Validation of immigrants' prior foreign learning as a framing practice

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the attempts by public officials and caseworkers to manage an overflow of immigrants in the labour market in Sweden. I draw on notions of framing and overflowing, inspired by Michel Callon's (1998) work on the organizing of market-based exchange relationships. I argue that validation is best understood as a *framing practice,* aimed at creating an understanding for the vastness of foreign experience − including skills and competence − of recent immigrants to Sweden, to make this experience measurable and manageable. Validation as a framing practice thereby exemplifies the widespread trust in framing as a way to normalise overflows − to turn overflows into normal flows. However, as the ethnography-inspired study reported here shows, repeated framing does not remove overflows; instead, it produces new and different types of overflows. In the conclusions, I emphasise the heavy investments required by validation in contrast with the fragility of the results it produces in the context of migration management.

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… where there is design, there is waste, and when it comes to designing the forms of human togetherness, the waste is human beings [Zygmunt Bauman, 2004:30].

1. Introduction

This paper explores the attempts by public officials and caseworkers to manage an overflow of immigrants in the labour market in Sweden. Sweden has for many years been the country in the European Union that has taken in the highest number of refugees per capita (UNHCR, 2015). Their integration into the labour market has on the other hand not been particularly successful (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2014; Joyce, 2015). Against the backdrop of growing flows of migrants across the globe (Castles & Miller, 2009; United Nations, 2015) and the more recent refugee "crisis" in Europe, calls for more effective migration management have become ubiquitous in Europe over the past two decades (see e.g. Council of the European Union, 2004; European Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2011:3).

These calls have met with resonance in Sweden, where labour market statistics consistently show that the level of employment among migrants—refugees and other immigrants and their family members—remains significantly lower than for Swedish-born

persons (Segendorf & Teljosuo, 2011). As a consequence, an arsenal of tools and procedures has been developed and introduced to manage this inflow of migrants on the labour market more efficiently, by supporting them into employment as part of their introduction program.

In this paper, I explore one such procedure in greater detail: the validation of foreign learning (in some countries called "recognition of prior learning", RPL, or accreditation of prior experiential learning, APEL). Swedish policy makers and other public officials described validation as an important part of the resettlement of recent immigrants and, more specifically, an important tool to manage what is perceived as an overflow[1] of migrants on the Swedish labour market − overflow in the sense that labour market participation for immigrants has been shown statistically to be well below that of Swedish-born persons.

I draw on notions of framing and overflowing, inspired by Michel Callon's (1998) work on the organizing of market-based exchange relationships. I argue that validation is best understood as a *framing practice,* aimed at creating an understanding for the vastness of prior (foreign) experience − including skills and

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[1] I want to be very clear here that I use the phrase "overflow of migrants" throughout the text to connote the consequence of framing practices, and not in any way to make a politically-charged statement regarding Sweden or any other European country overflowing with migrants. I wish to thank one of the reviewers for bringing the potential risk of misunderstandings concerning this issue to my attention.

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competence — of recent immigrants to Sweden, to make this experience measurable and manageable. Validation as a framing practice thereby exemplifies the widespread trust in framing as a way to normalise overflows — to turn overflows into normal flows. However, as the study reported here shows, repeated framing does not remove overflows; instead, it produces new and different types of overflows. In the conclusions, I emphasise the heavy investments required by validation in contrast with the fragility of the results it produces in the context of migration management. The study therefore puts in doubt the consensus of opinion — in Sweden and other countries — which portrays the effective management of migration, and the validation of migrants' prior learning as a panaceum, able to solve a wide range of educational, political and social ills.

The paper is structured as follows. I begin by explaining the emergence of the idea of validation in Sweden, showing how it became connected to the integration of recent refugees and other immigrants. Then I suggest that validation can be seen as a framing practice, aimed at managing what policy makers, researchers and other commentators in Swedish society perceive as an overflow of migrants into the contemporary Swedish labour market. Next, I show how repeated framing fails to remove the overflow, and how the new frames produce new overflows. I end listing the insights of this study showing how these may have implications for other domains of migration management. The focus is in particular on challenges associated with translating prior experiences, skills and competence gained in one time/space with the tools, methods and practices of another time/space.

