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THE INTERNET AS A MEANS OF STUDYING TRANSNATIONALISM AND DIASPORA?[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question, how the Internet can be used to study developments in migrants' interests, contacts and networks and so differentiate between transnational communities and Diaspora. As the Internet has become a central means of communication, especially true for geographically dispersed entities, the analysis of internet sites, their uses and the thus emerging communication paths can add to the understanding of differences and similarities of transnational communities and Diaspora. Based on empirical data and experiences collected as part of the authors´ ongoing research project on the political online activities from migrants in Germany , three different forms of national, transnational and international relationships will be discussed: transnational (online) communities, (virtual) Diasporas, and ethnic (online) public spheres.

Dieser Text beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, wie das Internet verwendet werden kann, um die Entwicklung von Interessen, Kontakten und Netzwerken von Migranten zu untersuchen und so zwischen einer transnationalen Gemeinschaft und einer Diaspora zu unterscheiden. Da das Internet zu einem zentralen Kommunikationsmittel geworden ist, insbesondere für räumlich von einander getrennte Gruppen, können die Analyse von Webseiten, ihre Nutzung und die daraus entstehenden Kommunikationswege dazu beitragen, Unterschiede und Ähnlichkeiten transnationaler Gemeinschaften und Diaspora zu verstehen. Auf Basis empirischer Daten und Erfahrungen aus dem aktuellen Forschungsprojekt der Autoren werden drei Formen nationaler, transnationaler und internationaler Beziehungen diskutiert: transnationale (online) Gemeinschaften, (virtuelle) Diaspora, und ethnische (online) Öffentlichkeiten.

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INTRODUCTION

Present day challenges in conceptualizing Diaspora and transnational migrant activities have lead to a bundle of different definitions of theoretical characteristics of a prototype group, without being able to analyse differences and commonalities in detail. The different typologies created (e.g. by Robin Cohen) have had the problem that most groups can be assigned to more than one type or that one group developed from one type to another over time (e.g. the Greek Diaspora in the USA turned from a trade Diaspora to a labour Diaspora) (see Kokot 2002: 35).

The Diaspora concept itself has evolved in the past years, from the original "old Diaspora" conception (Jewish, Armenian) defined by the groups´ concentration on return to the (imagined) homeland (see Safran 2004) to encompassing further characteristics such as a transnational relationship to both country of origin and host country, conceptualised now broadly as "new Diasporas" (see Grassmuck 2000). Such flexible and open definitions stress the particularity of each migrant group with its characteristics varying broadly. In this case almost all migrant groups could be defined as a ´transnational or new Diaspora´, thus making the concept itself quite meaningless. A narrower definition however can highlight structures and patterns of migrant contacts and networks better. In this respect a disassociation of Diaspora and transnationalism ideas could have more lucid results (see Cohen 1997; Faist 1999)

Another challenge to date is the classical triadic model (see Sheffer: 1986) that portrays the relationship between host and home country as well as the migrant community. It is criticized to be simplistic as it implies a homogenous migrant community in its activities and interests. This theoretical approach is central to most analysis, as interior differentiations of migrants´ contacts and goals are a methodological problem (see Adamson 2001: 158). Östergaard-Nielson summarizes that migrant activities in relation to host and home country "must be measured with a more finely meshed tool than is usually the case in the analysis of political change at domestic and international levels" (2002: 200).

In our paper we suggest that the internet could be that proclaimed finely meshed tool that can advance the studies and the comprehension of migrant networks and influence abroad and add to more fertile conceptions of Diaspora and transnationalism. The discussion of these concepts began (anew) simultaneously to the globalisation debate which shows that these ideas are closely intertwined. Additionally, new information and communication technologies (ICT) are one of the engines of globalisation processes what again adds to the importance and ongoing development of ICTs for migrant activities framed by globalisation.

This constellation alone makes it evident that Diaspora and transnationalism concepts have strong connections to the rise and evolvement of ICT, as Adamson points out: "In reality, the increased ´diazporization´ of ethnic groups around the world is a structural development related to the new opportunities for communication and transportation presented by available technologies" (2001: 158). Especially, the new rise in Diaspora activities and studies and the change of dynamics in the role played by migrant groups abroad in politics since the development of internet show that processes and contacts between dispersed groups (in different countries) are now enabled, not possible before in this degree (see Adamson 2001: 156). In fact, as Scherer and Behmer assume, community structures destroyed by migration are often rebuilt only with the help of the internet, developing new forms of community abroad (2000: 297).

When studying Diasporas or migrants´ transnational activities factors such as social networks, identity construction, the local dimension of day to day life, their role in bridging national and cultural boarders, their position in the public sphere and their migration history are often analyzed (see Kokot 2002: 34). The internet can be an asset in the exploration of many of theses aspects, as it is central to most of these dimensions of migrants´ lives abroad:

1. "Diasporic communities have always relied on networks, which expanded from the immediate local to the transnational and global" (Georgiou 2002: 3). The internet is now the central framework for such **networks**, so that viewing structures online can let us gain insights on diasporic community characteristics. When the main avenues of influence of migrant groups are investigated, it becomes obvious that that these lie in the development of networks with NGOs and third political parties, the construction of a new (alternative) political identities, discourse within transnational space as well as fundraising and campaigning for action (see Adamson 2001: 160). For all of these influential activities the internet is a significant instrument, if not *the* central instrument used by Diaspora groups.

