

Opening address

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Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I have only four points to make:

First, let me again welcome you warmly to Prague and to the Albertov campus. It is a great honour for us to have the opportunity to organize the Summer conference of IMISCOE here - at Charles University, Faculty of Science, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development. We will do our best to make it a success.

Second, it is not only Charles University that will benefit from this conference, but Prague and all of Czechia too, because we have a unique chance to be exposed to what migration and immigrants' integration really is and how it is currently developing – not based on impressions and emotions but on empirical facts and theoretical conceptualizations. We are convinced that we can all learn some lessons from these presentations and discussions.

Third, we could not be here without our supporters and sponsors: The conference is organised by the Geographic Migration Centre (GEOMIGRACE) and the Czech Geographical Society in collaboration with IMISCOE. The conference is held under the auspices of the Czech Geographical Society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague, the Charles University in Prague, and the City of Prague. The event is organised with the financial support of the following main partners: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, City of Prague, Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science, Geographical Institute and Department of Social Geography and Regional Development.

As we all know, it takes more than just money to organize a conference, it takes invention, energy and persistence. So, in addition to the IMISCOE administrative team who provided excellent support, I want to thank our Geomigrace team, especially, Eva Janská, Kristýna Psychlová, Zdeněk Čermák, Dita Čermáková and Lenka Pavelková. All were fantastic in their effort to do what is necessary and sometimes even impossible.

Fourth, and now I will switch to a little bit more „metaphorical genre“ ...

As you have probably noticed there is a nice logo for our conference. It is something resembling people-robots on the move, or, flying birds, probably swallows ... and because we know that „one swallow does not make a summer“ – we have 15 of them – it means that Summer must be here and it

is indeed here! By the way, besides representing a symbol of birth and „new fresh air“ swallows have other common features with genuine migrants ... In fact, one might call them – environmental and, to some extent also, economic, circular (seasonal) migrants, integrating well into human society in their destination countries. They stay in our latitude between April and September whilst they leave us and spend winter in the South ... The question is (and we leave it open) what is the deeper meaning that the most important swallow concentration in Prague is located on the premises of the Bohnice Mental Hospital. In contrast to genuine migrants, however, despite being (in Czechia) protected by the law, their numbers have significantly been declining ... And interestingly people's perception of swallows has changed historically - from very negative (e.g. during the Roman Empire) to rather positive at present.

I will finish with mentioning something that I like very much when characterizing swallows' living style – they often sing during flying. To convert it into our human language – they must be optimistic.

Please, although it may not be easy, let us try to keep our conference in the swallows' spirit.

Thank you very much

Dušan Drbohlav