

Intercultural Perspectives. The Missing Link in the Discussion about Sustainable Nature Management

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1. Background

In most of the European countries immigration is occurring since decades. Irrespectively of the reasons whether due to colonial heritage or because of economical or missing future perspectives in general the composition of the national population has changed into an intercultural mixture¹. For instance in Germany: about 20% of the population has a migration background meanwhile (Statist. Bundesamt 2007). In all European countries this amount probably will increase the next years.

In Germany up to now neither the scientific and public discourse on sustainable development nor research on issues referring to it have integrated the possible effects of different cultural socialisation on the realization of the concept sustainable development. There is a lack of profound knowledge about the attitudes or every day acting of (im-)migrants² towards nature and its management, about their interests and demands regarding environmental and sustainability issues (Katz/ Kontzi 2009 a, b). Additionally the percentage of immigrants engaged in environmentally relevant activities as volunteers or as employees, e.g. in organisations of the ecological movement is very low (ibidem, Kopf 2008).

Research on the requirements of immigrants towards “natural” areas is missing as well as on the actual situation of intercultural³ participation in natural management processes and on the needed preconditions for an appropriate “intercultural empowerment” in environmental planning (Katz/ Kontzi 2009b). Almost no data exist about the perception and esteem of nature, natural resources or landscapes or the conceptions (conditions and influencing factors) of nature management and their realisations by different ethnic groups, showing a migration background.

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¹ The idea of the existence of homogeneity inside of cultural barriers is a construction. As nature culture is a permanently changing historical result of differently intensive processes of adoption and separation (Hörning 2004).

² Of course there is no group called (im-)migrants. It is the name used for all those people who were immigrating to Germany during the middle of the last century until now. “Migrants” are not even in some way a homogeneous “group” of people with **one** specific interest and **one** specific perception of nature or environmental awareness. The various forms of experienced migration and cultural backgrounds as well as the various geographical regions, people are coming from, already interdict unifications.

³ Interculturality is based on a respectful and non hierarchical relation between people who belong to various cultural groups. It means more than “multicultural” but also act on the assumption that the only manner of correctly including/understanding another culture is to interpret its demonstrations in agreement with its own cultural criteria. Our own inevitable ethnocentrism makes us interpret the cultural practices which are strange for us and has therefore to be reflected.

Due to an own first and approximate literature study there is certain evidence that it seems to be very similar in other European countries. In addition the existing experiences and strategies in European countries in terms of an integration of migrants' know-how and views, i.e. their mighty participation in nature management processes obviously is not analysed yet.

Except of some insular activities at a local level according to committed individuals in environmental and migrant organisations respectively, the intercultural garden initiatives and islamic directions pointing to ecological necessities especially in the UK, there seems to be little (research) effort on linking the perspectives of migrants with environmental issues all over Europe.

In the following results of a first (explorative) study on environmental organisations in Germany and their activities or problems with "acting intercultural" are introduced. Qualitative data on the conditions to and obstacles for an adequate consideration of intercultural aspects, e.g. the existing mental images and ideas about migrants' interests in nature (management) and sustainability issues by environmental actors are presented and reflected.

A short review on the theoretical context and state of the art of the relation between culture and nature is in the first place.

2. Interdependency of Culture and Nature: Critical Whiteness and Nature Concepts

Fair Participation, inter- and intragenerational justice are main issues in the concept of sustainable development. Stakeholders of sustainability comprehend justice differently, from equal distribution of resources to much wider forms of equality (Eckhardt 2005). In general justice is a complicated category and historically formed as well as culturally. Historical built power relations still influence discourses and negotiations to a certain extension. Hidden weightings due to post-colonial power constellations support the reproduction of stereotypes of "the Others", the foreigners. The reception of post-colonial theory and critical whiteness, as a part of it, in the German speaking scientific and public sustainability or environmental discourse has been slowly (Kontzi 2009). Only since the late 1990s critical whiteness studies were received in the scientific debate in Germany. Walgenbach (2005) shows, it is not by accident that Germany is not perceived as a multicultural society as much as the United States or Great Britain.

The critical whiteness studies understand whiteness as a system. Therefore *white*, as a social category, is not necessarily connected with a special pigmentation of the skin. It is a historical, political and social construct. Therefore it is also possible to "become" *white*⁴. However whiteness isn't only an analytical category. It is today part of the social reality and influences the social life in most of the countries of the western hemisphere⁵. In these countries whiteness means still the position of power: *White* is defined as the norm to which "the Other" (black, of color) is set in relation to. The similarities to the gender relations can be found in many aspects. With an analytical understanding of interdepending categories, gender and whiteness are two analytical approaches to social life. Both are forms and instruments of power and oppression.

