Barriers and Bridges: Lived Experiences of Immigrant Staff in German Libraries

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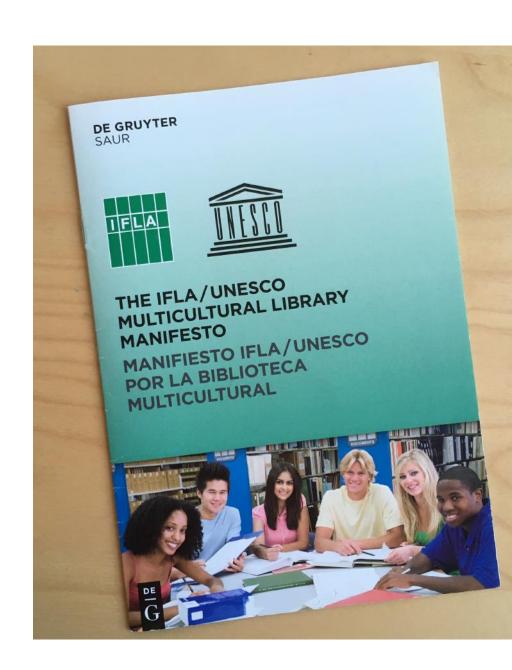
Session 210a: Library services: empowering people to develop

their inter-cultural identities

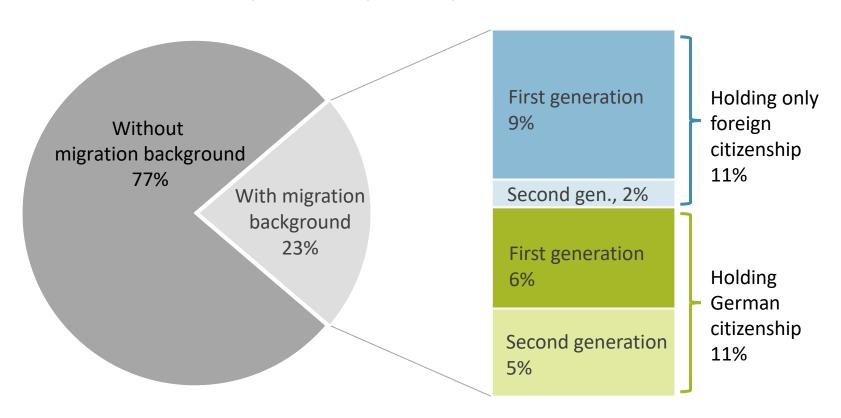
IFLA Section 32: Library Services to Multicultural Populations

"The staff of a multicultural library should reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the community."

IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto



23% of German residents are immigrants as defined in public policy



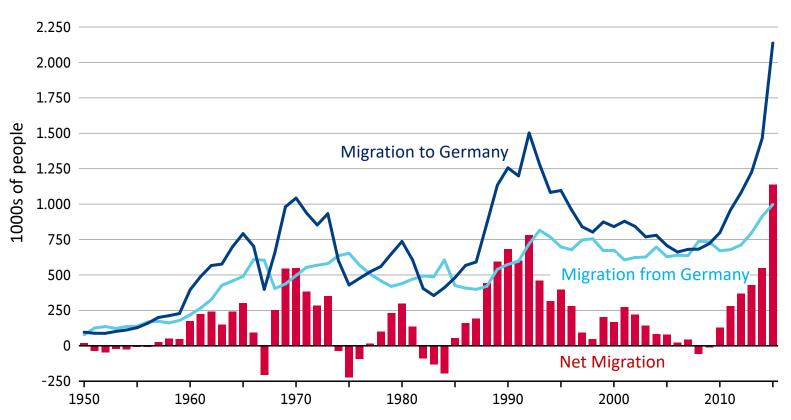
Total population: 82.4 million

Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Graphic by Leslie Kuo, based on 2016 microcensus data as summarized in a graphic by the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61646/migrationshintergrund-i

Immigration has been on the rise for decades.

Is this reflected by library workers?

Migration to and from Germany, 1950-2015



Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Graph © BiB 2016 / demografie-portal.de. Data: Federal Statistics Office. Data through 1990 based on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany at that time.

Population studied

Library workers
with migration
backgrounds
among the ~1100
staff in Berlin's
80 public libraries

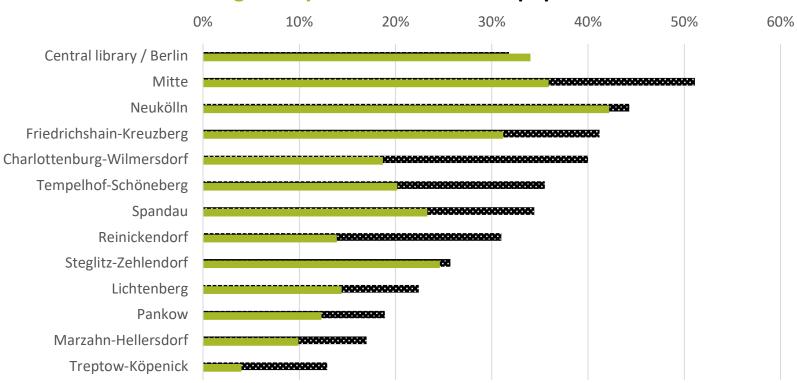
Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC Image: cover of the 2015 annual report of the public library network of Berlin (VÖBB). Photo © 2015 Barbara Dietl.



