How Do They Make It?
Perspectives on labour market participation among descendants of immigrants in Sweden

Pinar Aslan
This is a compilation dissertation based on a comprehensive summary and four empirical articles. The overarching aim of the dissertation is to study influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of employed descendants of non-European, non-Western immigrants in Sweden, from their own perspectives. The results are based on qualitative interviews with 9 men and 12 women, all born in Sweden with two immigrant parents. At the time of the interviews, the participants were aged 25–35 years and had been employed for a minimum of six months, most of them for at least three years.

Article I analyses and discusses family influences on the occupational aspirations of the descendants of immigrants. It employs a theoretical framework of cultural capital to demonstrate that descendants’ interpretations of their parents’ experiences and living conditions before, during, and after migration shape and positively influence their own occupational aspirations. The article also shows that siblings may function as important transferrers of knowledge and information.

Article II examines how the descendants of immigrants perceive that interactions with public officials have benefited their occupational aspirations and attainments. Using the concept of social capital as an analytical tool, the article draws three conclusions. First, public officials who establish a sense of connectedness in interacting with descendants of immigrants may transmit substantial symbolic resources to them. Second, it is important for public officials to support their clients’ personally meaningful goals and to focus on possibilities for achieving those goals. The article also shows that public officials may help descendants of immigrants to form and fulfil occupational aspirations by transmitting important knowledge and information.

Article III explores how descendants of immigrants understand labour market conditions, and how these conditions influence their occupational pathways and strategies. The article employs the concept of habitus to analyse approaches and strategies on the labour market in relation to objective conditions. Three themes are presented in the article. The first theme, being in the "right" field, covers respondents working in branches with labour shortages and/or a high demand for employees with an immigrant background. These respondents used their personal backgrounds as "selling points", turning the general disadvantage of having an immigrant background into an advantage. The second theme covers respondents who could learn through failing in entering and participating on the labour market, indicating a trial-and-error approach. The third theme deals with respondents who had actively searched for jobs in branches which value their particular skill set. The article highlights the important relationship between active individual agency and external, objective opportunities and constraints.

Article IV explores perceptions of labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals among men and women of migrant descent. Starting from the literature on work, family, and gender in a context of migration, and in relation to the Swedish social and political context, four themes are presented in the results. The male and female respondents viewed labour market participation from different, gendered, perspectives. The women saw labour market participation as a source of emancipation, whereas the men perceived it as a means for providing for a current/future family. Thus, while they depicted themselves as dedicated to norms of gender equality, they also expressed gender-biased views on work and family arrangements. These gender-biased views largely reflect those of Swedish people in general, as demonstrated in earlier studies. Nonetheless, the results reveal that the immigrant heritage of the descendants of immigrants influences their views on labour market participation, perceptions of gender norms, and parenting ideals. The article shows how these descendants interpret and actively challenge gender inequalities in the immigrant generation in ways that support intergenerational changes in work-family arrangements.

Keywords
Descendants of immigrants, labour market, occupational attainments, occupational aspirations, labour market conditions, social capital, cultural capital, habitus, institutional support, collectivism, socioeconomic mobility, qualitative research