2. The construction of shared imagination is also crucial to sustaining migrant communities. Central hereby is the inter-group communication behaviour, which promotes identification and goal attainment. Today, internet platforms play a key role in this process as they further the retention or reawakening of **identities and imagined homelands**. As Georgiou put it: "The Internet has allowed most of these communities to discover and rediscover this shared imagination and commonality; it has taken even further the potentials for developing diasporic cultures of mediated, transnational and partly free from state control communication" (Georgiou 2002: 3). While ICT alone don't create a community, they enable the communication essential between its members.

3. The internet has in the mean time also taken up a central function in many migrants' **day to day lives** (Forum, E-Mail, Chat, Weblog, private Homepages and Ethno-Portal etc.). This implicitness of ICT in migrants´ lives is equivalent to the use of this technology by non-migrant citizens. Generally, it can be stated that most migrants use the internet as often as everyone else and for the same reasons (information, communication, and recreation). Newer studies herby show that the percentages of internet use by migrants is increasing steadily as well as their competence of the internet use itself (see ARD/ZDF 2007).

4. Diaspora and transnational communities form **bridges** between host and home countries. For the analysis of these bridges the internet can be used as a device, as they mainly consist of communicative relationships sustained to a large degree with the help of ICT. The significance of the internet for this can be understood, when it is kept in mind that the situation of exile and dispersal is constituted by a specific communication problem (Scherer/Behmer 2000: 283). This issue was to a large degree solved with the rise of ICTS (internet, mobile phone etc.). Thus, this technology has become a central means of communication for migrants, especially true for geographically dispersed entities. Therefore the analysis of internet sites, their uses and the thus emerging communication paths can add to the understanding of migrants´ bridging behaviour, as well as the differences and similarities of transnational communities and Diaspora.

5. A part from this, the internet as a meeting point of private and public, personal or communal shows and reflects different levels of migrant interaction. Such online platforms are used for the organisation of activities and for the publication of (alternative) information about the home country's or the Diaspora's situation. Through this information of the general public as well as other migrant community members "dispersed Diasporas gain political and community **visibility**" (Georgiou 2002: 2). By obtaining access to the public sphere as it exists online, topics can be kept on the public agenda in the host country or even beyond. This might well be the most relevant possible influence of Diaspora groups. Again, this aspect can be analyzed by monitoring the internet, as it is to a rising percentage becoming central for the public sphere. While the offline

public sphere is dominated by mass media, the internet highlights private, non-governmental actors, such as migrant groups and organisations.

6. Last but not least, also a vast number of resources are available on the internet about the **history** of individual migrant movements. The study of these is basic and central, when focussing on migrant groups´ behaviour. Quite a number of these online libraries and data collections have been published by migrant groups themselves, contributing to the survival of their culture.

All in all, using the internet as an approach to deciphering the characteristics of different prospects of migrant orientations and relationships seems to be able to provide insights into institutions, behaviour and novel developments online as well as offline (Wellman and Gulia 1999). However, one should not make the mistake and try to grasp all of theses groups of activities solely by viewing the internet. Though online spheres are the extension of offline worlds, they alone do not suffice for thorough analysis. Field studies of course can not be substituted, but the internet can add to the overview of different migrant communities´ characteristics. Online and offline worlds interact are not independent of one another, so that analyzing online behaviour also lets conclusions be drawn as to overall, general interests (also offline) (see Matei/Ball-Rokeach 2002: 409).

At the same time the analysis of internet phenomena aids in overcoming the above addressed problems of "methodological nationalism" and "groupism", as internet sites and uses are irrespective of national borders, focussing instead rather on topics and communication partners. When surveying websites, hyperlinks, content and user groups, it is not possible to confine the study to national boarders. The online network is grouped around topics and interests and not geographic background or neighbourhood proximity.

METHOD

The methodological possibilities inherent to internet research for the exploration of Diaspora and transnational communities will now be exemplified with the help of empirical data and experiences collected as part of the authors´ ongoing research project at the University of Muenster, Germany. As political interest and involvement of migrants in host and/or home country are eminent aspects of Diaspora and transnational communities (Morawska 2003), we focus the political activities of migrants from the former Soviet Union and Turkey on the internet. These two groups are the largest and most important migration groups in Germany, representing roughly 25 per cent of all migrants (Destatis 2008). During our analysis it became evident that not only are both groups very different, they are also within themselves heterogeneous. For this reason we decided to take a closer look at different migrant "subgroups", such as Belarusians, Kazakhs, Alevis as well as Kurds. The analysis of these groups is still ongoing; however, we will in the following be presenting some preliminary results from the Kurdish study.

Our method hereby consists of a content analysis of websites created and used by migrants for political activities (focussing on their thematic orientation, self-description and group boundaries), an analysis of the link structures of these websites (using a hyperlink analysis program to uncover networks) as well as a survey of the sites´ users and administrators (detecting individual interests beyond groupism).

Using a structured website search with the help of search engines and the snowball sampling method (Hawe/Webster/Shiell 2004), we studied websites created and used by migrants from the former Soviet Union and Turkey now living in Germany. In this analysis we viewed over 400 sites, of which 95

„Russian[2]" und 76 „Turkish" sites turned out be relevant for our research question that focussed on the political content of theses web pages. These sites were explored as to their year of establishment, their up-to-dateness as well as their political information, communication and participation features. Also site operators and the existing references to home and/or host country politics were assessed. All in all 20 websites were chosen for a more intensive content analysis and a survey of the sites´ operators and users.

Since our interest lay in uncovering organisational structures and orientations of migrants´ political online activities, we used a network visualization tool (Issuecrawler). This server-side internet network location software performed a co-link analysis of the entered 95 and 76 relevant URLs (see Rogers 2006: 2). The results of this inquiry could be viewed in form of lists and geographical visualizations of the network (see appendix figure A1-3). This method enabled us to reveal relationships, displayed online through hyperlinks, between different political websites and so to add to our understanding of the studied political spheres of migrants.

