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# (IN-)VISIBILITIES OF MIGRATION BACKGROUNDS IN AUSTRIA

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## INTRODUCTION

From a global point of view, Austria belongs to both the groups of leading business locations as well as immigration countries. However, it has not been officially declared as an immigration country for decades which was nationally and internationally criticised. The current Austrian government proves to include those critiques after inventing the position of the State Secretary for Integration. So, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) functionary Sebastian Kurz holds this position at the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior since April 2011. In 2010 the Expert Council for Integration was established in order to support the current Austrian migration and integration policies. The council is chaired by the nationally and internationally well-respected migration researcher Heinz Fassmann.

As a matter of fact, the public and first of all official debate on migration has begun to change. In this sense, Sebastian Kurz states that Austria is “of course” an immigration country which needs skilled immigrants for the future labour market as well: “Without these people we would have already major problems in areas such as health care, but also science and research.” (Integrationsdialog 2012) In 2011 Sebastian Kurz launched the project of “100 Integration Ambassadors” with the aim to set up “role models” for successful integration in Austria and to contradict existing situations of and debates on exclusion, dequalification and discrimination of people with migration backgrounds on the labour market.

The main assumption of this paper is that the official migration debate in Austria currently undergoes discursive transformations and therefore becomes much more diversified. So, the connotation of the term migration is discursively changing from a primarily socio-political and security (negatively occupied) problem, as emphasised during the 1990's—after transferring the responsibility for immigration and integration from the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs to the Ministry of the

Interior in 1987 (Georgi, 2003: 5)—into the economic benefit of diversity and specific skills of migrants, as actually promoted.

In the following the term ‘migration background’ will be elaborated in order to clarify the possibility of “social mobility”, meaning the socio-economic and professional achievement in the Austrian context as well as to reveal the importance of “role models” in the current awareness raising process that has been initiated by the Austrian government.

### **FROM THE IMMIGRATION TO THE INTEGRATION DEBATE**

According to Reiner Keller, discourse can be defined “as identifiable ensembles of cognitive and normative devices. These devices are produced, actualised, performed, and transformed in social practices (not necessary but often of language use) at different social, historical and geographical places. [...] Discourses in this sense constitute social realities of phenomena ... [and] are realised by social actors’ practices and activities.” (Keller, 2005a) Furthermore, the power to enforce their own interpretation or discourse depends on resources which are available for social actors. Thus, not the teaching of “common knowledge” is focussed on here, but rather the social production of knowledge within differing public sectors, or identifiable and distinct institutional and thus permanent fields of society (Keller, 2005b: 228).

This paper deals with the official discourse on a particular group of people in Austria, namely people with the migration background of the former Yugoslavia which is—from the quantitative point of view—the most represented in Austria.

When talking about migration background, the usual definitions vary. In general, it is about the ancestry of the parents of affected persons. So, according to Statistics Austria those people “whose parents were both born abroad” (Statistik Austria, n.y.) are defined as people with migration background. This definition refers to the one of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). According to other surveys also people of whom only one parent was born abroad belong to that group. Worth noting is that this definition (people with migration background) does not rely on the actual citizenship, nor is it a synonym for the term foreigner. (Medienservicestelle n.y.) Although this concept is not without controversy, it proves to be feasible for a number of recent studies, because it goes further than the term citizenship. Moreover, as a discursively produced term it reveals discursive transformations within the last thirty years. As Ingrid Oswald (2007: 128) emphasises,

it was common to use the terms “foreigners” or “guest workers” and furthermore “guest workers’ children” in the 1980’s, in the 1990’s those terms were more or less replaced by the term “persons of foreign origin”. Meanwhile, it is common to talk about “persons with a migration background” (Ibid.).

The Austrian immigration debate has become interlinked with the debate on integration so that the postulate of assimilation appears to be replaced by the slogan of personal efforts and self-commitment. In other words, it is about the accumulation of human capital.

The main assumption here is that migration background is obviously put as a category of ethnicity to the foreground and at the same time connected to efforts and performance that serve as a category of human capital. By interlinking ethnicity and human capital, “role models” are set up, or taken out of the background so that finally performance and productivity overshadow the ethnicity factor.

