

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

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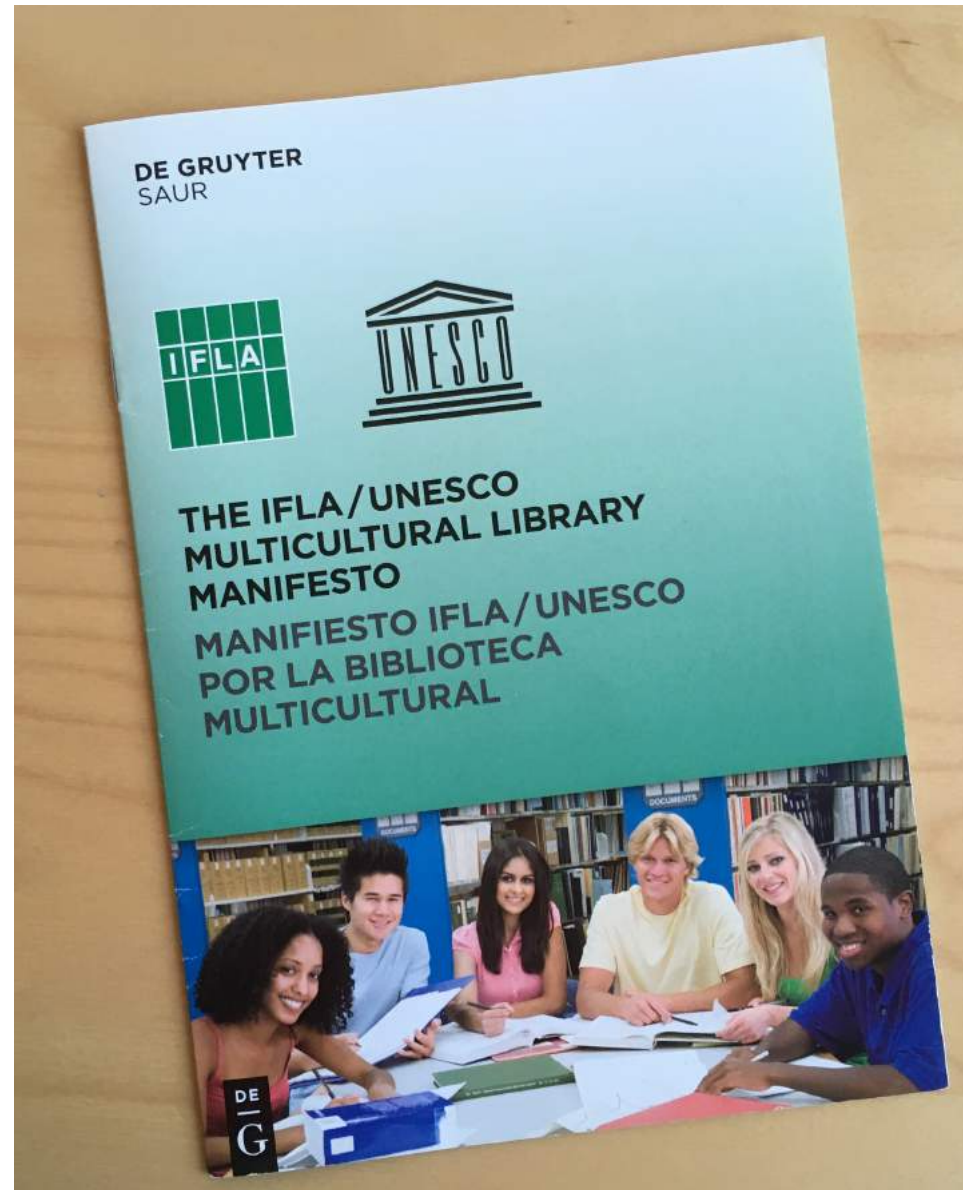
28 August 2018

Session 210a: Library services: empowering people to develop
their inter-cultural identities

