

NCCR On the Move Review Panel

Report of the Year 6 Online Review, 18-19 May 2020 (Webex Meeting)

Content

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Main purposes of the site visit 2020	2
3.	General impression and reaction to the panel recommendations	2
4.	Scientific performance	3
5.	Internal collaboration and synergies	5
6.	International standing	7
7.	Knowledge and technology transfer / public outreach	7
8.	Education and training	8
9.	Equal Opportunities	8
10.	Structural aspects	8
11.	Conclusion mid-term review and outlook	9
12.	Recommendations	9
13.	Next site visit	10
14.	Proposition to the SNSF	

Participants:

Review Panel: **Max Bergman** (Chair), SNSF Programmes Div.; **Gudela Grote** (Deputy Chair), SNSF Programmes Div.; **Rupert Brown**, University of Sussex, UK; **Ayse Caglar**, Universität Wien, AT; **Franz Caspar**, SNSF Div. Humanities and Social Sciences; **Gil S. Epstein**, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, IL; **Hill Kulu**, University of St. Andrews, UK; **Susan Martin** (emerita), Georgetown University, Washington D.C., US; **Noel Salazar**, KU Leuven, BE; **Maarten Vink**, Maastricht University, NL.

Excused: --

SNSF Staff: **Thomas Griessen, Yolanda Curletto**

NCCR Scientific Committee / Management Board / Network Office: **Gianni D'Amato** (Director), **Philippe Wanner** (Deputy Director), **Wassilis Kassis, Christin Achermann, Mihaela Nedelcu** and **Lorenzo Piccoli / Stefanie Kurt, Matteo Gianni** and **Nicole Wichmann / and Raquel Delgado Moreira, Anniqne Lombard, Andreas Perret, Inka Sayed, Robin Stünzi**, together with the presenting NCCR participants.

1. Introduction

The review panel conducted this very important review, as an anticipated mid-term review, for the 6th contact year on 18 and 19 May 2020 in the format of an online meeting via WebEx. The originally planned on-site visit had to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The panel members submitted written assessments on the general development of the NCCR, as well as the crucial question, whether the overall quality and level of integration has achieved the expected level, which will allow for the planning of a third funding phase. In addition, the panel experts were individually assigned to assess some of the NCCR's modules and projects.

The panel conducted a very thorough and encompassing online review, starting with a first internal preparatory meeting (ca. 1h 45 min on 14 May), followed by two review sessions (morning and afternoon of 18 May), in which the Director delivered first his status report, and then the NCCR participants discussed their research with the panel members. The afternoon session was dedicated to a substantive assessment of the cross-cutting subjects (so called hubs), in particular the migration-mobility nexus and the NCCR's data collections, as well as to an overview of the structural development. The panel's final internal discussion took place only the next day, on 19 May, within a 2 ½ hours session that developed into a very substantive, high quality debate on the real strengths and some continued weaknesses of this NCCR. As foreseen in the online procedure, the panel conveyed the outcome of its assessment via a short written summary to the NCCR Director. The summary contained the panel's overall impressions and main recommendations. The responsible SNSF officer, the panel chairs and international members consolidated this document within one week after the meeting.

2. Main purposes of the site visit 2020

The Review Panel focused its review on the following items:

- The main objective of the sixth site visit has been to evaluate the NCCR's scientific output and international standing. This included the appreciation of the NCCR's reaction to last year's recommendations
- The panel has also assessed the accomplishments relating to the migration-mobility nexus, the connection of the work in the modules to the overall goals of NCCR and the nexus, as well as the NCCR's development in phase II (strong aspects / points to be improved)
- Finally, the state of implementation of the contractual structural measures has been evaluated
- Based on the entire evaluation, the panel has formulated its major recommendation to the Research Council, i.e. whether the NCCR should be invited to submit a pre-proposal for a third funding phase.

