

“It will be easier to integrate if you cancel the links with the Russian-speaking community. And then you can come back to this of course!”.

In search of lost temporality: The Role of Temporality when analysing the Russian-speaking Community in Switzerland.

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Abstract

Considering the post-Soviet migration in Switzerland, this paper aims at exploring the impact of temporality in integration practices, both in the local society as well as in Russian-speaking networks that may exist in Switzerland. While integration is seen in the literature as a process, little attention has so far been paid to the variations that may occur depending on the stage of individuals' life course and their feeling of integration. Based on 32 interviews with Russian speakers who migrated to Switzerland between the 1990s and 2010, this study aims to analyse these variations in terms of sociability preferences. A feeling of integration into local society, coupled with the discovery of a certain social homophily by the actors, were therefore important factors in the changes in the socializing preferences of the interviewees. The feeling of integration felt by the individuals has in a way favoured a renewed interest in community relations, questioning the linearity process of integration.

A question of temporality

“It will be easier to integrate if you cancel the links with the Russian-speaking community. And then, you can come back to this of course!”. This excerpt from an interview conducted in January 2020 with Ruslan, a 28-year-old Russian, is one example where the role of time emerged from the interviewees' discourse and concerned the sociability preferences of migrants. While classical theories of integration stress that integration into a new society goes hand in hand with a detachment from ethnic ties (Gordon, 1964; Portes & Manning, 1985), this quote shows a more complex reality where integration representation, sociability preference and temporality are intertwined.

This paper is the result of a reflection that emerged during the field research for my PhD on the Russian-speaking community¹ in Switzerland. In this doctoral research, I was mainly interested in the bonding and emergence of social networks of Russian-speaking migrants who arrived in Switzerland from 1991 onwards, as well as their sense and process of integration into the local society. As I analysed the interviews conducted during the year 2020, I was struck by the different patterns of both integration and participation in community activities and in particular the non-linearity of these. While I had in mind several theories of integration² to try to understand these patterns, it turned out that these specific situations escaped the conceptual explanations I found in the literature. Indeed, I was confronted with a situation where changes in the behaviour of the interviewees towards relations with other Russian speakers, more generally towards the Russian-speaking community, with a rapprochement that was sometimes noticeable, whereas some people had previously done everything to avoid any contact with Russian speakers.³ This form of renewed interest in community ties sometimes seemed to manifest itself several years after their arrival in Switzerland.

The linear aspect in integration theories is also found in the conception of time, with “the reduction of social worlds into linear temporal paths, let alone ones forever moving 'forwards'” (Griffiths et al., 2013: 5). The issue of temporality has recently become part of migration research. Early studies date back to the early 2000s (Cwerner, 2001; King et al., 2006) but it is mainly in the late 2010s that several researchers have called for a broader focus on temporality in the migration context (Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Sheller, 2019; Yeoh, 2017). However, Cwerner (2001) has developed a conceptual framework on times of migration to frame the temporal predicament of migrants. This framework combines several temporalities, both linked to the country of origin and the host country. What Cwerner calls “diasporic time” (2001: 28) emphasises the importance of migrant networks and communities where friendships, support and information are intertwined. While this temporality is useful for understanding the formation of migrant communities and their social role, particularly from the point of view of the conception of time, it does not account for individual variations in terms of participation or distance according to the desires and needs of the actors. In general, this approach is useful for understanding the different temporalities that may exist in the lives of migrants and their role in cultural practices, but it does not focus on the temporality of integration.

¹ I use the concept of community here as a hermeneutical tool, bearing in mind that communities are social constructions imagined by actors (Anderson, 1983). As the question of community is a structuring debate in sociology, it is not my intention here to present in detail the different definitions of this complex concept. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen Zygmunt Bauman’s approach to community, for whom contemporary communities resemble social networks in that they depend on exchanges between their members in order to exist and are no longer based on a history and precise rules of behaviour (Bauman, 2000). Thus, communication would be the key element in the development and maintenance of a community. The other major criterion of contemporary communities would be their composition, with members remaining independent individuals despite their participation in the group (Blackshaw, 2010). I understand community membership as stemming from an individual choice by the individual, which makes it possible to avoid the error of considering that a community exists outside the will of individuals and their “imagination”, since they are the ones who construct the community “and make it a source and receptacle of meaning and a marker of their identity” (Cohen, 1985: 118).

