

Kukovetz, Brigitte; Sprung, Annette

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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Is adult education a 'white' business? Professionals with migrant backgrounds in Austrian adult education

Brigitte Kukovetz

University of Graz, Austria (brigitte.kukovetz@uni-graz.at)

Annette Sprung

University of Graz, Austria (annette.sprung@uni-graz.at)

Abstract

This paper is based on an applied research project, which examines the participation of migrants (first and second generation) as professionals in Austrian adult education. We present selected outcomes concerning barriers and encouraging factors in the careers of professionals with migrant background. Our main findings show the importance of the recognition of credentials, of social capital and of strategies to avoid discrimination on behalf of the institutions of adult education. Introducing the analytical perspective of critical whiteness, we conclude that Austrian adult education still has to reflect its own role in terms of white privileges. Finally we point out some approaches and strategies to widening participation and reducing discrimination in the professional field.

Keywords: critical whiteness; adult educators with migrant backgrounds; social capital; institutional discrimination

Introduction

Europe's demography has been changing, not least because of on-going processes of migration. The EU-27 foreign born population in 2012 was about 50 million people. Of this numbers, 17.2 million people were born in a different EU-27 Member State while 33.0 million people were born outside the EU-27 (Eurostat, 2013). Austria, where our research takes place, is one of the countries with a rather high migrant population—17.7% of the people living in Austria in 2012 were foreign born.

Migration can be seen as a driving force as well as a consequence of globalisation. It causes far-reaching social change in the host countries, but also in the countries of origin—for instance in terms of the labour market, brain drain/brain gain, remittances back home, the influence on family structures, the emergence of new global inequalities, etc. New patterns of mobility, among them transnational migration, are appearing; these change the ideas of identity, space and relationship-building (Pries, 2008). Dealing with migration has become a topical issue in every sphere of society. Consequently, this development also has a great impact on adult learning—in terms of

policies, institutions, concepts and research. Target groups are changing, new requirements for teaching and training are in demand, new actors and institutions are emerging.

The European policy addresses these phenomena with a variety of actions, which range from restrictive and inhumane border regimes—to ‘defend’ the EU against third country immigrants (Hess & Kasperek, 2010)—to the establishment of anti-discrimination strategies and the facilitation of mobility within the European Union (e.g., through the development of the European Qualification Framework). We can find the same pattern on a smaller scale in national policies like that of Austria.

European policy discussions include questions of diversity in adult education and anti-discrimination policies, thus they influence the domain of adult learning. The European Union is paying attention to discrimination in many ways—from monitoring (carried out by the Agency for Fundamental Rights¹, based in Vienna) to the funding of diverse programmes to promote equal opportunities, e.g., looking to labour market issues within the framework of the lifelong learning programme of 2007 to 2013². The non-discrimination Governmental Expert Group enhances good practice contributions in intercultural education, which should involve ‘respecting, recognising and celebrating the normality of diversity’, and ‘promoting equality and human rights and challenging discrimination’ (Crowley, 2012, p. 10). Another example: The European Agenda for Adult Learning 2011 seeks to promote equity and social cohesion through adult learning—with migrants being one of the target groups for strategies aiming at strengthening social inclusion and improving access to adult learning (The Council of the European Union, 2011).

As can be seen with these examples, the dominant perspective concerning ‘migration and adult learning’ focuses on immigrants as participants in adult and continuing education, often in a deficit-orientated manner. From the viewpoint of critical whiteness studies (e.g., Lund & Colin, 2010a), we want to state that migrants rarely seem to be thought of as professionals, decision makers or leaders in the field of education—we are certainly comfortable making this claim in the German speaking context. What is framed as a non-questioned ‘normality’ in most cases is the idea of ‘native’ instructors on the one side and migrant learners on the other. We want to bring about a change of perspective via our paper by presenting selected outcomes from an ongoing Austrian applied research project (03/2012 to 02/2014), which focuses on the situation of professionals with migrant backgrounds in adult and continuing education. In particular, we analysed the barriers to and the beneficial conditions for migrants’ representation in this professional field along with their access to appropriate qualification programs.