Additionally, we conducted an online user survey. Political online and offline activities of migrants from the former Soviet Union and Turkey were explored through an online questionnaire posted on the ten most relevant Russian and Turkish websites. In both cases, the questionnaire was available in two languages (German/Russian and German/Turkish). The form was completed by 136 persons from the former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan) and (up to date) 90 users with a Turkish migration background. 37.6 per cent of the first group indicated their ethnical background as Jewish, 21.8 percent as German and 20.3 percent as Russian. In the second group 92.2 percent indicated themselves as Turkish and 12.2 percent as German.

The sample is not representative due to the self selection of the participants (Dillman 2000: 209). Nevertheless, since drawing a representative sample in the internet is almost impossible, this procedure allows us to draw first explorative conclusions about the political internet use of migrants from the former Soviet Union and Turkey in Germany. By analysing the political activities of migrants in this way we hope to view the following dimensions of migrants´ orientations:

- internal interaction of migrants within one online-community and within one country (as to information and data exchange, discussion and political mobilization)

- interaction with the residents and organizations in the home country (input of alternative information; articulation of opposition, mobilising resistance)

- interaction with the residents and organizations in the host country (information about the situation in home country, lobbying for support)

- interaction and integration in an international public spheres (worldwide visibility and influence)

In compliance with Kokot (2002) we figure that rather than developing different concepts and then studying migrant groups to fit the definitions, vice versa is much more sensible. In analysing migrant activities we expose the characteristics of each group in order to compare these and conceptualize are finding in the end.

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[2] As the majority of websites and migrants analysed orginated in Russia and Turkey, we use the terms "Russian" and "Turkish" migrants or websites just as a simplification, without disregarding migrants from other countries of the former Soviet Union as well as migrants who do not assign themselves as Turks, but rather Kurds, Alevis or German-Turks or German-Russians.

RESULTS

3.1 WEBSITE-ANALYSIS

The website-analysis was mainly conducted in order to address the following questions: Which target groups do the sites have? Which political topics are treated with which priority? What language is used and how are the websites linked to each other? The most important results of this investigation are presented in the order of the mentioned main questions.

TARGET GROUPS

Migrants from the former Soviet Union are not the primary target group of eight out of the ten central political internet sites evaluated. The administrators of these sites more often stated that their website is designed for all Russian speaking users, people interested in the topics addressed, Russian culture and politics (for details see Seveker 2007). In contrast, nine out of ten of the surveyed Turkish administrators indicated that their primarily target group consists of persons of Turkish origin, who live in Germany respectively in Europe. Five administrators stated that they also address German-speaking web users. One administrator said that his site was supposed to serve as "a forum for exchange of experiences and opinions of all German speaking Turks, all their friends and those who are interested in them". The preliminary analysis of the Kurdish websites has shown that the target group of these sites is more international than the Turkish and Russian sites. These sites are not primarily designed for Kurds in Germany, but for Kurds everywhere in the world. Since many of these websites are blocked by the governments in Iran, Syria or Turkey, it can be assumed that the Kurdich websites are not used for communication between migrants and the inhabitants in the country of origin.

TOPICS

More than 50 percent of the evaluated Russian websites concentrate on transnational topics. In contrast, political topics with reference to Germany count for 19 per cent, and nine per cent of the websites concentrate solely on Russian topics. The emphasis of the analysed Turkish websites lies on German politics. Nearly 50 percent have a political reference to Germany. Main themes are "migration and integration" and current events, which particularly concern Turks in Germany (e.g. the house fire in Ludwigshafen). In contrast, only 17 percent of the websites refer to political developments in the country of origin. Political information from both countries is offered by 30 percent of the web pages. Beyond that, transnational topics are covered by only three percent of the web pages (for details see table 1). Kurdish sites show a strong focus on the Kurdish "cause". They are little aligned to German politics and/or integration topics. "Kurdish nationalism" stands out strongly.

Table 1: Geographical references to political topics on Russian and Turkish websites

	Percentage of Russian web-sites (N=95)	Percentage of Turkish web-sites (N=76)
Country of origin (Turkey/ former Soviet Union)	9,4	17,1
Germany	19,0	48,7
Both (Germany and country of origin	21,1	30,3
Others, e.g. transnational	50,5	3,9

LANGUAGE

The Russian language serves more often than German as the communication language of post -Soviet Migrants in the Web. 70 percent of the Russian websites use the Russian language, more than 30 as the only language. About 20 percent of the sites are exclusively in German. 24 per cent of the Web-sites are multilingual. In contrast, Turkish websites are mostly in German. More than 40 percent of the Turkish websites are exclusively in German. 30 percent are offered in both languages, German and Turkish. Ten percent use Turkish as the only language and 15 percent are multilingual, that means the user can choose for example between German, Turkish, English, French, Arab etc. (see table 2). In contrast, Kurdish sites are predominantly multilingual. Most of the sites offer at least two languages. Besides Kurdish, the most common languages are German, English and French.

Table 2: Language use of Russian and Turkish websites

	Percentage of Russian web-sites (N=95)	Percentage of Turkish websites (N=76)
Turkish/ Russian and German	21,1	30,3
Only German	22,1	43,4
Others	25,3	15,8
Only Turkish/only Russian	31,6	10,5

LINKS

Russian as well as Turkish websites are hardly linked with each other (possibly due to competition). Russian sites basically refer to other Russian websites that are located in Russia. These websites hardly show a connection to Germany, but are very well connected within the general Russian blo-gosphere. Links to German websites are hard to find (exception: www.hochschulkompass.de). Turk-ish websites are primarily linked with German-language websites (.de–pages), in particular with German media pages and national institutions such as the German Bundestag, the federal govern-ment, the ministry of foreign affairs, and Islam.de. Goethe.de etc. Another group of links refer to Turkish self help organizations in Germany, such as the Federation of Turkish entrepreneurs (Bteu.de), the Turkish student federation (BTS-online) or the Turkish community in Germany (TGD.de). Links to Turkish websites without a reference to Germany are very rare.