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⁴ Wollrad (2005) shows how Irish migrants in the USA were first seen as uncivilized, wild and of black "race". Through brutal aggression against Afro-American people and through defending slavery the Irish immigrants managed to be accepted as *white* (Ibidem: 74ff.).

⁵ The influence of whiteness as a normative order plays also a role in the southern hemisphere but can not be described here

They can never be found separately from each other. Bodies in the western hemisphere are always gendered and racialised (Wollrad 2005). Still, these aren't the only categories that shape a person's life in society. Other categories like class, dis-/ability, age, religion, habit, personal background, sexual orientation, family status are affecting ones possibilities in society too. So, race, class, gender are to be interpreted as interdependent (Walgenbach et al. 2007) or articulated categories (McClintock 1995), which are seen as forms of power relations with the result of racism, class and sexism.

According to this, research “on migrants” or how culture matters has to be very sensitive and self critical in order to avoid reproducing stereotypes and discriminative power ratios. It needs to considerate all factors and contexts forming and leading to oppressive socio-cultural relations. The concept of the *natio-ethno-cultural background* by Paul Mecheril (2003) gives an option to handle the dilemma of making visible so far unheard, not discussed and unknown aspects about a “group” of people without (re)producing hierarchical separations between the “Other” and the “normal” German citizen. The *natio-ethno-cultural background* is of importance, “*due to attributions, due to genealogical knowledge of background and descent, with the aid of narrations (reports of parents or grandparents), by phantasms and filling of gaps, due to visits and past but also planned stays*” (ibidem: 27 translation by Kristina Kontzi).

Besides such difficulties in “measuring” cultural traits of social collectives, i.e. nations, or of different cultural associations within a society, the variety in duration and intensity of people's cultural experiences is an additional complexity factor. In Germany for instance nowadays the so called first generation - the immigrated one - up to the third generation - their grandchildren born in Germany –, deriving from a set of different countries of origin is living side by side.

One result of a very long lasting epistemological debate is that concepts of nature, its perception and esteem as well as the real handling towards nature is interwoven with historical and socio-cultural conditions, contexts, experiences and traditions (Eisel 2004, Gloy 1995, 1996, Jahn/Wehling 1998, Katz/ von Winterfeld 2006) and with the conception of society and ourselves (Schäfer 1994). Nature and society are strongly interconnected⁶. Talking about nature means we are talking about culture and society at the same time (Schäfer 1994). Empirical research on the conception of nature and its management shows that professional actors busy in nature related affairs construct nature in dependency on their understanding of the relation between their own individual autonomy and the social order, i.e. how the individual vs. the collective options of acting in their professional fields or their self construction as professional actors are seen (Katz 2009, Katz/ Mayer 2006). It is dependant on the constructed relation between “The Self” and “The Other”, between subject and object, between production and reproduction, between all those pairs which are set as opposites representing a special order alongside we sort and organize reality in our modern western industrialized societies (Katz 2006). How different cultural socialisations experiences will affect these constructions and relations is not yet analysed.

Results of a diploma thesis about nature perceptions of adolescents with a migration background and being in professional education (Kontzi 2007), conducted in the context of a joint research project⁷ showed that images and ideas of nature are affected by the living environment and

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⁶ Various (and controversial) theoretical approaches are dealing with the description of the (regulation) pattern and regime of this interrelation (Becker und Jahn 2006).

⁷ Cooperation Project of the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (“Gender Analysis of Nature Knowledge and experiences communicated by foresters doing forest related environmental education in Germany”),

present or reminded or told nature experiences in the countries of origin. Different types of nature construction could be figured out, but could not be assigned directly to different cultural backgrounds.

A new study done at the university of Wageningen, NL, on immigrants' images of nature and landscape preferences clarified that the people from Islamic countries generally support the functional image of nature and show lower preferences for non-urban, wild and unmanaged landscapes in comparison to native Dutch people who are strong supporters of the wilderness images (Buijs et al. 2009). Further on the effect of culture (mostly measured on a national level) on the awareness, acceptance and the seen risk relevant shaping options has been shown in risk-research studies (Hinman et al. 1993, Krömker 2004, Renn/ Rohrman 2000, Vaughan/ Nordenstam 1991). In Germany a few investigations on the environmental awareness and behaviour of Turkish migrants (Kizilocak/ Sauer 2003, Maack-Rheinländer 1999) and about mundane life realities of migrants including their norms and values (milieu-approach, SINUS SOCIOVISION 2008, Wippermann/ Flaig 2009) describe at least similar or even higher sensitivities towards environmental and nature protection issues as the social majority.