The findings presented have to be seen in the context of the mere statistical representation of people with migrant background in Austrian adult education. Evidently, migrants are underrepresented *as participants* in Austrian adult education. The Adult Education Survey 2012 pointed out that 35.4 % of foreign citizens and 46.8 % of Austrians (age 15 to 64) participate in non-formal continuing education (Statistik Austria, 2013b). These figures also include German courses attendance, which is obligatory for non-EU citizens who want to settle permanently in Austria. The underrepresentation of several groups, such as migrants from Turkey and the countries of former Yugoslavia, is even more distinct. Among other reasons for low participation rates, the institutions of adult education themselves cause exclusion, for example by institutional discrimination or because of a certain ‘culture’ within the organisation. We could call it, referring to Gogolin (1994), the ‘monolingual/monocultural habitus’ of the education system. A ‘white dominance’³ also becomes manifest, besides other factors,

in the absence of diversity amongst *employees*. In Austria, there are no solid statistics about that issue, but some empirical studies show the tendency that migrants are rarely represented on qualified posts in adult education (Pohn-Weidinger & Reinprecht, 2005). Within our own project, we conducted an online survey addressing selected qualification programmes that lead into the professional field of adult education. First findings show an underrepresentation of several groups. We estimate that less than 14% of participants of relevant qualification programmes have migration background, whereas nearly 19% of the total Austrian population has migration background (Statistik Austria, 2013a⁴). People coming from non-EU countries seem to be even more underrepresented.

In our paper we will first briefly outline the concept and aim of our research. We will then analyse barriers and assistance in the adult education system which migrants experience when they try to gain access to employment in that sector. We explore our question by spotlighting the perspective of professionals with migrant backgrounds themselves, based on the outcomes from our qualitative interviews.

To this end we will discuss four main aspects:

- The role of formal qualifications and the necessity of further educational measures
- The importance of social capital and recognition
- The role of discrimination and racism
- The structural, political and institutional framework

We will frame our results within some theoretical perspectives from critical whiteness studies. They open new perspectives of educational research and practice on looking at migration society by analysing the privileges of the dominant social groups and institutions. We conclude with drafting the main implications for institutions active in adult and continuing education.

As there is no standardised terminology, we use the term 'adult education' in the following by subsuming all modes of organised adult learning in institutions, accredited as well as non-accredited courses, vocational training as well as all kind of other courses, including language learning, civic education, etc.

Research project: 'Migrants as professionals in adult education'

Our study explores, as mentioned, the representation of professionals with migrant biographies (focusing on members of the second generation) in the field of adult education. We ask for limiting and beneficial conditions, for structural (political, institutional) frameworks and the individual strategies of the actors and look at the impact of discrimination and racism. With our approach, we want to critically point out the implications for the whole adult educational system and not only the target groups in terms of justice and equality.

The transdisciplinary research is based on grounded theory (using an interpretive-reconstructive approach in analysing the qualitative data). We frame our analysis within the theoretical discourses of representation, critical and intercultural pedagogy, anti-discrimination, antiracism and critical whiteness. We conducted qualitative problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), online surveys, focus groups with experts from migrant communities and adult education. Furthermore experts with migrant biographies are involved as researchers within a special setting of participatory research ('Forschungswerkstätte'). The data of the interviews were used to explain the low representation of professionals with migrant background, but also the qualitative

interviews were supporting and specifying the quantitative results. Following the approach of triangulation, the inputs of the participatory research were included in every phase: defining the problem, deciding for special case studies and interpreting the results. The research team cooperates with leading Austrian institutions of adult education so that there is an involvement of practitioners in the research process itself (e.g., in development of the research design, in discussions about the interpretations of data, etc.), a cohesive transfer of the findings and the development of new approaches to practical work within the later phase of the project.

Professionals with migration background in adult education—empirical results

In this paper we present selected findings that mainly stem from a series of interviews with professionals with migration backgrounds. From our interviews, we identified some ‘typical’ factors which were described as barriers or supporting aspects from the view of our interviewees. They can be seen to be important for ‘new’ immigrants as well as for members of the second generation⁵. Whenever there are differences between these groups, we will explicitly point them out.

The meaning of credentials and continuing education

Qualifications and certifications can be seen as key in finding skilled jobs, also in adult education. This might be a problem, especially for people who received their credentials in their countries of origin. There have been a lot of discussions around that topic all over Europe in recent years. Of foreign-born residents aged between 15 and 74, 70 % did not earn their highest degree in Austria (Stadler & Wiedenhofer-Galik, 2009). Many skilled migrants cannot find adequate jobs. While 10 % of autochthonous Austrians say that they are employed below their qualifications, 27.5 % of foreign born people make the claim (Statistik Austria, 2012). Findings of an OECD study point out that Austria is one of the ‘leading’ countries within the OECD in terms of the deskilling of migrants (Krause & Liebig, 2011). The difficulties in recognising degrees are, of course, not the only reason for that phenomenon, but they are a central factor.