In contrast to Turkish and Russian websites, Kurdish websites are strongly linked to each other: many of the websites have a link list with a huge number of other Kurdish websites. There are also more

websites in the Kurdish web than in the Russian and Turkish web, which only purpose is to collect links to other Kurdish (Russian, Turkish) websites. Therefore they are more internationally interlaced than the Turkish websites (for details see figure A1-3 in the appendix).

3.2 USER-SURVEYS

The user survey was mainly conducted in order to address the following questions: What is the political interest of the interviewees? Which form of political activity (information, discussion, participation) do they prefer online and offline? And who are the preferred communication partners online and offline? The most important results of this investigation are presented in the order of the mentioned main questions.

POLITICAL INTERESTS

Nearly fifty percent of the Russian interviewees stated that their main political interest lies in "international relations" (46%, N=133) followed by the topics "education"(12.8%, N=133) and "labour and social affairs" (11.3%, N=133). The topic "migration and integration" is less important for this group of users (9.8%, N=133). In general, the majority of this user group is more interested in the politics of their countries of origin (56.7 %, N=134) than for German politics (for details see Kissau 2007).

The main topic of political interest to Turkish interviewees is "migration and integration" (41.1 %). "International relations" (23.2% with N=56) rank in second place. In contrast to the Russian group, Turkish web users are more interested in German politics (58.2%, with N=87) than in Turkish politics (for details see tables 3 and 4).

Tabelle 3: Main political interests

	Percentage of Russian Users (N=80)	Percentage of Turkish Users (N=87)
Turkey/ Countries of former Soviet Union	53,8	43,7
Germany, Austria, Switzerland	46,3	56,3

Table 4: Interest for political topics in the internet

	Percentage of Russian Users (N=133)	Percentage of Turkish Users (N=88)
International relations	46,6	23,9
Education	12,8	9,1
Labor and Social Affairs	11,3	2,3
Migration and Integration	9,8	37,5
Elections, Democracy, Participation	9,0	14,8
Economy and Finance	6,8	9,1
Religion	3,8	3,4

POLITICAL ACTIVITY

In general, the survey shows that Turkish users are online more politically engaged than Russian users. Turkish users more often require information on websites of parties/public authorities, online newspapers as well as associations than Russian users do. Forums and weblogs are equally used by Turkish and Russian users. Turkish users indicate that their political activity has increased considerably since they use the internet, while Russian users' political activity has increased only slightly.

Table 5: Political participation online and offline

		Percentage of Russian users (N=129)						
Users orientated to country of origin (Russia, Ukraine)	Preferred Online Partici- pation	31,5	15,1	43,8	5,5	4,1	Preferred Off- line Participa- tion
Users orientated to receiving country (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)		14,3	14,3	46,4	5,4	19,6	
		Percentage of Turkish users (N=90)						
Users orientated to country of origin (Türkei)	Preferred Online Partici- pation	13,2	25,6	44,7	10,5	5,3	Preferred Off- line Participa- tion
Users orientated to receiving country (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)		24,5	20,4	32,7	16,3	6,1	

These findings correspond to the political off-line activities of both groups: 19.3 percent (N=90) of the surveyed Turkish migrants are members of a political party, 24.4 percent of them are members of trade-unions and 38.9% are members in a migrant self help organisation. In contrast, only 4.5 percent (with N=134) of the Russian migrants are member of a party, 9.1 percent member of a trade union and 6 percent member of a migrant organisation. Russian migrants increasingly use the internet for information and participation in the political process of their home countries, whereas the use of the internet did not lead to an increasing attention of Turkish users for their country of origin (see table 5).

COMMUNICATION PARTNERS

Russian users primarily communicate with other Russian migrants on the internet, in second place the interviewees communicate with inhabitants of the former Soviet Union and in third place with Germans without a migration background. Turkish users also use the internet for contact with other migrants from their country of origin, but in the second place they have contacts to German users without a migration background and in third place contacts to users in Turkey. Turkish migrants also stated to more often have a permanent circle of communication partners in the internet (65.8% of the Turkish migrants (N=76) and 53,8 % of the Russian migrants (N=80) (see table 6).

Table 6: Communication partners in the internet

		Percent				
Migrants from the former Soviet Union in Germany, Austria, Switzerland (n=135)		33,0	24,0	17,0	15,0	11,0	
Migrants from the former Soviet Union in the USA (n=134)	very frequently	7,0	13,0	16,0	22,0	42,0	
Migrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel (n=135)		7,0	13,0	16,0	22,0	42,0	never
Residents of former Soviet Union States (n=135)		24,0	32,0	14,0	15,0	16,0	
Germans, Austrians, Swiss without migration background (n=135)		18,0	16,0	18,0	21,0	28,0	
Migrants from Turkey in Germany, Austria, Switzerland (n=86)		40,7	30,2	17,4	5,8	5,8	
Migrants from Turkey in the Netherlands (n=83)	very frequently	3,6	2,4	8,4	30,1	55,4	
Migrants from Turkey in France(n=82)		3,7	3,7	15,9	29,3	47,6	never
Residents of Turkey (n=85)		18,8	21,2	27,1	24,7	8,2	
Germans, Austrians, Swiss without migration background (n=84)		33,3	33,3	15,5	10,7	7,1	

DISCUSSION

The political online activities that we identified throughout our research can be used to characterize differences and similarities in the orientations and organisational structures of migrant groups. In our study we found variations between migrant groups in their online-linkage structures, languages predominantly used online, purposes of internet sites, integration status of migrants offline mirrored online as well as the central function of the internet for these groups. All in all, we think that the studied migrant groups represent three different forms of national, transnational and international relationships that have become evident through the analysis of their internet usage characteristics. We assigned our observations the headings of transnational (online) communities, (virtual) Diasporas and ethnic (online) public spheres (for an overview of the distinguishing criteria see table A1 in the appendix).

