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# **Internet and the Integration of Immigrants in Germany and Israel. Characteristics and Potentials**

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## **1 Introduction**

The ongoing development of new information and communication technologies is influencing and thus changing the way of life around the world. While the effects of technologies such as the Internet vary in detail from one country to another both politicians and citizens are generally confronted with the challenge to shape and to take part in this all-embracing development. As these technological innovations diffuse, gain importance and alter the public and private spheres, it can be assumed that the competence to use them increasingly determines the equality of opportunity and the level of societal integration. While this generally concerns all citizens, a case study of migrants is especially suitable to distinguish, what role these technologies, particularly the Internet, play in the integration of and into information societies.

In this chapter we first focus on the theoretical role of the media and especially the Internet for the integration of migrants and propose a model for the assessment of an online integration process. Then, we apply this model and compare the Internet use of migrants from the former Soviet Union in Germany and Israel in order to distinguish how their Internet use is linked to their integration. Finally, we discuss what our observations imply for societal integration of migrants in an environment increasingly characterized by information and

communication technologies and whether there is need for political action to steer this development.

## **2 Theoretical Implications on Internet Use and Integration**

Societies are ever more faced with the question how the Internet and its influence on many realms of life is establishing new conditions for the obtainment of equal opportunities. It is undeniable that the Internet can be not only an *asset* for the organization of many aspects of life but is increasingly a *necessity* (see Finaguina 2002). In many countries around the world, to be “on-line” is becoming central for one’s knowledge about one’s environment, for the retention of one’s social contacts but also for the organization of one’s life and the participation in society, as fields such as e-government, e-banking or e-commerce develop. Furthermore, competences using these technologies have become a precondition for many jobs in these information societies (see Körber/Schaffer 2002).

This is of course generally true for all citizens, but even more so for immigrants, who are especially in need of information on their new environment and who often rely on their new and old social networks in order to adjust to the foreign country (see Elias/Lemish 2008). The question of the use or non-use of the Internet therefore has serious consequences for disadvantaged or minority groups as it has the potential to improve their living conditions. As Fairlie concludes “future economic, education, community participation and political advancement for these disadvantaged groups may depend on access to computers, the Internet and broadband technology“ (2005: 9).

This topic has been embraced by the term “digital divide” which is often wrongly understood as referring to mere access and usage possibilities of the Internet (see Kubicek/Welling 2000). Recent studies have proven that such a divide in terms of mere access to the In-

ternet does not exist in Germany. 65 Percent of the German population above 14 years of age use the Internet, while 66.8 percent of persons who migrated to Germany themselves and 75.3 percent whose parents came to Germany are online (see (N)Onliner Atlas 2008). Migrants in Germany are in fact quite Internet affine. In Israel 74 percent of the households have an Internet connection; while access of migrants to the Internet is estimated to be just slightly below that level (see TNS 2008).

But apart from these general facts regarding access, what is more substantial in terms of integration is *how* and *why* this technology is used and *which* gratifications are obtained (see Hwan/He 1999). In this sense, the actual and more comprehensive concept of the digital divide goes beyond access itself and encompasses the relevance of the Internet for the individual user to indicate how digital and societal divides are related. The German Enquete Commission on the Globalization of the World Economy drew attention to this social significance of digital inclusion, when it stated that today's digital divide can well be tomorrow's social divide (see 2002). This is due to the fact as more of society's processes are transferred to the Internet, its use will increasingly become a bottleneck for the participation and integration in society. While pessimists conjure that societal integration is therefore at stake, optimists promote the potential of this technology in various realms of society (see Buchstein 1996, DiMaggio et al 2001, MeKenna/Bargh 2004).

As far as migrants are concerned, Mehra et al. resume: „In casting the digital divide as an important national problem, scholars, policymakers and the public recognize the tremendous potential of the Internet to improve everyday life for those on the margins of society, and to achieve greater social equity and empowerment“ (2004: 782). To stress the digital divide's importance and to illustrate that the way the Internet is used has consequences for societal and political conditions and

processes Norris introduced the related term “democratic divide“ (2001: 12).