The development of a European Qualifications Framework should first and foremost facilitate mobility in the labour market within Europe. Nonetheless this tool is not yet established in practice (in Austria) and does not fit the needs of third country immigrants. For these reasons many migrants struggle with difficult procedures in getting their degrees and diplomas recognised. The regulations for recognition in Austria are experienced as being hard to fulfil e.g., because of a lack in transparency, high costs or the need to retake exams. As one interview partner points out: ‘I did not see any chance at all or I had too little information’ (Int. Lena). Refugees have to face some additional challenges in that sometimes they were not able to save all of the necessary documents. There might be legal restrictions concerning access to the labour market and education for as long as their asylum status has not been recognised (which can last several years in Austria) and their financial situation is thus often precarious. For a few professions, and especially for citizens from the European Union, the recognition of diplomas takes place automatically—but this does not apply to degrees in the field of education. There are some structural conditions, especially in the sector of vocational training, which exclude professionals with non-Austrian diplomas. An adult educator and sociologist in the field of labour market policy states:

The rules of the public employment service, concerning also all the institutions of adult education, regulate, who can be employed as trainer or not. Therefore you have to fulfil a specific quantity of points and . . . the problem is, that the experiences often don't suffice and you need to show specific competences or certificates and sometimes migrants cannot fulfil these. (Int. Shilan)

Many institutions are funded by the public employment offices within a competitive, point-based system. The quotation above shows that the qualifications of trainers are a crucial factor (amongst other criteria) in being successful in the competition for funding, so institutions avoid employing professionals who do not possess a recognised diploma—an example for structural barriers affecting professionals with migrant backgrounds.

In our interviews, the second generation, which had been educated in Austria also emphasised the increasing importance of credentials—in terms of accessing jobs as well as in becoming permanently established in a professional field. Most of our interviewees (both first and second generation) told us about their numerous activities in continuing education (to the extent that they could overcome barriers related to financing and German skills). Some felt that certifications were a clear precondition to gaining access to or to keep hold of jobs; others moreover expressed their own desire to feel recognised and competent to do the job by having acknowledged credentials and skills. As one interview partner states: 'Because as a migrant I have made the experience that you have to, I have to proof ten times what I am competent for'.

Continuing education helped some of our interview partners who had been employed as experts in 'migrant affairs' or as native speakers to widen their range of opportunities in the field of adult education and consequently to get out of a so called 'ethnic niche'. Even if migrants take great efforts to fulfil all criteria, in the end many of them are still not successful in the labour market; this also results from racist discrimination and the lack of symbolic capital which many immigrants have to face. Similar results can be found in former empirical studies (Sprung, 2011). Symbolic exclusion takes place in manifold interactions, sometimes very openly and directly, but also as a part of rather subtle processes. These processes stabilise certain orders of belonging which are essentially reproduced by a permanent differentiation between 'we' and 'the others'—a process which was called 'othering' by Said (1991).

Nevertheless migrants might often choose a strategy of qualification because they also have internalised the dominant lifelong learning discourse which is attached to strong market individualism and emphasises individual responsibility in terms of permanent learning (Guo & Shan, 2013). Moreover the Austrian integration discourse is characterised by a clear assimilative tendency and communicates that individual learning is the 'key' to participation. Another reason for extensive participation in continuing education, even if people realise that there is no change in their situation due to this education, could be their simple ambition to take action. There might be a feeling of powerlessness in the face of discrimination and symbolic exclusion, so much so that agency in terms of learning efforts may seem to promise more success.

Finally, our claims should not be limited to the acquisition and recognition of credentials; also the underlying discourses have to be deconstructed to generate awareness of the conditions and power relations that influence individual agency.

Networks and social capital

Another central outcome of our study points to the importance of social capital for accessing jobs in adult education. The networks mentioned in our interviews stemmed from diverse contexts—mainly from learning activities and employment.

Firstly, former participation in education (such as in language courses or vocational training) and in counselling for migrants turned out to be important in terms of setting up social capital. For example, there were trainers or counsellors who remembered their participants and later gave them information about job vacancies. Some of our interviewees were recruited directly within the institution from where they were trained in adult education, and became employed there afterwards. For example, one interview partner explains that he attended a German class and the institution first enabled him to give individual lessons to students and then offered him a regular employment. Professionals like him thus changed from being participants to having professional status.