2. Towards validation as a framing practice

Validation of prior learning initially concerned higher education only. In the wake of the focus on student-centred pedagogical approaches at the US universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, validation was described as a tool for social justice, bringing academia and the rest of society closer together (Michelson, 1996). Even later validation took place predominantly in more formalised educational settings such as schools and universities; other places honoured the validation results (degrees and certificates) produced in such settings.

Over the last two decades, interest in validation has become ubiquitous — in Sweden and elsewhere (see e.g. Colardyn & Bjørnavold, 2004; Jarvis, 2007; Andersson & Osman, 2008; Stenfors-Hayes, Griffiths, & Ogunleye, 2008; Andersson & Guo, 2009; Diedrich, Walter, & Czarniawska, 2011). Researchers, policymakers and practitioners alike have become interested in validation as the means of promoting equality and inclusion in education and training, of creating a more flexible labour market, and of promoting integration and social cohesion (see e.g. Harris, 1999; Jackson, 2011; Jarvis, 2007). In other words, validation is seen as a panaceum for many of the problems facing contemporary Western societies. Until recently, however, researchers have predominantly focused on the effects of validation for individuals, groups, organizations and countries, and largely ignored validation practices as such. Critical researchers have lately refined the literature on validation on methodological and theoretical grounds, challenging the conventional views of experiential learning and the particular readings of knowledge, pedagogy, learning, identity, governance and power, which these views privilege (see e.g. Andersson & Harris, 2006; Brine, 2006; Fejes & Nicoll, 2008; Field, 2000; Harris, 1999; Michelson, 1996).

Still, the prevalent approach to validation of prior learning focuses on the effects of validation by examining lifelong learning policies and their application to various groups (Chapman, Gaff, Toomey, & Aspin, 2005; Pitman, 2009; Stenfors-Hayes et al.,

2008). This research demonstrated that the agenda for lifelong learning is driven mostly by social inclusion, and it also showed the difficulties associated with implementing lifelong learning policies, including policies regarding the validation of prior learning. Yet many studies and reports adopted a managerialist, essentialising perspective (see e.g. Bjørnavold, 2000; Cedefop, 2009), taking for granted the idea that validation has a liberating effect, and that it promotes social justice and equity (e.g. Jackson, 2011). Such research is based on three assumptions. First, knowledge and skills are objects with essential characteristics. Second, people possess knowledge and skills, which are products of formal, informal and/ or non-formal learning (see e.g. Eraut, 2000). Third, there exist methods and tools with 'objective' characteristics that, if implemented correctly, can 'objectively' assess knowledge and skills. Like Clarke and Fujimura's (1992) laboratory scientists, striving to find 'the right tools for the job' in their experiments, validation's proponents search for the best tools to (objectively) identify, document and assess prior learning.

Some researchers have questioned such essentialising approaches to validation and lifelong learning. In a seminal article, Elaine Michelson (1996) criticised the validation literature for its focus on rationality and for treating knowledge as an entity with essential characteristics. Assuming the situatedness of knowledge and learning (the notions developed by Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1993), she argued for an understanding of validation in a particular context. Such a situated learning perspective has more recently been used to examine the validation of prior learning in specific contexts such as migration to Sweden (Andersson & Frejes, 2010).

A few studies have examined validation as an organizing practice consisting of struggles, negotiations, mediations; creating ambiguity and multiple demands from persons, groups and organizations involved, as well as producing a plethora of material artefacts. In organizational practice, the idea of validation is translated, made sense of, and materialised — or not — into a stable process, model, tool or method (Diedrich, 2013a, 2013b; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Joining this growing tradition, I suggest that validation can be understood as a framing practice. Framing, according to Callon (1998), implies a possibility of identifying overflows and containing them. Practice shows that overflows persist, while framing is a fragile and costly element of organizing, which produces overflows rather then eliminating them.

