

Political Online-Participation of Migrants in Germany

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1 Introduction

What potential does the Internet possess for the political participation of migrants? This question has been disregarded in German migration and communication research. Its relevance however is evident: modern information technologies enable migrants to contact their country of origin easily and quickly and thus retain relationships where once all bridges were demolished. Therefore, migrants today lead a life between two poles: They often speak multiple languages, move between two cultures and feel part of more than one society. Therefore, they also pursue interests regarding political, economical and cultural life in two or more countries. In this context, the Internet is of special relevance, since it is both an information and communication media. Migrants can use the Internet, especially emails and chats, to establish a vivid link to their family and friends in their country of origin. Additionally, they can inform themselves through different online sources such as online journals, weblogs, newsgroups or forums and obtain detailed information on the political events and the public opinion in their country of origin.

Additionally, the Internet offers immigrants possibilities—more than traditional print and audiovisual media can—to publish their own opinions through online articles or comments and thus to contribute to the formation of public opinion. This alternative public sphere thus has the potential to influence the public opinion and to support or even initiate social change. Addi-

tionally, not only the transnational exchange of views and information is simplified through the Internet, but also the political organization of civic engagement in the form of online campaigns (see the contribution of Baringhorst in this volume), email-initiatives, lobbying, etc. can be done via the Internet. For this active individuals build networks with peers to establish interests groups or connect to existing larger organizations. This way immigrant can cost-effectively and easily contact one another to advocate their interests regarding their country of residence or their country of origin. While this might enable migrants voices to be heard where political participation is otherwise scarce, these activities are also of great importance for the country of origin. Through the Internet certain information, positions and debates, which might otherwise be censored in countries such as Iran, China or Russia, can be transmitted from abroad and reach an audience.

In this chapter the empirical data and experiences collected as part of the authors' research project at the University of Muenster in Germany will be presented. The central question of this research project was whether and if so, how the Internet is changing the political activities of migrants. Does the Internet merely facilitate the communication and information between migrants or do these activities develop and obtain a whole new quality, because new ways of influence are successfully utilized? What impact on the political events in the countries of origin and of residence can be identified, how do they occur and what consequences do they have? Exemplarily, this will be analyzed regarding immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Turkey and Kurdish areas in the Middle East.

2 Method

Our method consists of a content analysis of websites created and used by migrants for political activities (fo-

cusing 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 virtual 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, Turkey and the Kurdish areas now living in Germany, Switzerland or Austria. In this analysis we viewed over 800 sites, of which 99 German-Post Soviet sites, 108 German-Turkish and 102 German-Kurdish websites¹ turned out be relevant for our research question that focused on their political content. These sites were explored as to their year of establishment, their up-to-dateness, their political information, communication and participation features as well as existing references to home and/or host country politics. Additionally, 30 websites were chosen for a more intensive content analysis and a survey of the sites' operators and users.

Since our interest lay in uncovering organizational structures and orientations of migrants' political online activities, we made use of a network visualization tool (Issucrawler). This server-side Internet network location software performed a co-link analysis of the entered 99, 108 and 102 relevant URLs from the three groups (see Rogers 2006: 2). The results of the inquiries are geographical visualizations of the networks. 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.

¹ Below, Germany is referred to when speaking of the host country of these migrants to simplify and improve the legibility of the text, even though the study also included websites and migrants that live in Austria and Switzerland.

We also conducted an online user survey, which was posted on the 30 most relevant German-Post-Soviet, -Turkish and -Kurdish websites² and explored the political online and offline activities of the three migrant groups. In all cases the questionnaire was available in two languages (German or Russian/German or Turkish). The form was completed by 136 migrants from the former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan etc.), 177 Turkish and 136 Kurdish migrants. 37.6 percent of the first group indicated their ethnical background as Russian-Jewish, 21.8 percent as German (“Aussiedler”) and 20.3 percent as Russian, which shows how heterogeneous the migrant groups are. The sample is not representative due to the self selection of the participants (Dillman 2000). Nevertheless, since drawing a representative sample of Internet users it to date impossible, this procedure allows us to generate first explorative conclusions about the political Internet use of migrants in Germany.