3. General impression and reaction to the panel recommendations

Last year the panel discussed a selection of planned and published papers, including the relationship of these papers with the core objective of the NCCR. The panel's main objective in this debate was to assess, on the one hand, the *integration of the NCCR projects toward the notion of the migration-mobility nexus (MMN)* and, on the other, the *core output in terms of academic publications* and linked to this, *the NCCR's international standing*. Now, one year further and after having read the 6th progress report, the panel experts are impressed by the proactive and constructive way in which the teams have taken up last year's recommendations.

The internal discussions and all reflections the researchers dedicated to the migration-mobility nexus, make it an original and useful, more diverse and dynamic conceptual framework. Moreover, the teams have developed and presented explicit linkages with the nexus in their projects. In this context, the panel enjoyed reading the progress report, but also thought the circulated posters about the projects were an excellent way of sharing the projects' focus, progress and relation to the overall goals in a succinct manner.

Concerning the publication record, the panel commends the teams for the excellent and transparent presentation of their track record and academic output, again, in a clear and visually attractive style. In general, the publications achieve very high to highest standards, as many of the teams have already published high-quality contributions in reputed journals. Indeed, the scientific outputs now reflect the ambitious standards the NCCR has set for the publications of the teams in phase II. The panel still notes some differences regarding the output across IPs, reflecting different stages of progress across the IPs. Nonetheless, the panel is pleased to see remarkable progress that has been made, and with this very clear upward trajectory, the consortium has advanced substantially with regard to the points addressed by the panel last year.

The panel is glad to highlight a number of additional impressive developments in this NCCR: the innovative linkage of census and longitudinal register data and the migration-mobility survey; the policy relevance and influence on policy making in several domains; the high quality and excellent scope of the NCCR's education programme. The panel particularly appreciates the timely, thoughtful and internationally visible reaction of the NCCR on the Covid-19-crisis, including its impact on migration and mobility as well as the proactive and agile contingency planning of the teams, concerning their own ongoing research.

The panel's aim was to thoroughly assess the NCCR's accomplishments concerning the migration-mobility nexus, the connection of the work in the modules to the overall goals of NCCR and the nexus, as well as the overall development in phase II (strong aspects / points to be improved). During this year's review, the panel experts were convinced by the very positive development concerning the interactions, the substantial strengthening of the MMN framework and the quality of scientific contributions and outputs.

Based on its assessment, the panel concludes that the NCCR On the Move has now achieved a very high level of scientific quality, fruitful collaboration, leading to innovative research, international recognition, and substantive impact on the field. In short, the NCCR has established itself as a major research and training centre for research into mobility and migration – as expected for an NCCR.

4. Scientific performance

Overall, the panel was impressed by the clear leap made by the NCCR since the last review and the genuinely collaborative spirit conveyed by the researchers during this year's review. Significant progress has been identified concerning the publication activities and the level of scientific output of the participating researchers. There is no doubt that the NCCR scientific performance meets very high standards.

Most of the panel members have followed the NCCR over its now already considerable duration, and they are happy to see that the researchers have achieved a shared understanding of the migration-mobility nexus as a dynamic, multifaceted frame of reference, to which all projects have established explicit links. It is obvious that the understanding of this notion will continue to evolve along the NCCR's research, based on continued theoretical reflections as well as a number of empirical tests. This reflexivity concerning the MMN has clearly developed since the last review, it offers room for variations and further development, which is a very important step to deepen internal interactions and magnify ground-breaking work.

On the publication record, the panel commends the teams for the excellent presentation of their outputs and track record. The overall quality of the NCCR's academic output is very high. Where the panel still noted some differences concerning the output (both quantity and quality) across IPs, these were mainly determined by different stages of progress (new projects present a lower rate of output). Some unevenness has to be expected in such a large consortium. Nevertheless, on the whole, the teams have met the level of international visible research output the panel expected to see. The panel experts especially appreciate the ambitious standards the NCCR has set for its members, and how this is reflected in the high-ranked journals in which many of the project teams have already published their work.

