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Östen Wahlbeck (University of Helsinki) tells us about what the team have been up to over the summer

We're mainly involved in wp3 and wp5 – so politicisation and the local governance context. We're looking at two smaller municipalities and looking at the local level governance of the reception of asylum seekers in 2015.

What's been the key finding?

Well the background is that the challenge of increasing numbers of asylum seekers meant that a lot of municipalities had new reception centres. So we're looking at the local governance of that and it's an interesting theme in Finland because reception is mainly state-led. So policies are decided at the government level and then they contract out with different organisations that run reception centres, mainly the Finnish Red Cross. As a result, whilst the municipalities are not that significant in terms of reception facilities, they are important to look at because to successfully run a reception facility you need support from the local community. And here's where the importance of local politicians comes in. There's a tension for some local politicians as they don't necessarily feel like they've been consulted on whether a reception centre should open or not. As a result, there's been a lot of debate about the affect opening reception centres has on the local community.

The other highly relevant issue here is integration. Integration is the task of the municipality. The issue here is that whilst individuals wait for a decision on their asylum claim there are no integration processes in place, they are left in reception. Then when a decision comes, the role of the municipality is paramount – so responsibility effectively shifts to municipalities once a decision has been made but there time is lost whilst asylum seekers are waiting for that decision. And that's why it's important for the municipality and the local community to get involved earlier because they can start the integration support earlier.

Has there been a difference in discourse and problems in CEAS system according to different actors?

Yes, the state actors because they have a different perspective they are really interested in getting the administration working smoothly and the control of arrivals including distribution across the country. At the local level they are more interested in positive integration and the cause of an unsuccessful integration, such as unemployment.

Have you come across any surprising findings?

Well let me put it this way the state administration has become more and more professional and the administration has developed a lot in recent years but when looking at specific issues , there is only a handful of people who are experts on specific issues. EU cooperation and expertise becomes more important for a small country like Finland who doesn't have the possibility to rapidly find the various asylum experts and the information needed.

Any methodological challenges?

Gaining access took perhaps longer than I expected. Even finding the right person – sometimes it is not obvious who the appropriate contact is and you might be contacting the wrong person. And if they don't know you personally or the project it can be difficult to gain access.

Tell us about WP5 – what have been the key findings?

There is actually something that is quite clear when you look at how the debate has evolved – it hasn't been debated as a crisis from the perspective of asylum seekers but a crisis from the perspective of the Finnish society – how should society deal with these issues? We have two different time periods effectively. In the later time period it is clear that the debate has shifted from crisis of reception to crisis of integration. Because the number of asylum seekers dropped quite dramatically after 2015, there was a peak and then it dropped, and it means that the issue has become more a question of integration and recognition rates