By analyzing 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 (information and data exchange, discussion and political mobilization)
- interaction with the residents and organizations in the country of origin (input of alternative information; articulation of opposition, mobilizing resistance)
- interaction with the residents and organizations in the host country (information about the situation in the country of origin, lobbying for support)

2 Below, these websites are often referred to as „Turkish websites“ or „Kurdish sites“ in order to improve the readability of the text. However, these websites are as explained above websites used by or created by migrants from Turkey, the countries of the former Soviet Union or the Kurdish areas in the Middle East now living in Germany, Austria or Switzerland.

- interaction within a possibly international public (Diaspora) sphere (worldwide visibility and influence)

3 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?

3.1.1 Target groups

Migrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) are not the primary target group of eight out of the ten most relevant political Internet sites evaluated. The administrators of these sites more often stated that their website was designed for Russian speaking users in host and home countries as well as people interested in Russian culture and politics (for details see Seveker 2007). In contrast, nine out of ten of the surveyed Turkish administrators indicated that their primary target group consists of persons of Turkish origin, who now live in Germany. Five administrators stated that they also address web users of German origin. One administrator explained 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 analysis of the Kurdish websites showed that these sites are not primarily designed for Kurds in Germany, but for Kurds everywhere in the world or people interested in the Kurdish issues. Since many of these websites are blocked by the governments in Iran, Syria or Turkey, it can be assumed that the Kurdish websites are not commonly used for

communication between migrants and the inhabitants in the country of origin.

3.1.2 Topics

On the majority of websites political issues concerning the country of origin as well as the country of residence are commented on, but viewing each migrant group separately clear discrepancies become evident (for details see table 1). More than 50 percent of the evaluated Post-Soviet websites concentrate on international topics. In contrast, political topics with reference to Germany count for 19 percent, and nine percent of the websites concentrate solely on Post-Soviet topics. The emphasis of the analyzed Turkish websites lies on German politics. 50 percent have a dominant political reference to the migrants' host country. Roughly 17 percent of the websites refer to political developments in Turkey. Political information from both countries is offered by 32 percent of the web pages. Kurdish sites show a strong focus on the Kurdish "cause". 28 percent focus exclusively on this topic; their "Kurdish nationalism" stands out strongly. 70 percent of the websites deal with political events in their host country, but only whenever these are linked to Kurdish interests or incidents in the Kurdish areas in the Middle East.

Table 1: *Geographical references to political topics on the analyzed websites*

	Total (N=309)	Post-Soviet Study (N=99)	Turkish Study (N=108)	Kurdish Study (N=102)
Both country of origin and country of residence	41,7	21,1	32,4	70,6
Solely Germany/Switzerland/ Austria	24,9	19,0	50,9	1,0
Different countries (international, beyond countries of origin and residence)	17,2	50,5	4,6	1,0
Solely the country of origin (former Soviet Union; Turkey; Kurdish areas)	16,2	9,4	12,0	27,5

Source: PPI data; in percent; Chi-square test significant ($\chi^2=175,661$; $p<0,001$); Cramer's $V=0,533$

3.1.3 Language

German is used most often on the analyzed websites, although there are distinct differences between the three migrant groups (see table 2). The Russian language serves more often than German as the communication basis of Post-Soviet migrants on the web. 70 percent of the Post-Soviet websites use the Russian language; on more than 30 percent of the sites it is the only language. About 22 percent of the sites are exclusively in German, while 23 percent are multilingual. In contrast, Turkish websites are mostly sustained in German; more than 47 percent are just in the language of the host country. 26 percent are offered in both languages, German and Turkish, where as 12 percent use Turkish as the only language. Again, Kurdish sites differ, as they are predomi-

nantly multilingual. This means the user can choose between at least two languages such as German, Turkish, English, French or Arab. 20 percent of the sites are in German and Kurdish, while 23 percent use solely German.

