Abstract submitted to the 5th Equality Diversity and Inclusion Conference 2012  
23-25 July, Toulouse, France

Stream 3: “The Politics of Diversity”

**The Macro and Micro Politics of Diversity in Public Services**

The Employment of Immigrants as Political Arena

Renate Ortlieb

**Biographical Note**

Renate Ortlieb has been Full Professor of Human Resource Management at University of Graz, Austria, since 2009. She completed her Ph.D. in 2002 and her “habilitation” in 2009 at Freie Universität Berlin. Her research interests include gender and power relations in organizations, human resource strategies focused on ethnic minorities and immigrant workers, employee absenteeism and company pension plans. Publications: Journal of the Royal Statistical Society - Applied Statistics, Management Revue, Schmalenbach Business Review and others.

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Out of the many actors concerned with diversity, the state is doubtlessly one of the most powerful. However, it is also a double-headed actor. On the macro level it passes laws and political action programmes, whereas on the micro level it has to act itself within these frameworks − which sometimes turns out to be rather difficult. Using the employment of immigrants by the Austrian state as an example, this paper analyses how macro political aims concerning diversity conflict with human re­source practices and micro politics in public administrations.

Similar to many other European nations, Austria has a long tradition regarding mi­gration and cultural diversity. In 2010 more than 1.5 million people, equalling 19.2 per cent of the Austrian population, had an immigrant background (Statistics Aus­tria, 2011). The Austrian state fosters the social and economic integration of these people through several institutions, for example the “National Action Plan for Inte­gration (NAP)”. The NAP was developed in 2009 by a panel of governmental and non-governmental experts, lead by the federal ministry of internal state affairs. Among other issues, the NAP states that the employment of immigrants in the public sector should be increased, for instance, in the police, judiciary, schools, job centres, and in the health sector (Austrian Integration Fund, 2010). While the NAP’s state­ments partly refer to the function of the state as a model employer, it also uses ar­guments that are attached to the diversity (management) discourse, in particular to the business case for the integration of immigrants into the workforce (cf. Riccucci, 2002). For instance, the state can utilize the language and cultural skills associated with an immigrant background to facilitate and accelerate legal proceedings or criminal prosecution (Healy *et al.,* 2010; Pitts and Wise, 2009).

However, findings of a case study in two Austrian public administration units (Ortlieb and Stadler, 2011) point to difficulties associated with the integration of immigrants into the workforce. Despite the macro political intent to increase work­force diversity and equal opportunity, historically grown human resource practices jeopardize the recruitment and promotion of immigrants. These practices in turn are tightly connected with personal interests of politicians (which make the final re­cruitment decision) and with the Austrian macro discourse regarding immigrants.

The paper will conceptualize the employment of immigrants in public services organizations as a political arena, where many actors − e.g., representatives of the gov­ernment, political parties, the public services union and other non-governmental organizations, diversity management consultants, scientists, heads of human re­source management departments, other managers responsible for recruitment, co-workers and migrant job applicants − try to advance their interests. On the basis of interviews with managers, other employees and further experts in the Austrian public sector, supplemented by written documents such as mission statements, it will provide a reconstruction of the political struggles concerning the employment of immigrants, thereby also pointing to opportunities and power bases that enforce their integration into public services organizations.

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