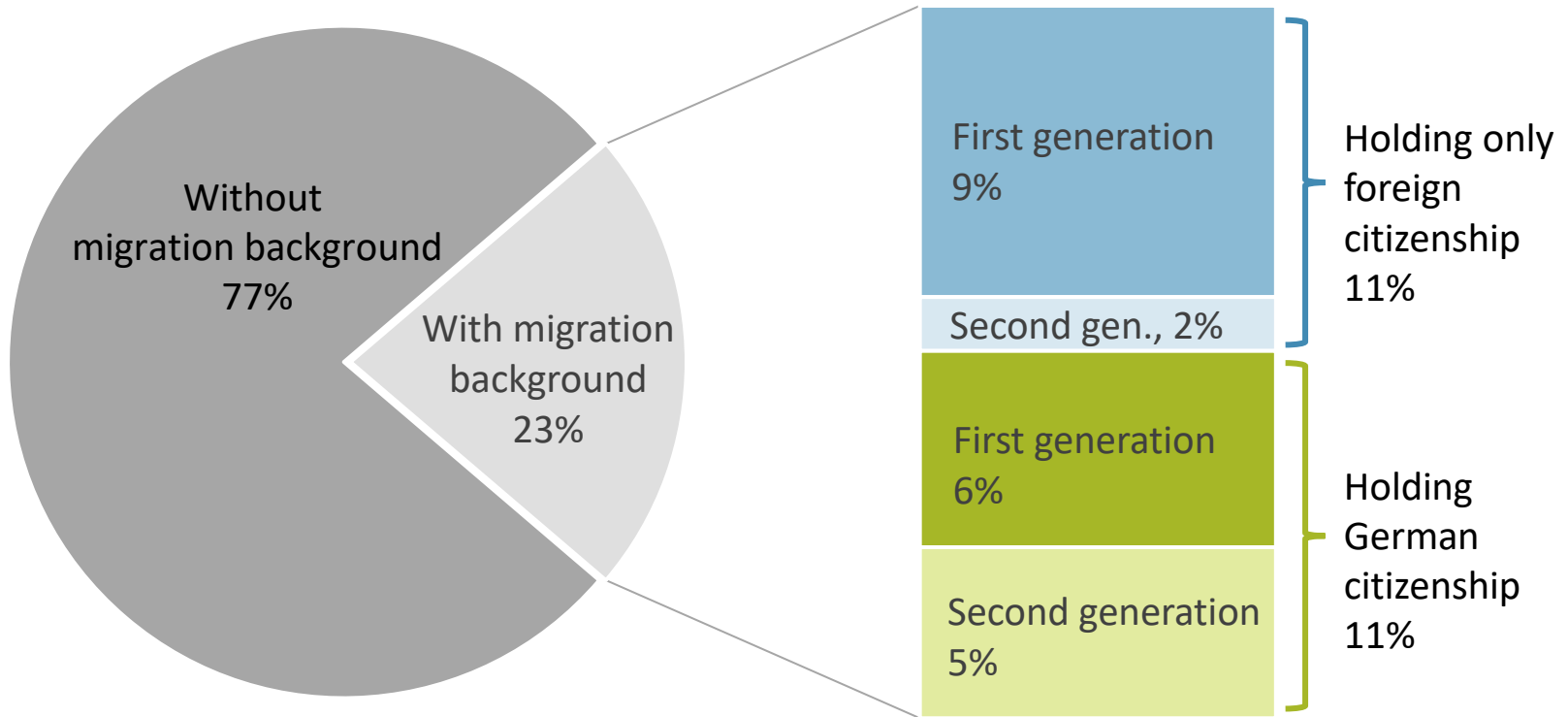
IFLA Section 32: Library Services to Multicultural Populations

“The **staff of a multicultural library** should reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the community.”

IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto



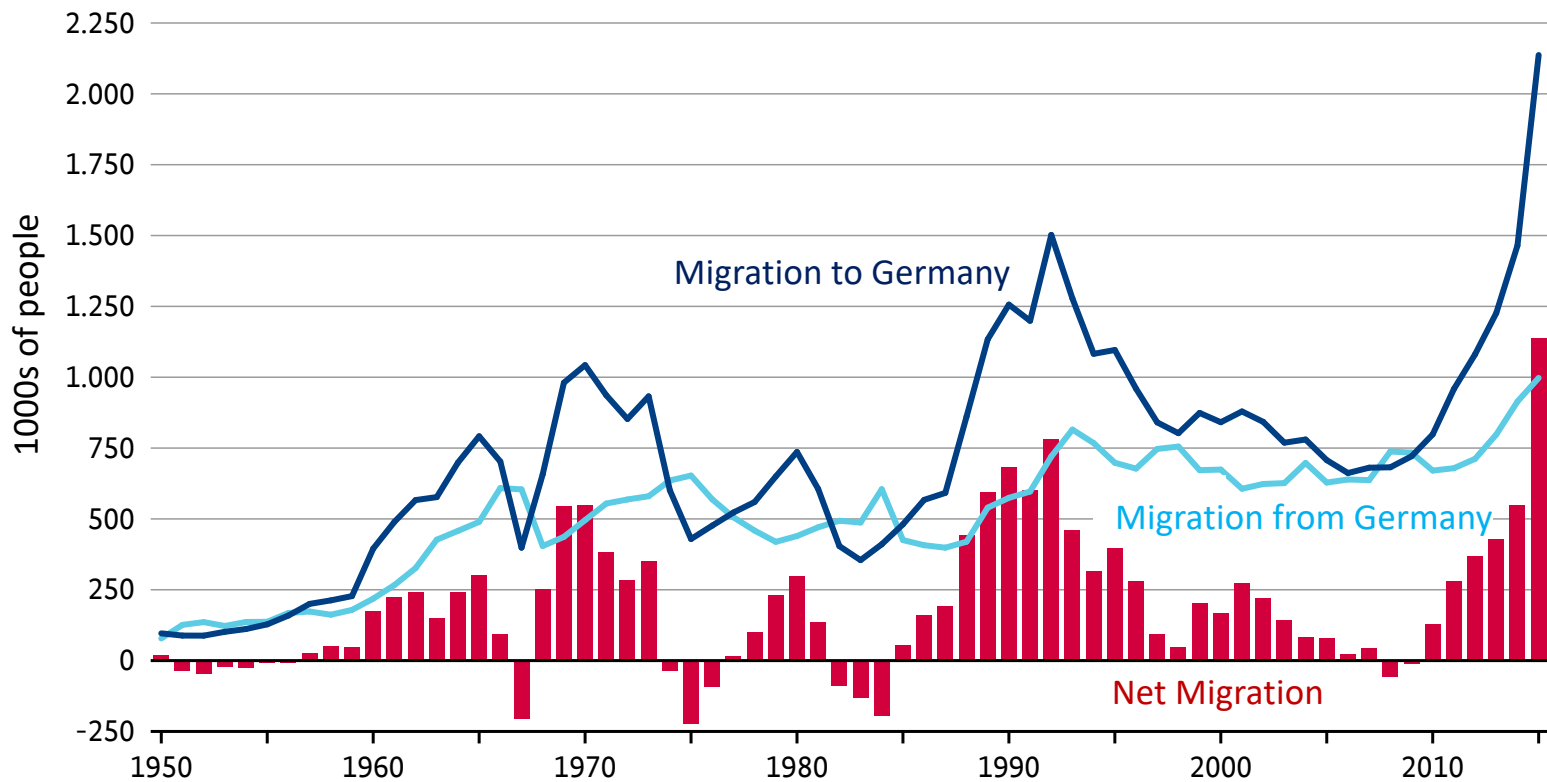
23% of German residents are immigrants as defined in public policy



Total population: 82.4 million

Immigration has been on the rise for decades. Is this reflected by library workers?