Table 2: *Language use on the analyzed websites*

	Total (N=309)	Post- Soviet Study (N=99)	Turkish Study (N=108)	Kurdish Study (N=102)
Solely German	31,4	22,2	47,2	23,5
Multilingual (e.g. Kurdish, Turkish, German, English, Swedish)	24,9	23,2	13,9	38,2
Turkish/Russian/ Kurdish <i>and</i> German	23,9	24,2	26,9	20,6
Solely Russian, Turkish, Kurdish	19,7	30,3	12,0	17,6

Source: PPI data; Chi-square test significant ($\chi^2=35,859$; $p<0,001$); Cramer's $V=0,485$

3.1.4 Links

Links to other websites are the foundation and the central idea of the Internet. However, Post-Soviet as well as Turkish migrant websites are hardly linked to each other (possibly due to competition). The sites of Post-Soviet migrants basically refer to Russian websites, especially Weblogs. Only rarely do they show a connection to Germany by linking to German websites. In gross contrast, Turkish sites are primarily linked with host country websites, in particular with German media sites and national institutions such as the German parliament, the federal government, the ministry of foreign affairs or goethe.de. 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. Websites of Kurdish migrants, however, are strongly interlinked: many of the sites have a link list with a number of other Kurdish websites maintained from Germany or other European countries. There are also generally more websites in the Kurdish network than in the Post-Soviet and Turkish web.

3.2 User surveys

The user survey addresses the following questions: What are the political interests 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?

3.2.1 Political Interests

For the majority of the interviewed migrants international politics are of foremost interest as well as the developments in their country of origin. Of the Post-Soviet interviewees 46 percent stated that their main political concern lies in “international relations” followed by the topics “education” and “labor and social affairs”. The topic “migration and integration” is less important for this group of users (see table 3). In general, 56 percent of the Post-Soviet users were interested more in the politics of their country of origin than in German politics (see table 4, for details see Kissau 2007). The main topic of political interest to Turkish interviewees is in contrast “migration and integration” (29 percent). International politics rank in second place, in front of themes such as elections or democracy. Kurdish migrants show a dominant concern for “international relations” (55 percent), developments in the Kurdish areas in the Middle East (91 percent) and for the topic of migration.

Table 3: *Interest for political topics in the Internet*

	Total (N=133)	Post- Soviet Study (N=133)	Turkish Study (N=174)	Kurdish Study (N=129)
International relations	39,2	46,6	21,3	55,8
Migration und Inte- gration	18,3	9,8	29,3	12,4
Elections, Democra- cy, Participation	11,7	9,0	13,8	11,6
Education	10,8	12,5	11,5	7,8
Labor and Social Affairs	8,9	11,3	11,5	3,1
Economy and Finance	6,7	6,8	8,6	3,9
Religion	4,4	3,8	4,0	5,4

Source: PPI data; in percent; Chi-square test significant ($\chi^2=57,258$; $p<0,001$); Cramer's $V=0,257$

Table 4: *Main political interest/orientation*

	Total (N=441)	Post- Soviet Study (N=134)	Turkish Study (N=172)	Kurdish Study (N=135)
country of origin (former Soviet Union, Turkey, Kurdish areas)	65,3	56,7	51,7	91,1
country of resi- dence (Germany, Switzerland, Aus- tria)	34,7	43,3	48,3	8,9

Source: PPI data; in percent; Chi-square test significant ($\chi^2=58,003$; $p<0,001$); Cramer's $V=0,363$

3.2.2 Political activity

In general, the survey shows that Turkish and Kurdish users are online more politically engaged than Post-Soviet users. Turkish and Kurdish users more often

search for information on websites of parties/public authorities, online newspapers as well as associations than Post-Soviet users do. However, forums and weblogs are used more by Post-Soviet users. These findings correspond to the political off-line activities of the three groups: Turkish and Kurdish migrants are more frequently members of political parties, trade unions or migrant self help groups than Post-Soviet migrants. They also discuss about politics offline more often. Turkish and Kurdish users also indicated that their political activities (information retrieval, political discussions and participation) have increased considerably since they use the Internet, while Post-Soviet users' political activity has increased only slightly.