The role of overflow in management and organization studies has been acknowledged more recently (see e.g. Czarniawska & Löfgren, 2012; 2013). Franck Cochoy (2012) argued that management and overflow are adversative notions as management is about channeling flows, not overflows. Indeed, he argued, that if overflow occurs, the "over" can be seen as an indication that management has failed in its attempts at flow generation and control. Thus, once an overflow occurs, new practices and procedures are put in place to channel, reduce or even eliminate the excess. But, as has been suggested previously, managing one overflow problem can lead to a new one (see also Pinch, 2012). Also, as pointed out by Löfgren and Czarniawska (2012: 7), overflows do not have to be managed; they can also be spilled, lost or ignored, or remain unseen, undetected and unregistered. On the other hand, dealing with overflow may also generate new competencies, subjectivities, practices, routines, devices and rituals, and new coping strategies for organizations, groups and individuals.

In what follows, I shortly present the study that forms the basis of the present paper.

3. The study

In this text, I draw on material from fieldwork undertaken by me

between 2006 and 2011 as part of two commissioned evaluations of state-sponsored labour market projects in Sweden aimed at integrating migrants more effectively in the Swedish labour market. The first project was coordinated by the County Labour Board of West Sweden, while the second project by the Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education. My fieldwork consisted of nonparticipant observation (Czarniawska, 2014), open-ended interviews (Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 1993) and document analysis. I observed 27 workshops and meetings arranged as part of the projects and 12 validation activities in practice and took extensive field notes. The validations ranged from two hours to three days in length. Furthermore, over a period of 10 weeks I followed a "Qualification portfolio" course, a daily four-hour long course aimed at documenting recent immigrants' prior personal and vocational experiences and, using various job-seeking activities, at making them more 'job ready' for the Swedish labour market. The group of migrants attending the course consisted of four women and six men aged between 20 and 50.

In the course of the study, I conducted 73 interviews with public officials, caseworkers, educational experts and migrants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full.

I have also analysed documents, including official reports from the Swedish Government, reports published on the Internet, memoranda and notes taken by project members during the meetings, magazine and research journal articles, and other material published by the Swedish National Commission for Validation on the Internet such as official reports, educational material, and images, photos and utterances from the Public Employment Service (PES), the educational services providers (ESP) and other organizations.

The analysis focused on organizing practice. The analytical premises were that: (1) practice is difficult to understand simply by examining its products or outcomes; (2) practice involves joint efforts over time and is processual; and (3) meaning is continuously negotiated and mediated in a context. Influenced by a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I followed their precepts of constant comparative analysis. As I began analysing the field material, comparing the first interview with the second, and then the first and second interviews with the third interview, and so on, I was struck by the fact that there was no shared understanding of what actions and activities were to count as validation in the context of migration, what the object of validation should be, what validation should mean in the first place, and what its results and outcomes could be. In order to better interpret my results, I need to situate them in the history of labour migration in Sweden.

4. From overflowing migrants to overflowing foreign skills and competence

4.1. Framing 1: from immigration to integration

I begin my story with an "underflow" (Kunda, 2012), which occurred in Sweden after the Second World War: a severe labour shortage on the Swedish labour market in the 1950s and 1960s (see Table 1). This problem was addressed by encouraging labour migration from other Nordic countries (especially Finland) and southern European countries (especially Italy), and the numbers of labour migrants from these countries increased rapidly. As the migrants immediately went into employment, and as they were expected to return to their home countries at some stage, there were no specific attempts to integrate them in society at that time. Additionally, "integration" was not perceived as an important or problematic issue at all, as the migrants arrived from other European countries, some from the neighbouring ones (Dahlström, 2004).

In 1972, labour market immigration was halted due to increased pressure from the large trade unions (in particular the all-powerful LO), which saw it as a threat to their members' interests. Subsequently, skill-based labour immigration from other Nordic countries, directly linked to the industrial demand, dropped to around 5% of overall immigration, which became dominated by political refugees, for instance from Chile (Lundh & Ohlsson, 1999). Since that time, the main migrant categories have been refugees and asylum-seekers and their family members. For a number of years now Sweden has consistently taken in more refugees per capita than other member country of the European Union (see e.g. UNHCR, 2011; UNHCR, 2015) (in the latest information provided by the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2015), Sweden shares first place with Malta). At the time of my study, around 14% of Sweden's overall population of 9,3 million was born abroad (Statistics Sweden, 2009). This figure has further increased over the past few years. The largest groups of asylum seekers to Sweden today come from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Iraq (Swedish Migration Board, 2016) and the country's immigrant population is characterised by a high number of people in need of protection — a type of immigration that labour market economists have described as not intended to meet any immediate labour market needs (Segendorf & Teljosuo, 2011).

