

Immigrant Integration, Transnational Activities and the Life Course

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Schunck, R. (2011). Immigrant Integration, Transnational Activities and the Life Course. In M. Wingens, M. Windzio, H. d. Valk, & C. M. Aybek (Eds.), *A Life-Course Perspective on Migration and Integration* (pp. 259-282). Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1545-5_12

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Chapter 12

Immigrant Integration, Transnational Activities and the Life Course

Reinhard Schunck

12.1 Introduction

Transnationalism refers to the increased interlinkage between people all around the world and the loosening of boundaries between countries. With respect to migration, transnationalism describes immigrants' engagement in economic, socio-cultural, and political activities across borders.

Although a notable body of mainly qualitative research has developed on transnationalism and transnational migration, there are still theoretical and empirical blind spots regarding the prevalence and characteristics of transnationalism. This holds especially for the relation between migrants' transnational involvement and their integration into the receiving society. Moreover, quantitative empirical evidence for transnational activities among the immigrant populations is scarce and still missing for Europe.

Interestingly, there are only few attempts to theoretically (e.g. Bommes 2005; Faist 2000; Morawska 2002; Pries 2001) or empirically link immigrant integration and integration. Most of the work available targets the US (e.g. Guarnizo et al. 2003; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Portes et al. 2002; Portes 2003) with a few exceptions (e.g. O'Flaherty et al. 2007; Snel et al. 2006).

This paper attempts to further fill this gap. Focusing on visits to the country of origin, it presents evidence for transnational involvement of immigrants in one of Europe's major receiving countries, namely Germany. Specifically, this paper seeks to find answers to two questions: (1) to what extent do immigrants residing in Germany engage in transnational activities? (2) how are these activities related to the immigrants' integration into the receiving country?

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The following section gives a short overview on the concept of transnationalism and reviews some of the most important studies in this field of research. The third section proposes a theoretical frame which links immigrant integration to transnational involvement by combining insights from life course research with research on immigrant integration. The fourth section presents the data and subsequently the analyses conducted to test the theory's implications. The fifth section sums up the main findings, discusses strengths and shortcomings, and lays out paths for further research.

12.2 Transnational Activities and Immigrant Integration

Transnationalism, as defined by the pioneers of the field, Basch et al. (1994:6), is “the process by which immigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social fields across borders”. In other words, transnationalism describes the emergence of social structures that transcend national borders through migrants' continuous involvement in both the sending and the receiving country, as for instance by frequent travel between these two destinations. As a consequence, stable networks across borders emerge, which may in turn intensify migration. Migrants are supposed to live ‘dual lives’, living in two countries, speaking two languages, and are subject to the standards of two cultural reference systems. Thus the process of migration has to be conceptualized not as a one time move from one place to another, but as a process which entails the interlinkage of two or more places, providing the opportunity for remigration and the continuous existence of social ties between these places.

12.2.1 Transnational Activities

This paper does not attempt to deliver an overview of the competing concepts of transnationalism. There are a number of instructive reviews available which discuss conceptual, methodological as well as theoretical issues of transnationalism (see e.g. Kivisto 2001; Levitt et al. 2003; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Portes 2001, 2003).

A word on terminology still seems helpful. In the course of the paper I will abstain from using the term transnationalism, instead using the terms transnational activities and transnational involvement. The term transnationalism, as Smith (2002: 148) points out, often seems to indicate a “third space”, which, albeit being divorced from both the origin and the receiving country, implies an entirely new way of living simultaneously in both places. Transnational activities are more narrowly defined – as individual immigrants' border-crossing activities – and do not necessarily imply a simultaneous mode of living in-between two societies. Moreover, any social

structure connecting origin and receiving society, such as transnational social spaces, transnational communities, and transnational networks (Faist 2000; Pries 2001), presuppose transnational *activities*, as these social structures are products of immigrants' actions. In sum, it therefore appears reasonable to focus on the micro-level and concrete actions when assessing transnationalism as an empirical phenomenon.

This work investigates a tangible aspect of transnational involvement: visits to the country of origin. Visits to one's country of origin may be the most basic form of transnational activities, because they encompass physical border-crossing (O'Flaherty et al. 2007: 819–820). To maintain social ties with persons in one's country of origin, physical presence is prone to be of great importance, despite means of modern telecommunication. This also holds for keeping an orientation towards the country of origin: frequent visits are likely to strengthen and reinforce an immigrant's orientation towards his or her original culture.

12.2.2 *Previous Empirical Evidence*

Aside from a rich body of (ethnographic) case studies and anecdotal evidence, large scale empirical evidence for transnational involvement among immigrants is still scarce. In the following section I will discuss the most relevant quantitative studies available so far. The arguably most regarded studies come from the Comparative Immigrant Entrepreneurship Project (CIEP) conducted in the US (Guarnizo et al. 2003; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Portes et al. 2002; Portes 2001, 2003), which was explicitly designed to investigate transnational involvement among contemporary Latin-American immigrants in the US.

The first lesson to be learned from the CIEP data is that transnational involvement among immigrants is far from being a large scale phenomenon. Depending on the type of border-crossing activity, the share of immigrants transnationally active rarely exceeds one third (for an overview see Portes 2003). Moreover, only a small share of immigrants regularly participate in time- and resource-intensive transnational activities (as for instance taking part in political campaigns and rallies in the country of origin or in transnational entrepreneurial activities).

The findings of the CIEP on the relation between transnational activities and immigrant integration call into question traditional theories of immigrant integration. As Portes et al. (2002) and Guarnizo et al. (2003) argue, traditional theories of immigrant integration (or assimilation) would conceive of transnational involvement as temporary and bound to disappear over time, as immigrants become better integrated into the receiving society (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1,215; Portes et al. 2002: 288). Yet, the analysis of the CIEP data shows the exact opposite pattern. Not only do transnational activities (economic and political) increase with the time spent in the receiving country, but factors such as education, which are typically assumed to ease integration into the receiving society, actually raise the chance of

being transnationally active. Moreover, Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo (2002) find evidence indicating that transnational involvement might be caused as a reaction to unfavorable conditions in the receiving society. This “reactive transnationalism” (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002: 772) comes into play if immigrants are dissatisfied with their life in the receiving country as the dissatisfaction promotes a greater orientation towards the country of origin.