Secondly, contacts from former employment supported access to new employment—mainly in connection with jobs in adult education and in institutions for the integration of migrants. Some of the people who had already worked in adult education were helped and greatly empowered by colleagues who took the role of a ‘gatekeeper’. (Here, we are interested in a specific type of ‘gatekeepers’—persons in institutions who have the power to decide about access to or exclusion from relevant transition points (Hollstein, 2007)). These might have been colleagues working at the same level of the institutional hierarchy or supervisors, or likewise instructors during their qualification process. Professionals with a migration background can often access the field by using their embodied cultural capital linked to their place of origin (like linguistic capital)—or their migration experience (e.g., in jobs involving counselling with migrants). We found that some of the gatekeepers especially encouraged our interviewees in that regard—i.e. to get their specific skills involved—because they recognized them to be a resource that could be helpful in meeting the needs of the institution.

[. . .] my former boss, who [...] realised very early these qualities and used them; so he turned them to account and said I should deploy my language skills, because more and more young people with migrant background were participating. (Int. Asenina)

As the number of participants with migrant background is increasing, institutions have to face new challenges. Some gatekeepers also supported individuals in widening their job opportunities, which for them meant overcoming being limited to their expertise in ‘migrant affairs’. The support was realised in the form of encouragement and appreciation, as recommendation for further jobs, as offering participation in continuing education and as the assignment of new positions within the institution, including new duties and more power.

We think that in addition to concrete job opportunities, the aspect of empowerment is rather important in this context. Former studies about skilled migrants in adult education (Sprung, 2011) showed that the experiences of migrants can be analysed within a theoretical framework of recognition theory, specifically that of the German philosopher Honneth (1992). Honneth differentiates between legal/political, emotional and social recognition—all three modes of recognition are important for the self-assessment and self-confidence of the individual. The problems concerning the recognition of qualifications are a common example of *failed recognition at the level of rights* and policies. In contrast to law, which should ensure rights to citizens independent of their individual talents and characteristics, social recognition refers to

the individual skills, competencies and the unique personality of a subject. For that reason the experience of being recognised as a competent professional seems to be rather meaningful for the subjects in terms of empowerment and agency. We should thus think about how institutions deal with that topic—do they establish structures which support a 'culture' of recognition, do they implement structures and procedures to fight discrimination, etc.? And what does it mean to recognise a migration biography as a resource without reconstructing 'the other' at the same time? Our results show that using cultural capital linked to one's migration experience and origin is an ambivalent and risky strategy—it may open access to skilled employment and serve as a stepping stone to further career options, but it could also lead to ethnicising attributions and limitations in the professional context.

Private networks were also mentioned, but to a smaller degree (bonding social capital). They were experienced as being useful in a general sense, e.g., by facilitating work-family balance or as leading to friendship with people who worked in education and therefore being recommended to employers.

Our data does not allow an empirically grounded answer to the question whether job related networks are more important for immigrants than for adult educators without a migration biography. Nonetheless if we frame our results using the theoretical ideas of Bourdieu (1983) and Coleman (1991), we could assume that social capital might—to a certain extent and under certain conditions—compensate for a lack of other sorts of capital (like institutionalised cultural capital or symbolic power). Contacts that resulted from the professional context turned out to be more important for career development than private structures of support—which could be defined as so-called 'linking social capital'. Morrice (2007) uses this term referring to Woolcock, who developed Putnam's differentiation between bridging and bonding social capital. Social capital here means involving connections with *relevant* others in positions of power and influence (vertical relations) who are positioned outside of one's own social milieu (Morrice, 2007).

As we can see in our empirical results, participation in education can help in building up social capital and social capital can also help in finding access to further educational options. Consequently, we should reflect on the question of how immigrants could be supported in setting up 'linking' social capital, for example institutions ought to offer appropriate options like internships or mentoring. To find more detailed answers, we will also look more closely at the individual strategies of the actors in our analysis. How do they activate resources? Which skills are needed to develop and make use of networks in a way that turns their contacts into something of value? This analysis is still ongoing and will be presented in further publications.

Discrimination and racism

Processes of 'othering' and the realisation of social networks and recognition via appropriate support can also be framed in terms of discrimination⁶ and racism. We identified various additional discrimination experiences in our data that occur through structures or individual practices.