TRANSNATIONAL ONLINE COMMUNITIES

We consider migrants from the former Soviet Union to be an example for a transnational (online) community which is - by the majority - politically involved both in home and host country on the internet. This group predominantly communicates with other Russian migrants (worldwide) and inhabitants of their country of origin online, thereby preferring to use the Russian language and frequently reverting to their common Russian culture. The network of their political sites and the general communication structure within Russian migrants on the internet is stable; in contrast to the Kurdish group, for example, their aim is not to facilitate their return to their home country. Rather, political topics in host and home countries interest these users. They exchange information and their political views actively. Even political actions in both countries, such as online-petitions or fundraisings, are supported by a majority of the Russian migrant internet users.

The political internet sites used by Russian migrants in Germany are part of a larger Russia based internet network, most hyperlinks referring to Russian language internet sites and only few to German sites (see appendix figure A1). Through hyperlinks internet sites express their orientation and interests, as they thus forward their users to these other pages. In this respect links to web pages have been compared to references in academic documents (see Thelwall 2001). The number and quality of links on one page also add to the relevance and visibility of an internet site. Hyperlink structures of websites therefore reveal power structures within the network, communication paths as well as relationships and interests between different sites (see Kim 2000). In our example relevant political sites of migrants in Germany mainly refer to Russian language sites from Russia, showing the groups´ central thematic focus.

The social spaces inhabited by transnational communities are not uniform but should rather be viewed as constituting what Appadurai refers to as a "diasporic public sphere" (1996: 147). This is in fact visible when studying the online interests and interactions of Russian migrants. Within their public sphere online that is dominated by the use of the Russian language, an inner differentiation exists. Russian migrants are divided in to more host and more home country oriented individuals or sub spheres; but as a whole the Russian migrant community online can be conceptualized as transnational. Many of the migrants explicitly stated that they would not like to decide between home and host country, rather they had a parallel interest in politics in both countries. As to the relationship between offline and online activities, it became visible that offline the users are politically active in German organizations, while online their orientation is focussed on their home country.

Transnational communities maintain lasting relationships across borders, agents thereby being not states or nations, but individual actors or associations (see Kokot/Tölöyan/Alfonso 2004: 4). This individualistic character is also noticeable online. The majority of the Russian migrants interviewed inform themselves about political topics in online journals, forums or weblogs, while the sites of political parties or governmental organizations are seldom visited. While most of the questioned migrants have posted in a forum or blog, only 13.5 percent have used e-mails to contact politicians in home or host country.

As the internet has in general increased the possibilities of migrants to participate, especially in the political development of their home country, a political mobilization has become apparent. The interviewed migrants stated that they inform themselves more about politics in general, since using the internet. In result it seems that the internet has created a sphere for political participation in the host country not existent before so that now Russian migrants can increasingly show transnational orientations. The Russian transnational community thus not only focuses on home country politics online but is also interested and involved in the public sphere of the host country and its organizations offline.

Transnationalism is quite often referred to by as concerning ways of life, identity structures but not so much economic or political contexts. In contrary, in our study it can be seen that these spheres are not independent of one another and can not be analysed as such. Political orientations can be transnational also. Similar results unfolding a general and also political transnational focus of online interaction have been found regarding Jews from the Former Soviet Union in Germany (see Kissau 2008). This shows that transnational online characteristics specified in here regarding Russian migrants might well be true for other migrant groups as well.

VIRTUAL/ONLINE DIASPORAS

In contrast to this transnational orientation our analysis of Kurdish migrants' uses the internet displayed that their online activities enhance their Diaspora identity. This migrant group is centrally focussed on the Kurdish "cause". While they communicate with other Kurdish migrants dispersed worldwide, the whole structure of their online interaction and their residence abroad is not stable, as

their return to Kurdish areas is a predominant goal. At the same time the network of these Diaspora websites has an apparent campaign character, where as only few of the other Turkish or Russian sites have such a simulative nature. Many of these sites are thus even blocked by Iran, Syria or Turkey, which again demonstrates their central focus on political change and influence.

Their political involvement in their host country, as it becomes visible online, is in contrast only peripheral. However this should not be misunderstood as a general deferral, as often the host country's government is lobbied into taking action. "A positive redefinition of diaspora offers the possibility of a positive identification with locality because a diaspora can only serve as a mediator if it is successfully integrated in its country of residence" (Schwalgin 2004: 88).

Kurdish websites reflect – much more than Russian and Turkish websites - the common cultural identity and ethnic group consciousness (common homeland, myth, origin, tradition, history), which is used to defining themselves in contrast to other groups in the host society (see Wonneberger 2004: 118). In difference to Russian and Turkish sites, topics such as life in Germany, integration or the political development in Germany are hardly ever discussed. In contrast Kurdish nationalism is evident in many of the analysed sites and in the least subliminal to the political online discussions of Kurdish migrants.