The question of how the media effects societal developments and more specifically how it is involved in the integration of society and of immigrants has an extensive research tradition (see Weiß/Trebbe 2001, Geißler/Pöttker 2006). However, the existing literature mainly discusses the role of the traditional mass-media such as newspapers, radio and television. Neither has the question if the Internet can be framed in the same logic been intensively broached nor have existing models been adapted to the additional features that the interactive media “Internet” contains.

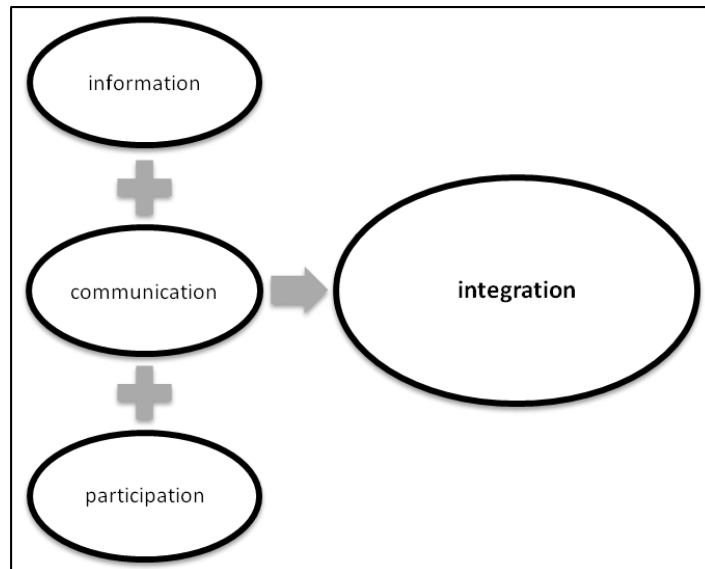
Traditionally, mass media’s role in integration processes within a society is framed as supporting social homogenization. In this understanding the media transport information about the country, its norms and culture, its current events and general functioning to the recipients. This commonly shared experience of media reception as well as of the information transmitted has a harmonizing and thus integrating effect on the individuals within society and creates an inclusive public sphere (see Vlašić 2004). Central for this concept is the aspect of information, which is understood to be central for integration processes (see Esser 2001). This argument is criticized as it implies a homogeneous culture, which however does not exist in pluralistic societies (see Deligöz 1999). However, disregarding the question of homogeneity, the general importance of information about the country of residence for the integration process of individuals is not disputed.

A second research approach focuses more on the aspect of communication. The classical mass media’s role hereby is that of supplying the individual with information or with a media reception experience. The individual can then use this experience as a foundation for communication with other recipients (see Weßler 2002). Thus the traditional media’s importance is that of setting the basis for subsequent communication (“Anschlusskommunikation”). Again, the relevance of

communication in general for the integration process is common consent (see Kim 2001). However, the form of communication is more disputed, as the language used or the persons communicated with can moderate the integrating effect. While some see these effects only if communication is in the language of the country of residence and ideally with citizens of this country (see Esser 2001), others have found evidence that communication in the mother tongue or with other migrants might as well have a positive influence (see Jungk 2002; Hafez 2000). Additionally, the question has been raised whether (parallel) media consumption from and contact to residents of the country of origin or the reception of information about events from their influence the integration process positively or negatively (see Glick-Schiller/Basch 1995, Meier-Braun 2002).

All these issues can also be discussed regarding the use of the Internet by migrants. Firstly, the Internet's central characteristic is that of an information database that exceeds the informative potential of the classical mass media by far. Secondly, as to communication, this media also allows users to directly communicate with one another, which lets this media's relevance regarding societal communication become even more obvious and vivid than before (see Neverla 1998). Thirdly, this hypermedia's characteristics and possible uses exceed information and communication as it enables the direct participation in societal structures and groups online (see D'Haenens et al. 2007). Social and political participation is a third process that is generally seen as central for the integration of immigrants (see Diehl/Urbahn 1998).

Figure 1: *The Triavis-Model of Integration through the Internet*



Source: Kissau (2008)

These traditional theoretic aspects of media's role in integration (information and indirect communication) can thus be conveyed to the Internet and combined with its novel possibilities (direct communication and participation) to an encompassing grid for the empirical analysis of the Internet's actual role in integration (see Kissau 2008).