Many interview partners reported that they have been discriminated both in their daily lives and within adult education contexts, due to different factors related to their migration background. This can be interpreted as racial ascription (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998; Kalpaka & Räthzel, 1994). Discrimination due to a foreign accent when speaking German mainly affects people who were not born in Austria and/or have not attended a school in Austria for a sufficient number of years. Other factors are skin colour or a surname indicating that the origin of their family is a country with lower status. It became apparent that discrimination is mitigated or increased by the degree of

visibility and audibility. The experience is strongest if the visibility and the audibility (e.g., via an accent or grammatical mistakes) coincide (see also Karakaş, 2011; Mecheril, 2003)⁷. For those people who have the ‘possibility’ to hide an origin that is a non-western third state, the experience of discrimination diminishes as long as the people follow a strategy of invisibility.

Especially in the field of adult education, discrimination occurred in people’s access to university and in their application for jobs. In some interviews, it became evident how difficult it is to trace personal discrimination in access to the labour market on an individual basis as the procedures and the basis for decision making are not transparent. Our interview partners assessed some experiences clearly as discriminatory: e.g., regarding the invitation to an interview (‘I very often have not been invited for an interview, although I totally met the required qualifications. So here I assume that this has to do with my name,’ Int. Miriam). A director of an adult education organisation, who himself has a migrant background, observed: ‘I see at a lot of educational projects, adult educational projects, where those people, who are native, sort of familiar, take over the more conceptual and responsible work.’

Professionals with migrant background are often at the same time participants and they therefore also experience discrimination in the context of adult educational measures as noted before (e.g., even in a very open manner, including that other participants do not want to sit next to the interview partner).

Apart from these direct personal discrimination experiences, other kinds of discrimination could be identified. Trainers with migrant background noted derogatory comments directed at migrant participants from colleagues or from participants of the workshops they lead: ‘For example I remember a trainer [...] who worked with me, I mean, in the same institution, has made remarks without further reflection about participants with migrant background’ (Int. Lukas). We assume that this so-called categorical discrimination (Mecheril, 2003) has major impacts on professionals having migrant background because it concerns groups the person identifies with in a certain way. Further kinds of racist experiences in fields other than adult education (primary/secondary school, public services, other working fields, private contexts) were mentioned as being relevant. Discrimination due to other ascriptions (gender, impairments, age) were reported and can be summarised as being intersectional discrimination experiences. To analyse these intersecting effects will be a further challenge within our research, bearing in mind that the precise impact is difficult to evaluate.

Institutional and structural conditions

Essentially, we analyse discrimination and racism by focusing on the structure of discriminating actions and its embeddedness in institutional and organisational contexts. Moreover institutional discrimination, in the understanding of Gomolla and Radtke (2009), does not consider only *one* organisation but the whole set of laws, political strategies, professional norms, organisational structures and established practices and values of the socio-cultural context (Gomolla, 2009).

Institutional discrimination occurs e.g., if a general rule seems to be ‘neutral’, but has discriminatory effects if the different conditions and circumstances of the people concerned are taken into account.

Discrimination in the field of adult education is not only accounted for within the system in the context of training measures or in terms of contact with colleagues. It is also reported in relation to access to the system. In addition to possible discrimination in recruitment procedures, there are already pre-existing difficulties such as the access to

formal voluntary work in established organisations (More-Hollerweger & Heimgartner, 2009) which can be seen as an opportunity for starting a career in adult education. Moreover interviewees witnessed a tendency for employment on a short-term basis (e.g., as multipliers) rather than on a long-term basis, which is disadvantageous in the furthering of one's career.

The poor working conditions in the field of adult education in Austria concern both migrants and non-migrants. Some aspects such as the precarious financial situation of people with migrant background or the recognition of the problem of credentials could entail an even more precarious situation for professionals with migrant background.

Theories of institutional discrimination explore discrimination not only as prejudice or individual acts performed by individuals (or groups) but as embedded in the structures, rules and culture of organisations. They point to institutional responsibility in avoiding racist practices. Theories of critical whiteness add a similar but also different perspective to the discussion. As we will elaborate on below, critical whiteness also points out invisible and unquestioned norms. While the emphasis of the approach of institutional racism is on the strategies for avoiding negative consequences for those who are affected by discrimination, critical whiteness highlights the privileges of those who represent the unquestioned norm—in our case the institutions of adult education and their representatives.