In this sense, efforts and performance refer to human capital (the accumulation of cultural capital, such as education and professional skills), while migration background is discursively extended by adding categories such as multilingualism, intercultural skills and international networks (especially to the so-called “home country”) and therefore positively connotated. As a result, the migration background is brought to the surface and forms—in contrast to the previous decades—no stigma, but an economically exploitable “social capital” (Bourdieu, 1989: 190).

## **THE LIVING SITUATION OF PEOPLE WITH EX-YUGOSLAV MIGRATION BACKGROUND IN AUSTRIA**

In 2007, before the international financial and economic crisis hit the global arena, an OECD ranking placed Austrian gross national product (GNP) fourth among the European countries, and ninth among all OECD countries. (OECD, 2007: 20) Even the crisis itself did not seem to harm the Austrian economic and employment situation at all. According to the OECD Economic Survey of 2011, in 2009, the unemployment rate—after a brief rise—rapidly fell to 3.9 percent. That was close to the OECD average. Due to its high employment rate Austria holds the eleventh place in an international comparison (OECD, 2011: 6).

Among the approximately 8.4 million people living in Austria the proportion of foreign nationals is 11 percent (as of 19.05.2011). (Statistik Austria, 2011a) In the frame of the EU enlargement in Eastern and Southeastern Europe Austria became one of the

largest investors in that region (OECD, 2007: 8). Parallely, the quantitatively largest immigrant group comes from Southeastern Europe, from the former Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states. So, at present (as of 01.01.2011), a total of 376,149 people from the successor states of Yugoslavia (excluding Slovenia) are registered in Austria. In comparison, the share of citizens with Turkish citizenship is 159,891. Due to current migration flows migrants from Germany are with a number of 198,525 currently the second largest immigrant group in Austria (Statistik Austria, 2011b). This group appears to be the largest one, if people from the Yugoslav successor states (including Bosnia and Herzegovina: 134,098; Croatia: 34,037; Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo together: 188,627) are considered separately (see *Ibid.*). In sum, the ex-Yugoslav immigrant group proves to be the most numerous one.

The large number of ex-Yugoslav and Turkish immigrant groups results from the recruitment policy of the Austrian government in the 1960's when due to a booming economy and a shortage of labour force immigrants had to compensate the lack of domestic labour (first migration flow). Bilateral agreements between Austria and Turkey (1964) as well as Yugoslavia (1966) made the recruitment of temporary workers possible. These, so-called "guest workers" ("gastarbajteri") mostly came from rural areas and were less educated. They and later their families settled in Austria. The number of these "gastarbajteri" increased from 76,500 in 1969 to 227,000 in 1973, 178,000 thereof came from former Yugoslavia. (Jandl/Kraler 2003)

Until the late 1980's the most numerous migration group, people from former Yugoslavia, respectively "gastarbajteri" and their families, and children (the so-called "second" and "third generation") were primarily characterized by low education and living standards as well as social and political marginalisation or discrimination

Similar to the high share of citizens from former Yugoslavia, the transformation of this group's social structure can be traced to the second immigration wave, when refugees, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina fled to Austria due to the Yugoslav disintegration and wars during the 1990's (*Ibid.*). In the course of this second immigration wave the social structure of those people has changed to the extent that the share of highly-educated people and females increased.

National and international studies (see Bauböck, 1996; Bauböck, 2006a, b; Biffi, 2004; Binder, 2005; Blaschke 2004; Bratić, 2000; Castles, 2006; Davy/Waldrauch, 2001a, b; Erler, 2007; Fassmann, 1995, 2002, 2003, 2007; Jawhari, 2000; Oberlechner, 2006; Perchinig, 2005, 2009) criticised in recent years that new circumstances,

challenges and requirements were not considered by the Austrian immigration and integration policy.