Successive migration and integration policies have acknowledged the reality of Sweden's growing ethnic diversity and have formulated explicit strategies for a multicultural society, based on equality, freedom of choice and co-operation (Eastmond, 2011). Internationally, Sweden is often described as a well-developed, liberal welfare state with a strong egalitarian and multiculturalist policy agenda (see e.g. Bloch & Schuster, 2002; Koopmans, 2010; Wiesbrock, 2011). Its welfare state policy is seen as playing an important role in the integration of immigrants, as it formally grants refugees and other immigrants the same rights as other citizens (Graham & Soininen, 1998). While Sweden shares this approach with other western European countries, its Scandinavian heritage is seen to have resulted in the emergence of a specific form of welfare state system — one that combines universal access to generous welfare services with the goal of full employment and growth (Halvorsen & Jensen, 2004; Sainsbury, 2012; Schierup, Hansen, & Castles, 2006). Achieving full employment has proven difficult though. This becomes apparent in the employment statistics that continue to show that employment levels among immigrants are significantly lower than among the Swedish-born population (Segendorf & Teljosuo, 2011; Statistics Sweden, 2009).

The solution to this perceived overflow of migrants is seen to lie in managing it more effectively (see e.g. Council of the European Union, 2004; European Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2011:3; Swedish Govt, 2008). Subsequently, an increasing number of tools, models and procedures have been developed to "properly" support the integration of migrants: activities to support migrants in the acquisition of a nationality, providing access to housing, mainstreaming immigrant integration, creating dialogue platforms, improving the governance of integration, empowerment of immigrants, educating immigrants, and facilitating their integration in the labour market (European Commission, 2010). These and other goals pursued through integration usually revolve around the idea that the precarious situation of recent refugees and other immigrants should be normalised as quickly and efficiently as possible by granting them equal rights in a country compared to the "native" population of that country (see e.g. Koopmans, 2010).

In 2009 the Swedish parliament passed a proposition (2009/10:60), which included a range of proposals for integration policy reforms. One of them was, the Establishment Reform, which came into effect on December 1, 2010 ("Law on the establishment of

Table 1
From an underflow of migrants to an overflow of foreign skills and competence in Sweden.

Year	1950	1972	2000	2010—
Type of policy	Integration policy			
Main form of immigration	Labour market immigration	Refugee and family member immigration		
Important integration activities performed by state authorities and other actors	Facilitating labour supply to companies and other organizations	Managing refugees and other immigrants in the welfare state	Developing "effective" tools/models for identifying foreign skills and competence for the labour market	
			Validating foreign skills and competence	

certain recent immigrants" 2010:197). The reform's goal was to put in place procedures to integrate recent immigrants into the Swedish labour market and society as soon as possible, by supporting them into employment, utilising their skills and competence in a better way and improving the coordination between the various state agencies' responsibilities (see §1, Law 2010:197). The state gave the Public Employment Service (PES) the task of translating the policy into practice through the introduction programme, which included incentives for immigrants to participate in the introduction activities offered. Unlike in other Western European countries, participation in these activities remained voluntary, however. Thus, the idea of integration has increasingly come to mean labour market integration.

4.2. Framing 2: supporting integration through mapping skills

The Swedish Migration Agency has by law (1994:137) the responsibility of welcoming and handling asylum seekers to Sweden from the point where they submit their application for asylum to the point where the person is handed the decision on their application, and is either received by a municipality to enter into an introduction program or needs to leave the country. In case of a positive outcome, the "recent immigrants" (as they are referred to once they receive their permanent residency permit and for a period of up to two years — in specific cases up to three years) enter the introduction programs nowadays run by PES.

The introduction programs can vary, but usually include Swedish language courses, cultural sensitivity training, career counselling, guidance by professional coaches, on–the-job-training or other training and education activities, and seminars teaching how to write a CV and act during job interviews (Diedrich & Styhre, 2013). To identify suitable activities, the PES caseworkers "map the immigrant", that is, interview an immigrant about his or her personal and professional background — often through an interpreter - and registering the information they are given in a database (Diedrich & Styhre, 2008). Based on the "map" thus produced, caseworkers then attempt to place their immigrant clients, as they do with all their clients, in an occupational category based on the Swedish National Labour Market Board's Occupational Classification System AMSYK.