The perspective of critical whiteness

Before we discuss some ideas from critical whiteness studies we would like to make clear our use of the term 'whiteness'. This seems to be important because there are several critical arguments concerning the transferability of the concept of critical whiteness to the European context. The 'race' terminology has a strong biologicistic connotation, especially in the German speaking context in connection with Germany's and Austria's history of the Nazi regime and anti-Semitic ideology. Furthermore, terms like '*Black*' or '*White*' are not so much used in the sense of 'race' being a construction, which refers to the heritage of slavery or white supremacy. European racism goes back to colonialism and the concept of 'strangers' in terms of postcolonial migration, etc. One could say that it is not 'colour' but 'territory' (in an ideological sense), which marks the difference (Dietze, 2006). In addition, the new and dominant modes of racism we face in Austria today (like culture-based ascriptions) are mainly directed towards Muslims or people who immigrated from certain regions which are viewed pejoratively in the public discourse—this could be migrants from lesser developed third countries as well as from 'poorer' European states. Amongst the most discriminated groups in Austria are Turkish people, immigrants from several EU countries like Romania, parts of former Yugoslavia and refugees from Chechnya. Besides this new racism, we also still find 'classical' forms of racist exclusion, for example towards people of African descent. Thus when we reflect on critical whiteness studies below, we define here as 'non-whites' those people not corresponding to the dominant norm of white adult educators in the broader sense we explained above.

'Whiteness' was already at the centre of analysis in the early 20th century in the critical reflections of Black authors and civil rights activists, e.g., W.E.B. Du Bois or James Baldwin. It was further developed as so-called Critical Whiteness Studies in the early 1990s (Giroux, 1997; Walgenbach, 2008). The concept of whiteness refers to the relation between racial categories and power 'concentrating on the privileges granted only to whites' (Lund, 2010, p. 16). Generally, studies of the white peoples presume

that the subjects of the study are racially neutral, if racism is not being directly addressed (Frankenberg, 1993, as cited in Lund, 2010). Therefore whiteness is invisible, but at the same time it is very powerful as it is connected with a wealth of privileges in everyday life. These privileges become manifest within different aspects, which were listed by authors such as Peggy McIntosh in 1988 and Paul Kivel in 1996 (Lund, 2010). McIntosh tried to identify those factors that are more related to skin colour than to class, religion etc. To give just a few examples, the list includes renting or purchasing in an affordable and desirable area, expecting neighbours to be neutral or pleasant, shopping alone without harassment, representation in the media, criticising the government without reprisal, expecting not to be mistreated in public accommodations, and attending organisational meetings without feeling isolated.

As already mentioned the concept of white privileges has a strong relation to theories of institutional racism and discrimination. They point to invisible and unquestioned norms just as critical whiteness does. White privilege becomes manifest under certain hegemonic structural and institutional conditions. Therefore the claim of critical whiteness reflecting on white privilege has to be strengthened in theories of institutional discrimination. To change structures, institutions should become aware of the advantages they take from the exclusion of certain groups and be ready to give up upon those benefits. McIntosh (1990) compared the notion of white privilege with her experiences in the gender debate. Even though men recognised the disadvantages of women, at the same time they did not acknowledge their own privileges; they could not see their gain from women's disadvantages and were not willing to withdraw their privileges. McIntosh makes us aware that the same is true for white privileges. She describes the oppression as more than individual acts of racism, but more as invisible and unconscious systems conferring the dominance of whites. The system works by pretending that the lives of whites are the norm and even the ideal (McIntosh, 1990). McCann (2008) puts it in a nutshell: 'The invisibility of whiteness exemplifies how whiteness is constructed as a norm, and neutral; thus, it is accepted as a universal standard' (p. 4).

White privileges should also be seen in terms of intersectionality (e.g., McCann, 2008; McIntosh, 1990). McIntosh (1990) points out that not only the advantaging system of whiteness but also those of 'age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation' have to be analysed. By using the concept of white privilege we will not exclude other factors strongly related to migration background such as ethnic ascriptions, nationality or religion. We rather would like to point to the specific shift in perspective. Regarding our research focus, we suggest reflecting on whiteness as the dominant and unquestioned norm within adult education.