Berlin: 1 city, 13 library systems, serving very different communities of users

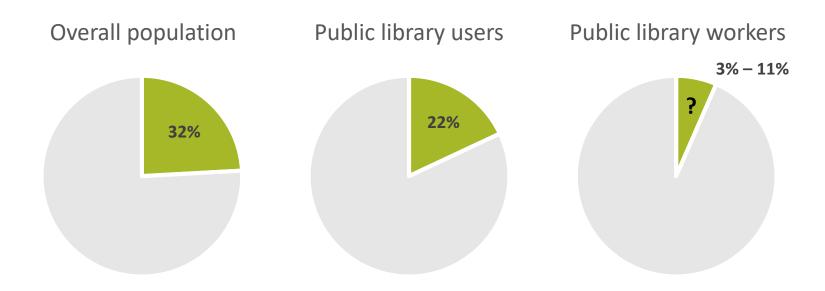
Representation of immigrants by library system / district:

among library users and in overall population



Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Graphic by L. Kuo, based on data in: Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, "Statistischer Bericht A I 5 – hj 1 / 17 Einwohnerinnen und Einwohner im Land Berlin am 30. Juni 2017."

Immigrants are underrepresented among library users and staff in Berlin



Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Graphic by L. Kuo based on the following data. Overall population data, ibid (see previous slide). Public library user data, Schank and Nestlinger, "Bibliotheken in Berlin: unverzichtbare Orte einer interkulturellen Stadt," *Bibliotheksdienst*, 2014. Public library workers: no data is officially gathered by the Land of Berlin on the migration background of its government employees. The estimated range here is based on my study and census data on civil servants in Berlin from the Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg.

A study of lived experiences

Research question

What challenges and opportunities do immigrant library workers in Germany experience?

Theoretical basis phenomenology, Critical Race Theory, #critlib

Qualitative methodology

Survey + 12 interviews + analysis

Staff not reflecting community **Truly intercultural services** Staff lacking intercultural competence Not a one way street! "here's your shelf" vs. access to everything "Berührungsängste" Inclusion and participation Library can be intimidating Doing foreign language collections right Investing in language expertise Librarian image: "shhhh!" vs. approachable Transforming role of libraries in society Library not really serving everyone Old vs. new image Language barriers Barriers Space for books vs. space for people Discrimination from staff Bridges Library Users No opportunity to use language skills Feeling isolated Issues with German Users discriminating against me Staff discriminating against me Users othering me Library has strict hierarchies Users making assumptions Applying for jobs/school Discriminatory actions Speaking up vs. not speaking up German vs. foreign credentials Working below skill or pay level Feeling accepted Staff representating community Belonging to a team Immigrant users come specifically to me **Supportive bosses** Intercultural competence **Libraries hiring for** Understanding immigrant users' needs Empathy with immigrant experience intercultural competence **Bridging language barriers** Libraries attracting more immigrant staff Using foreign language skills **Immigrant** Ideas from foreign libraries Organizing outreach, events library worker

* The code cloud around "discrimination from users" is also relevant for the code "discrimination from staff"



türkçe





Immigrant library workers build bridges to users

- 1. Empathy with feeling out of place
- 2. Language skills
- 3. Bridging language barriers
- 4. Different perspective
- 5. Standing for inclusion



Immigrant library workers face barriers at work

- 1. Being the only one
- 2. Structural and hiring discrimination
- 3. Interpersonal discrimination
- 4. German language, culture (new immigrants)
- 5. Losing hope

Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Photo © 2016 Isaiah Lopaz. "Where do you really come from," color photograph. Photographed by Richard Hancock. Used with kind permission of Isaiah Lopaz.

The message for libraries:

- 1. Listen to immigrant staff
- 2. Value the bridges they build
- 3. Break down the barriers

How to learn more

More about this study: leslie@lesliekuo.com

Jaena Alabi. "Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries[...]" (2015). doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2014.10.008.

Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho. "Intersectionality at the Reference Desk: Lived Experiences of Women of Color Librarians" (2017). Pre-print: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/30r7s9nw

Maha Kumaran and Heather Cai. "Identifying the Visible Minority Librarians in Canada: A National Survey". doi: 10.18438/B8ZC88.

Juleah Swanson, Azusa Tanaka, and Isabel Gonzalez-Smith. "Lived Experience of Academic Librarians of Color". (forthcoming). Pre-print: http://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/16850

Mark Terkessidis. **Die Banalität Des Rassismus. Migranten zweiter Generation entwickeln eine neue Perspektive.** Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004 (print monograph).