"In the sphere of politics, scholars have described differences between refugees who stand in political opposition to the regime/government in the country of origin, perhaps even to the existing territorial state, and those migrants who support or are indifferent to the regime/government in the homeland" (Emanuelsson 53). This factor is another of the distinguishing aspects of the Kurdish Diaspora's online activities. In comparison to the Russian migrants in Germany, who migrated out of economic and social reasons, the Kurdish refugees were often politically active in their countries of origin an were forced to leave or evicted. This migration history and their status in Germany is reflected by the importance of political topics in general on Kurdish websites.

Another difference to both Russian and Turkish sites is the network factor. Their inter-linkage is strong and reciprocal. Apparently, competition between sites is no obstacle whereas this seems to be the fact for many of the Russian and Turkish sites. Kurdish internet pages have an international focus group of Kurds living worldwide, since quite often the sites are multilingual (French, German, Kurdish, Turkish, English).

Furthermore, Belarusians, Kazakhs and Alevis in Germany show similar qualities of such a diasporic online orientation. Alevis have also established a close network of action, in order to improve the living conditions and rights of Alevis in Turkey. However, they are much more enrooted in German life and society than Kurdish migrants in general (Sökefeld 2002). This again shows that even within this forms of diasporic migrant organisation, differences between groups are probable, but can be assessed by using the internet as a means of analysis.

ETHNIC ONLINE PUBLIC SPHERES

Additionally, the evaluation of political information, communication and participation of migrants online has disclosed that further forms of political migrant institutions and structures have developed. We have come to conceptualize these as "ethnic (online) public spheres" (Hunger 2004), an example for such being the case of second and third generation migrants from Turkey in Germany. While their contact to the country of their ancestors is solely observant their political interest and action is focussed on their host country Germany. However these migrants prefer to discuss political topics within their differentiated sphere.

While contact to German citizens does take place frequently (in contrast to Russian migrants), their chosen political communication space is one of Turkish origin. Online and offline worlds are in this case much closer and interwoven, as the local dimension of users within one country make it theo-

retically and practically possible for users to meet offline etc. (whereas online and offline contact is much more unrealistic in Diaspora and transnational contexts). Such internet use as shown by the Turkish group describes the creation of a public sphere in a twofold sense: these contents are on the one hand publicly accessible, often even in German language (this is much more often the case than on Russian websites) and topics are tailored for an "ethnic" user group of Turkish migrants. On the other hand the internet as a platform enables the creation of an own ethnic public, not dependant on the overall German public or journalistic selection mechanisms.

Similar to Fraser's (1992) concept of subaltern publics, this concept describes a public sphere that is predominantly open to a subgroup within society, in our case Turkish migrants. This sphere enables its members to evolve discursive abilities under conditions shielded from the pressures of dominant group's public sphere and simultaneously allowing members to maintain or develop their cultural identity a part from the dominant culture (see Fraser 1992: 126ff.).

Such a sphere is not to be mistaken with an ethnic enclave that severs all connections with the general public sphere (see Fraser 1992: 124). In contrast, our survey on the link structure of the websites (see appendix figure A2) uncovered a tight network and inter-linkage of Turkish and German websites in contrast to the almost non existent virtual connection of Russian and German websites. The study also revealed that web-users of Turkish origin have a closer relationship to German web-users than users of Russian origin have.

This example shows that not everything is transnational online, not every migrant group can be coined as a (virtual) Diaspora. Further research has for example shown that Indian migrants in Germany might well be also categorized as maintaining such an ethnic public sphere (see Goel 2007). Characteristics of sites such as www.theinder.net seem to indicate that differentiations viewed in our analysis might also apply to other migrant groups.

OUTLOOK

These three communication structures are probably not implicitly stable; rather their modification is dependant on the political, social, economical or even religious developments of home, host and third countries, the status of migrants themselves and the duration of their presence abroad. In this context Faist proposes a phase model based on time (1999: 44): the first generation of migrants could be coined as a Diaspora, second and third generation as a transnational community (see in Emanuelsson 2005: 52). Our research however suggests that at least a third stage in form of an established ethnic public sphere is possible. This is predominantly nationally oriented and displays only a secondary transnational dimension. For this reason, we could also call it a ´national public sphere with an ethnic imprint´. Given this typology, one could also speculate whether the transnational Russian online-community might develop in this direction.
This of course can not be resolved at this stage, but must be observed closely in the years to come. Herby especially the young generation, grown up with internet use in day to day life, will determine migrants' networks and orientations in the future. Also second and third generation migrants in host countries will have to decide how the internet can be used to fit their political interests and activities. By evaluating ongoing changes in the communication practices and characteristics of internet sites, however, the fluidity and malleability of transnational structures and relations can be taken into account. E.g. using network analysis of linkage structures of different communities within the internet, the contact to other actors can be traced and shifts in activism and orientation can be monitored. Thereby these stable linkages between websites and user groups give evidence of the existence of stable transnational communities in contrast to mere transnational practices of individuals.

In this context it appears to be necessary to accentuate that though national boarders are not visible online, they are often artificially drawn through the behaviour of users, in our case of migrants. Where no such boarders exist, language and ethnic belonging enable the creation of new ingroup-

outgroup structures. It therefore seems evident that the nation state is nonetheless dominant for online interaction. Especially in respect to political topics, the migrants analysed acted in relation to these national patterns even though the internet enables activities beyond the nation state.

Additionally, the internet is of growing importance for numerous aspects of society (e.g. internet and development) and it will have an enormous impact on the structural change of migrants´ situations abroad. But this does not mean that migrants´ interests or organisational trends did not exist prior to these technological possibilities. Rather, the dominant features of different migrant settlements abroad where underlined and strengthened by new media developments. In some cases (e.g. the Crimean Tatars) the internet has aided Diaspora communities to survive, when contact had been lost, numbers of members were too low and individuals too dispersed. In these cases the internet has not only intensified diasporic communication or activities, but has been essential for survival.