4.3. Framing 2 does not eliminate overflow: the mapping of prior learning and experience does not work

My interlocutors described this work as challenging due to language problems (recent immigrants usually do not speak Swedish), and to lack of formal documents showing their prior education and training. The caseworkers see their immigrant clients as a problematic group of jobseekers and as different from their "normal" clients — the Swedish jobseekers. Still, a placement of a person into a category of the AMSYK system was crucial for the caseworkers, as they otherwise could not decide on further measures to be taken. In practice, this meant however that caseworkers frequently made use of residual categories in the system, such as

category, "jack-of-all-trades". Placement into such a residual category made any further decisions on how to handle the persons in question difficult (see also Bowker & Star, 1999) and the overflow of unemployed migrants persisted.

While the PES caseworkers blamed the problems of categorisation on the characteristics of the immigrants themselves, others blamed the PES. Senior municipal and state officials repeatedly criticised the PES caseworkers, claiming that they did not understand the intricacies of various occupations, lacked the technical knowledge required to produce a "good" map of the immigrant, did not know how to ask the "proper" questions, or where to look for the "correct" answers. As a result of such wrong mapping,

> …, people [immigrants] could be registered with the Public Employment Service as builders for five, six, seven, or eight years. And only after that might it become apparent that this person wasn't a builder [Vocational expert employed by professional committee].

The expert, after undertaking another assessment judged the immigrant not to be a builder, but a concreter. Some years later a senior PES official corroborated this view of the deficiency of the PES caseworkers' mapping exercise when she in an interview referred to a PES survey that had recently shown,

> […] that of the 3000 immigrants registered in our databases, 40% have an "indeterminate occupation". That shows us, that we need to become better at asking the right questions [Senior PES representative].

According to the survey, the PES representative told me, members of the group "non-Nordic immigrants" were described as possessing highly "fragmented" occupational backgrounds, and "weak" educational backgrounds with high rates of illiteracy. These sentiments were echoed in the validation projects I followed. One vocational expert said, for example:

> If we look first and foremost at those who come to us today from other parts of the world, almost all of them have obvious shortcomings in relation to the demands we have today within our industries [Vocational expert HT].

Many public officials and vocational experts I talked to believed that as a result of being consigned to the wrong occupational categories or to a residual category such as "indeterminate occupation", immigrants were not placed in jobs or in adequate training activities and thus did not become not integrated. This was in contrast to previous research that has argued that in Sweden (and elsewhere) problems of integration tend to be constructed squarely in terms of the characteristics of the arriving groups, and not based on the structure and setting of the receiving society (see e.g. Eastmond, 2011, p. 282). In the case I studied, negotiations involving various actors were still on-going about whether or not the problems of integration should be understood as connected to

the characteristics of the arriving groups or to the inadequacies in the bureaucratic setup.

4.4. Framing 3: new maps are needed — validating immigrants' prior foreign learning

A solution appeared on the horizon: the validation of prior learning. According to a definition by the Swedish government, validation is,

> … a process that involves the structured assessment, valuation, documentation, and acknowledgement of the knowledge and competence that an individual possesses irrespective of how these were acquired [Swedish Ministry of Education 2003:23, 2003, p. 19, *my translation*].

The idea of validation had appeared in Sweden in connection with the *Adult Education Initiative* (Kunskapslyftet), an elaborate education program run by the Ministry for Education from 1997 to 2002 (see e.g. Swedish Govt. Official Reports 2001:78, 2001). As part of this initiative, validation had been positioned as a vital part of a process whereby the prior learning of *every* citizen is recognised, and the results of which are used to channel persons into further, formal learning activities and programs. Thus the vision associated with validation in Sweden is that *all* learning, formal, informal and non-formal is valuable, no matter where or when it has been achieved — it just needs to be focused on, identified and documented.