The question if and how the Internet influences the integration process of societies and specifically of immigrants cannot generally be answered, as the Internet does not just enfold its effect on the passive users: In line with the Uses and Gratifications-Approach the Internet has to be *actively* used by people and can in doing so fulfill their desires and goals (see Bonfadelli 2004; Hwan/He 1999). In the two case studies presented below the authors accordingly aimed to reveal the main gratifications sought and obtained by migrants when using the Internet to identify how different usage patterns are related to the integration process.

### **3 Case Study: Jewish Emigrants from the Former Soviet Union**

#### *3.1 Method*

The research presented here focused on two groups of Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU). Their emigration began in the early 1990s and was triggered by the latent and increasingly overt anti-Semitism as well as by the problematic economic and humanitarian situation in general after the end of the communist regime (see Haug/Schimany 2005: 4). Since then roughly one million people have left the FSU for Israel, about 400 000 for the USA and 200 000 for Germany (see Remennick 2006). It is estimated that 800 000 to 1 000 000 Jews still live in the countries which formed the USSR (see Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 3).

As stated above, representative data has only lately been presented which shows that many migrant groups use the Internet as extensively as non-migrants do (see N-Onliner-Atlas 2008). Beyond this, however, there is still a lack of data on usage patterns as well as on the motives or interests of migrant Internet users (see Kissau/Hunger 2009). Therefore the authors carried out two separate explorative case studies on migrants from the FSU to gain insight on how and why they use this technology. One study was conducted in Germany and one in Israel. Though both focused on emigrants from the FSU a slightly different research design was used: For the German study the Internet usage data was collected through a questionnaire survey of immigrants from the FSU within three Jewish communities in Northern Germany in 2007. The sample was drawn using a cluster sampling method (see Lohr 2002). The nature of the Israeli study was in contrast more qualitative. It was carried out in 2006 and 2007 using in-depth interviews. The interviewees were recruited through a snow-ball sampling procedure, so that the Israeli results presented below originate from a non-probability sample (see Bernard 2000).

For this analysis corresponding data from the two studies will be presented and contrasted to identify both *general* usage characteristics and interests of migrants from the FSU and *country specific* ones. However, a direct comparison of the results is not always possible because both methods and original research interests differ considerably. Additionally, the limitations of this analysis regarding representativity should be kept in mind due to the explorative nature of the research designs.

### 3.2 Results

#### 3.2.1 Internet Usage

In the German study 59 respondents had used the Internet at least once in the past six months and were thus classified as Internet users and included in the following data analysis. These 36 men and 23 women had all immigrated to Germany between 1990 and 2006. At the time of the survey they were between 14 and 72 years of age. 71.2 percent of these users declared that they used the Internet daily and 16.9 percent used the Internet twice or three times a week. Two thirds had been “online” for more than three years, while 35.6 percent of the migrants had already used the Internet prior to their emigration. This indicates that the majority of the survey participants in Germany were experienced and frequent Internet users.

In the Israeli study personal interviews with 43 immigrants from the FSU were used to assess their Internet usage patterns. The interviewees were all Russian-language speakers, Israeli citizens and Internet users, who immigrated to Israel between the years 1989 and 2003. Thus they can be considered to be first generation migrants. Interviews were conducted with 26 women and 17 men, whose age ranged between 19 and 43 years. Their experience as Internet users varied from occasional to regular, day to day Internet usage; one



female interviewee even described her usage of the web as "web addiction".

### 3.2.2 Reasons for Internet Use

All of the respondents in Germany declared that their main reason for using the Internet was to search for information. 87.8 percent also used it to communicate with other people and 80.4 percent of the immigrants wanted to give information to others. 75.6 percent also explained their aim was to keep in touch with their country of origin through the Internet, while 60.9 percent of the people said, they wanted to relax. In general, time on the Internet was spent using the World Wide Web, search engines and emails as well as downloading programs or files. Less frequently applications such as playing games or chatting were mentioned.

