

Moving, not to move: anti-authoritarianism, reclaiming society and disrupting the “migrant-per-default” image in shifting Europe(s)

Jelena Tasic (University of St.Gallen, Migration Studies)
University of St.Gallen, Switzerland

Universität St.Gallen (HSG) | Unterer Graben 21 | CH-9000 St.Gallen
Phone +41 71 224 2547
jelena.tasic@unisg.ch

This paper zooms in on on-going protests in Serbia to think about new epistemic horizons in migration and mobility studies. *“It concerns us”, “We are staying here”, “Let us change the society, so we don’t have to change the society”*. As these slogans of the student led protests in Serbia – sparked by the collapse of a newly renovated railway station in the city of Novi Sad in October 2024 claiming 16 lives – show, the protests do not only articulate longstanding claims against corruption and authoritarianism, but also take issue with migration. Stressing their commitment to society in spite of their “mobility capital”, the students foreground the value of non-migration and thereby disrupt the hegemonic (balkanist) stereotype of (young) (South)East-Europeans as “migrants-per-default”. At the same time, it is precisely mobility (walking and cycling in and between cities in Serbia, and from Serbia to Strasbourg) which figures as a prime protest practice to connect people and places and spread protest claims.

By building on recent epistemological interventions to demigrantize and de-exceptionalize migration (research), this paper is interested in the political power and effects of non-migration claims. Looking at how young protesters “demigrantize” (stereotypes of themselves) by framing non-migration as a core value in their (highly mobile) struggle for a livable democratic society is a prime way to analytically access: the pro-/anti-migration epistemic binary; and the inconsistency and entanglement of both authoritarian and EU’s “stabilocratic” politics.