A systematic analysis of white privilege within the system of adult education was brought up recently in the journal 'White Privilege and Racism: Perceptions and Actions' (Lund & Colin, 2010b). Various examples of white privileges given by Lund (2010) could also be identified in our empirical research. This includes the observation that white educators rarely know about the theoretical paradigms outside of Western thought. White educators can be loyal to the policies of their institution or organisation at the same time as they remain loyal to their own racial and ethnic group. Non-whites however have to choose between group loyalty or following a strategy of invisibility. Especially regarding the aspect of recruitment practices, it can be stated that for white administrators and educators it is a routine practice to hire colleagues just like themselves without much thought.

Other aspects of white privileges are relevant to the analysis of the adult educational system as well. Who is endorsed and who is urged to speak for which group? Do whites have to fear criticism if they support educators of their own race or of the non-migrant population, whereas do non-whites supporting people of their own race have to fear disapproval? Is it possible for whites in the mainstream discourse to associate racism with something that only happened in the past (such as slavery or the Second World War), while non-whites are confronted with racism in their everyday lives? Can white adult educators decide freely if they want to pick out racism as a central theme? And if they do not, will no one see them as racists? The main overall topic seems to be that 'white educators and learners set the standard for all others in educational expectations' (Lund, 2010, p. 20).

Implications for institutions and practitioners of adult education

Considering the empirical results and theoretical considerations presented above, we want to point out a few ideas concerning institutions of adult and continuing education together with their political frameworks.

If we aim at overcoming white dominance and establishing structures of equality, it is important to raise awareness of white privilege. Aspects of institutional discrimination and white privilege have to be analysed in society as well as in the adult educational system. A critical look at perceptions of norms and standards would be helpful in understanding limiting factors for adult educators with migrant background in terms of their accessing and establishing themselves in relevant institutions.

How could a theoretical reflection on white privileges and institutional discrimination be implemented in practice? In the following we will present a few aspects of this issue.

A) The structural and political level

Several ideas for institutions can be drawn from our research. One major step towards more equality would be the full recognition of foreign certificates. Currently Austrian politics is making some headway in this regard, for example implementing institutions for counselling ('Anerkennungsberatungsstellen') with multilingual services, but there is still a lack of recognition on the level of legislation. Therefore a critical discussion is needed that addresses the importance of recognition policies as the discourse follows the principles of market individualism and ignores barriers like racism and structural discrimination which cannot be overcome through individual (migrant) effort or learning activities. It has to be stated that institutions or companies often profit from the employment of skilled migrants without recognised degrees because these employees do qualified work but earn the lower wages of an unskilled person. Also worth noting is that all claims for recognition up to now do not question the norm in terms of defining appropriate skills for a profession. We only discuss facilitating the adaption of the host societies curricula without reflecting on the possibility that 'foreign' qualifications could include additional, new and maybe even better skills, so that the view of Western societies' definition of appropriate skills as benchmarks could be questioned (cf. Guo & Shan, 2013).

The Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (WBA—Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich) can be acknowledged for its flexibility in recognising the skills and credentials within a framework of professionalisation in adult education. This institution recognises both foreign certificates (if they are translated) and informal competencies.

In this respect, it can present significant potential for migrants in their taking the opportunity to overcome structural discrimination, e.g., financial barriers are sometimes too high and can be bypassed.

In Austria it is still accepted as a given that one has acquired his/her qualifications and diploma in Austria. So beyond the presented efforts *within* the system of recognition, we could change the perspective more radically and think of attaining qualification in a foreign country as the norm. Herein the systems of recognition would have to be made much more flexible. We should ask if it is useful and practical to look at each person and each diploma separately or if it would make more sense to recognise the local educational systems of other countries or regions in their entirety— not only within the EU but worldwide.

Because of the precarious situation of a number of university students with migration background, supportive initiatives, especially regarding funding possibilities, including those coming from public employment services, could be very helpful. In this way more people could be motivated to participate in adult education. This would correspond to a shift from granting access to more socially advantaged people to supporting people from socially disadvantaged classes—also due to an unjust distribution worldwide of opportunities in gaining access to the educational system.

B) The institutional level

Regarding access to adult education, we found that it is important to set up possibilities to reinforce the social capital of potential professionals with migrant backgrounds. As social networks (especially those that were labelled as ‘linking’ social capital) were identified as being very important for occupational advancement, initiatives such as mentoring programmes should specifically address this target group. Another issue is recruitment practices. One possibility is to support anonymised applications for employment, which is not common in the adult education field in Austria at this time.