3.2.3 Communication partners

Using the Internet to enable and simplify the contact to their country of origin is a central motive for many of the questioned users. This shows that their individual online sphere and their online activities are influenced by their migratory experience. Their primary communication partners online are migrants from the same country of origin that also live in their country of residence (see table 5). In detail, Post-Soviet users more often communicate with inhabitants of the former Soviet Union than with Germans without a migration background. Turkish and Kurdish users tend to have this contact to German users more frequently. The majority of the Turkish and Post-Soviet migrants also stated to have a permanent group of communication partners on the Internet, whom they discuss politics with (52.6 and 53.8 percent). Kurdish users were less often integrated in such an online community (46.6 percent).

Table 5: *Communication partners in the Internet*

	Total (N=433)	Post-Soviet Study (N=135)	Turkish Study (N=165)	Kurdish Study (N=133)	χ^2 P
Migrants from the former Soviet Union, Turkey and Kurdish areas in Germany, Switzerland, Austria	61,3	57,0	59,1	67,9	not significant
Germans, Swiss, Austrians without a migratory background	44,2	33,4	55,1	44,2	16,908 0,031
Residents of the States of the former Soviet Union, Turkey or Kurdish areas	44,1	55,6	40,6	36,0	16,736 0,001
Migrants from the country of origin in other countries	12,9	19,5	5,7	12,9	-

Source: PPI data; in percent; sum of response categories "very often" and "often"; Germans: Cramer's $V=0,140$; Residents: Cramer's $V=0,139$

4 Discussion

The political online activities that we identified throughout our research can be used to characterize differences and similarities in the orientations and organizational structures of migrant groups. In our study we found variations between migrant groups in their on-line-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 groups represent three different online spheres of migrants (see also Kissau/Hunger 2009). We assigned our observations the headings of transnational (online) communities, (virtual) Diasporas and ethnic (online) public spheres that have become evident through the analysis of their Internet usage characteristics (see table 6).

We consider migrants from the former Soviet Union to be an example for a transnational (online) community which is mostly politically involved, though not very actively, both in home and host country through the Internet. This group predominantly communicates with other Post-Soviet migrants 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, respectively the general communication structure of Post-Soviet 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 or their political views and actions in both countries, such as online-petitions or fundraisings, are supported by many of the Post-Soviet migrant Internet users.

The political Internet sites used by Post-Soviet migrants in Germany are part of a larger Russia based Internet network. Most hyperlinks of the analyzed sites refer to Russian language Internet sites and only few to German ones. Through hyperlinks website administrators and users express their orientation and interests, as they thus forward other users to these 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 thus show the groups' central thematic focus on their Russian heritage.

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 Post-Soviet migrants. Within their online public sphere, which is dominated by the use of the Russian language, inner differentiations of more host and more home country oriented individuals or sub spheres exists. Many of the migrants also 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 focused more 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). This individualistic character is also noticeable online. The majority of the Post-Soviet 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.

In contrast to this transnational focus our analysis of Kurdish migrants' uses of the Internet displayed that their online activities enhance their Diaspora identity. This migrant group is centrally focused 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 "Kurdistan" is a predominant

goal. At the same time the network of these Diaspora websites has an apparent campaign character, whereas only few of the other Turkish or Post-Soviet sites have such stimulant nature. Many of these sites are even blocked by Iran, Syria or Turkey, which again demonstrates their central focus on political change and influence.

Their political involvement in the 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. Schwalgin points out that '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' (2004: 88).

Kurdish websites reflect—much more than Post-Soviet and Turkish websites—the ethnic group consciousness (common homeland, myth, origin, tradition, history), which is used to define themselves in contrast to other groups in the host society (see Wonneberger 2004). In difference to Post-Soviet and Turkish sites, topics such as life in Germany, integration or the political development in Germany are almost never discussed. In contrast, Kurdish nationalism is evident in many of the analyzed sites and is at least subliminal to the political online discussions of Kurdish migrants.

Another difference to both Post-Soviet 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 Post-Soviet and Turkish sites. Kurdish Internet sites have an international focus group of Kurds living worldwide, since quite often the sites are multilingual (French, German, Kurdish, Turkish, English), showing how the analysis of the Internet goes beyond national frameworks.