The idea of validation became connected to migration and integration of recent immigrants when Swedish policy makers highlighted the importance "to validate the prior learning of persons with foreign backgrounds in order to facilitate integration in society and entry into the labour market" (Swedish Integration Board, 2002; Swedish Govt. Official Reports 2003:75, 2003). Some years later the Swedish efforts in this direction were furthermore highlighted when the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) recognised validation as an "effective means" of integrating recent immigrants into Swedish society and the labour market (see e.g. Cedefop, 2009). The project leader of one regional validation project thus explained to me to the perceived problem that validation was supposed to address:

> In Sweden, people always begin by saying 'a person from Iraq who came here in 1994.' You never hear them say 'an engineer who came to Sweden' … We need to change that! [Senior County Labour Board Official (Project leader)]

The project leader here echoed the ubiquitous view that ethnic categorisation constructs (unwanted) difference, while a focus on occupational background, qualifications, vocational experiences and prior learning constructs (desirable) similarity: engineers are educated in both Sweden and Iraq; people engage in lifelong learning everywhere, etc. Validation, in other words, was understood as a remedy against discrimination of migrants on the Swedish labour market.

4.5. Framing 3 does not work either: one validation is not like another

A large number of local, regional and national labour market projects was initiated in Sweden, aiming at developing and introducing viable procedures for validating the prior learning of migrants. In contrast to the UK or France, Sweden at the time of study did not have a national system for validating prior learning, and the responsibility for the development of validation procedures was delegated to various actors. The projects initiated often aimed at establishing administrative structures and routines for validation, at developing new validation models in industries that do not yet have such models as well as refining the existing ones, and at testing the models on a predetermined number of immigrants (see e.g. Diedrich, 2011; Diedrich, 2013a, 2013b; Swedish Agency for Public Administration, 2013). Validation has however not yet delivered on the high hopes invested in it and immigrants have not established themselves quicker on the Swedish labour market (Swedish Agency for Public Administration, 2013).

As a result, in Sweden validation continues to be used as a label for a variety of different activities. The assessments are usually carried out by vocational specialists and may last from a few hours to a few days. They can consist of one or more of the following activities: an "exploratory conversation", where a training specialist asks the person about his or her past experiences and professional background; a computer-based multiple-choice test, with or without a time limit; and a practical assessment in a simulated work environment under the auspices of a vocational trainer. The results from the assessments are reported in the form of certificates or other formal documents issued by the trade bodies.

In the following, I will take a closer look at two sites where validation activities were carried out as part of two different integration projects run between 2006 and 2011. The two episodes — one depicting an exploratory conversation and one depicting an occupational assessment — are characteristic examples of the kind of validation activities I came across over the years involving recent immigrants. They highlight an important issue: while the idea of validation is translated differently in each case, one commonality is that foreign skills and knowledge do not become recognised.

4.5.1. Partial frame 1: validation as exploratory 'mapping' Dmitri[2] from Chechnya

As part of a regional integration project run by the County Labour Board of West Sweden, Dmitri, a Chechen man in his fifties, is scheduled to be validated as a truck driver. His PES caseworker determined that he possessed an occupational identity as a truck driver and wanted this to be confirmed. Dmitri speaks very little Swedish and a translator has been booked for the meeting. The translator did not arrive and Dmitri's 13-year-old son who speaks Swedish was asked to assist. Stefan, the vocational expert, sits down in front of a desk and computer and asks Dmitri and his son to sit down close to him so that they can see what he is doing. Stefan begins by checking Dmitri's details. After briefly asking Dmitri about his schooling, he proceeds to his work experience. Dmitri has difficulties explaining what he has done after school. With the help of Dmitri's son and pictures on his computer, Stefan finds out that Dmitri has operated a forklift truck. He has also driven a taxi, a bus and during five years trucks. Stefan continues to inquire about Dmitri's prior experiences:

S: […] What other jobs did you have?

D: I opened my own auto repair shop.

Dmitri said that he ran the repair shop with 14 employees between the wars in Chechnya. The airport where he had worked before was, after all, destroyed.

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[2] The names are fictitious. The contrast between referring to immigrants by names while differentiating the Swedish-born validators by their profession is intentional.

S: Did you repair cars or trucks?

D: Cars.

S: Russian cars?