This would fit well with an approach of anti-discrimination. It has to be discussed with practitioners whether anonymised applications are an adequate approach for this field or if initiatives for affirmative action would be more effective. This could include a recruitment strategy favourable to migrants through the following of a constructivist personnel policy (Sauer & Schmidt, 2012). These approaches (especially affirmative action and mentoring systems) try to foster migrant access to the existing system of social capital. More generally, we could also question the underlying habit of tending to support and trust most the people you or your confidants know. This would mean a shift in attitudes: the well-known is de-emphasised in personnel requirements, instead the new and the unexpected gains in prominence.

Hiring policy is one of the important aspects of human resource development which should be looked at more closely—also from the viewpoint of critical whiteness. Monaghan (2010) says that actions should also be taken with regard to training, performance, assessment and career development. She advises administrators and adult educators to a) think critically ‘about the impact of white privilege and racism on our responsibilities at work’, b) to ‘speak up and call colleagues out for racist behaviour’, and c) to ‘be a role model to other whites by genuinely supporting black employees’ (Monaghan, 2010, p. 61). Following the ideas of Monaghan, we think that associating a consciousness and practice of critical whiteness does not necessarily have to be connected with a notion or feeling of guilt for whites. As Giroux (1997) points out, it is possible for whites to struggle against white racism while reflecting on their own identity in order to critically rethink whiteness. Specifically in terms of Monaghan’s

idea of supporting non-white employees, we found following factors that further one's career within the professional field:

- The culture of the organisation has to be committed to anti-discrimination and institutional openness. To give an example: We had mentioned above from our empirical data the experience of hearing derogatory comments from colleagues about migrant participants. For such cases, there should be a clear policy within the institution concerning how to deal with racist practices. Anti-discrimination efforts must include reflection on one's own privileges in terms of critical whiteness along with the steps involved in overcoming this.
- Using one's own resources should be made possible, independent of dedicated individual superiors, e.g., via a mentoring system or other support programs.
- It is necessary that professionals with migrant backgrounds can freely choose if they want to use the specific competencies they may possess due to their migration background in their jobs (such as knowledge of foreign languages or of another educational system, or competencies in gatekeeping for other migrants). These competencies can be seen to represent educational potential generated by migration. The institutions should provide structures for recognising these competences.
- At the same time, it is essential to promote professionals in their careers according to their individual interests, and to facilitate their work in fields that do not specialise in topics related to migration.

In summary, the results presented lead us to conclude that Austrian adult education has strong tendencies that reflect the white dominance of Austrian society. Various efforts can be made to reduce barriers. A central challenge can be seen in shifting perspectives towards reflection on white privileges.

In this regard, it would be beneficial if the changes focus not only on adult educational practice but also research. As an analysis of German language publications in adult education shows (Sprung, 2013), at least for Germany and Austria, it is true that the scientific emphasis regarding adult education in the migration society is oriented toward questions addressing a specific target group. The dominant perspectives are either deficit-oriented or focus on cultural aspects. Concepts that aim to deconstruct differences, analyse processes of 'othering' or target racism or discrimination are infrequent (Sprung, 2013). We would assume that the perspective concerning the privileges of the dominant social group of 'whites' within adult education, and on the existing power relations with regard to this topic, is even more neglected. Moreover, we assume that the greater valuation of research including whites rather than minorities (cf. Hooks, 1996, as cited in Röggl, 2012) is also true for adult educational research. It would thus be beneficial to include the concept of critical whiteness in future research.

Notes

¹ <http://fra.europa.eu/en> (retrieved 22.07.2013)

² http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm (retrieved 22.07.2013)

³ As the term 'white' can not simply be transferred to the German speaking context, we explain our use of the terminology in chapter 4, 'The perspective of critical whiteness,' in detail.

⁴ Migration background means that both parents were foreign born, wherein the first generation was born in a foreign country and the second generation was born in Austria.

⁵ We differentiated between people who migrated themselves and the second generation because immigrants largely have to deal with other problems like the recognition of their credentials, improving language skills, overcoming legal restrictions, etc. 'Second generation' was used for persons who were born in Austria or had taken part in the Austrian primary school system.

⁶ We use discrimination as the more general term, including different aspects of exclusion like gender, and others and the term racism for specific forms of discrimination. Migrants can be affected by several aspects which intersect with each other.

⁷ Until now we have not found any professionals who wear a scarf as sign of religious affiliation working in adult education—except migrant-led organisations. We assume that this kind of visibility has great impact on discrimination experiences, as a lot of literature points out (e.g. Petzen, 2012).

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