As a matter of fact, immigrants and their children mostly remain marginalized and discriminated in four key areas, namely with regard to the labour market, education, housing and in terms of political participation. The results of the OECD Economic Survey of 2007 revealed the lowest educational attainment among migrant children or children with a migration background, the so-called “second” or even “third generation” in Austria (OECD, 2007: 12). With regard to higher or university education the marginalization of the second generation is obvious. The share of those university students who have a non-German mother tongue and who have passed the whole Austrian educational system (of 12 years) as “educational natives” (“BildungsinländerInnen”) is about 7 percent (Unger/Wroblewski, 2007: 79).

The Vienna AMS survey on young unemployed people with a migration background revealed similar results: in 2006, 25 percent of the unemployed in Vienna were foreign nationals, the share of Austrian unemployment was about 18 percent (AMS, 2007: 13). Two-thirds of the unemployed youth have a migration background, mostly from Yugoslav successor states and Turkey, while their educational attainment is not much higher than the one of their parents. (Ibid.: 1) When taking into account the specific type of their education or training it is striking that 29 percent have attended the secondary school, 19 percent have attended a polytechnic course and 25 percent have recently gone to a vocational school (Ibid.: 2). In addition to an inadequate knowledge of the German language, “cultural” and “religious” specifics are mentioned in this survey as the key “challenges” or problems to integrate these young people into the Austrian labour market (Ibid.: 4). What exactly is meant by the “cultural” and “religious specifics” is not further clarified. This might lead to the conclusion that marginalization and discrimination in education and employment do not rely on structural, but rather on individual, personal reasons. On the contrary, the essay “The integration lie” (“Die Integrationslüge”) written by Eva Maria Bachinger and Martin Schenk which was published and widely discussed in 2012 provides the following conclusion: the discourse on culture silences the asymmetric access to resources and hence economic and social problems as a cause of marginalisation and discrimination.

According to the comparative analysis of European immigration and integration policies by Ulrike Davy and Harald Waldrauch, in 2001 the Austrian one ranks the

last. In order to counteract the intergenerational reproduction of economic, social and political marginalization, the above-mentioned OECD report asks for action, in particular the promotion of German language skills among pre-school children. That has already become part of everyday practice Austria. Meanwhile, the last kindergarten year, or pre-school year is mandatory so that children should be promoted at that time. In some Austrian schools bilingual education is already offered by the help of two teachers. The awareness that apart from school, also the kindergarten serves as an educational institution is gradually increasing.

### **LANGUAGE SKILLS, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY**

Inadequate language skills are officially declared as one of the most immanent problems the so-called guest workers' children, the "second" and even "third generation generation" face nowadays. In addition to ethnicity, language serves as a criterion of ideological differentiation as well. Language is not subsumed by ethnicity due to the reason that the importance and significance of languages are determined discursively.

Western European languages are valued differently than Eastern or even Southeastern European ones according to "symbolic geography" and "mental mapping" (Liotta, 2005; Brooke, 2006). Thus, speaking German with a French or with a Slavic accent evokes contrary connotations, associations, and finally stereotypes, for instance, the imagination of 'la grande nation' in contrast to the 'wild' or 'Balkanised Balkans' (see Todorova 1999).

The long-standing Austrian migration, integration and language policy can be understood in the historical context of the Habsburg monarchy where non-German-speaking people were successfully integrated on condition that they adopted the official language German and the "Austrian way of life" (Georgi, 2003: 8). However, multilingualism in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy proved to be natural which was reduced due to arising national movements and established nationalisms since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The growing importance of multilingualism and care of the mother tongue or everyday language can be actually seen especially in the context of the EU enlargement process in recent years which is in stark contrast to the 1970's and 1980's. At that time it seemed to be recommendable to conceal Serbo-Croatian language skills to avoid associations with "gastarbajteri" and furthermore discriminations with regard to "ethnicity" and "class".

Nowadays, the Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian languages do not only serve as social capital (skills), but also as a specific human capital (knowledge). In the economic sector those languages proved to be useful and profitable in form of human capital due to the EU enlargement in Eastern and Southeastern European countries. Such developments appear to contradict the blooming period of the “guest workers movement” when Southeast European languages seemed to be stigmatised (Nadjivan, 2012: 290).

Meanwhile the value of mother tongues or everyday languages has increased, while the more or less perfect knowledge of the German one is officially declared as “the key to successful integration”. In contrast to that, missing language skills lead to social, economic and cultural exclusion.

