https://www.imiscoe.org/research/standing-committees/930-superdiversity-migration-and-cultural-change>.

in a transatlantic perspective, and also on the spaces and the moments when this participation intersects with, and binds to, public forms of intercultural collective engagement, whether artistic, political, or both. Empirical and theoretical papers addressed some overriding questions, such as: what role do culture and the arts play in the lives of newcomers and descendants of migrants? Which cultural and artistic practices and forms of participation do newcomers and descendants of immigrants develop? How do cultural institutions take into account those publics often considered to be disengaged at the cultural and artistic level? Do these cultural practices contribute to creating bonds of solidarity between migrants and natives? And if so, what forms of political representation and collective engagement do they inspire? The 5 papers included in the special issue were selected from the 12 papers presented at the conference, and they present diverse but connected approaches to the broad themes of art and border crossings.

The paper by Clelia Clini, Jasmine Hornabrook and Emily Keightley analyzes the engagement in cultural and creative practices of people of South Asian heritage in the borough of Tower Hamlets in London and in Loughborough, East Midlands. They argue that the arts play a key role in maintaining and claiming South Asian heritage/s and in negotiating diasporic identities in Britain. Félicien de Heusch examines how the “Street Vendors Popular Syndicate of Barcelona”, a bottom-up organization composed mainly of undocumented Senegalese migrants, develops political narratives and repertoires of action through rap music and clothing design. He studies in particular two artistic projects developed by the collective: a rap and a clothing brand they have created. The paper provides a better understanding of how arts and design are used to build solidarity between undocumented migrants and to respond to stigmatisation as well as to make a living despite their precarious legal status. The third article by Francesco Delle Puppa and Giulia Storato focuses on a musical project aimed at encouraging the social inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers on Northern Italy. This case-study shows the potential of such projects for the creation of social bonds and networks across ethnic and national lines, and for deconstructing the stereotyped image of refugees and asylum seekers and the exoticization of their musical productions. Following up from a different perspective on the debate concerning exoticization of immigrants and refugees, Monika Mokre and Christoph Leitgeb discuss the ambivalences of staging participation in selected Viennese cultural productions. They ask: Under which conditions do productions of this type become an excuse for aesthetical exoticism by exploiting the participation of refugees, rather than taking participants engagement seriously? They also discuss under which conditions the staging of participation can result in an increased autonomy of the refugees. Finally, with Lionel Arnaud, we venture outside migratory and post-migratory situations. Arnaud studies the role of physical space in the political mobilization of cultural minorities in the French overseas territory Martinique. He shows how the inhabitants of a poor working-class district of Fort-de-France have managed to make their neighborhood a place of conservation of their dances and music.

A Border Crossing Collaboration

This issue grows out of a growing interest in the overlap between artistic efforts to depict borders and their crossings, and efforts aimed at reaching a broader segment of the population with messages of tolerance, hospitality and generosity in an era of regressive populism. In 2019, Barsky was elaborating upon a longstanding effort to create a new journal, called *Contours Collaborations* (<https://contours.pubpub.org>), that would work with artists who had experienced and/or attempted to represent borders, and the crossing thereof, in visual arts, photography, performance art, dance, or film. At the very moment of discussion between parties to this effort, an important new book appeared on the list of possible book review titles for *AmeriQuests*, which treated the precise subject