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Titel: The dilemma of bridge builders: Local politicians with a migration background.

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Summary

The political representation of people with a migration background is increasingly becoming the focus of public and academic attention. Even though people with a migration background are still underrepresented in German parliaments, an upward trend can be observed at all political levels including at the municipal level. Demographic change and the increasing number of naturalizations will further increase the electoral relevance of persons with a migration background.

The focus of this book is on how local councilors who themselves are international migrants, or whose parents have migrated internationally, perceive their political positionalities. The book explores who they want to represent and how they negotiate their positioning as political actors. The work focuses on two local contexts (Hannover and Frankfurt/Main) where interactions between electorate and representatives are particularly immediate. The research contributes a new perspective to the literature by engaging with both political practices and self-perceptions of research participants.

Analyses of political practices from the perspective of the everyday clearly show that local councilors with a migration background participate in different arenas of action in which different expectations have to be negotiated. These expectations create a central tension where being a representative for a migrant and/or ethnic group clashes with the expectation to be an "eligible" and electable candidate for all voters and with being ‘placeable’ within the party mainstream. The resulting balancing process produces four ideal-typical positions. The position of the *social climbers* is based on one of the central narratives of modern and meritocratic societies. According to this narrative, difference and inequality in society (class, ethnicity, etc.) are hurdles that make it difficult for anyone to reach the higher ranks. At the same time, the position of the social climber symbolizes that ascent is possible for those who make sufficient efforts. The second ideal type is the position of the *role model* which characteristically produces activities that aim at promoting the participation of young people with a migrant background. In the third position - the *migrant lobbyist* - local councilors act as a voice for the interests of migrants. The fourth position – the "*normal" local politician* - visibly relativizes the migrant background, downplaying it and denying ethnic attributions their absoluteness.

The study finds that almost all research participants at times adopt all of the outlined positions. The study can thus show that MPs with a migration background have to be able to act as bridge builders who can move in and out of different positionalities in order to generate their own options for action. This is due to strong entrenchment of expectations of what roles politicians with particular backgrounds can inhabit in the local political field. What emerges is a situation where anyone who wants to have realistic political career prospects cannot refuse to be a bridge builder. How this role is enacted however is up to each

individual and leaves room for variation and agency. The figure of bridge builder is based on the idea that the existing contradictory expectations can be balanced by individual politicians. There is a reflexive process at play that continuously reverts back to the figure of the bridge builder who is expected to facilitate links between migrants and broader society whilst following universalistic goals as well as standing for particularistic interests.

The four positions allow to navigate between this seemingly ludicrous fault line between expectations and possibilities for action. The perceived expectations of representation are reflected in the image of the bridge builder, and to a certain extent reflect the conditions under which local councilors operate. The ideal types symbolize that difference exists, but can only be politically mobilized if it can be bridged or overcome. This figure of bridge builders is more than just a position MPs with a migration background can take. Rather, it covers the variances of the presented positions. Local councilors believe that their migration background is perceived by the parties and other urban actors as a resource and potential asset. In public debates, however, discourses on political Islam, the unwillingness to integrate of certain groups and alleged parallel societies can be found. The ambivalences these narratives entail create a demand for bridge builders who can mediate between immigrants and mainstream society.