The NCCR delivers truly innovative and outstanding research in a number of projects. To mention but a few, the panel highlighted work in Module I (IP 24), an impressive effort pulling together several layers of legal frameworks and multilateral agreements linking trade and human mobility. This is in fact a very important aspect, still vastly understudied and most policy makers in the trade field are not fully aware of the long-term implications, human mobility clauses in trade agreements actually have. By including the complexity of different legal frameworks in the analysis, this work is cutting-edge and it is innovative by applying mixed methods to the issues under study. As to the application of ground-breaking methodologies, there are other examples, e.g. in Module II (in particular IP 30), using quasi-experimental and even fully randomized research designs in the social science: this is clearly at the cutting-edge of the field. The team – and not only this one – is closely connected to international networks (e.g. Immigration Lab at Stanford University), is working interdisciplinarily, has clear links to NCCR core, collects original data and makes excellent use of NCCR data sets (register data) as well. Likewise, another IP in Module II (IP 31), on societal norms shaping inclusive or exclusive behaviour and attitudes, is an exemplary illustration of how the combination of multiple perspectives and bridging macro perspectives (policy level) with individual level attitudes toward such “norms”, brings about innovative work. Still in Module II, the panel highlighted a particularly strong link of IP 29 to the MMN.

Indeed, ground-breaking research is most apparent in all projects, in which the participating researchers /groups have left their traditional or disciplinary “comfort zone” and deeply engage in interdisciplinary collaboration. They do thought experiments, are applying expanded concepts in their research, and are testing their frameworks with these new concepts, either in a disciplinary or interdisciplinary fashion. And by doing so, these groups are taking risks, which always are part of truly interdisciplinary and cutting-edge work. In Module III this “out of the box” spirit is most widespread and probably finds its purest illustration in IP 34.

Another innovative part the panel continuously praised over the years, is the rich and unique data set, linking official registry data (anonymized), now also connected with similar data sets in other European countries (e.g. Sweden). Such data sets are invaluable for longitudinal and cross-cutting analyses, but generally are not readily made available by public authorities due to the effort and

expertise needed to compile such complex records and to comply with privacy standards. This dataset is complemented by the now widely used “Migration-Mobility Survey”, the NCCR launched in the first phase. Only because of these data sets, NCCR researchers could – for the first time in Switzerland – analyse trajectories of refugees, migrants and transnational mobility, an important scientific contribution but also very relevant findings for Swiss policy makers.

What has become very obvious in the most recent period is the sheer societal and political relevance of migration and mobility studies as such. The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged in a deeply interconnected world of hyper-mobile workforce, and brought even highly favoured and politically protected mobility regimes (e.g. free movement with EU / Schengen) to an immediate halt. One could not think of a more blatant illustration of societal and policy relevance. In this context, the NCCR researchers could and can make their voices heard, as they possess strong linkages to Swiss public authorities and political actors.

The panel members observe somewhat less innovative research in those parts of the NCCR programme, where the researchers seem to have settled in the comfort of their established networks or “traditional” modes/models of thinking, and thus somewhat lack the additional provocative intellectual stimuli to push their work to even higher levels of ambition and quality. As already mentioned, a certain unevenness of aspirations and potential impact seems unavoidable in such a large consortium, and when related to weaker output, it seems clearly as an effect of frankly more recently established projects, running only for roughly two years in phase II.

To summarise, the panel experts would like to make sure that the NCCR participants and the Research Council will hear this message clearly: the progress in this consortium is remarkable in the second phase, and quality of the science is excellent in many of the projects, and very high throughout the NCCR. The participating researchers are strong, some are world-leaders in their specific fields, their ideas to advance the science and the quality of the resulting research has elevated to a remarkable degree over the years. The trajectory of this NCCR consortium is truly positive, and therefore the panel sends an unambiguous message to the Research Council; the scientific performance of NCCR On the Move is at very high and internationally competitive level.

5. Internal collaboration and synergies

In fact, already when the panel assessed the full proposal for the second phase, the experts were convinced that the NCCR has gathered a very strong set of researchers and project leaders, and composed the modules and projects very sensibly for phase II. At both levels, the teams look at core issues in migration and mobility, always from different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds in a truly integrative way.

