

Report on the Cologne Summer School

Serendipia: migración como oportunidad – Serendipity: Migration as an Opportunity

The *Spain-Portugal-Latin America Study Group/Centro Latinoamericano de Colonia (ASPLA-CLAC)* hosted the interdisciplinary summer school *Serendipity: Migration as an Opportunity* from July 24th – 31st, 2016. The summer school was a cooperative project with a consortium of South European and Latin American universities and was supported by the University of Cologne's Competence Area IV "Cultures and Societies in Transition".

The topic *Serendipity: Migration as an Opportunity* presented the lecturers as well as the students with two different tasks. The easier of the two was to show that the importance of migration for the development of the European cultural region can best be illustrated by the positive impacts that intercultural encounters between individuals and societal groups have had over the past centuries. Some of these encounters were voluntary, through trade relations, research or educational travel, for example. The majority, however, were often the result of forced displacement, slave trade and colonization.

The more difficult task was trying to define the very nature and the meaning of *Serendipia*. The English translation – serendipity – is used in colloquial US-American English to describe a "lucky coincidence", as the movie *Serendipity* by Peter Chelsam shows. In academic discussions, however, "serendipity" is used to describe the sudden realization of the significant consequences of coincidental discoveries made during an arduous search for something completely different. The term therefore stands for a source of unintended innovations that are much more than the mere optimization of the previously known.

The summer school was interdisciplinary in nature in order to do both of these aspects justice, and it took on the character of an eight-day symposium. Apart from the professors from Cologne, there were 31 other participants including MA and PhD students and lecturers from different academic disciplines, such as Spanish and Latin American literature, culture and history, translation sciences, computational linguistics, media studies, philosophy, classic philology, Arabic studies, musicology, art history and architecture from Armenia, Argentina, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand and the USA.

In the structured discussions, the participants reflected together in an undogmatic and open-ended manner on the necessary general framework for a constant search, unexpectedly fruitful encounters and, if the situation arises, the ability to perceive new things as promising. During these discussions it repeatedly became clear that migration can represent the possibility for "serendipity", that means the facilitation of the occurrence of coincidental developments that can be regarded as "lucky" because they unexpectedly open up new and promising perspectives, even if these innovations, like

all “serendipity”, miss the original aims and happen while searching for a completely different solution.

Each participant made their own contribution in one of the twelve working sessions with a short presentation. Here, they presented relevant examples from their areas of expertise and put them forward for discussion. With regard to the connection between migration and serendipity, the contributions often focused on examples of “quest”, “encounter” or “recognition” in relation to the migration of individuals and collectives as they can be found in historical sources or in literary texts. In addition, internationally renowned specialists held keynote speeches on a wide range of interesting topics. For example, we heard about new forms of architecture in laboratory buildings or on campuses that facilitate spontaneous encounters between investigators from different disciplines, about how people deal with “coincidences” in computer sciences, but also about aleatorics in the design of literature, art and music where “serendipities” are commonly only first discovered as such upon reading, observation or listening.

The morning and afternoon working sessions during the week were complemented by an accompanying program in the evening and on the Sundays. This way, the participants were informed about MA and PhD programs at the University of Cologne and were able to get an impression of the University’s libraries and main research areas. They were also able to familiarize themselves with the city of Cologne as well as the rococo palace in Brühl with its beautiful courtyard. The program allowed time for reflection on both the discussions in the working sessions regarding the phenomenon of serendipity, and the interdisciplinary discussions on migratory movement – or the role they played in the development of the European cultural region. For that, we enjoyed analyses of original contemporary paintings in Museum Ludwig as well as musical improvisations and watched the movie *Serendipity* together. There were additional encounters with specific forms of peaceful coexistence of different traditions, such as a Gregorian liturgy in a Romanic church, the reading of suras of the Koran in a Mosque and a concert with Arabian music before we ended the summer school with a North African dinner on our last evening together.

The written versions of the participants’ contributions are currently being edited for language and content, whereby the English and Spanish native speakers have volunteered to help non-native speakers with their texts. A selection of the contributions will be released in an anthology. The student’s papers will be published online and made available for general access.

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