² For instance, Gordon (1964), Alba & Nee (1997), Esser (2001), Portes & Zhou (1993), Portes & Manning (1985).

³ I avoid using concepts such as “compatriots”, “co-ethnics” or “ethnic community” as much as possible. These terms are problematic when studying Russian-speaking populations because of their multinational and multi-ethnic character. Moreover, the term “compatriot” is widely exploited for political purposes in Russia, which makes it difficult to use.

From the early 2000s onwards, the consideration of time and temporality in the study of time in a migratory context has made it possible to consider migration as a long-term process and to better grasp the different temporalities experienced by migrants at different stages of the migration process. In more recent studies (Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Sheller, 2019; Yeoh, 2017), temporality is often analysed as an inter-linkage between different kinds of mobility. The issue of time and migrant community has also been addressed, mainly through the question of its development and continuity over time (Bastian, 2014). Temporality in the process of integration and settlement in a new environment is little explored, especially when one is interested in the variations that can appear in the preferences of sociability of migrants who declare themselves well integrated. This situation is regrettable since, as Bastian (2014: 137-8) points out, “time is implicated in social methods inclusion and exclusion, as well as understandings of legitimacy, agency, and social chance” and that it is a central element in the experience of individuals and their networks.

This paper is an opportunity to reflect more broadly on the variations that may occur depending on the stage of individuals' life course and their feeling of integration. This lack of attention to time is probably the result of the fact that there are often “a taken for grantedness about time as experienced by migrants and researchers alike” (Griffiths et al., 2013). As Baas and Yeoh (2019: 161) stressed, taking time and temporality into account in migration studies “represents a significant, and possibly paradigmatic, shift”. One example of this non-linearity when considering migrant communities is the concept of “part time worlds” (Sandoval, 2017:199), which implies that depending on the situation and the activities, some individuals will tend to join some community activities from time to time. Although the conditional and temporal aspects of these behaviours are worth noting, they do not help us understand the temporality that emerges from these behaviours of moving away from and then moving towards the community. The main contribution of this paper will therefore be to question and analyse this temporality observed in several interviews and which seems to be largely linked to the feeling of integration of individuals and their agency.

In order to answer these questions, I will first look at the main concepts that can help us understand the temporal phenomena observed. I will first look at the issue of integration, which is a key topic in migration studies. I will then address more specifically the issue of temporality with the idea that these variations in behaviour towards the Russian-speaking community observed among certain actors interviewed would be linked to a “micro” timescale (Sheller, 2019) dependent on the life course of individuals and their agency. Here, agency is used to highlight a certain independence of actors and their ability to influence their lives through choices and preferences (Elder et al, 2003; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Hitlin & Johnson, 2015). The concepts of integration and agency seem to be particularly useful here for studying those changes in behaviour that emerge over time, and which may appear several years after arrival in the host country, insofar as both involve a process and temporal orientations.

Specifically, this study is based on the analysis of 32 interviews with Russian speakers who moved to Switzerland between 1990 and 2015 using a methodological perspective inspired by the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). It is an exploratory research on the evolution of preferences in terms of sociability of Russian speakers in Switzerland. This paper also aims to make a specific contribution to the literature on post-Soviet migration. This seems particularly important to us as several researchers have pointed to the limited existing studies on the migration experience of Russian speakers (Maluytina, 2015; Pavluscenco, 2016),

resulting in “an often understudied immigrant population” (Kisselev et al., 2010: 768). This situation therefore implies a relative lack of knowledge about the lived experiences of integration and adaptation of this specific group of migrants (Pavlusenco, 2016).

The fluidity of social relations: between integration and agency

In reviewing expectations in terms of sociability regarding migrants’ integration, it is largely apparent that mixed social relations between migrants and natives are widely regarded as a norm for integration (Esser, 2001; Gsir, 2014; Safi, 2006). More specifically, integration theories have paid little attention to the relationship that migrants may have with “their” migrant community once they are considered structurally and socially integrated. While social relations are characterized by a certain fluidity (Ryan & D’Angelo, 2018) and temporality (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014), these aspects rarely appear in studies of migrant integration, especially when it comes to “invisible” migrants (Kopnina, 2005) who are considered well integrated.