The work in the three modules is focussing on salient and important issues that need to be part of any migration-mobility project in order to better understand related societal implications, e.g. inequalities, social cohesion and the complexities entrenched in transnational mobilities. Hence, the research of the modules has advanced our understanding of the factors promoting or hindering immigrant integration, social cohesion in Switzerland and beyond, and shed light on the nature of some drivers underlying human movement.

The migration-mobility-nexus (MMN) is the main added value of this NCCR project vis-à-vis the distinct trajectories of migration and mobility scholarships. The MMN enables the researchers to

critically explore and reflect on the variegated entanglements, tensions and contestations between different forms and registers of human movement. The theoretical frameworks and the adopted/chosen methodologies of the projects are well thought-out and rigorously applied. If synergies are understood as reflective and critical thinking on projects at hand, in light of other NCCR projects' findings and analytical frameworks, so far collaborations have been more visible than synergies in NCCR.

With the new measures installed to secure stronger coherence and critical interaction among different projects and researchers – e.g. by means of interdisciplinary working groups (especially on the MMN), internal incentive structures for collaboration and joint thinking and publication – increasing interdisciplinary collaborations has clearly been achieved. The NCCR has provided structures to create new and to strengthen existing mechanisms for advanced complementarity of research, and increased collaboration and synergies. Notably, this collaboration is not just “interdisciplinarity” for the sake of it, but collaboration with the clear focus on conceptual development of the MMN and, via the feedback from this exchange, the strengthening of the research in the projects and modules. Indeed, the internal discussions surrounding the nexus resulted in an internal document that explicitly describes the conceptual common base of the programme. This framework offers room for development beyond complementarity toward novel and more differentiated understandings of the relations between migration and mobility dynamics. The NCCR Director already announced that the research teams will continue asking different and new questions related to critical junctures and the nexus, which the panel encourages, as it will shift our understanding of the interplay between the dimensions of the MMN, but also its limits for migration and mobility scholarship.

At the level of the modules, the scientific added value is remarkable as well. Module III offers a very good example of how one can put the analytical lens of MMN at work by combining (transnational) migration studies and the mobilities paradigm. The conducted research is, at the same time, sufficiently specific to contribute to specialized areas of research, and framed in such a way that also other thematic streams can conceptually and theoretically link to it. The panel considered this module to be exemplary, as the participating researchers really make an effort to take the MMN framework at the heart of their work and come up with innovative ways to study and (re)conceptualize the relation between migration and mobility.

Other mechanisms, as the establishment of a collaborative fund to support inter-IP collaboration, or the NCCR's research days are good tools to link inquiry and debates even more systematically to the MMN within the whole NCCR. However, the panel felt that the proposed new inter-IP-projects could engage more closely and substantively with the MMN (as outlined in the new document) and this should be one of the most important criteria for additional projects in this context.

Overall, the interdisciplinary collaboration is continuously expanded as well as internationalised. Having said this, the panel recommended making strategic choices of the partners and broadening for international networking. While it is clear that progress is being made in terms of scientific added value, the review panel remains unclear about the role of project IP 22_HISTORY as a hub-project. Whereas the MMN and IP 23_DATA, including two overarching data sets, clearly add scientific value and serve as transversal platforms, the transversal character of IP 22 is less obvious and needs to be refined. The research teams are on track to tap the full synergistic potential of their NCCR, yet they should continue to expand and deepen their interactions with the proposed focus, and high-level ambitions they want to accomplish.

6. International standing

The panel much appreciated the many successful attempts to increase the centre's global visibility, e.g. by numbers of international collaborations and invitations. With the continuing stream of scientific output, in terms of published and accepted international publications, as well as those submitted or planned for submission, the NCCR participants have reached a considerable international recognition and impact.

As to its embeddedness, the NCCR is very present in traditional migration-related networks, but somewhat less in newer and sometimes more dynamic ones. The NCCR is less strongly involved in mobility-related networks. In the view of the panel, this is a missed opportunity, as both the NCCR and mobility scholars might mutually benefit from shared reflections on the interplay between the two aspects in general and the MMN in particular. Hence, in terms of networking, more could be done to explore new relevant networks, especially in the burgeoning field of mobility studies. Being more visible in more places could enhance the international standing of the NCCR even beyond the realms in which it is already well-established, which is mainly in Europe.