In general the authors (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1,233, 1,238) conclude that predictions from traditional assimilationist frameworks are consistently rejected, as transnational activities do not decrease as integration into the receiving increases. At the same time, these studies do not support the assumption that transnational involvement is a venue to marginalized migrants. Transnational involvement is often highest among those immigrants who are comparably well integrated into the receiving society.

Waldinger (2008) also finds evidence for transnational involvement among Latin-American immigrants in the US. His study refines previous findings by showing that border-crossing activities do not “cluster together” (Waldinger 2008: 24). Sending remittances is characteristic for new arrivals and decreases with time spent in the receiving country, whereas settled immigrants with secure legal status are more likely to engage in transnational activities, which require physical border-crossing. Taken together, Waldinger (2008: 824,826) concludes that genuine transnational modes of living are the exception and most immigrants intend to settle permanently in the destination country.

O’Flaherty et al. (2007) provide evidence of transnational involvement among newly arrived immigrants in Australia. Investigating visits to the country of origin by analyzing data from LSIA [Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Australia] the authors (O’Flaherty et al. 2007) find that only about one tenth of the newly arrived immigrants in Australia frequently visit their country of origin. These border-crossing activities are related to the immigrants’ integration into the receiving society. However, the factors that shape immigrants’ transnational involvement appear to change over time: initially, economic resources are a positive predictor for visiting the country of origin, but as immigrants become integrated into the receiving society, cultural factors, such as English language proficiency, become important (O’Flaherty et al. 2007: 832, 840).

These studies have been invaluable first steps in assessing how prevalent border-crossing activities are among contemporary immigrants and in which ways these activities might be linked to these immigrants’ integration into the receiving countries. But the findings are far from being definite, for the reason that the above studies have a number of shortcomings that limit the conclusions that can be drawn from them. As Waldinger (2008: 6) emphasizes, the CIEP data might not be representative of the (Latin-American) immigrants in the US, because the sample consists of a significant, nonrandom referral element (for a discussion see Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005: 906), among which transnational involvement is much higher as compared to the random sample. What is more, the CIEP data as well as the data used by Waldinger (2008) is cross-sectional, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences from it, as it is usually impossible to distinguish between

selection and causation effects in this kind of data. Although the LSIA data are longitudinal, which certainly is an advantage, it is unfortunate that it follows immigrants only for 3½ years after initial arrival. While the “embryonic stages of settlement” (O’Flaherty et al. 2007: 840) are without doubt important for further paths of integration, it is too short a time period to assess how integration and transnational activities relate. Moreover, it is unfortunate that O’Flaherty et al. (2007) do not employ adequate statistical techniques for the analysis of longitudinal data, but instead compute pooled cross-sectional regression models, as the former make much better use of the data and produce more reliable estimates.

12.3 Theoretical Frame

This study’s theoretical frame proposes bringing together frameworks of immigrant integration and life course research. Theoretical conceptions of immigrant integration share a major aspect with life course research: both underscore the importance of time and temporal aspects of social processes. One key assumption within the life course framework is that “events, experiences, and contexts affect individuals differently depending on their timing in the life course” (George 2009: 166). Immigrant integration in itself is a process that unfolds over time and, in this sense, over the life course. Thus, the four main themes of life course research identified by Elder (1994) – lives in historical times, linked lives, timing of lives, and human agency – link up very well with contemporary research on immigrant integration and transnational involvement. Life course research has already been applied to the study of migration (e.g. Jasso 2003; Kley 2010; Kulu and Milewski 2007). It is moreover noteworthy that these two theoretical traditions have the same roots: one of the first studies on immigrant integration and immigrants’ border-crossing involvement, Thomas and Znaniecki’s famous “The Polish Peasant” (1918), also inspired life course research (Elder 1985: 24).

Few attempts have been made so far linking transnational activities to the life course (exceptions are Kobayashi and Preston 2007; Levitt 2002; Smith 2002). This is suprising, considering that particular forms of transnational involvement are likely to be associated with central stages in the life course, such as education, getting married, starting a family, finding or changing employment, and retirement. Thus, the form and extent of border-crossing activities can be expected to vary over the life course, to “ebb and flow at different stages, varying with the demands of work, school, and family” (Levitt 2002: 139).

Yet, life course research at times remains descriptive. As such, it can profit from a more direct link to a theory of action, which specifies how life course patterns come into being through individual decisions and actions. As opportunities and motives (or desires, preferences, etc.) arguable make up the basic ingredients for many theories of actions (e.g. Elster 1982; Esser 1999; Hedström 2005), this study will develop hypotheses on how opportunities and motives for transnational involvement are shaped by an immigrant’s life course and her or his position in the receiving society.

Before developing concrete hypotheses on the relation of immigration and transnational involvement, we have to get an understanding what immigrant integration refers to. Integration is often conceptualized as having different dimensions, with a differentiation between four core dimensions: cultural, structural, social, and emotional integration (Esser 2006). The cultural dimension refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, such as language, knowledge of norms, etc. Structural integration relates to immigrants' positioning and the participation of migrants in core spheres of the receiving society – such as the labor market. Social integration refers to the interaction and contact with the autochthonous population, i.e. friendships, intermarriage, etc., whereas emotional integration refers to aspects of identity and belonging. In principle, integration can take place both into the receiving society and/or the ethnic group (for details see Esser 2006: 24ff) and we can speak of assimilation on a particular dimension if there are no differences between the immigrant group and the autochthonous population.¹ Assimilation into the receiving societies' labor market is given, for instance, if both groups' labor market participation and positioning is equal.