While the mother tongue promotes the accumulation of social capital, education contributes to the accumulation of human capital. In their study on recent developments within the educational participation of the second generation, Hilde Weiss and Anne Unterwurzacher refer to the European Commission study “Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems” of 2006 which directly interlinks problems of those children (on the micro level) with national migration policies in Europe (with the meso and macro level). Those policies were primarily focused on the regulation and protection of the labour markets, instead of facilitating a long-term integration of immigrant families and their children born in the host country (Weiss/Unterwurzacher, 2007: 227).

Such policies went hand in hand with statistical invisibilities of the second and third generation. In 2005, Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger (2005: 5) estimated the number of the second and third generation of about 300,000 which correlates with the aforementioned actual data of Statistics Austria. Her comment that naturalised immigrants are statistically invisible seemed to be heard so that the official data situation has become more accurate. Raising awareness in data collection should also correlate with new accents in the Austrian migration and integration policy.

Both, the first (2003) as well as the second Migration and Integration Report (2007) that were edited by Heinz Fassman revealed the statistical difficulty of covering the second generation appropriately. As a result, longitudinal studies concerning that focus group are still hardly to realise on the basis of the existing data which is expected to change in the future.

However, Hilde Weiss and Anne Unterwurzacher discovered a slight improvement regarding the educational participation of immigrants’ children

(Weiss/Unterwurzacher 2007: 229). In comparison to the school year 1993/94 the “over-representation” of children with an ex-Yugoslav or Turkish background, the second, or even third generation in special schools was reduced and their “under-representation” in secondary schools such as high schools and vocational high schools improved.

In contrast to earlier statistics, new quantitative surveys capture already naturalised immigrants and make them in the following statistically visible. Thus, new statistical surveys include categories such as “people with a migration background” as well as “immigrant of the first generation” and “immigrant of the second generation”, and also provide information on the country of birth and the current nationality (Statistik Austria, 2011c).

With reference to Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger, Weiss and Unterwurzacher acknowledge that the academic success of the second generation in Austria seems to be systematically underestimated, since many of this group statistically “disappear” or get “lost” after their naturalisation. In the same direction also points the actual migration and integration report of Statistics Austria (Statistik Austria, 2012) Meanwhile the group of naturalised immigrants is made visible by the above-mentioned actual statistical surveys that collect the birthplace of the parents as well.

According to Herzog-Punzenberger the Austrian citizenship or naturalisation appears to be a crucial factor (not to mention a *sine qua non* condition) for political, social and economic integration as well as for academic success. The Austrian citizenship, therefore, implies a specific bonus or “Staatsbürgerschaftsbonus” (Herzog-Punzenberger, 2007: 242). Weiss and Unterwurzacher conclude that naturalised students have capital forms such as “language skills, education acculturation, safe maintenance” at their disposal which vice versa facilitates their school success (Weiss/Unterwurzacher, 2007: 232).

In this sense, naturalisation appears to significantly promote social mobility. At the institutional level the Austrian citizenship facilitates the working and living conditions, and enables the political participation (right to vote). From the symbolic point of view, the Austrian citizenship permits the integration into the majority society and culture. At the individual level, the self-identification with the country, coupled with the subjective feeling of social mobility (to a higher “class” or layer) is facilitated.

However, social mobility only on the basis of naturalisation should not be taken for granted of course. As highlighted by the studies of Weiss and Unterwurzacher



and Martin Unger and Angela Wroblewski the training for the second generation in general takes longer than in the case of those young people without a migration background. Besides, members of the second generation are more frequently affected by unemployment than the comparison group. The main reason for that might be the lack of social capital, that means the networks for finding a job in Austria. Similarly, the longer duration of training can be related to insufficient economic resources leading to a more difficult social situation. The so-called “heritage of the guest work” (Ibid.: 241) evokes lower educational achievements of the second generation compared to “natives” of the same social class. In other words, the “native” working-class child has those forms of capital at his/her disposal that are not available for the “gastarbajter” child. To sum up, Austrian citizenship and naturalisation favour the accumulation of different forms of capital, as reflected in the above-mentioned findings. According to August Gächter (2010), social mobility in Austria takes three to four generations, since immigrants traditionally always enter the lowest ranks of the labour market and displace hence the second or even third generation up.