Nonetheless, with their recent response to the COVID-19 crisis, the NCCR members have seized relevant opportunities and are complementing their ongoing and future work with topics that have a huge potential for internationally visible contributions. Some project teams have launched new surveys (e.g. on perceptions of welfare deservingness in the crisis), and the Migration-Mobility-Survey will add specific items related to the pandemic in its 2020 wave. In the planned call for additional projects, the NCCR has focussed on new projects addressing the impact of the pandemic (e.g. one of the approved projects, on bordering discourses regarding migration and mobility in Europe). Finally, the NCCR management team made COVID-19 dedicated resources available on NCCR webpages, very rapidly and for all target audiences. With a dedicated blog series, and a summary of Lorenzo Piccoli's (NCCR Science Coordinator) blog article, the Washington Post published on 5 April, the NCCR could also increase its international visibility.

In the panel's assessment, the NCCR has effectively increased international visibility of its research and achieved the scientific impact and standing, the reviewers expected to see at this stage. Of course, the panel discussed the necessity to further promote the NCCR's impact – also beyond Europe – while acknowledging that the NCCR's most recent reaction to the Covid-19 crisis has already found both national and international attention.

7. Knowledge and technology transfer / public outreach

Much of the aspects discussed in previous section of this report relate – at least to a certain degree – to outreach and knowledge transfer aspects. The dedicated staff members in the management team do a brilliant job in supporting widespread activities to make the centre know, via public events, the NCCR's website, blog series, policy briefs etc. Communication and knowledge transfer are targeted to the general local public, but also to specific stakeholders, policy arenas and public authorities. The NCCR's activity and impact via social media (in particular on Twitter) is impressive and on a top-level compared to other research centres (including Swiss NCCRs). The NCCR's transfer and outreach programmes are successful and an obvious strength of the entire consortium.

8. Education and training

The panel experts were impressed by the doctoral training provided by the centre. Indeed, the NCCR's efforts and activities in the domain education and training are a clear asset. Not only it is serving the needs of the young researchers, it is thoughtfully designed and provides clearly a world leading training opportunity for the participating NCCR fellows and additional students, enrolled in the programme. There is a large group of PhDs, and they benefit from being embedded within such a large and productive centre with many different research strands and associated methodologies. Moreover, the multi-mentoring model is very much appreciated by the panel, as it leads to expanded interdisciplinary interactions at all levels of the NCCR research groups. In this context, the panel experts wondered in their internal debate to what extent the education and training is actively used to expose researchers to the MMN framework and to experiment with it so that it can be further developed. It would be a good idea, if this has not already happened, to have the young researchers reflect on how their particular project fit within the framework as it currently stands and what they can contribute to it.

As the panel noted already last year, this is really one of the domains in which the NCCR excels. The current state and operation of the NCCR's doctoral training programme is a remarkable achievement, and the panel fully supports the plan that this successfully designed education and training activity is being institutionalised during and beyond the third funding phase of the NCCR. To do so, the NCCR will need the support of the University of Neuchâtel to ensure adequate long-term structural support for this training programme.

9. Equal Opportunities

The NCCR continues to address issues of gender equality in a highly proactive manner. A relevant stimulus to do so is probably related to the fact that the majority of researchers involved are women and the NCCR finds itself in a "strongly feminized" research domain. As the equal opportunities programme could cover much more than only gender, i.e. other aspects of inequality (e.g. related to disability, ethnicity, race, religion, etc.) are equally relevant, the panel would like to encourage the team to approach these dimensions in more depth, particularly given the focus on migration and mobility.

10. Structural aspects

The panel only superficially assessed the structural development in the research domain of the NCCR. In fact, all structural positions promised for Phase II are already appointed and the researchers are very actively involved in NCCR's: two Senior lecturers (MER) have been appointed (Didier Ruedin, Sociology, July 2019, and Jean-Thomas Arrighi, History, November 2019). An additional Lecturer position (MA) has been filled as planned (Simon Noori, in the MAPS lab, November 2019). With regard to the positions filled in the first phase, the three assistant professors will undergo a final assessment and promotion procedure, and it is expected that they will be offered (upon successful evaluation) permanent positions in the coming two years, i.e. before the end of Phase II. The NCCR negotiated the final implementation of the structural anchorage of its activities in the area of knowledge transfer, communication and data management at the home institution.