In Israel a similar behavior became evident: 76.7 percent of the interviewed immigrants predominantly used the Internet for information retrieval. 33.4 percent said that they often download music and films. In contrast gossip and games sites, as well as entertainment sites which include jokes, funny pictures, horoscopes, fashion and book related sites were all rated as least important. Thus rather serious informative or communicative uses of the Internet by the immigrants were dominant both in Germany and Israel. Additionally, it became clear that the Internet is seen as an important instrument to stay in touch with faraway family and friends

### 3.2.3 Language of Internet Usage

In general, the immigrants in Germany preferred using Russian-language Internet sites (49.2 percent) while 27.1 percent used both Russian- and German-language applications equally. 20.4 percent of the immigrants visited predominantly German-language websites and

3.4 percent stated that they also used other languages such as English on the Internet.

These web site preferences seem to be in part determined by language aptitude of the immigrants, as most users of Russian-language sites had poor German-language skills. However, also one third of the immigrants with “very good” and “good” German-language skills preferred to use mainly Russian-language sites nonetheless. Thus, it can be concluded that German-language aptitude furthers the use of German-language sites, but does not quasi automatically draw immigrants away from Russian-language websites. Instead, knowledge of both languages allows a freedom of choice, e.g. to use the Internet in both languages.

Similarly, 95.3 percent of the interviewed immigrants in Israel correspond in the Russian language on the Internet most of the time (or always), and this language, according to them, is their mother language. 30.2 percent have experienced, from time to time, some correspondence in Hebrew and 25.6 percent of the interviewees pointed out that they also correspond in languages other than Russian such as English, Ukrainian, Swedish or Danish. The reason for this, according to the interviewees, is that they do not have enough knowledge of other languages in order to lead conversations online.

However, a part from language skills, the choice of the language used online is also influenced by other factors such as the sense of belonging that the use of the Russian language as a mother language holds (see Feldman 2003). Additionally, the choice of language also determines what kind of and which information can be attained through the Internet, as for example not all Israeli government websites have Russian translations of central content. Thus, the preference or dominance of a language restricts access to certain sources of information, views and topics on the Internet and therefore affects the role the usage of the Internet plays within the integration process.

The observed preference of the use of the Russian language online appears to contradict earlier research, where the same immigrant group in Germany was found to extensively use the traditional German-language mass media offline (see Elias/Lemish 2006). Further research into this field is necessary to clarify if *online* and *offline* media used by migrants in general, as well as the respective languages complement, correspond or compete with each other. At the same time, Elias' and Lemish's observations on immigrants from the FSU in Israel and their preference of Russian-language offline media can be confirmed by this case study of online behavior. This immigrant group seems to prefer to use Russian-language media in both spheres.

#### 3.2.4 Information and interests

The immigrants in Germany were mainly interested in news (89.5 percent), product information (55.2 percent) as well as information about employment or education (48.3 percent). Additionally, their aim when using the Internet is it to make and contact friends as well as find regional information (both 39.7 percent). When asked about their general interest in Germany or their country of origin it became evident that the majority of the immigrants showed a parallel interest in "Russian" (home country) as well as in German news, day to day life and culture. Those who were strongly interested in their country of origin were thus at the same time equally interested in Germany. This shows that immigrants from the FSU in Germany use the Internet to become acquainted with their new surroundings. Parallel to this familiarization with their country of residence, they use the Internet to remain informed about political or social events as well as the culture and language of their country of origin.

The immigrants in Israel also used the Internet to gather information about current news, weather fore-

casts or information regarding education. Their Internet use invoked a feeling of freedom and accessibility. However, the interviewees' interest in Israel did not exceed the necessary information for their day to day life just as their motivation to make non-Russian speaking Israeli friends was limited. This attitude appeared to be stable, as the length of residence in Israel had no effect on the interests of the immigrants. Therefore, it can be concluded that the immigrants from the FSU in Israel have less inclination to explore cultures such as the Israeli one online. Additionally, some immigrants mentioned that emotional loneliness is what leads them to communicate on the Internet, where they hope to find friends and feel homelike. A relationship thus appears to exist between loneliness of immigrants in Israel and their interest in using the Internet. Their preference of specific websites or topics is determined by their aim to find and feel close to an environment they are familiar with. In this case this aspiration is frequently not satisfied by the city they live in or Israel's non-Russian speaking citizens.