Migration to and from Germany, 1950-2015



Population studied

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

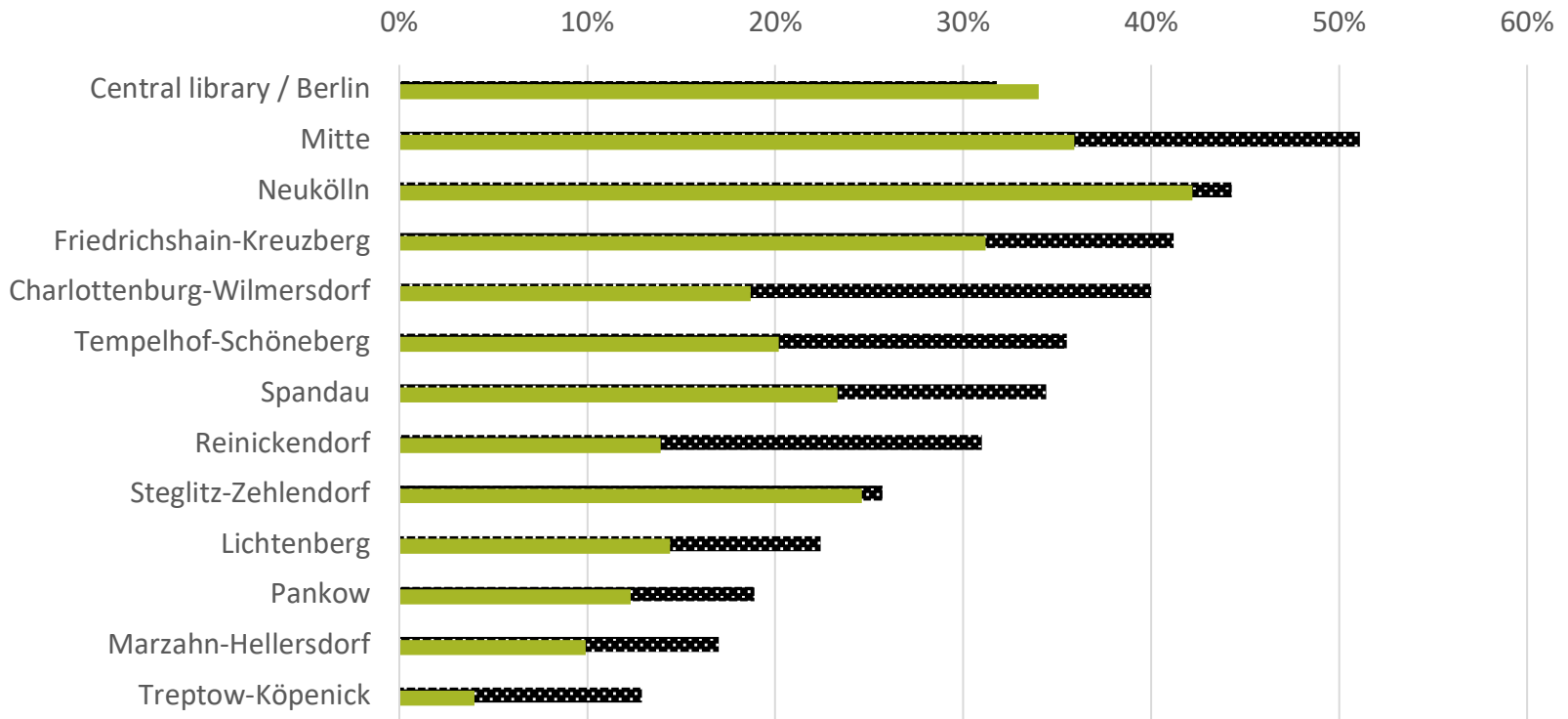
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Image: cover of the 2015 annual report of the public library
network of Berlin (VÖBB). Photo © 2015 Barbara Dietl.



Berliner Öffentliche
Bibliotheken
für die Zukunft

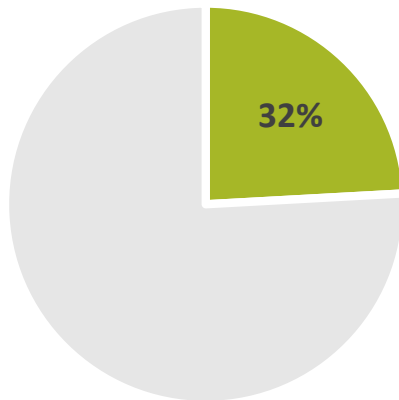
Berlin: 1 city, 13 library systems, serving very different communities of users

Representation of immigrants by library system / district:
among library users and **in overall population**