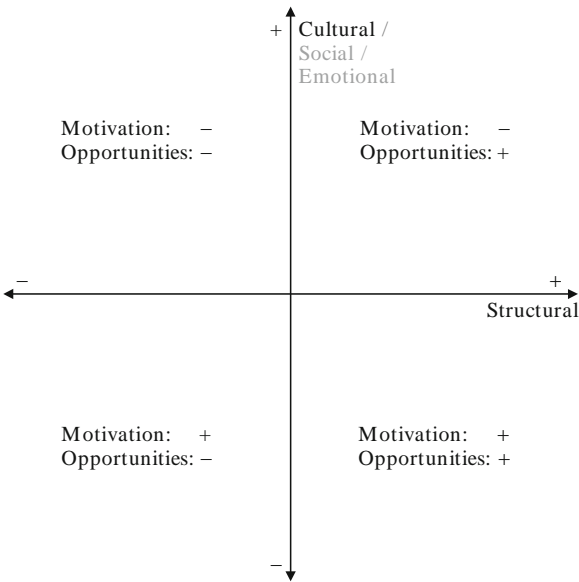
Whereas older theories assume a linear and stepwise process of integration, with integration on one dimension being a requisite for further integration on following dimensions (e.g. Esser 1980; Gordon 1964), recent theoretical and empirical research has demonstrated that the link between the different dimensions is not as clear-cut as previously assumed (Bommes 2005; Gans 1992, 2007; Kalter and Schroedter 2010; Kalter 2005b; Zhou 1992). A strict link between the different dimensions of integration is possible but not necessary. Different configurations of integration on the different dimensions are, at least theoretically, possible.

How does transnational involvement come into play? If we conceptualize immigrant integration as a series of investment decisions (Esser 2006; Kalter and Granato 2002), where immigrants can either invest time and resources into receiving country capitals (i.e. pursue an assimilationist strategy) or into ethnic or origin country capitals (i.e. pursue an ethnic strategy) there is a clear link to transnational involvement: transnational activities are similar to investments into ethnic capitals.

Obviously, an important question in previous research concerns the compatibility or incompatibility of transnational involvement and immigrant integration. From the perspective of traditional frameworks, one could argue that integration into the receiving society and maintaining ties with the country of origin are mutually

¹In the public as well as in the scientific discourse there is a heated debate on the concepts of integration and assimilation. The concept of assimilation is criticized for rendering incorporation into a receiving country as a unidirectional process, which requires the immigrants to give up their identity, which is said to be normatively as well as descriptively problematic with respect to pluralistic societies. However, the concept of assimilation as proposed by Esser (2006) distinguishes between processes and outcomes. While assimilation is one alternative investment strategy, Esser's model allows for several outcomes. Moreover, as an outcome, assimilation merely describes a situation in which parity between two groups. This situation of similarity can, however, be reached via different routes and does not necessarily require a unidirectional adaption of the immigrant group.

Fig. 12.1 Configurations of dimensions of integration into the receiving society and motivation and opportunities for transnational involvement (Modified from O’Flaherty et al. (2007))



exclusive, because the investment strategies are incompatible. Increasing integration will thus lead to a decrease in transnational involvement. But the compatibility might very well depend on the specific aspect we are investigating. Mutual inclusion in both origin and receiving country labor markets seems rather unlikely and exceptional (as suggested by the findings on transnational entrepreneurship), while bilingualism, hybrid ethnic identities, to name but two examples, are more likely.

At this point we find a direct link between immigrant integration and transnational involvement through the situation the immigrant faces in the receiving society. This situation is characterized by the immigrant’s position in the receiving society and her or his stage in the life course. The former can be understood as the immigrant’s positioning in a multidimensional social space, which is constituted by the dimensions of integration – not unlike Bourdieu’s conception of social space (Bourdieu 1985). The propensity to be transnationally active then depends on the configuration of these dimensions, as combinations of these dimensions create specific motives and opportunities to assimilate, to retain an ethnic orientation, or to engage in transnational activities (graphically displayed in Fig. 12.1).

We can exemplify this on the basis of the structural and the cultural dimension. Immigrants who are structurally well integrated (or assimilated) are provided with the necessary financial means for transnational involvement, while those who are structurally not well integrated lack the resources. At the same time the degree of cultural integration shapes the motive: those who are culturally well integrated (or assimilated) have a higher orientation towards the receiving country and hence a lower motivation for keeping ties with their country of origin.

But this conception still is too static, given that opportunities and motives for transnational involvement are also structured by patterns of the life course.

At different points in the life course, there are also different opportunities for transnational involvement, as age underlies the organization of education, work, family, and leisure time (Settersten 2003: 81). To understand how transnational involvement comes into being and how it relates to integration thus requires the reconstruction of how trajectories of integration (i.e. the specific conditions that describe the immigrant's position in the receiving society over time) shape individual opportunities and motives for such involvement.² From such a perspective, integration is a multidimensional process on which transnational involvement is contingent and not an excluding alternative to transnational involvement.

12.3.1 Opportunities

The first variable of interest in shaping opportunities for transnational involvement, which is intimately linked to the timing of events, is certainly age. The tripartition of the life course (Kohli 1987) suggests that (time-demanding) transnational activities are more common during the first and last segment of the life course, because opportunities for such border-crossing involvement are limited during the main period of one's working life. In particular younger and older age groups, compared to persons in the midst of their life, can therefore be assumed to have more time at hand for visits to their country of origin (Hypothesis 1).

This also suggests that full-time employment limits one's opportunities for visiting the country of origin, as employment "ties" the immigrant to the receiving country. Full-time employment is thus expected to hinder long visits to the country of origin, whereas not working is assumed to provide the temporal opportunity and thus increase one the probability to visit (Hypothesis 2). Still, visiting the country of origin requires (financial) resources, despite the fact that the costs of traveling may have greatly declined in the last decades. Therefore, independent of the immigrant's labor force status, we can expect immigrants who are financially well off to visit their country of origin more often than immigrants who command few financial resources (Hypothesis 3).

12.3.2 Motivation

The opportunities to pursue a certain course of action are only part of the picture, we also have to consider an individual's motivation for certain courses of action. With regard to the motivation to be transnationally active, this paper concentrates on two important aspects: the temporal aspect of integration and the degree of (emotional) attachment to the receiving society.

²This work's understanding of trajectories is level-based. Consequently, trajectories are defined as a time-dependent pattern of increase, decrease, or stability of a characteristic of interest (George 2009: 164–165).