The existing data indicate that cultural socialisation and nature relation are linked. Since awareness, perception, demands and knowledge are influencing the options, strategies and acceptance of nature management and natural resource use, knowledge about these factors in terms of people with a migration background as well as their participation in nature related decision processes is necessary due to a fair chance to taking part in societal forming procedures and because of a necessity to maximizing the diversity of possible options for action. Culture is nothing fixed which can be easily analysed or "allocated" to people or a societal group. It is a construction which evolves and changes by doing it, is deeply interwoven with social relations and other categories structuring societies.

2. A study on German environmental NGOs

One of the main starting points for this project was the observation that migrants¹ and their interests, demands or experiences are not considered in the work of environmental NGOs. In a former study on the environmental awareness of „turkish“ migrants (Kizilocak/ Sauer 2003) high sensitivity and positive attitudes towards nature or environmental protection issues could be identified as at least comparable to the German social majority. One main assumption therefore was that migrants are not attracted by environmental organisations. The question arose which options and obstacles would exist in these organisations - considering themselves as open minded and grass-roots democratic -, in respect of powerful participation of people with a migration background and in terms of including their interests in the NGO's agenda?

The overarching target was, to support and enable these NGOs in better meeting the needs of an intercultural society by opening themselves up to an intercultural approach to their work.

The present status in NGOs was analysed by asking for reasons, affecting factors and contexts in regard to their organisational structures, processes and behaviours hindering or supporting interculturality. Using an

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which has to - among other things - identifying the nature and gender concepts transported via forest related environmental education activities (Leuphana-University Lüneburg and University of Freiburg, Hehn/ Katz 2005). Of course "migrants" are not even in some way a homogeneous "group" of people with **one** specific interest and **one** specific perception of nature or environmental awareness. The various forms of experienced migration and cultural backgrounds as well as the various geographical regions, people are coming from, already interdict any unification.

internet research and inquiry of the member organisations of the Deutscher Naturschutzring e.V., an umbrella group for the nature and environmental protection organisations in Germany, all existing, planned, finished activities or current projects addressing immigrants or intercultural topics were investigated. Representatives of the staff (employees and volunteers) of many of the environmental NGOs (Katz/ Kontzi 2009a), were interviewed (35 qualitative telephone interviews throughout Germany). The data was content analytical processed (Mayring 1995).

3. Results

What is already done – activities from individuals

- The majority of the existing “intercultural” initiatives found at environmental NGOs is bound to the local level of their operation. It is concentrated on environmental protection issues relevant for the budget of private households like waste-avoidance/ -separation or energy saving. Most of these activities are caused by the engagement of individuals (often with a migration background) and disappear with the abandonment of those persons (Katz & Kontzi 2009).
- One single youth organisation solely followed a distinct target oriented approach in its trials to contact adolescent migrants by organising a Hip-Hop event.
- Quite a lot of activities are conducted in the context of environmental education. This seems to be the most popular and acceptable access to nature related topics for children and youngsters with a migration background.
- Successful projects required activities either jointly conceptualized and accomplished in cooperation with migrants or those, which were pointing directly to every-day life realities (environmentally friendly clothes washing, sane nutrition or organic food, self and subsistence supply). Especially women seem to be attracted thereby – probably due to the gendered allocation of tasks in most of the migrant households⁹.

Obstacles and problems by integrating the “intercultural perspective”

First of all most of the asked representatives of environmental NGOs showed a lack of knowledge and experience about migrants` interests in and appreciation of nature and environmental issues. For instance the above mentioned existing studies on the awareness and dealing of migrants towards environmental protection are unknown as well as possibilities are not in mind to reach different ethnic groups, e.g. via new alliances with self-organisations of immigrants.

