Consumer Acculturation

Between

Consumer Protection and Asylum Policy
Outline

1. Background, objectives and methodological design of the research project „Consumer Protection and Socialization of Refugees“ 03/2017 - 02/2020

2. Results
   - Restricted market access: asylum policy
   - Challenges for (refugees as) consumers: the German market
   - Consumer acculturation and its agents

3. Conclusion
Consumer Competence in the Market Society

• Consumer Policy in Europe: Empowered, responsible Citizen-Consumers
• Consumer Agency: Mediating personal needs and public welfare in everyday life
• Preconditions: Freedom of choice (legal); access to information and knowledge about the complex relations of consumption, production, and their social and ecological consequences; connection to consumer discourses (intermediaries like foodwatch)
How do we get competent consumers: Consumer Socialization

• Agents (family, peers, media)
• Incorporating practices (seeking information, choosing, complaining) that entail
• Cultural norms and values (»Cultural categories are the fundamental coordinates of meaning, representing the basic distinctions that a culture uses to divide up the phenomenal world.« McCracken 1986, p. 72)
• Socio-economic factors (financial ressources, education, gender)
• Local/digital infrastructure
Preconditions to act competent as Consumer

- As a result of consumer socialization: Identify needs, market knowledge (Nullmeier 2002), meta-education (Oehler 2017)
- Situative factors: Mental Capacity, planability, availability of information and consumer goods/services
- Access to infrastructure and markets (legal, economic)
“The canons for acceptable consumptive behaviour indicate that material goods have an inherent ranking according to the level of necessity of the consumer. Ironically, it is the well off (who have less needs) who establish this ranking.” (van Bavel und Sell-Trujillo 2003, p. 349)

→ Consumption and ist hidden rationality can only be understood in the context of lifeworld
Methodological Design: Focused ethnography

• Interviews and participant observation with refugees from Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria
• Interviews with consumer acculturation agents: volunteer helpers, community workers (MBE: migration consultancy for adult immigrants), teachers of the German integration courses, translators, stuff from EAE (initial reception center) and interim accommodations (janitors, security)
• Collecting data online: You Tube videos, guides (welcome to Germany), apps, websites
Refugees as flawed consumers? Some results

Consumer acculturation shaped by asylum system

- Social welfare for refugees before recognition as non-cash benefit, sometimes supplemented with pocket money
- Goods voucher (instead of cash) determine what and where to buy
- Mostly after leaving the initial reception center, the region for settlement is set by a distribution key
- Arrival process: long, uncertain, stressful, no access to education or work or consumer information or internet
- Resettlement in rural areas complicates access to ethnic shops and support
The Right to Consume?

Refugees threatened by exclusion in several dimensions

- Political: None of the preconditions to participate as citizen-consumer is met
- Social: Discrimination
- Economically: Secondary markets
- Culturally: Practices of consumer work in a digitalized market economy
Agents of Consumer Acculturation Ia

Personal attachment
- Family in country of origin
- Family and extended network in Germany
- Media Agents

Acculturation Strategies: Providing cultural knowledge, emotional support/burden, facilitate arrival, determining
Agents of Consumer Acculturation Ib

Volunteers

- Important support, especially on the housing market
- But choosing the refugees they like to support by own criteria
- Ability to support in distinct consumer fields is restricted
- Strategies of consumer acculturation differ widely between: Explaining, accompanying, deciding, teaching, negotiating, withdrawal
Agents of Consumer Acculturation II

Unvolunteer Support

- Security staff: First interaction partners in reception centers
- Janitors: Basic support and orientation
- Sellers: Orientation in the city, advice and translation
- Integration course teachers: Trustful authorities and important mediators of support

Strategies: improvising, provide orientation in the local environment, mediating assistance, insisting on cultural norms
N: Most difficult are the first five days, that you have to arrive somewhere new, knowing nothing, not where the next bus stop is, where to shop, after the first few days they get organized somehow and then they get information among each other. But the first days, it is difficult. Because a communal worker is not always available.

M: We are the first persons they meet and this is why expectations on us are very high. Somehow they think we could tell them everything. We can say, to which doctor to go and, yes, we are the all-supplier for them and yes, in that sense we are the first persons, who are there for them and the first contacts. And so it is clear that hope is set on us and that they expect a lot. (Interview Janitors, p. 131)
Agents of Consumer Acculturation III

Organized Support

- Agencies of Integration (i.a. AWO, Caritas, MBE)
- Consumer Agencies
- Religious/migrant groups
- Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Strategies: Top-down and come-in structure, adjustment only temporary and project based (e.g. WEBi-Tipp)
أخبار علاء محمد

"في الأصل، كانت هذه الندوة مزمعة لعرض الفوائد وال xmlDoc

التي توفرها الكارت في الأماكن العامة، ولكن في النهاية، تم منحها لمحة عامة من الصور التي قدمها الفرد.

أنا غير متأكد من مدى فائدة هذه الندوة، ولكن من فضلك، نحن نريد مساعدة الجمهور في الاستفادة من خدمات الكارت.

عذراً، لم أتمكن من العثور على مزيد من المعلومات حول هذه الندوة.

Alaa Mohamed
Conclusion and theoretical implications

Theoretical starting point of the project
- Penalozas model helpful for research design
- Interpretation: Askegaard et al. (2005), Lüdicke (2010), Üstüner and Holt (2007)

Theoretical points of reference:
- Relation between acculturation, stress, and consumption
- Integration in and exclusion of consumer society (Bauman 1998; Jacob Miller 2019, Williams 2003)
- Socialization (Geulen 2011; Böhnisch, Lenz, Schröer 2009)
Research Perspectives

• Limitations of the project
• Everyday life after flight
• Exclusion/Poverty of refugees (need for statistical data)
• Strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation (sociology and psychology)
• Longitudinal studies
• Re-Embedding acculturation in socialization theory?
• Digital consumer acculturation
Thank you for your kind attention!
References


B: (Laughter) Yeah and I stay there for 6 and half months. It really hurt.

I: Was it together with your family?

B: Yes. We were in one room like that. 3 children, me, my wife, and my mother. The room just like so was really hard. I never see like that and the- yeah (...) but something in the camp, that was really good. They came to us, they say going to be finished. You are not staying all your life here. They talk with us, they were good. Someday my little child - she likes the animals really - and there was a woman, she's name is Rosie's. In Germany it was the first woman, and she say I pick you tomorrow your all family to somewhere there're animal and it was a nice day. She take us with the car, yeah and I mean it's also there's somebody really they are good, they help us. They don't know us but they really help us. And also some they don't want to look at us. Every, anywhere and everybody is not the same also in this country somebody don't like us, but yeah (...) And after 6 months they give me transfer and I come to here to C-town. And now it's 4 months I'm here in C-town.

I: And now you've got a flat for your family.

B: Yeah it's not it's the house to (?Etage), the up, the Etage, upstairs I live in there and downstairs another family. But it's very good and more more better than camp. It's really good