Age, in particular the age at migration, appears as a crucial factor shaping an immigrant's motivation for transnational involvement. The more time an immigrant has spent in the country of origin before migration, the stronger will be the orientation and ties to this country, because she or he will have accumulated more origin country specific capital (e.g. social and cultural). Thus, the higher the age at migration, the stronger will be the ties to the country of origin and the higher the likelihood of being transnationally active (Hypothesis 4).

Years since migration (or years of residence) are assumed to have the opposite effect. Integration is a process over time: learning the new language, getting used to new customs and norms, building up new relations all happens over time and the years of residence capture the length of exposure. Consequently, the longer an immigrant lives in the receiving society, the higher will be his or her orientation towards this country and thus the lower the motivation to be transnationally active (Hypothesis 5). To be sure, years of residence by themselves do not constitute a causal factor for integration processes (Esser 1981), but if we are interested in investigating the link between trajectories of integration and transnational involvement, it is indispensable to look at how different measures of integration interact with time spent in the country of origin.

Life course research moreover suggests that individual lives are closely connected to the lives of others. From the perspective of linked lives (Elder 1994), we can assume that the motivation to be transnationally active is especially high, if there are direct family ties to the country of origin, as family members constitute important "location specific capital" (Michielin and Mulder 2007). One of the most intimate and important relationship is certainly that between parent and child. Therefore, we can assume that the motivation to visits one's country of origin will be higher if the parents are still living there (Hypothesis 6).

Two comments on the differentiation of opportunities and motivation appear due. First, it should be clear that this is an analytical differentiation. Factors said to shape opportunities are likely to also shape motives and vice versa. For instance, having family members living in the country of origin is likely to increase the motivation for visiting and may also indicate opportunities (e.g. a place to stay). Second, it should also be clear that the identified factors are far from exhaustive, as there are many other aspects influencing the opportunity and the motivation for border-crossing involvement. As far as the data permits, these aspects are controlled for.

Before proceeding to the empirical section of this paper, the following gives some background information on immigration in Germany.

12.4 Immigration in Germany

Today, about 19% of the German population are immigrants (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010), putting Germany among the top Western receiving countries. Postwar immigration to Germany began in 1950s and 1960s, when Germany recruited foreign workers ("Guestworkers" mainly from Greece, Portugal, Spain,

Turkey, and former Yugoslavia) to meet its industries' growing demand for labor in the reconstruction period. Although migration to Germany was supposed to be temporary labor migration, many immigrants settled permanently. After a period of comparatively low immigration in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly in form of family reunions and on humanitarian grounds, immigration to Germany increased again with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. In the late 1980s and in the 1990s Germany experienced a massive influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and the Balkan states, being either Ethnic Germans ("Spätaussiedler"), that is descendents of Germans living in Eastern Europe, or refugees fleeing the violent conflicts and wars in former Yugoslavia. Today, immigration is mostly temporary, intra-European labor migration (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010). Thus the majority of the immigrants who have settled in Germany are former "Guestworkers", their descendents, or Ethnic Germans.

The immigrants' position in the German society is rather disadvantaged, with the first and second generation still far from reaching parity of life chances with the autochthonous population, as they, for instance, lack human capital, have higher unemployment probabilities, and lower average incomes as compared to the autochthonous population (see e.g. Buchel and Frick 2004; Kalter 2005a; Kalter and Granato 2002; Kogan 2004). There are, however, considerable differences between the immigrant groups, with immigrants from Turkey being the most disadvantaged (Granato and Kalter 2001; Kalter and Granato 2002). Regarding these immigrants' border-crossing activities, representative estimates are unavailable up to now. There is, however, indirect evidence: a considerable share of interethnic marriages – foremost among immigrants with Turkish origin – are transnational marriages in the sense that one spouse immigrates to Germany after the marriage (across all groups on average 18% of the husbands and 33% of the wives, see Kalter and Schroedter (2010: 20–21) for details).

12.5 Data and Analysis

The current study is based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) (for detailed information on the data see Wagner et al. (2007)). The SOEP is a longitudinal survey of Germany's resident population, carried out since 1984. It contains a relatively large subsample of important immigrants groups in Germany – from Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and former Yugoslavia – and is therefore well suited for the analysis of immigrant integration. To ensure a sufficiently large share of immigrants in the SOEP, two of the several subsamples (subsample B in 1984 and D in 1994/1995) were specifically targeted at immigrants.

Since the dependent variable – visits to the country of origin – was first included in the SOEP in 1996, the analysis is restricted to the waves from 1996 to 2008. All persons who are identifiable as being a first generation migrant are included in the analysis. To identify these respondents, information on the country of origin was used. Consequentially, the defining criterion for being an immigrant is not

nationality but the country of origin. This allows including immigrants into the analysis who have acquired the German citizenship. Based on the country of origin, Turkish, Italian, Portuguese/Spanish, and Polish immigrants, immigrants from former Yugoslavia, immigrants from other Western European countries, immigrants from other Eastern European countries including Russia, and from other countries can be distinguished. A further differentiation by country of origin is impossible due to the small case numbers.

The dependent variable of the study, visits to the country of origin, is included in the SOEP every 2 years. Respondents are asked if they have been in their country of origin in the last 2 years and if so for how long. This might result in the data actually underrepresenting the incidence of visits, because if several trips have been undertaken only the longest is reported. The dependent variable was originally an ordinal variable (detailed information on the dependent and central independent variables are available in Table 12.A.1 in the appendix). It has been recoded into a binary variable, with “1” indicating a visit to the country of origin in the last 2 years that lasted at least 4 months (categories 4 and 5) and “0” if otherwise for the multivariate analysis, because spending more than 4 months in the country of origin comes closest to what is described as transnational modes of living in the literature (Basch et al. 1994; Glick-Schiller et al. 1995; Szanton-Blanc et al. 1995).

In order to ensure the correct temporal order between dependent and independent variables, time-lagged predictors have been used in the multivariate models; this means that in predicting the duration of the visit in the time between t and $t+2$, indicators from t and $t-1$ have been used.