Table 6: *Migrants' political orientations*

	transnational (online) community	(virtual) Diaspora	ethnic (online) public sphere
Political involvement in home country	partly involved in home country	centrally focused 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 focused 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
Political objectives/goals	improve relations between both countries	have political influence	keep informed, participation not central
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.palpallo.de www.atameken.de	www.turkcom.org www.theinder.net

Source: authors' own conceptualization

Other research data suggests that Alevis in Germany have a similar diasporic online orientation. They 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 (see Sökefeld 2002). This again shows that differences between Diaspora groups are probable, but can also be assessed by using the Internet as a means of analysis.

Additionally, the evaluation of political information, communication and participation of migrants online has disclosed that further forms of political migrant

institutions and structures beyond Diaspora and transnationalism have developed. We have come to conceptualize these as “ethnic (online) public spheres” (Hunger 2004), an example for such being the case of migrants from Turkey in Germany. While their contact to the country of origin is solely observant their political interest and action is focused on their host country Germany. However these migrants prefer to discuss political topics within their differentiated “ethnic” sphere.

While contact to German citizens does take place frequently (in contrast to Post-Soviet migrants), their chosen political communication space is one of Turkish heritage. Online and offline worlds are in this case very close and interwoven, as the local dimension of users within one country make it theoretically and practically possible for users to meet offline (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 Post-Soviet or Kurdish 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 dependent on the overall German public or journalistic selection mechanisms.

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. Such a sphere is not to be mistaken with an ethnic enclave that severs all connections with the general public sphere (see Fraser 1992). In contrast, our survey on the link structure of the websites uncovered a tight network and inter-linkage of Turkish migrant and Ger-

man websites. The study also revealed that web-users of Turkish origin communicate more frequently with German web-users than users of Post-Soviet or Kurdish origin do.

This example illustrates that globalization has not influenced all migrant groups to act as a Diaspora or transnational community. Other research has also shown that Indian migrants in Germany for example might well also be categorized as maintaining such an ethnic public sphere (see Goel 2007). Characteristics of sites such as “theinder.net” seem to indicate that differentiations viewed in our analysis might also apply to other migrant groups.

These three communication structures are probably not implicitly stable; rather their modification is dependent 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 it seems possible to imagine a phase model based on time, in which the first generation of migrants could be coined as a Diaspora and the second as a transnational community (see also Faist 1999; Emanuelsson 2005). The results of our research also suggest that a third stage in form of an established ethnic public sphere is possible, which 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 speculate whether the transnational Post-Soviet online-community might develop in this direction over time.

This question of course cannot 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. Second and third generation migrants in host countries will have to decide individually how to use the Internet to fit their political interests and activities. By evaluating on-

going changes in the communication practices and characteristics of Internet sites, however, the fluidity and malleability of these 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 stable linkages between websites and user groups give evidence of the existence of durable transnational communities in contrast to mere transnational practices of individuals.

In this context it appears to be necessary to accentuate that though national borders are not visible online, they are often artificially drawn through the behavior of users, in our case of migrants. Where no such borders exist, language and ethnic belonging enable the creation of new ingroup-outgroup structures. It therefore becomes evident that the nation state is dominant for online interaction nonetheless. Especially, in respect to political topics, the analyzed migrants 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 processes such as development cooperation or societal integration (see Kissau 2008) and it will have an enormous impact on migrants' positions abroad. But this does not mean that migrants' interests or organizational structures did not exist prior to these technological possibilities. Rather, the dominant features of different migrant settlements abroad were underlined and strengthened by new media developments. However, 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 democratization 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 politicized 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 or invisible, as Georgiou summarizes (see 2002: 10). Since communication online is non- or almost non-hierarchical, it lets Diaspora centers become less vivid, strengthening pluralism beyond the focus on an (imagined) homeland. This empowerment of the periphery might thus 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 hinder 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 cannot 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.

The Internet constitutes a new realm and possibility for migrants for communication, representation and imagination, as they are otherwise often excluded from the public sphere or mainstream media (see Georgiou 2002). However, this alternative space online is only to some extent a solution, as the central problem of exclusive public spheres in the host countries still exists.