To reiterate, the Panel clearly supports the institutionalization of the NCCR's Doctoral Programme in Phase III, as it offers a unique interdisciplinary combination, and seems world-leading in its

quality. The curriculum includes everything what is needed for combined migration – mobility studies. Overall, the NCCR’s structural impact is already visible and a successful continuation of the consortium in a third phase and some of its “jewels” will have significant and lasting structuring effects on the home institution, and on the entire research field in Switzerland.

At the level of the postdoctoral fellows, the panel acknowledged that extension of postdoc contracts to compensate for crisis-induced delays, will be a crucial support not only for the concerned young researchers, but also a very much needed protection of planned scientific results.

11. Conclusion mid-term review and outlook

Based on the scientific and structural achievements, including data infrastructure; the substantive advancement of the NCCR’s now impressively developed conceptual core, the migration-mobility-nexus; as well as the progress reports on the developments within all the IPs, including activities aimed at strengthening the internal cohesion of the NCCR, there is ample evidence that the NCCR will achieve the panel’s expectations within the current phase.

The NCCR convincingly integrates migration and mobility research in an original international and comparative research agenda, effectively addressing the opportunities and challenges of interdisciplinary research. With its publications and other scientific output, the NCCR has reached the expected level of quality and impact. Research teams have pushed for high-level outputs and achieved this without neglecting to share their results with their interdisciplinary communities. The panel expects the researchers to implement their ambitious publication strategies, or to refine these in light of this report.

Looking at the NCCR’s further development and its research programme for a possible third funding period, the panel would like to see a clear focus on the strong aspects and innovative research strands, as well as an enhancement of the existing MMN framework. That means broadening the perspectives or adding empirical tests including the various dynamics and drivers of mobility and migration. The panel looks forward to learn more about how the researchers will “play” with the MMN dimensions, which is likely to strengthen the entire conceptual framework.

12. Recommendations

The main recommendations by the panel can be summarised as follows:

Recommendation concerning the submission of a pre-proposal for the subsequent phase III:

Based on its decidedly positive assessment and the NCCR’s remarkable leap in advancing its ambitious research agenda since the last review, the Panel recommends unanimously that the Research Council shall invite the NCCR team to submit a pre-proposal for a subsequent phase III.

Recommendation concerning the further development of the NCCR’s research programme:

The panel is pleased to see that the NCCR teams apply the migration-mobility nexus as a dynamic frame of reference and that their understanding of this notion continues to evolve along the conducted research. Hence, the panel encourages the NCCR to continue to develop this nexus, to frame additional “tests” for this framework, by including different perspectives and new directions in their future research. The presented approach – to further refine and develop the nexus under

the perspective of the current crisis as a critical juncture – seems a good entry point, and could potentially be expanded to other similarly significant global challenges.

Recommendation concerning structural achievements:

The NCCR has developed a very impressive, interdisciplinary PhD programme including a uniquely broad range of subject matters in the field of migration and mobility studies. The panel recommends safeguarding and institutionalizing this programme within the University of Neuchatel as a structural asset and accomplishment of the NCCR.

Recommendation concerning international collaborations:

The NCCR has developed impressive external interdisciplinary collaborations with universities and other research institutions that focus on migration and mobility. The panel appreciates the time spent in forging these partnerships, which, however, mainly focus on Europe. Extending such collaborations to include partners in the Global South would extend the capacity of the NCCR to analyse migration and mobility from the perspective of scholars and issues arising in these regions.

13. Next site visit

The next site visit will be held in spring 2021 (most likely in the second half of May). The main goals will be the assessment of the achievements of the 2nd phase and the assessment of the pre-proposal for the 3rd phase.

14. Proposition to the SNSF

Bern, 30.06.2020 / tg