

Announcement of a new FWF Project at CSEES: ‘To the Northwest! Intra-Yugoslav Albanian migration (1953-1989)’.

CSEES is pleased to announce the launch of a new research project “To the Northwest! Intra-Yugoslav Albanian migration (1953-1989)” supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) P 32345) and led by Rory Archer. The project will begin in April 2020 for a duration of three years.

Researchers have explored many aspects of Albanian migration – so much so that one renowned scholar of the field, Russel King, described Albania as a ‘laboratory’ for the study of migration and development. Despite the large number of studies examining the experience of Albanian migrants in countries like Greece, Italy and Switzerland (and the impact of migration in the towns and villages in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia) one crucial part of the story is missing. What about the many Albanians from Kosovo (and Macedonia) who migrated within Yugoslavia during the socialist period in considerable numbers?

Albanians were the largest non-Slavic population in Yugoslavia, reaching up to 8 per cent of the population by the 1980s. Predominantly rural in origin, Albanian labour migrants gravitated to industrial centres around the country in search of work. This three-year research project explores the case of Albanian labour migration from the Southeast of Yugoslavia to the country’s northwest (Croatia and Slovenia) between 1953 and 1989 through historical and historical-anthropological methods.

The first research objective of the research is to provide a historical survey to show how the migration of Yugoslav Albanians to Croatia and Slovenia was facilitated and understood by the authorities. The second objective explores how the local communities in Croatia and Slovenia understood and managed the migration. Most importantly, the third objective explores how migration was understood by the Albanian migrants themselves. The fourth and final objective is to compare intra-Yugoslav Albanian migration to the better-documented socialist-era Yugoslav migration to capitalist Western Europe as well as Yugoslav rural-to-urban migration trends. Methodologically, the research relies on the analysis of library and archival documents and extensive oral history interviews. Oral history will be undertaken by the project researchers in two case study sites of Albanian migration – in Pula, northwest Croatia, and in an industrial town in Slovenia (e.g. Titovo Velenje).

The project engages with recent scholarly innovations in SEE studies of race, ethnicity, class, gender and the interaction of these categories of identification in a research paradigm of intersectionality. It hypothesizes that the experience of migration for Albanians was shaped by a range of factors including religion (Islamic, Catholic or secular), gender (male or female?), place of origin (rural or urban?), and political orientation (loyal communist or nationalist sympathiser?). These categories intersect, resulting in different material outcomes for the individuals concerned. The goal of the research is to carefully unpack these outcomes. The research contributes to debates in the fields of Southeast European migration history and Yugoslav historiography. More broadly for migration studies, the empirical case offers an instructive example of cross-cultural migration taking place within state borders in a context of socialist modernisation.