### 3.2.5 Social Contacts on the Internet

Contact to other Russian-language users was most frequent (51.4 percent) and also favored by the majority of the immigrants questioned in Germany. When communicating with other Internet users it was secondary where their dialog partner lived (in Germany, in the FSU, elsewhere), more relevant was their common Russian cultural background and the use of the Russian language itself. 34.0 percent of the immigrants also had frequent contact to Germans on the Internet. In comparison, those immigrants with "very good" German-language competences had contact to Germans slightly more often (38.5 percent), while their communication with Russian-language Internet users decreased. Offline however, language aptitude was more strongly related to social relations, as immigrants with better German-

language aptitude had more contact to Germans offline (at work, in school or when shopping) but still generally less than to other Russian-language immigrants.

The results of the Israeli study again resemble the German ones: All the interviewees communicate exclusively or mostly with other Russian-language speakers on the Internet. 62.8 percent of the immigrants stated that they communicate with people from the FSU in Israel as well as in their country of origin (family members, friends, or people they met through the Internet), alongside to communication with Russian speakers from other countries such as Canada, the USA, Germany and Australia. The interviewees emphasized that through the Internet they found it easier to contact friends abroad, although contact to people from outside Israel who do not speak Russian is rare. The interviews thus revealed that the immigrants predominantly wish to and tend to make Russian-speaking Israeli friends (i.e. Israelis with a Russian background) through the Internet, because of the similar mentality, the shared experiences and their common country of origin. It also became clear during the interviews that the immigrants live within an Israeli reality, work among Israelis and use the Hebrew language in their daily lives offline, where it is unavoidable. However, for these immigrants Hebrew is a business language that is used in work and during studies, while the Russian language is the one used at leisure time and therefore especially online for social contacts (see Yelenevskaja/Fialkova 2005).

Immigrants from the FSU in Germany and Israel use the Internet to contact Russian-language users all over the world and especially within their country of residence. Keeping in close contact with friends and family in their country of origin is also simplified enormously through the Internet. Thus the Internet is not only a source of information for immigrants, but also an important social sphere (see Rafaeli et al. 2005). Contact to Israelis or Germans without a Russian background is only rarely sought on the Internet, even if the necessary language skills exist (though more by the analyzed migrants in

Germany than in Israel). Thus, contact online is a deliberate decision favoring people with shared interests and ideologies. Since geographical distance is no barrier, social contacts are sought and sustained within a Russian-speaking online sphere (see Skitka/Sargis 2005).

### 3.2.6 Participation and Identity

Regarding the use of the Internet for participation in society, 20.5 percent acknowledged that they had used the Internet to participate in public life, such as commenting on articles in online-newspapers, writing emails to politicians or taking part in a citizens' initiative. 55.2 percent of the migrants had used the Internet to contact the local administration, 8.5 percent had discussed German politics on the Internet and 40.4 percent stated that their German-language skills were improved through their use of the Internet. While 40 percent believed that the Internet could theoretically aid their participation in society, 20 percent had effectively made this experience (see also Kissau/Hunger in this volume).

Though this use of the Internet is less common with migrants as information and communication, it is also less widespread with non-migrant Internet users. Most of the migrants felt that they were not represented well by German institutions, such as German politicians (12.0 percent), trade unions (11.1 percent) or citizen's initiatives (6.3 percent). However, Jewish communities (56.1 percent) and interest groups online (21.3 percent) were seen as the two institutions that most acted on their behalf and represented their interests in public life. Considering that they felt insufficiently represented by traditional institutions in Germany, online interest groups were seen as the second strongest voice they had in the German public. The use of the Internet to find a job, to handle bureaucratic processes as well as to gain information about their rights and possibilities in their country of residence also implies that the use of the In-

ternet had an empowering effect on immigrants. 60.4 percent of the migrants that used the Internet did not feel as part of the German society. Nonetheless, 78.0 percent of the questioned migrants were happy with their life in Germany, want to remain there in the future and 80.4 percent were also interested in attaining German citizenship.

