The Internet and Social Capital: The Case of Young Migrants

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Introduction

1. Introduction

• ‘[The] lack of knowledge on users, usages and impact makes it difficult to assess the relative contribution to the Riga goals for cultural diversity of policy-driven projects.’

  Kluzer et al. 2008: 32

• The focus is not on ‘online communities’.

• Subject of the analysis is not so much the ‘backwards’ communication with relatives and friends in the home country, but foremost how the Internet is used at the destination for ‘opening up’ a new spatial and social environment for the migrant.
Introduction

1. Introduction

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Approach

2. Approach

‘Social capital are resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilised in purposive actions.’

_Nan Lin 2001_

Three factors that define the ‘amount’ of social capital of a personal social network (Flap/de Graaf 1986: 146):

1. The _quantity_ of people who are willing to provide resources;
2. The _resources_ that are directly or indirectly provided by these people; and
3. The degree to which people are _committed_ to support.
Approach

2. Approach

Resources

‘Migrant social capital resources are defined as information or direct assistance provided by prior migrants to potential migrants.

Filiz Garip (2008: 594)
## Two ideas of network structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>‘Network closure’ (Coleman 1988)</strong></th>
<th><strong>‘Structural holes’ (Burt 1992)</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networks in which everyone is connected such that no one can escape the notice of others: (1) Quality of information (2) Trust</td>
<td>Social capital lies in the possibility of connecting two groups: (1) Volume of information (2) Diversity of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment / solidarity</td>
<td>Diversity of resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong ties</td>
<td>Weak ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding social capital</td>
<td>Bridging social capital</td>
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</table>

‘Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle; but strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available.’

*Mark S. Granovetter (1983: 209)*
Approach

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*Networks around Robert and James*

(Source: own illustration based on Burt 2001: 33)
The network society

‘Even a totally mediated society, where all relations are fully realized by, and substantiated in, media networks, where social and media networks equal each other, would still be based on bodies, minds, rules and resources of all kinds.’

Jan van Dijk 1999
2. Approach

Media-ecological framework by Döring (2003)

(Source: own translation of Döring 2003)
Methodology

• No online community or such was investigated!

• All interview partners were young immigrants from three New Member States of the EU: Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria.

• Focus groups and single in-depth interviews were conducted.
Findings
Difficulties, Resources and Networks

• Difficulties
  – language problems, the search for an apartment, and dealing with administrative formalities

• Strategies
  – institutionalised aid, use of financial capital and exploitation of social capital

• Resources
  – direct physical support or transfer of very specific information

• Language as resource
  (1) Lack of language skills can be compensated by network.
  (2) Language skills are acquired according to current needs.
Findings
Difficulties, Resources and Networks

5. Findings

• Networks:
  (1) of people with same nationality, but also people from different national backgrounds who simply faced the same situation, i.e. who had immigrated recently.
  (2) the value or utility of a contact is determined by the extent to which this person occupies a position the migrant cannot take him- or herself.

‘I knew that already beforehand, I need to find somebody who is already here for a longer time, because it is pretty hard to do everything on your own. [...] Yes, but that doesn’t happen so often. But when you find somebody like that... The guys who already live here for a few years, they know how to do it; with university or how long it takes to find a place to stay. Where are you able to work in the first couple of month? Or such a mini-job like McDonalds or something.’

Boris
Overcoming inhibitions and limitations of face-to-face communication

‘Of course, persons, who I don’t know so well, I can’t call them directly and say ‘Hi, what are you doing tonight?’ It’s easier for me to write them a message and ask if they have plans for the weekend or so.’

Ilze

by using

• e-mail,
• social networks (technological, e.g. Facebook or StudiVZ),
• online communities,
• VoIP,
• instant messaging,
• and forums.
5. Findings

Interpretation of the media-ecological framework by Döring (2003²)

(Source: own interpretation based on Döring2003²)
Findings
The Internet as an Amplifier of Personal Networks

**The amplification of new networks**

(1) contact new people whereby the **first step was made online** and a later physical meeting took place

‘That was at the beginning. Back then I have searched for people in Cologne, who might be able to help me. [...] Because I thought they might know the situation that you are a stranger in a big city, and, yes, they might help me with some helpful advices or contacts.’

Ilze

(2) ‘**manage**’ communication with new contacts who did not emerge from online communication, but from other occasions

‘I have met somebody. He signed me in on this mailing list. Through this I heard about a trip to Brussels and to the German parliament.’

Yelina
Findings

The Internet as an Amplifier of Personal Networks

The amplification of new networks

- In most cases it showed that the type of contact is the same as in situation without the Internet.
- In both cases it is the collective situation that a) makes contacting seem sensible and b) makes it easier. Hence, it is not another category of ‘ties’ that connect over the Internet.
Findings

The Internet as an Amplifier of Personal Networks

Enhancement of social capital

- An enhancement of social capital took place through the **possibility to exchange experiences** with other migrants via online forums and the like.

  ‘That is actually only a platform, it’s called germany.ru. [...] When I considered going to Germany I found out about it and posed a couple of questions, which had also been answered. In fact it was about how I can accredit a document the easiest way, so it is notarially certified in Germany.’

    *Jegor*

  ‘Sometimes there are e-mails from new students for example, who want to know everything about their studies; searching for an apartment, searching for a job and so on. We answer these and give short introductions. That is all over the Internet.’

    *Danilo*
Enhancement of social capital

- Compared to other forms of social capital, the only resource provided by these virtual networks is information – physical support was never the attention of the respondents.

- ‘Sociotechnical capital’, i.e. ‘productive resources that inhere in patterns of [impersonal] social relations that are maintained with the support of ICTs’

*Resnick, 2005*
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(Source: Stubbe 2009, translated by the authors)
Conclusions and outlook

• There is a ‘migration-specific’ Internet usage; also apart from ‘migration-specific websites’.


• It was shown that people make use of Internet application in many different ways – as far as they possess the necessary ‘e-Skills’.
Conclusions and outlook

- It became apparent that **Internet services play a great role in the phase prior to the migration movement** in order to prepare the migration.

  If it would be the case that such services are moderated and offered from the public side, they can also function as a bridge ‘into’ the new society.

- Research should **not stop at describing usage patterns**. This would result in

  1. that many backlashes on the migration processes remain undetected and
  2. that many migrants remain unconsidered, as they are not interested in websites that are specifically run for migrants.