The life course paradigm, through its emphasis on agency, also illustrates this fluidity of individual paths and preferences according to the choices and possibilities offered by a given context and individual aspirations. In general, the life course paradigm and the principle of agency put “human life at the forefront and leaves migration in the background” (Voicu & Vlase, 2018: 229), making it a central conceptual approach in the study of individual migrant behaviours and their temporality. By linking the concepts of integration and agency, it is possible to obtain a better understanding of the fluidity of migrants’ social relations by detaching ourselves from a linear reading of integration that requires a detachment from community relations.

Sociability expectations in regards with migrants’ integration

The question of integration lies at the heart of this paper as these variations between avoidance and rapprochement of the Russian-speaking community come together with discourses on actors’ integration. Preferences in terms of sociability that evolve over time are accompanied by a sense of belonging to the host-country as well as by certain individual needs linked to the life paths of the individuals. Due to the specificity of Russian-speaking migration, which includes mostly highly skilled migrants who migrate for professional reasons, marriage migrants within mixed marriages or students, the integration of this population would tend to resemble what Portes and Manning (1985) refer to as “integration into the stable sector of the economy” (p. 59), where these migrants acquire a thorough knowledge of the language and culture of the host country. As Safi (2006) notes, integration is also largely related to the high level of human and social capital of migrants, particularly because of the possibility for them to integrate professionally and socially. In addition, highly educated migrants tend to have more contacts with locals and their identification to the host country increase with time (Bennour & Manatschal, 2019). However, it is interesting to note that highly skilled migrants also tend to seek contact with members of their ethnic communities, especially right after their settlement in the host country (Föbker et al., 2016).

There is an extensive literature on migrant integration, which is a theme that has engaged sociology since the early days of the Chicago School (Rea & Tripier, 2008). However, although integration has been seen as a process since its beginnings, it is often seen in a linear fashion.

For example, Gordon (1964) proposes a model of linear integration first through acculturation and then structural assimilation with integration into the host society through mixed marriage, mixed social networks and identification with the host country. A more recent example, and which was more critical regarding linearity is Esser (2001) who defined four stages of integration, namely cultural (command of the national language and knowledge of local norms), structural (integration on the labour market and spatial de-segregation), social (mix networks and participation), and emotional (sense of belonging). In a similar vein, Safi (2006) has defined five criteria for measuring migrant integration, which are socio-economic, cultural, normative, emotional and relational. Both approaches consider the mix of relationships as an indicator of integration but do not take into account the variations in sociability preferences that may appear according to the life course of individuals.

More broadly socio-cultural integration is usually analysed through different kinds of social interactions between migrants and natives, including interethnic friendship and encounters (Gsir, 2014). According to this logic, developing social relationships with locals allow to acquire socio-cultural codes and practice the language in order to improve the level of integration (Gsir, 2014). While this approach is interesting from a conceptual point of view, it does not take into account the variations that can occur according to the feeling of integration of individuals. Indeed, while the approach to structural integration of migrants operates in a linear way, with a progressive detachment from community relations, it does not take into account the changes in sociability towards co-ethnics that may occur according to the individual's life course or external events. This linearity leads to a lack of knowledge of both the preferences of individuals and the needs that can be met by community participation.

Migrants' agency at the centre of sociability preferences

Agency, as one of the five principles of the life course, is useful here in trying to capture these changes in sociability preferences. Defined by Elder et al. (2003: 11) as the way "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance", it allows to focus on individual preferences. Individuals are seen as being able to make choices based on the possibilities they see within a given social and historical context (Gecas, 2003). It refers "to the capacity for social actors to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve their desires" (Bakewell, 2010: 1694). Agency is therefore intrinsically multidimensional and involves temporality. Several conceptions of agency can be found in the literature. The "subjective" approach consists in the "development of a model of social actors that can reflectively influence their lives", indicating that "internal beliefs are important" (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015: 5) in the behaviour and choices of individuals. More specifically, the life course approach to agency views it as "an individual-level construct, fundamental for social action" (Hitlin & Elder, 2007: 172), with the idea that social interactions are dependent on temporal orientations (Flaherty, 2003). It is by adopting this micro, individual-focused approach that it is possible to explore in more detail this temporal effect and the variations in sociability that may result. It is also a useful concept when one wishes to integrate a temporal perspective into the analysis of the social behaviour of individuals. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 693) write, human agency is

“a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)”.