In another respect, the internet also allows for a diversification or democratisation of migrant possibilities. Now not only opposition leaders decide, what should be done by the Diaspora, also other, even marginalized individuals can gain a voice within these communities. An example here is the Kurdish Diaspora, which was originally a tightly-linked and politicised community. Now the open and more democratic design of online interaction enables alternative actions, beyond established power structures. The minority within the minority is no longer voiceless nor invisible, as Georgiou summarises (see 2002: 10). Since communication online is non- or almost non-hierarchical, it lets Diaspora centres become less vivid and their action no longer necessarily focussed on an (imagined) homeland.

The new generation also uses these online interaction possibilities to express their own views, displaying an alternative voice to those claiming a homogeneous migrant culture. The internet thus may possibly change the power structure within migrant groups: "Diasporas cannot only exist as satellites around a centre anymore; the power of knowledge and control of information, the responsibility and the active participation in community activities that do no go through the centre and which develop beyond the control of the centre, reflect a new diasporic condition" (Georgiou 2002: 12). This empowerment of the periphery might also add to the advancement of Diaspora groups towards transnational, ethnic public spheres or other forms of migrant orientations.

Nonetheless, not all migrants are online. A digital divide lies also within migrants abroad and social boundaries are reproduced online, which hinders the all-embracing evaluation of migrant actions with the help of the internet. Further problems and restrictions of the analysis of migrant networks are the deficits of technological infrastructure in home countries, control or censorship by governments, slight knowledge of internet use and the importance of the English language for computer and internet activities. Usually the internet can not reach a large (world) public by itself without classical mass media coverage, which also constricts the role of the internet for migrant activities and empowerment.

However, excluded from the public sphere or mainstream media, the internet produces a new place for migrants for communication, representation and imagination (see Georgiou 2002: 5). The internet makes the development and expression of diverse identities possible, where as mainstream media has mainly reproduced stereotypes and images of migrants. This alternative space online however may only be seen as a partial solution, as the central problem of exclusive public spheres in the host countries still exists.

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APPENDIX

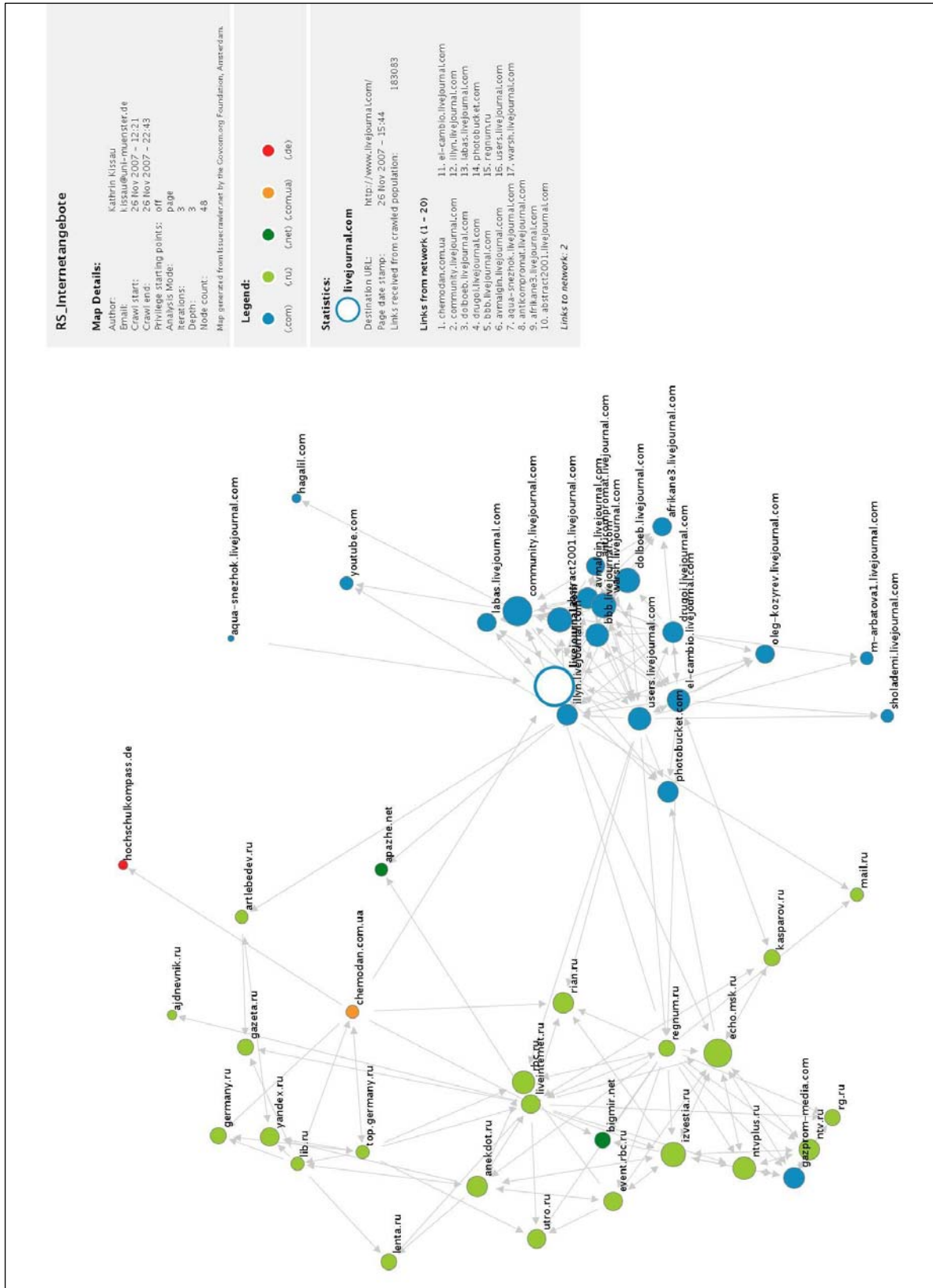Figure A1: Network Analysis of Russian websites