Prejudices and images

In the interviews a set of prejudices and images about „The Migrant“ became evident: Nature events and experiences are supposed to be middle class (and German) activities. That is why migrants would not feel attracted so much to those issues. In general the asked representatives of the environmental NGOs indicated internalized images of immigrants constructing them as social deficient and extremely traditionally anchored. Accordingly they are said to be stronger bound to

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⁹ Before executing activities like mentioned here, it is important to consider their consequences for gender inequality thereby reproduced and maintained beforehand.

family structures as Germans and less interested in environmental issues. Therefore they would not educate their children in being curative or protective towards nature affairs. Due to different cultural backgrounds the immigrants probably are favoring other topics than nature or environmental related ones. They appear to be more interested in private affairs and in consumption.

The Germans were supposed to be more ecologically-minded due to the environmental movement in the 1980th, which didn't occur in a similar way in those countries most immigrants are coming from. For instance Turkish people were considered by a few interviewed representatives less interested in environmental issues due to the inadequate role of environmental protection issues in Turkish policy in general.

The barriers for activities like hiking, mountain climbing especially for societal groups or people who are doing badly, have been connected to the image and history of this activities. The ones named above were considered to be exercises of the middle class and to be linked to the western culture. Therefore such operations are not estimated that important or widespread in non western countries.

It was however countered by a few interviewed persons, that interests in outdoor activities are not only influenced by a cultural barrier but also by financial hindrances – and education. People with low budgets cannot afford the costs of climbing (equipment and the use of facilities), therefore it is connected to middle class. So a lack of knowledge and a bad social standard of living were argued being main barriers for migrants' participation in environmental actions. Often the line was drawn to other “social groups” like unemployed people, who are neither visible in the organizations.

Some of the interview partners distinguished Russian/ Easter European migrants and Turkish/ Arabic migrants. The so called Russian Germans were supposed to be closer to nature, because they mostly came from rural regions. For the Turkish migrants this was used as a counterargument for not being interested in an aesthetic nature perception and therefore hardly to animate for environmental activities. Additionally Russian migrants were not seen as “real migrants”. Since a lot of the (German)-Russian migrants have German ancestors, they possess German passports, hence are Germans and perceived as such. Another possible explanation might be, that most of them are *white* and Christian, so they are considered closer to the German culture.

A few of the asked representatives asserted that immigrants are not reliable and solid in terms of time commitments for the reason of different cultural practices. For this scheduling was considered to be impossible or more difficult. At least bureaucratic ways of addressing seem to be merely successful. Communities of immigrants were noticed as “closed shops”, they don't want to be integrated but separated and like to stay in their own cultural contexts. Different gender roles are complicating an appropriate addressing of issues additionally.

Intercultural competences

Considering all the aspects mentioned above, the following deficiencies in intercultural communication, in cooperation skills and competences coming across and identified in the statements of many of the asked representatives are not surprising:

- In general it was claimed to be open to anybody with an interest in nature. This implies that everybody who isn't taking part in their actions has no interest in nature and in environmental protection work. The self-image of the organisations

is connected with the stereotype of migrants not being interested in their natural surroundings. In addition the interviewed representatives assumed to reach everybody in equal measure with their information material. An estimation like this however ignores the results from the environmental and sustainable communication research, which state that if to communicate with everybody is wanted, no one is reached. Environmental NGOs need to reflect their actual openness and whom their public relations and info material is addressed to and whom not.

- The existing material, said to be supportive for intercultural communication and cooperation respectively, like guidelines or handbooks (Kleinhüchelkotten/ Danner 2006, Kleinhüchelkotten/ Wegner 2008) is not used, normally not even known.
- Missing language skills (on both sides!) were considered to be a hindrance, which has to be relieved first and quickly. But interestingly this was not seen as the main barrier towards intercultural communication in environmental issues. Many experiences showed that language problems are not that existential and could be overcome and managed.

Social aspects of nature

The perception of nature issues as being free of social relations is a phenomenon widely spread in natural scientific or technical oriented working fields and amongst people professionally active in the realm of natural or environmental protection (Katz 2009, Mayer und Katz 2008, Katz/ v. Winterfeld 2006). Such an exclusion or separation of sociality from nature issues is done too by the staff of the NGOs (Fischer et al. 2006), that is mostly educated in natural or environmental sciences and therefore contributes to the ignorance towards the relevance of interculturality for environmental affairs. The statements “We are doing our job for everybody” and “Our focus is nature, not society or culture” describes quite well the attitude of the majority of the asked representatives of the environmental NGOs towards the relation between nature and society and their own position in it.