5 Outlook

Our findings suggest that the internet has indeed transformed the political participation of migrants. While Turkish immigrants primarily use the Internet to inform themselves and talk about the political situation in their country of residences, Kurdish immigrants make use of the Internet with a focus on their regions of origin. The Internet is hereby also used as an instrument to attain greater general and media attention for the Kurdish cause. Post-Soviet migrants in turn make use of the Internet to maintain contact with other Russian-speaking users in their home countries or other countries of the world. In all three cases, the Internet has the potential to expand the political participation of migrants. These changes are not limited to migrants, but refer globally to political participation on the Internet. In conclusion, a general outlook on further developments will be given, how the Internet may modify politics

Thus our study and others have shown that the new possibilities of interaction on the Internet primarily live through the activities of the users. Participation therefore takes place by itself as a bottom-up process. Users can not be “forced” to political commitment top-down. Especially online communicates (see the contribution of In der Smitten in this volume) as well as Web 2.0 applications such as Forums and Blogs (“peer production”) have a great political potential as they often show particular motivation and a high political activity. Political discussions on the Internet are determined by the users. Additionally, as our study found, websites that allow the influence of users are most successful. This not only leads to well-visited sites and lively exchanges, but also sets the stage for political effects. For political actors this provides a facility to cooperate with already well-structured forums, rather than building an own competing platforms. This also applies to “migrant sites”. Hereby, new potentials for international relationships can develop, as political interests of users online are not

restricted to local issues, as our research on Post-soviet, Turkish and Kurdish migrants revealed. Political online applications are appreciated by users across geographic distances and national borders. Multilingualism, intercultural competence as well as simple handling determine whether new user groups or potential political partners can be attained. Thus, new political spheres online develop, within which knowledge is exchanged and transnational political groups can arise.

At that, political online involvement is not a zero sum game. When it comes to political participation of migrants on the Internet, we found, that the more involvement in a topic or a country is shown, the greater also the interest and willingness for further activities regarding other countries. In general, it can therefore be assumed that existing political engagement online should not be seen as a competition but as an indication that a potential or a basic political interest exists. Thus, networking with other political projects on the Internet should be assessed as a possibility to raise the awareness of one's own activities and then to jointly pursue the shared political goal. "Lone Wolves" do not correspond to the logic (and functionality) of the Web 1.0 and certainly not of the Web 2.0.

At the same time the Internet allows the specialization on selected political issues. Not every political actor can and must cover all policy issues or every possible target group through a website or integrate all existing web applications (blog, wiki, podcast) on his or her website. It is more sensible to select key issues, target groups and applications and to concentrate on cooperation with other providers and users (networking) to cover the entire field. Here, as our study demonstrated, significant potential yet exists. Although the Internet provides ideal opportunities to forge networks that are more than the sum of their parts, we hardly found productive networks in our analyzed web spheres.

Despite the increasing importance of the Internet local or traditional forms of political communication such as public meetings, panel discussions, roundtables

or (migrant) organizations will retain a major importance. However, the Internet complements these forms of participation with new location-independent communication possibilities such as podcasts, chats and blogs.

Through the search function or links a user can come across new political groups and publics that are mainly concerned with issues that are central for the individual. As the example of migrants showed, people with similar interests—no matter how particular they are—can increasingly find one another on the Internet to discuss and sometimes to become politically involved. In addition, the target group and interest specific presentation of political information is facilitated (e.g. through RSS feeds). Through such applications political content can be made available to the users in form of small packages so that he or she can be informed on a mix of topics according to personal preferences

This perfect address can contribute to reducing political apathy, boredom and fatigue due to topics which are of no interest for the individual and thus even to promote political participation. Political content on the Internet can reach a large user group, if it is available free of charge. This leads to additional distribution effects, as users might cite this information elsewhere or refer to it and thus increase its audience and public awareness for free.

The information potential of the Internet today is not exploited to the full. For example many municipalities have not created areas on their websites, where they address specific target groups such as immigrants (see Hentschel/Schröder/Wiggerink 2009). Therefore, not only free access to political websites is sensible, but also multilingual content so that user groups are not excluded because of a lack of language skills. This would not only promote its use, but also counteract the digital division of society. The political potential of the Internet—also regarding immigrants—is thus far from being exhausted.

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