As a measure of financial resources, the inflation-adjusted, OECD-equivalized (adjusted for the household composition) annual net household income in EURO divided by 1,000 is used. Labor force participation is operationalized with five categories: working, unemployed, retired, non-working, and other labor force status (such as being in education, on maternity leave, or military service). To capture the potential nonlinear effects of different life course stages, different age groups (up to 20 years, 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51–60, and 61 years and older) have been constructed. Since respondents provide information on the age at migration this can be directly included into the multivariate models, whereas information on the years of residence can be easily constructed from the age at migration. Information on the parents’ whereabouts was collected in 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2006. From this information two binary variables have been constructed separately for mother and father: one variable indicating, whether the respondents mother (or father) still lives in the country of origin (“1”) or not (“0”) and one variable indicating whether information on the mother’s (or father’s) whereabouts are missing (“1”) or not (“0”). This allows to keep the cases for which information on the parents are missing while ensuring that the reference category does not include respondents whose parents are actually living in the country of origin.

To control for unobserved heterogeneity, the respondents’ gender, level of education using the ISCED classification, marital status, number of children under 14 years in the household, intention to stay permanently in Germany (no-yes), whether or not the respondent has acquired the German citizenship (no-yes),

perceived discrimination (no-yes), whether or not the respondent has visited or was visited by Germans in the previous year (no-yes), sending remittances (no-yes), German language proficiency (very good/good vs. fair/poor/not at all), origin country language proficiency (very good/good vs. fair/poor/not at all), and period dummies are additionally controlled for.

This set up leaves 2,105 respondents with 5,672 person-years for whom there is information on all variables. The data for the analyses is unbalanced. Hence, not all respondents are observed in all seven waves; on average there are 2.7 observations per respondent.

12.5.1 Transnational Activities Among Immigrants in Germany: Descriptive Results

To assess the prevalence of visits to the country of origin, descriptive results showing how often immigrants in the sample have reported to have visited their country of origin in the time from 1996 to 2008 are presented in Fig. 12.2. The percentages have been computed by treating the different waves as if they were independent, cross-sectional data (see e.g. Diehl and Schnell 2006).³ The number of cases therefore differs from the number of cases in the multivariate analysis.

In total and across all waves, more than two-thirds (71%) of the immigrants have visited their country of origin. As Fig. 12.2 shows, on average 29% of the immigrants report not having visited their country of origin in last 2 years. This number increases across the considered time period, from 24% in 1996 to about 30% in 2008. The majority of the visits to the country of origin is 1–3 months long. However, this share decreases almost 20% points from 46% in 1996 to 27% in 2008. At the same time, the percentage of immigrants, who only pay short visits to their country of origin, that is no longer than 3 weeks, increases from 21% in 1996 to 33% in 2008. A relatively stable share, about 4–5%, visits their country of origin for 4–6 months and an equally sized share stays even longer. It is interesting to observe that while the share of moderately long visits (1–3 months) decreases over the time, the share of short visits (up to 3 weeks) increases. This could be related to the decline in prices for flights during this time period, which might have shifted immigrants'

³Of course, this is not entirely correct, as it is actually a trend analysis based on the same persons. Potentially selective panel attrition can thus result in inaccurate estimates. However, the direction of any bias is likely to be negative that is a potential bias will lead to an underestimation of the visits to the country of origin. If transnational involvement is linked to the drop-out probability, the only theoretical plausible way is that transnational involvement increases the probability to drop out, which then leads to a sample from which transnational involvement is underestimated. A potential remedy for this problem lies in using cross-sectional weights. But since appropriate weighting schemes for immigrants in the SOEP are not available (see Diehl and Schnell 2006: 798 for details), the waves of the SOEP in the descriptive analysis are treated as independent, unweighted samples.

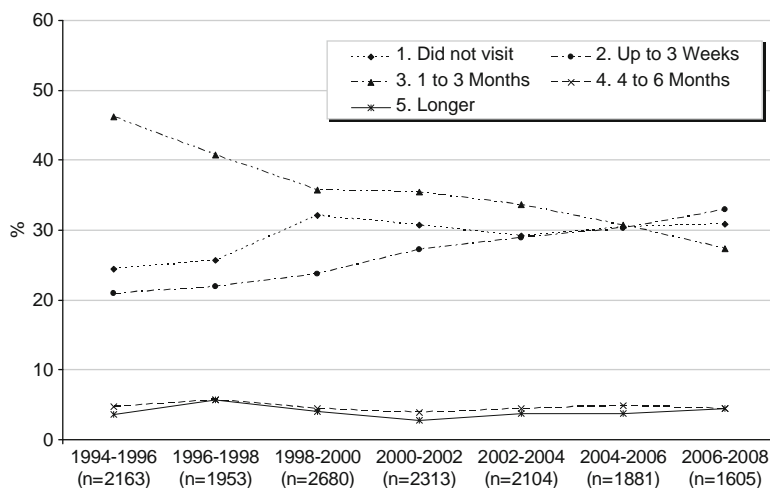


Fig. 12.2 Visits to country of origin in the last 2 years (Source SOEP 1996–2008, own computations, unweighted)

home visits from fewer and longer trips to shorter and more frequent trips. But with the data at hand, this is impossible to test and thus remains speculative.

12.5.2 *Transnational Activities and Immigrant Integration: Multivariate Analyses*

The following section discusses the results of the multivariate models which have been computed to test the hypotheses. To make efficient use of the panel structure of the data, random and fixed effects models have been computed (Allison 2009; Halaby 2003; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005). The basic idea behind these models is quite simple: since there are several observations for the same individuals at different points in time, the observations are so to speak “clustered” in individuals. These observations are not independent from one another. Some persons are generally more transnationally active than others, which will show in their individual observations. Panel data analysis allows controlling for such unmeasured characteristics in several possible ways. The random effect model allows the intercept to vary over the clusters, in this case individuals. Although the random intercept model is a considerable improvement over pooled cross-sectional regression models, it relies on a number of strong assumptions that are not always met. In particular, the random intercept model assumes that all time constant, unobserved characteristics (which cause the intercept to vary over individuals) are uncorrelated with the independent variables. If this key assumption is not met, the estimates will be biased by the (time-constant) unobserved characteristics.