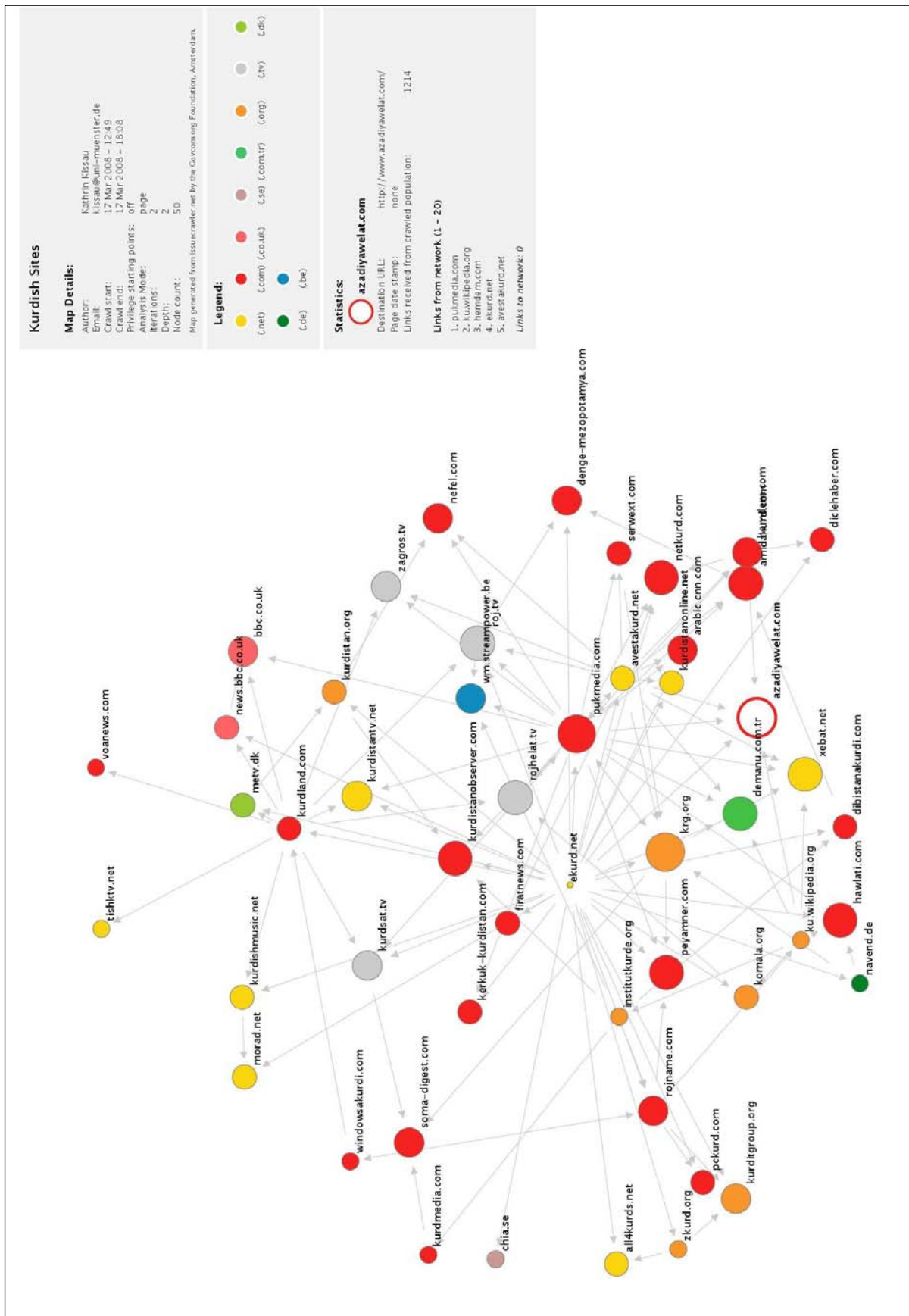Figure A2: Network Analysis of Turkish websites

Figure A3: Network of Analysis Kurdish websites

Table A1: Migant political orientations

	transnational (online) community	*(virtual) Diaspora*	*ethnic (online) public sphere*
political involvement in home country	partly involved in home country	centrally focussed on home country	observant, not directly involved
political involvement in host country	partly involved in host country	Low, only with respect to home country	centrally focussed on host country
stability of communication structure	high	medium	medium
central orientation	transnational	national (home country)	national (host country)
anchorage	migrants worldwide from one home country and inhabitants of that home country	migrants worldwide from one home country (dispersal)	migrants within one host country
integration level in host/home country	high - medium	medium	high
political objectives/goals	improve relations between both countries	have political influence	keep informed, participation not central
reason for/emotion behind development	emotional	emotional	rational
examples for migrant groups	migrants from Russia, Jewish migrants from Russia; migrants from Mexico	Kurdish migrants; Ukrainian migrants, Kazakh migrants	Turkish migrants in Germany, Indian migrants in Germany
example websites	www.eursa.org; www.sem40.ru	www.palpalo.de; www.atameken.de	www.turkcom.org; www.theinder.net