The interviewees in Israel generally made the distinction between "Russians" and "Israelis" (which refers to all others who are not immigrants from the FSU). Generally, a rather stable separation between "Israelis" and "Russians" seems to exist and contacts between the two groups are limited online and offline. While the process of building a new identity is common among immigrants from the first generation, 65.1 percent of the interviewees classified themselves as belonging to the Russian "elite". This overt identification as part of the culture they grew up in might be explained as a temporal consequence of the cultural shock (see Feldman 2003). However, the interviews showed in the contrary that the longer the period of residence in Israel the more the interviewed are conscience of the difference between them and "Israelis". This differentiation and the stereotypes connected are also stable regarding other factors such as education or socio-economic status. 25.9 percent of the immigrants showed openness to accept the differences without judgment, and interest in establishing friendships with Israelis. They tended to criticize their Russian heritage, while adapting their behaviors and social habits to the Israeli way of life.

Immigrants from the FSU in Israel who use the Internet seem to distance themselves from Israeli society getting closer to the culture that is known to them. For this process the Internet offers a wide range of possibilities, simplifying contact to the country of origin as well as finding like-minded Russian-language Internet users. For them the Internet is not used as an aid for participation in Israeli society, but more as a tool with which to choose or produce a personal (virtual) surrounding that

fits their intellectual and mental background best, independent of their real life environment.

### *3.3 Summary of the Case Studies*

The data collected in two rather different settings (Germany and Israel) on the online activities of the same migrant group revealed considerable similarities and only few differences in the way the Internet is used by immigrants from the FSU. Obviously, the relevance of the Internet for immigrants is not only theoretical and the migration experience itself seems to affect users' fields of interest and usage characteristics.

First of all, this technology is used by the participants of the case studies as a source of information about their immediate environment. Thus, the Internet has a socializing effect, providing migrants with an easily accessible possibility to learn about their new surroundings. 60 percent of the migrants in Germany acknowledged this by explaining that their usage of the Internet had increased their understanding of other cultures as well as their foreign language aptitude. However, the migrants in Germany pointed out, that the potential they saw in this function of the Internet can to date not be met by existing resources online, as many official municipal websites solely provide information in German, which hinders many of the migrants from the FSU of attaining necessary information online (see Hentschel/Schröder/Wiggerink 2009). At the same time the information sought not only concerns their country of residence, but they also seek information regarding their country of origin. Information retrieval about the country of residence on the Internet therefore does not imply a de-socialization with their native culture. Especially the migrants in Germany showed an almost equal simultaneous interest in both countries. The migrants in Israel seemed less inclined to voluntarily devote their time online on Israeli culture or way of life.



The second possibly integrating use of the Internet by the migrants from the FSU is that as a communication instrument. For most the possibilities of communicating with other migrants from the FSU or family and friends in their country of origin was a central usage motive. This use of the Internet enables the retention of their (old) social network while adding other migrants from the FSU to it (bonding social capital). In contrast, migrants do not broadly use the Internet to develop contacts to non-Russian speaking Germans or Israelis (bridging social capital) (see Woolcock 2001). In this sense the Internet primarily supports the development of ethnic networks or virtual spheres, while less assisting immediate social integration through contact with Israelis or Germans of non Russian origin. This is due to a deliberate decision of the migrants and cannot be fully explained by language barriers as even migrants with good Hebrew or German competences show this preference of Russian-language and -user communication.

Regarding the third process participation through which the Internet can influence the integration process, the results of the case studies vary. More than 40 percent of the surveyed migrants in Germany believe that the Internet could help them participate in society, though only about 20 percent have actually made this experience. While they felt insufficiently represented, online interest groups were seen as the second strongest institution that would aid in the inclusion of their preferences in the public. The use of the Internet to find a job, to handle bureaucratic processes as well as to gain information about their rights and possibilities in their country of residence also implies that the use of the Internet has an empowering effect on immigrants. Similarly, two thirds of the migrants in Germany explicitly stated that the Internet had increased their ability to act in their new surroundings, even though 60 percent believed it had not supported their identification with Germany. In Israel the possibilities of participation in the public sphere was mainly also not taken advantage of, though Israeli websites exist that address the inter-

ests and needs of Russian immigrants. Balasiano and Purian-Lukatch for example observed that: “new immigrants tend to shy from government business online, especially due to the language barrier” (2008). A part from the language barrier, the interest for this kind of Internet use also appears to be rather low. Immigrants from the FSU in Israel seemed to use the Internet’s possibilities more to retreat to a separate Russian sphere online, as they felt more as “Russians” than as “Israelis”, independent of their length of stay in the country.