D: Yes, but also Mercedes and BMW.

While Stefan adds the information in the computer, Dmitri tells his son that they didn't have any tools and were required to find or develop their own solutions.

[Field notes from observation of an occupational assessment for truck drivers]

Stefan documented the results from occupational assessment and issued a certificate, which he sent to Dmitri's PES caseworker. The certificate summarised Dmitri's prior learning and recommended further steps to develop his skills and competence for the Swedish labour market – but it did so in terms of his experience as a truck driver only.

While this does not have to be seen as a problem as such – after all, Dmitri was sent by his caseworker to be validated as a truck driver – the case nevertheless draws attention to the idea that as validation is translated into practice in the form of an exploratory conversation, it produces an overflow of foreign skills and knowledge. His other experiences, which he mentioned during the conversation, were not part of the summary and no recommendation was made as to how to further develop any skills and knowledge connected to these experiences (e.g. of running a company under adverse conditions) in preparation for further validation or placement into internships or training activities aimed at labour market integration.

4.5.2. Partial frame 2: validation as simulating practice

Another way in which the idea of validation is translated into practice is as a tool for assessing prior learning as close to the practice in question as possible. Proponents of validation argue that such practical assessment has a much better chance of ensuring specific successful outcomes with regards to labour market integration of immigrants as this type of assessment is a much "purer" form of validation compared to the computerised tests or the exploratory conversations, as it allows the immigrants, according to one project representative I interviewed, to "really show what they can do".[3]

A group of men from Iraq

The following episode is part of the validation of prior foreign learning of a group of men from Iraq as goldsmiths in a workshop of the Craft Academy, a vocational training college for students participating in the vocational training programs of the Swedish higher secondary schooling system. The school did not specialise in training goldsmiths, but was a training college for a large variety of different crafts.

As the group of Iraqi men entered the workshop, the following dialogue ensued between the master goldsmith, one of the Iraqis and one of the college's vocational trainers:

Master goldsmith: I thought that we'll today do one cutting exercise and one soldering exercise. If you think that you're very good at something, you're welcome to show me what you can do …

Participant 1: I'd like to produce the ring you showed us earlier (the Master goldsmith had shown them a ring he had produced).

Master goldsmith: Oh, that won't be possible. We don't have those materials here … and in any case, diamonds and white gold are too expensive.

Vocational teacher: What do you want to work with today? Nickel silver or brass?

Master goldsmith: Brass is enough.

[Field notes from observation at craft academy]

The choice of tools and materials available to the participants was governed among other things by the fact that they found themselves in a workshop of a large vocational school within the Swedish training system, not a college *specialising* in training or assessing goldsmiths. As only one such college remains in Sweden, it could not have been used for financial, logistical and practical reasons. The master goldsmith pointed to the challenges this created:

These are difficult conditions, because they don't have their own tools and because the flame (the heat) is different to what they are used to. […]

Well, this is actually quite a nasty form of validation that we're doing here. Usually it takes many weeks, even if I have a newly employed goldsmith who knows Swedish, until I feel that I have him on board. […]. [Conversation with Master goldsmith]

The master goldsmith acknowledges here that the validation activities do not do justice to the prior learning of the participants, when compared to the ways he usually assesses the skills and knowledge of his apprentices. During the validation activity the following scene takes place:

While some of the men are engaging in tasks such as soldering to show their skills, the Master goldsmith asks one of the men watching the others while he waits to show his skills a few questions. With the aid of the interpreter he finds out that the man has worked with designing patterns and doing engravings. He subsequently asks him to do a design and leaves him to it. The man draws three different patterns on the paper in front of him: some doves, a flower and the name of a person. The master goldsmith returns after a while and is very impressed with the patterns. He tells me that this person obviously has a lot of experience in producing these kinds of designs. [Field notes from observation at Craft Academy]

Later on, he shares his thoughts on the men's prior learning:

My understanding of the countries these guys come from is that a person works very specialised: one person solders, one person cuts … they have specialist skills, but they lack breadth [of Swedish goldsmiths]. [Conversation with Master goldsmith]

The case of the goldsmith validation shows how the procedure is implicated in performing the immigrants as "specialists", in soldering or in cutting metal, but not as professional "goldsmiths". It brings to the fore and stabilises this performance and situates the immigrants as different to Swedish goldsmiths, who "can do everything" (Conversation with Master goldsmith). Furthermore, the case of the goldsmiths once again shows how some knowledge and skills, while identified during the procedure, do not become recognised and validated – in this case the specialist skills of the Iraqi men or the design skills of one of them.