Considering the present case, this is rather unlikely to hold: among the unobserved, time constant factors can be such things as a general orientation towards the country of origin which might depend on experiences in the country before migration. Such an orientation is likely to be correlated with observed predictors, as, for instance, the intention to stay permanently in Germany.

In such a situation the estimation of a fixed effects model proves to be better, as it relies only on within-person variation to estimate the coefficients. This means that the effects of the independent variables are computed by inter-individual comparisons: fixed effects models investigate how change in the dependent variable is related to change in the independent variable within the same individuals. As time constant, unobserved characteristics are fixed within individuals, the effects are estimated net of these unobserved characteristics. However, fixed effects logistic regression models only use observations that experience a change in both the dependent and the independent variable. Hence, they use comparably few cases and are less efficient than random effects models. Moreover, fixed effects models are unable to estimate the effects of time-constant independent variables. Because the effect of time-constant variables, such as the ethnic origins or age at migration, are of interest for this paper, both random and fixed effects have been computed.

12.6 Results

The results of the multivariate analysis are presented in Table 12.1. The first model includes immigrant origin and age groups. With respect to origin, Turkish immigrants have the highest likelihood ($OR = 3.18$, $p < 0.001$) of visiting their country of origin compared to immigrants from Italy, which serve as the reference category. Aside from immigrants with Turkish origin, Spanish and Portuguese as well as Greek immigrants also show higher likelihoods to visit their country of origin. Whereas Spanish and Portuguese immigrants' odds are increased by a factor of 2.04 ($p < 0.05$), the Greek immigrants' odds are increased by a factor of 2.69 ($p < 0.001$). Immigrants from former Yugoslavia, Poland, and other Western-European countries do not differ significantly from Italian immigrants in the probability to visit their respective origin countries. However, immigrants from other Eastern-European countries, which are likely to comprise mostly of ethnic Germans, are significantly less likely ($OR = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) to engage in these border-crossing activities.

The hypotheses (H1) on the structuring effect of the immigrants' age are only partly confirmed. Compared to the reference category, that is immigrants of 31–40 years of age, the odds of paying visiting the country of origin are increased by the factor 2.17 ($p < 0.01$) for the second youngest group (21–30 years). Surprisingly, the other age groups do not differ significantly from those immigrants who are in the midst of their life. One might assume that this is due to age being confounded with the labor force status, i.e. that it is not the age groups per se, but instead one's position on the labor market that shapes the temporal opportunities for

Table 12.1 Determinants of long visits to country of origin, logistic random (RE) and fixed effects (FE), OR

	Model 1, RE		Model 2, RE		Model 3, RE		Model 4, RE		Model 5, FE	
	OR		OR		OR		OR		OR	
Country of origin:										
Italy	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.		Ref.			
Turkey	3.18***		2.76***		3.01***		3.05***			
Greece	2.69***		2.83***		2.88***		2.97***			
Spain and Portugal	2.04*		2.20*		2.11*		2.14*			
Ex-Yugoslavia	1.31		1.35		1.46		1.52			
Other West-Europe	1.03		1.30		1.36		1.36			
Poland	0.34		0.42		0.69		0.68			
Other East-Europe (incl. Russia)	0.20**		0.24**		0.41		0.41			
Other	0.99		1.11		1.15		1.27			
Age:										
Up to 20 years	3.02		2.47		1.78		1.67		- ^a	
21–30 years	2.17**		2.08**		2.09**		1.92*		1.88	
31–40 years	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
41–50 years	0.88		0.81		0.75		0.67		0.48	
51–60 years	1.53		1.28		1.08		0.97		0.38	
61 years and older	2.67		1.78		1.44		1.26		0.49	
Age at migration	1.11***		1.10***		1.11**		1.10**			
Age at migration squared	0.99**		0.99**		0.99*		0.99*			
Years of residence	1.06**		1.06**		1.07**		1.10***		1.18	
ISCED:										
(0) In School/No answer			1.64		1.42		1.42			
(1) Inadequately			1.65***		1.54**		1.51*			
(2) General elementary			Ref.		Ref.		Ref.			
(3) Middle vocational			1.05		0.99		0.98			
(4) Vocational plus Abitur			0.72		0.68		0.68			
(5) Higher vocational			0.87		0.85		0.84			
(6) Higher education			0.97		0.87		0.80			

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

	Model 1, RE		Model 2, RE		Model 3, RE		Model 4, RE		Model 5, FE	
	OR		OR		OR		OR		OR	
HH-Income year (in 1,000€), OECD equivalence scale, inflation-adjusted			1.00		1.00		1.07***		1.13*	
Labor force status:			Ref.		Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
Working			2.25***		2.37***		2.38***		2.65***	
Non-working			1.58		1.61		1.58		1.44	
Retired			1.71**		1.75**		1.72**		1.34	
Unemployed			1.36		1.32		1.34		2.36*	
Other										
Father: lives in country of origin					1.93**		1.88*		— ^b	
Mother: lives in country of origin					0.75		0.72		— ^b	
Sending remittances					0.97		0.95		0.96	
Wish to remain in Germany permanently					0.84		0.85		1.43	
German citizenship					0.50		0.55		— ^b	
Perceived discrimination: experienced					0.89		0.89		0.81	
Interaction: years of res. X Income							0.99***		0.99*	
N (persons)	2,105		2,105		2,105		2,105		334	
N (person-years)	5,672		5,672		5,672		5,672		1,317	

Model 4 (and Model 5 if variable is time-varying) also controls for: gender (n.s.), marital status (single: +/other: n.s.), number of children under 14 in hh (—), visited Germans in their home in the last year (n.s.), visited by Germans at home in the last year (n.s.), information on father's/mother's whereabouts missing (n.s./n.s.), German language proficiency (n.s.), country of origin language proficiency (writing: —/speaking: n.s.), period dummies (years) (n.s.)