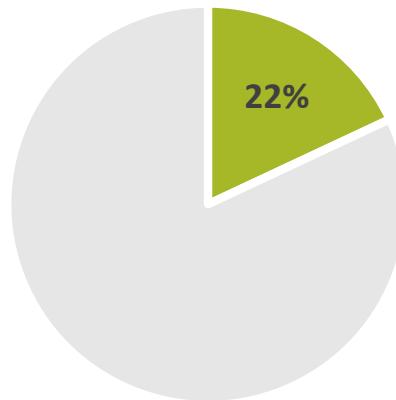


Immigrants are **underrepresented** among library users and staff in Berlin

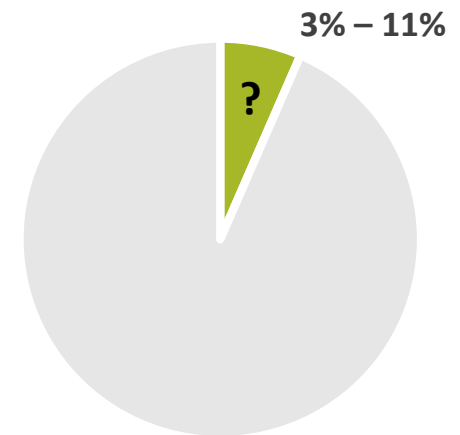
Overall population



Public library users



Public library workers



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

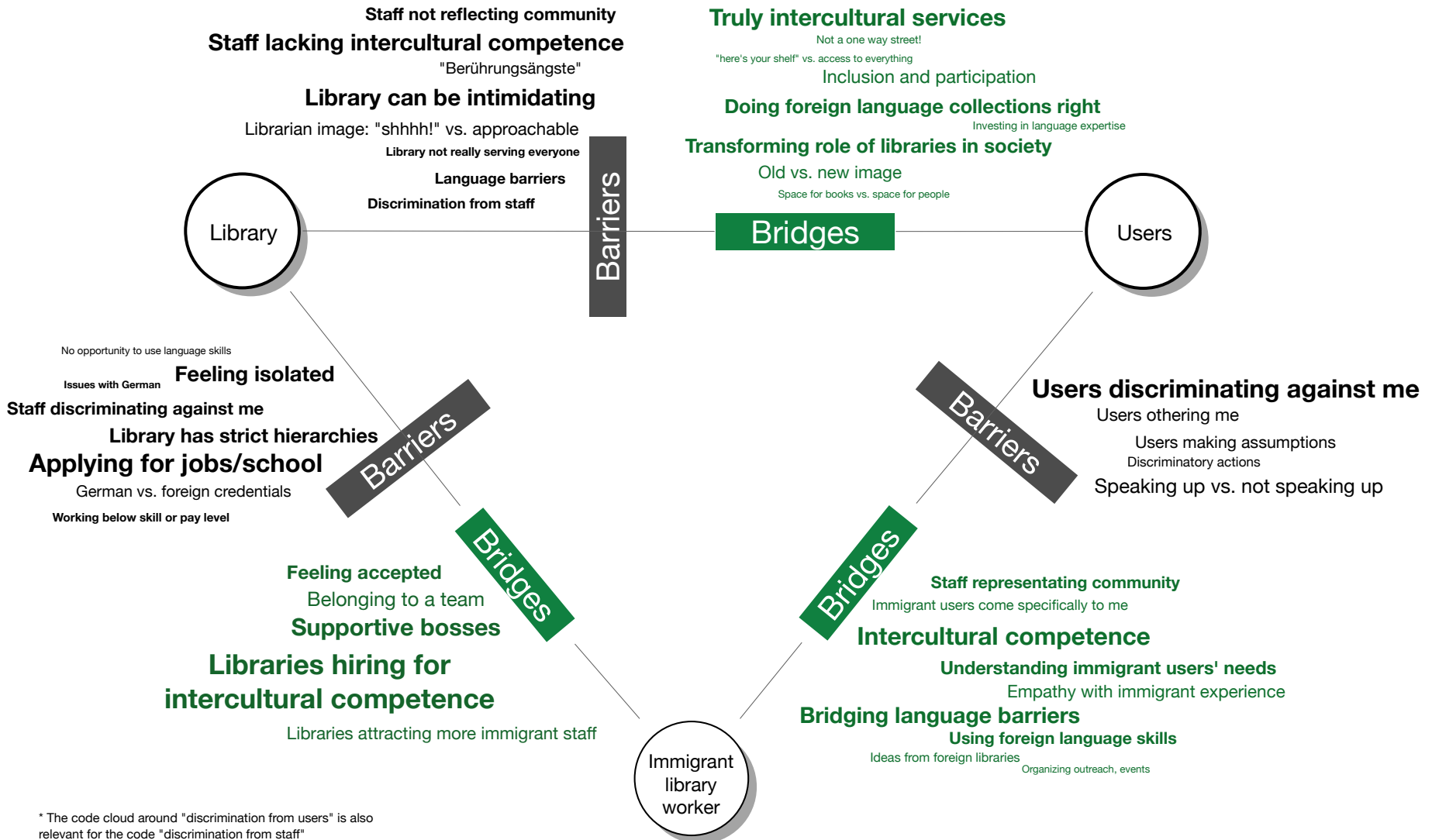
What challenges and opportunities do immigrant library workers in Germany experience?

Theoretical basis

phenomenology, Critical Race Theory, #critlib

Qualitative methodology

Survey + 12 interviews + analysis



español

italiano

türkçe

РУССКИЙ



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

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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).

Thank you!

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