Recent immigrants, who are validated, have usually not had the

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[3] Interview with project representative.

time or opportunity to work within their professions in Sweden. Therefore, as part of the validation of their *prior* learning, the migrants have to interrelate with concepts and objects (human and non human)—tools, materials and Swedish experts —many of which, are not part of their *prior* practice as auto mechanics, truck drivers or goldsmiths, but of practice in Sweden. And the prior learning, which the vocational experts identify as relevant, is the learning that is recognisable to a Swedish training expert, rather than to a company owner in Grozny, or a goldsmith in Baghdad. Thus, the actions of the there-and-then (of a goldsmith in Iraq) do not become connected through validation to the actions of the here-and-now (of a goldsmith in Sweden).

To sum up, two things happened as a result of the validation activities: the migrants' idiosyncratic skills and competence embedded in the "there-and-then" were ignored, while a lack of skills and knowledge in the "here-and-now" was brought to the fore. The episodes presented demonstrate that while validation is enacted differently in different settings, one common aspect may be identified: an overflow of foreign skills and knowledge.

5. Different frames only change the type of overflow: now it is foreign skills that are overflowing

The common assumption is that overflow comes first, and is followed by the attempts at managing it — by framing. Callon (1998) suggested that it is framing that creates overflow, and this study confirms his observation. In the 1950s and 1960s there was no overflow of migrants: immigration to Sweden was a harmonious flow and migrants ended up in employment on the Swedish labour market. Successive Swedish immigration and integration policies and practices then produced overflows by introducing frames such as the country's asylum policy, which was still permeable ("everybody in need of protection is welcome here"), but later its integration policies (migrants are welcome as full-fledged citizens when they become integrated into the labour market).

Policy makers and public officials describe recent immigrants as a valuable resource on the labour market, at the same time as they refer to them as belonging to a "problematic" group that for many reasons takes too long to become integrated into the Swedish labour market. Consequently, the introduction program, and validation in particular, aims at managing this overflow by speeding up their labour market integration. It can be seen as the managerial attempt to handle integration in a more efficient and effective way by means of tools and methods for identifying, mapping and further developing skills and competence, which are demanded by the Swedish labour market. Furthermore, the validation of prior foreign learning is described as one of the most important tools and procedures aimed at making recent immigrants "job-ready" in Sweden. Yet my study shows that repeated framing did not lead to removal of overflow. In fact, the validation procedure produces new types of overflow, in the form of the experience, skills and competence that do not pass muster in the Swedish context — the diverse experiences of somebody who has not only driven trucks, but has also had a small business repairing cars, and refuelled airplanes at the airport in Grozny, or skills of somebody who not only made furniture, but had also run a company building tailor-made kitchens in his home country. The attempts at managing the overflow of migrants through frames is thus less about mobilising resources in the wake of large-scale immigration and more about the performing of "temporal tricks to balance overflows" (Cochoy, 2013). Invariably, those attempts at balancing out things, lead to further overflows.

Are the public officials and caseworkers incompetent? No, but — unsurprisingly — the vocational experts and public officials focus on what is important to them — local ideas of professionalism and expertise, on "how we do things around here". Their actions could of course be interpreted as discriminatory behaviour and ethnocentrism, but it is not my intention to do so. From the perspective of managing overflow, they can be seen as technicians who were given the task of organizing the everyday work of integration in contemporary society characterised by growing flows of refugees and other migrants. As part of these organizing practices, new ways of managing and still new overflows are being invented. One way consists in normalising overflows: the excess of non-usable skills has been identified in validation procedures, and taken for granted. But the overflow continues, so new frames are sought for. One example is channelling recent immigrants into internships and other non-permanent employment. It is still too early to say anything about the results of such internships - whether or not they indeed lead to an increase in levels of employment among immigrants, changing the overflow into a controlled flow.

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