*p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

^aCategory was too small (n = 10) and was merged with age category 21–30 years

^bToo little change over time

transnational involvement as the second hypothesis specifies. As model 2 shows, which includes aspects of structural assimilation, this is only partly true. Compared to immigrants who have a full-time job, non-working and unemployed immigrants have higher likelihood of visiting the country of origin ($OR = 2.25$, $p < 0.001$ and $OR = 1.71$, $p < 0.01$). We have to keep in mind that these are the effects of labor force status net of income. Interestingly though, neither retirement nor annual net household income prove to be significant predictors for long visits to the country of origin.⁴ Thus, there is only partial support for the second and none for the third hypothesis.

Age at migration, however, affects the likelihood of visiting the country of origin in the expected direction (H4): the older an immigrant at migration, the more likely will she or he visit the country of origin ($OR = 1.10$, $p < 0.001$). But the relation between age at migration and visits to the origin country is curvilinear, as indicated by the significant and negative coefficient of the squared age at migration ($OR = 0.99$, $p < 0.01$).

The most surprising result, however, is the positive and significant effect of years of residence ($OR = 1.06$, $p < 0.01$). Contrary to the expectation (H5), it appears that the probability to visit one's country of origin increases with time spent in the receiving country. Although this is theoretically surprising, it links up with previous studies mentioned above. Moreover, this effect seems to be linear, as other model specifications (not reported here) show that the effect is neither curvilinear nor in any other way non-linear.

Model 3 (Table 12.1) includes the variables on the parents' whereabouts. There is partial support for the sixth hypothesis, as the likelihood of visiting the country of origin increases if the father is still living in the country of origin ($OR = 1.93$, $p < 0.01$). It is also noteworthy that sending remittances, which is added as a further control, is not significantly associated with visits to the country of origin.

Despite the strong effect of the years of residence, time alone does not provide a theoretical explanation for immigrant integration (Esser 1981). Instead, as argued above, the processes that happen drive integration happen over time. Therefore, to investigate the effects of potentially differential trajectories of integration over time, model 4 (Table 12.1) includes an interaction between years of residence and income. After including the interaction, which itself is highly significant ($OR = 0.99$, $p < 0.001$), the adjusted household income also becomes significant ($OR = 1.07$, $p < 0.001$), and the significance level of the coefficient of the estimated effect of years of residence increases ($OR = 1.10$, $p < 0.001$).

Interaction effects in logistic regression models are not easy to interpret, because we have to consider the main and the interaction effects simultaneously. To facilitate understanding of the interaction between income and years of residence, Fig. 12.3 displays the combined effects on the odds of paying a long visit to the country of origin. Overall, the positive association between years of residence and visiting

⁴Moreover, income does not have a curvilinear relation to visiting the country of origin, as the inclusion of a squared income term does not result in a significant effect (results not reported here).

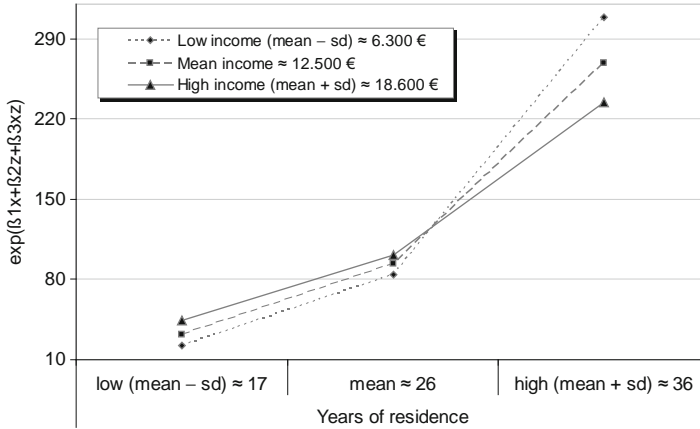


Fig. 12.3 Combined (main and interaction) effect of income and years of residence on the odds ratio of visiting the country of origin from the fixed effects logistic regression model in Table 12.1

the country of origin is also found: as the years of residence increase, so does the likelihood of visiting. However, there is little difference between the income groups (mean income plus or minus one standard deviation) for short and mean years of residence (mean years of residence and mean years of residence minus one standard deviation) as Fig. 12.3 shows. Still, for short and mean years of residence, higher income translates into a higher likelihood of visiting the country of origin, compared to low income immigrants. But the relation between the income groups reverses and the differences increase if we consider a long residence (mean years of residence plus one standard deviation). Now the high income group has the lowest likelihood of visiting the country of origin and the low income group the highest.

To check whether time-constant unobserved heterogeneity is biasing the results, an additional fixed effects model (model 5 in Table 12.1) was computed.⁵ The first thing to notice is that no time-constant independent variable is included in the model and that it uses much fewer observations than the random effects models, as it relies only on within-variation and discards all observations that do not vary in their dependent and independent variables over time. If we compare the estimates of the fixed effects model to fully specified random effects model (model 4 in Table 12.1), we see that the age group effect has disappeared. In this regard, the observed effects in the random effects model may not be genuine life course or life cycle effects. Instead, belonging to a certain age group might be confounded with time-constant unobserved characteristics that are correlated with transnational involvement.

⁵Comparing models 4 and 5, a Hausman-test ($p < 0.001$) favours the fixed effects model, suggesting that important, time constant unobserved characteristics have been omitted from the random effects model.

Moreover, the positive association between unemployment and visits to the country of origin disappears, whereas the positive effect between non-working and visits remain. Therefore, the data indicates that becoming unemployed in itself is not a true predictor for visits to the country of origin. Rather, the effect of unemployment seems to stem from a correlation between unemployment and time-constant confounders. It is noteworthy that the fixed effects model also shows a positive association ($OR = 2.36$, $p < 0.05$) between spending time at the country of origin and “other” labor force status, which includes diverse status such as maternity leaves, military and community services, irregular employment and the like. Unfortunately, the category is too small to disentangle what is behind this effect.

Most importantly, the positive income effect ($OR = 1.13$, $p < 0.05$) and the interaction effect remain significant ($OR = 0.99$, $p < 0.05$), whereas the effect estimate of the years of residence is no longer significant. Still, the fixed effects model generally supports the interpretation of the interplay between years of residence and income.