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DISCURSIVE DEVELOPMENTS**

In Vienna alone, there live more people with international origin than in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary together (Breinbauer, 2009: 30). This situation, as a matter of fact, proves to be profitable for operational handling or planning, management and control of cross-border business processes. So, it can be concluded that those people are predestined by the following skills: specific (East and Southeast) language skills, intercultural skills and special knowledge about actors and networks at home and abroad (Ibid.: 28). All these skills result from migration experiences and hence developed “transnational” or “trans-state networks”, meaning networks beyond national boundaries. Such networks can generate new forms of identities, loyalties and interests—finally so-called “hybrid spaces”—that may contradict the nation-state self-identifications and solidarities (Sheffer, 2005: 16).

However, political and economic decision-makers appreciate the specific individual skills and competencies or “soft skills” of people with East and Southeast European migration backgrounds. According to the report of the Vienna Immigration Commission, Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries prove to be priority target areas and target markets for Vienna. As mentioned above, especially from those countries the migration flows to Vienna took place in the last decades. As

an obvious benefit for the city of Vienna appears to be the possibility of those migrants to easily develop economic, scientific and cultural networks to those countries. As a result, those networks can be established in Vienna much faster than in other European cities (Wiener Zuwanderungskommission, 2010: 9).

Similarly, the research findings of Kurt Schmid come to the conclusion that foreign language skills and intercultural competence are “valuable resources for the development of new markets” (Schmid, 2010: 7) in Austria and abroad. First of all, the highly qualified with migration background are particularly important for international companies, because they can be engaged in project management as well as in technical and commercial areas (Ibid.: 4).

Andreas Breinbauer, however, emphasises that significant stereotypes and barriers prevent to recognise and use the potential of people with migration background appropriately (Breinbauer, 2008: 51).

According to the SME Research Austria stakeholders, agents and companies (meso level) are often not aware of the Austrian “migration elite” (KMU-Forschung Austria, 2005: 138). In general, people with a migration background often face a ‘guest worker’s image’, associated with a low level of qualification, although their educational careers and employment history reveal a great human capital (Breinbauer, 2009: 28). This problem is interlinked with the problem of “brain waste” which means that the professional qualifications of immigrants, first of all third-country citizens, are not fully recognized in the destination country so that they face the risk of dequalification on the Austrian labour market (Gächter, 2006, 2007, 2008).

As a result, the current project of “role models” of the State Secretary for Integration serves as an awareness-raising initiative with the aim to change the discourse on migrants as a whole and furthermore to improve their social and economic situation under the condition of effort and performance.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

In the public discourse, the categories of human capital (in terms of education and performance) and social capital (meaning “soft skills” based on the specific migration background) are increasingly interlinked, and positively connotated which correlates with current social, economic and finally political developments.

Once in the 1960’s, low-skilled workers from Southeast Europe were required for industrial applications, today it is the use and profit from highly-qualified and

skilled workers (especially in engineering and nursing). The origin or ethnicity of the workforce is now enhanced discursively, by referring to the social capital that proves to be profitable. What as a discursive reference point remains unchanged for almost 50 years—equally in times of economic boom, recession and crisis—is the factor performance and labour (in terms of human capital) that reveals market-oriented interests. In this sense, migration background, or ethnicity is highlighted as a profitable social capital in order to point to the parent and targeted human capital in the next step. Finally, the economic benefit of human capital proves to be the main reference point of the current migration and integration debate in Austria. The discourse is not only transforming with regard to improving the social, economic and political situation on the micro level, of individuals (people with migration background), but also with regard to maintaining the high economic level in Austria. Obviously, migration flows to Austria are needed to compensate demographic challenges such as low birth rates in the future. After the low-qualified immigrant workforce was needed during the economic boom in the 1960's, highly-qualified people with migration backgrounds are expected to meet the future tasks of an increasingly internationalised market economy.

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## Chapter II

Enlargement, energy, civil society