#### **4 Conclusion: Internet and Integration in Theory and Practice**

The Internet seems to encompass a potential to aid in the integration process while simultaneously simplifying contact to the migrant’s country and culture of origin. The role of the Internet in the integration process is thus one, which bestows new possibilities on migrants to deliberately model their lives according to their personal desires: In accordance with the uses- and gratifications approach and thus depending on their intentions and ways of use the Internet can aid immigrants’ integration in the host society by supplying information, facilitating intercultural contact and providing means to take part in public life. It can also hinder integration, when the Internet is used to “virtually” live in the country of origin reducing the necessity to engage in the real surroundings. At last the Internet gives migrants the possibility to combine both cultural orientations and live simultaneously in two national spheres.

The study of Jewish migrants from the FSU in Germany indicates that their use of the Internet enables them to satisfy their dual interest in their former and present environment (see also Kissau/Hunger in this volume). Similarly, Fialkova found that this migrant group uses the Internet to sustain “multi-stranded relations” (2005). However, their network mainly includes other Russian-language Internet users in their countries

of residence as well as of origin and fewer users without this cultural background. Thus the dual cultural orientation is not completely mirrored by their social contacts. Furthermore, their dominant use of the Russian language is problematic for their integration process, as aptitude in the host country's language and its use is undeniably central for integration (see Esser 2001).

Migrants from the FSU in Israel show an even greater tendency to focus on a Russian cultural sphere online and less on an Israeli one. Thus the Internet is not so much used to sustain a dual orientation but rather to retreat to a Russian online sphere. For migrants from the FSU the Internet is not supporting intercultural contacts and thus social integration. Rather it is reducing the necessity to establish a new social network, as the "old" one in the country of origin can virtually be sustained. The Internet also has the function of a social shelter, a place they escape to from loneliness, where they feel in control and can exert influence and pinpoint the borders of their environment (see Ye 2005). While the structure of life in Israel is imposed, they can choose friends, fields of interest and the language freely on the Internet. This behavior, however, shouldn't be interpreted as a *general* disintegrative tendency, as the interviewed are satisfied with their life in Israel and structurally integrated offline (see Weiskopf 2007). Rather, this satisfaction could very well be due to the possibilities the Internet opens up for them to satisfy their social and cultural needs.

One reason for the use of the Internet was also "loneliness", as some interviewees in Israel mentioned. This might indicate a problematic integration situation offline, which caused them to turn online to find support and stability in their Russian identity (see Rydin/Sjöberg 2008). It is central for understanding the motives and consequences of migrants' internet use to bear in mind the reciprocal relationship between online and offline worlds (see Georgiou 2002). Hampton also affirms this important linkage of the two social spheres by stating that "the Internet should not be privileged as

a distinct social system, for online relationships are intertwined with social ties maintained through other means of social contact“ (2001: 167).

In fact, the integration situation offline of this immigrant group in Israel and Germany is quite diverse; while both groups retain a vivid Russian culture (see Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). In Israel immigrants from the FSU gain citizenship immediately at arrival as they are less seen as migrants than as returning co-ethnics. This legal equality facilitates the integration process, especially their political participation. Additionally, Israel's integration aid, the immigrants' high level of education, their middle-class background and strong ambition for social mobility have contributed to their successful structural integration (see Smooha 2003). While Israel had originally aimed at culturally “absorbing” migrants, mass migration from very diverse countries showed that this was an unrealistic aim. Migrants from the FSU have also built a rich system of Russian-language media and cultural institutions in Israel striving to retain Russian as their language and passing down this culture to their children (see Isakova 2000). In consequence, social integration is difficult while they also maintain strong social, cultural and economic ties to their country of origin.