Organisational structure and culture

Structures supporting cross topics in general are missed in most of the environmental NGOs. What is worse, the interest at the superior organisational level is focussed on promoting environmental targets in the context of parliamentary work. Financial and personal straits do not advance issues, which are not directly environmentally occupied and which would require additional skills or competences (Katz/ Kontzi 2009a). Intercultural activities therefore are dependant solely on the individual engagement. Only in one of the investigated cases the initiatives were integrated structurally. As a further difficulty identified, none of the interviewed representatives seemed to have nameable contacts to immigrant-organisations. The media, consumed by migrants, neither are included in the press distribution list of the NGOs .

4. Conclusion

In Germany the intercultural dimension in the public and scientific debate on an appropriate regulation of societal natural relations is considered insufficiently. People with a migration background are rarely involved in nature related decision and management processes. This is the same in environmental NGOs. Research efforts are needed about the influence of culture as an

interdependent category on the societal nature relations and about powerful participation options for migrants thereby.

An increasing understanding of the awareness and interests of immigrants in nature management or environmental protection on one hand and of adequate and powerful strategies for an intercultural participation in sustainable and environmental planning processes on the other hand however would contribute to the interconnection of the social and the ecological aspects of regulation requirements of societal nature relations.

In the interviews the image of the “poor, not well integrated, traditional, patriarchal migrant” was stated in various forms, environmentalism and nature conservation was seen as a “typical German” topic. The organisations themselves are determined by *white*, middle class Germans. The lack of interest of migrants was explained with the differences in cultural backgrounds. The German culture is perceived as nature loving and caring, whereas the cultures of the “migrants”, since they are considered dirtying up the parks in the cities, are not appearing to be environmentally concerned.

Hereby the migrant is constructed as the imperfect “Other”, whereas the “Germans” are set as the (perfect) norm. This construction of “Self” and “Other” legitimises to judge over the “Other” (Hall 2008: 166). The “Self” and its possible imperfections and faults are not questioned. Walgenbach (2005) points out, that the German meaning of nation is strongly linked to Germany being a *white* nation. From the 19th century forward the nation building process was not based on territorial location but on biological concepts. The principle of *ius sanguinis* was manifested: not the ones born in German territory are Germans, but persons who have “German blood”¹⁰. As many authors show, the interconnection between whiteness and the image of German people still exist in Germany today (Eggers et al. 2005, Ha et al. 2007). Especially in an academic context “people of color” are hardly to find. The examples of discrimination against people of color in Germany are vast (e.g see www.derbraunemob.info/deutsch/index.htm).

The research results presented above showed that practiced cooperation for instance in the frame of a joint project could contribute a lot to communicate and understand each other in a better way. But not each meeting with „others“ will lead to a reduction in stereotypes or prejudices. It is important to mind that corporate processes/ activities are not imbalanced in terms of resources and power positions. An understanding of participation and integration as a two-sided process and for which acculturation is not a coercive requirement is needed.

A first step for this is to reflect the own prejudices and images and to accept the own involvement. As a tool to reflect on the especially implicit, hidden power relations and the own position in society the Anti-Bias approach¹¹ could be helpful and should be introduced. Basic assumptions of Anti-Bias-Trainings are, that each human being has biases, which he or she is learning in the early childhood. These biases are transported through images, attitudes and values in the environment of the growing child. Anti-Bias is trying to build up an awareness of these biases (Bovha/ Kontzi 2009: 296). The goal is to act consciously in a biased world. Anti-Bias is

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¹⁰ The *ius sanguinis* still exists today, however since 2000 the *ius soli* principle is additionally used.

¹¹ The Anti-Bias approach was originally developed in the late 1980s in California by Louise Derman Sparks, as an approach in infant pedagogic. The approach was adapted in South-Africa, where its object was to overcome racism in the heads of the people after the apartheid. In the late 1990s Anti-Bias was taught in Germany by two South-African trainers. Since then the approach has been developed further and has been used with target audiences like students, teachers, activists of NGOs, scientist, children in nursery schools and so forth.

to be understood as critical to the current political and societal system and trying to abolish unfair structures in society (ibidem).

One of the essential ideas of the concept of sustainable development is solving global problems by cooperation on an equal level. The cognitions of the north might not be enough to get suited and acceptable solutions. In the last decades the industrialized “North” was set as the “role model” for the world. History indicates that this model might not be the most sustainable one. We need fair interaction and powerful participation of all actors and inhabitants to increase the diversity and thus the options for acting.

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