12.7 Conclusion

This paper used data from the SOEP to study the prevalence and the determinants of visits to the country of origin by immigrants in Germany. It delivers evidence for immigrants’ involvement in Germany, by investigating a tangible aspect of border-crossing activities: visits to the country of origin. Descriptive analyses have shown that a considerable share of the immigrants engages in such activities. At the same time, the share that is transnationally very active, defined in this study as visiting the country of origin for 4 months and longer in a 2 year period, is not large, around 10%.

This study proposed to combine theoretical considerations from life course research with research on immigrant integration. It should be apparent that both streams of research are highly compatible. Analyzing immigrant integration and transnational involvement from a life course perspective can provide a coherent framework for understanding the effects of age, duration, and timing. The proposed perspective suggests that transnational activities vary over the life course, structured by age- and timing-effects as well as the immigrant’s position in the receiving society, by creating specific opportunities, obstacles and motives for such activities.

Although the analyses only partly confirm the theoretical expectations regarding the structuring effect of an immigrant’s age, they provide ample evidence on the importance of the timing of events and the temporal aspects of integration, as indicated by the effect of age at migration and the combined effect of years of residence and financial recourses. The latter finding is particularly important as it underscores that a factor’s effect might be time-dependent. Moreover, transnational involvement seems to be structured by the immigrants’ participation in the labor market, and this certainly is patterned over the life course.

Regarding the relation between immigrant integration and transnational involvement, this paper's findings neither conform fully to predictions of assimilationist nor to transnational theoretical conceptions. First, a basic assimilationist perspective would expect a declining tendency for transnational involvement as integration into the receiving society increases over time. This is obviously not the case, as years of residence seem to increase an immigrant's propensity for the origin country. However, there still seems to be a patterned association between an immigrant's position in the receiving society. The interaction of financial resources and years of residence point toward potentially different trajectories of integration, given that the effect of the available financial resources change with the time spent in the receiving country. Financial resources appear to be enabling, creating the opportunity for transnational involvement. But over time those immigrants who command most financial capital are the least likely to be transnationally active, which again links up with an assimilationist perspective. Moreover, although there is no clear association between other aspects of structural assimilation, such as education, and the propensity to visit one's country of origin, those who are not working and have no formal education are transnationally more active.

Second, similar to findings of Waldinger (2008), this study shows that transnational activities do not cluster together. Although this was not at the focus of this study, it is noteworthy that sending remittances is not linked to visits to the country of origin. Thus, the data do not support the idea of a transnational mode of living.

But this is only a first step to investigate the relation between immigrant integration and transnational involvement. The results of this study suggest that integration and transnational activities, at least when it comes to visiting the country of origin, can go hand in hand. It needs to be checked whether this also holds for other aspects of transnational involvement.

This study has a number of shortcomings that point to further directions of research. First, it is apparent that the specified models are far from being able to comprehensively explain why immigrants' engage in transnational activities. If we take the notable differences between the immigrant groups as the point of departure, we see that these differences do not disappear, once characteristics shaping opportunities and motivation are controlled for. Second, the SOEP mostly contains information on immigrants who have been residing in Germany for quite some time and most of them intend to stay in Germany permanently (Table 12.A.1). It would be interesting to check whether similar patterns can be found among immigrants who have been in the country of origin for shorter time spans. Third, panel attrition can pose a serious threat to longitudinal analysis, specifically if panel attrition is non-random. It is possible that transnational involvement over the life course increases the probability to drop out of the sample, for instance, through permanent remigration. Consequently, the fact that retirement (or the older age groups) does not seem to be related to visits to the country of origin, could be due to selective panel attrition in the sense that only those (old) immigrants remain in the sample, who per se have a

lower probability for transnational involvement and permanent remigration. Future research should take these issues into account when further investigating the relation between immigrant integration and transnational activities.

12.A.1 Appendix

Table 12.A.1 Descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables based on the multivariate sample (N: Person-Years = 5,672) (Source: SOEP 1996–2008)

Variable	Categories/description	Mean/%	SD	Min	Max
Visit to country of origin:	1 “Did not visit”	18.05			
	2 “Up to 3 weeks”	24.58			
	3 “1–3 months”	45.96			
	4 “4–6 months”	6.49			
	5 “Longer”	4.92			
Sex :	0 “Male”	50.49			
	1 “Female”	49.51			
Country of origin:	Italy	34.57			
	Turkey	15.29			
	Greece	8.97			
	Spain and Portugal	4.48			
	Ex-Yugoslavia	17.15			
	Other West-Europe	4.99			
	Poland	3.49			
	Other East-Europe (incl. Russia)	7.32			
Age:	Other	3.74			
	Up to 20 years	2.10			
	21–30 years	16.80			
	31–40 years	25.26			
	41–50 years	20.33			
	51–60 years	21.65			
	61 years and older	13.86			
ISCED:	(0) In school/no answer	3.84			
	(1) Inadequately	18.53			
	(2) General elementary	30.15			
	(3) Middle vocational	30.98			
	(4) Vocational plus Abitur	6.47			
	(5) Higher vocational	2.38			
HH-Income year (in 1,000€), OECD equivalence scale, inflation-adjusted	(6) Higher education	7.65			
		13.19	7.35	0.0	174.0

(continued)

Table 12.A.1 (continued)

Variable	Categories/description	Mean/%	SD	Min	Max
Labor force status:	Working	55.64			
	Non-working	22.87			
	Retired	6.33			
	Unemployed	9.43			
	Other	5.73			
Remittances to relatives/friends abroad	0 "No"	85.01			
	1 "Yes"	14.99			
Father lives in country of origin	0 "No"	62.84			
	1 "Yes"	37.17			
Mother lives in country of origin	0 "No"	51.66			
	1 "Yes"	48.34			
Intention to stay permanently in Germany	0 "No"	36.39			
	1 "Yes"	63.61			
German citizenship	0 "No"	94.38			
	1 "Yes"	5.62			
Experienced discrimination	0 "No"	52.77			
	1 "Yes"	47.23			
Years of residence	Years of residence since arrival	21.64	10.73	0.0	52.0

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ISBN 978-94-007-1544-8 e-ISBN 978-94-007-1545-5

DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-1545-5

Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011931669

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