In Germany, Jewish immigrants from the FSU immediately attain an unlimited right of residence, though they have to wait for seven years to be able to apply for citizenship. Generally, the structural integration is tedious, as the majority of migrants cannot find adequate work though being highly qualified (see Tchenina/Tchernin 2005). This is in part due to a lack of German-language competence (see Harris 1999), the restrictive recognition of qualifications in Germany as well as the migrants' high average age (see Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). These problems also affect their social and cultural integration, especially of the older generations. In this respect the Jewish communities in Germany play an important integrative role, although this new function of the “Jüdische Gemeinden” (“Jewish Communi-

ty”) has been controversial (see Schoeps 2005). As the Russian-language community is second largest migrant group in Germany (BAMF 2007), Jewish immigrants from the FSU have access to a broad array of Russian-language media and cultural institutions. They also maintain social and cultural links with their country of origin.

In face of these differences of the integrative situation in both countries, it is striking how similar their online activities are. However, migrants in Germany differ, as they seem to exploit the Internet more to inform themselves about their country of residence (which they are also more interested in) while facing larger integrative challenges. It might be assumed that they have realized which possibilities the Internet has to offer to be an integrative asset in their situation. In contrast the migrants in Israel are structurally integrated and thus less constrained or inclined to utilize the Internet in the same manner. Both migrant groups choose to retain their Russian culture offline and online and remaining socially mainly integrated in their Russian cultural sphere.

This kind of cultural and social focus on the country of origin (e.g. use of ethnic or foreign media) might be interpreted as disintegrative from an assimilationist perspective. In this line of thought integration into one culture and country can only take place when other cultural and national ties have been cut (see Esser 2001). In the past this was quite often plain fact and migrants had no choice of orientation, as no means existed for them to keep close contact to their country of origin.

Nowadays, technical developments make it possible to keep in touch with ones country of origin. The expectation that migrants will dissolve all contact with their country of origin does not apply to the reality of immigrant life in a globalised world. In this transnationalist line of thought migrants can and do stay attached to their homeland (e.g. by using the Internet), while simultaneously adjusting to life in the host country (see Glick Schiller/Basch 1995). Transnational integration there-

fore implies not having to give up one's cultural background in order to adapt to a new one (see Morawska 2003). As the data presented above shows, this is common for immigrants, who appreciate the hold that the (virtual) familiar can provide in a migration situation. Russian-language Internet usage by immigrants is thus a normal and justified aspect of being part of "two worlds" or countries (see Ottensschläger 2004). As the migrants from the FSU also showed a Russian-cultural orientation offline, the Internet's role is one of intensifying and facilitating this transnational lifestyle (see Yang 2003). Immigrants belong to more than one culture and use the Internet respectively. Integration is thereby not seen as a zero-sum-game, but more as an additive process (see Ben-Rafael et al. 2006).

Thus, it becomes evident that a digital divide does exist between migrants and non migrants in Israel and Germany, though this does not refer to mere access to the Internet, but rather forms of usage of this technology. Migrants and non migrants differ in the way they use the Internet, the needs they satisfy with this technology and the virtual spheres they inhabit. Existing societal divides are thereby translated into the Internet and vice versa. Similar to the social divide the digital is one of information and content used due to the language applied and the interests satisfied, of communication spheres and partners as well as of participation. As to this divide's political implications it can be argued that it would be sensible to include digital inclusion in national integration programs and thus to tackle the challenge of integration from two sides or societal gateways: online and offline.

In face of these results, however, it should be considered that these technological developments are still relatively young, it must be conceded that these observations refer to an explorative analysis of a specific immigrant group and are yet to be tested representatively among others and in different countries. Furthermore, this relationship between integration and Internet usage is described for the first generation of immigrants in

Germany and Israel, who started using the Internet sometime in the past decade as the Internet developed into a mass media. In the future, for second and third generation of immigrants, who grow up with the Internet in the receiving country of their parents' migration, the described usage pattern as well as its interrelation with integration might well differ.

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