Furthermore, these authors add that agency is both social and relational, in the fact that “it centres around the engagement (and disengagement) by actors of the different contextual environments that constitute their own structured yet flexible social universes” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 973). Actors therefore have the opportunity to exert “some degrees of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree” (Sewell, 1992: 20). More broadly, individuals therefore exercise their agency when they can choose their social relationships, especially during leisure time, linking this to their life satisfaction and well-being (Bayraktar et al., 2016). Agency is therefore a useful conceptual tool for analysing people’s sociability preferences given a specific context. In the context of migration, agency is particularly prominent in studies of migration decisions, especially in the case of voluntary migration (Bakewell, 2010). Agency also plays a determinant role in the re-framing of migrants’ lives and social networks after migration (Wingens et al., 2011) point out that migrants must “re-frame” their lives and social network after migration. In that perspective, agency offers a better understanding of the temporal evolutions that can occur in this sphere and that go beyond a linear approach to integration and preferences in terms of mixed social relations.

Methodology

I used a sample of 32 interviews conducted between January and December 2020 with Russian-speaking people aged between 25 and 59 who migrated to Switzerland between 1990 and 2015 (range: 9-48, median age: 28). The interviewees either were from my social circle or were recommended by other participants in the form of snowball sampling. In order to avoid too much social homophily, which is the risk of this sampling method (Kirchher & Charles, 2018), I made sure that I had different seeds, especially for contacting people who arrived in the 1990s.

19 people were born in Russia, 5 in Ukraine, 2 in Kazakhstan, 2 in Latvia, 1 in Estonia, 1 in Lithuania, 1 in Tajikistan and 1 in Kyrgyzstan. To analyse more concretely these temporal effects, which sometimes occurred after several years, it was necessary to select participants who had migrated to Switzerland at different times. Among them, 10 arrived in Switzerland in the 1990s, 11 in the 2000s and 11 in the 2010s, presenting a variety of migration and integration contexts. The sample includes interviews with 22 women and 10 men, 17 of whom have children. 25 people were married or divorced and 17 of them have or had a Swiss spouse. All interviewees have higher education degrees and were active in sectors as diverse as finance, law, research, arts, or teaching. 3 people are active in the field of cosmetology but had a university degree in their country of origin and considered themselves more broadly as small entrepreneurs and business owners. Of the 32 participants, 3 migrated to Switzerland as young teenagers and went to compulsory school in Switzerland, which makes them close to 2nd generation migrants. The sample’s heterogeneity in terms of social and demographic characteristics is necessary in that it incorporates different variables and parameters, allowing for cross-sectional and cross-cutting axes of analysis, including the age, gender or family situation (Föbker et al., 2016; King et al., 2006).

The interviews, conducted in French, English and German, were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. They followed a semi-structured outline around key themes such as friendship, leisure, family and parenthood. The interviews were then read several times and coded in the NVivo software by category. All names have been changed to guarantee participants' anonymity. For the qualitative analysis, I adopted a conceptualising category approach, inspired by the grounded theory (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2016). This approach seemed to me to be the most suitable insofar as there was, to my knowledge, no literature analysing the observed process. By focusing on the free discourse of the interviewed actors (Kaufmann, 2007), I was able to link this phenomenon to a broader questioning of the process and the feeling of integration of the actors, the stereotypes linked to integration as well as the changes of preference according to the life course of the individual.

I did not use pre-established categories from our interview grid but preferred a more inductive approach to develop conceptualising categories following the method proposed by Kaufmann (2007: 83) of confronting “local knowledge”, which are the categories of the individuals interviewed, with “global knowledge”, i.e., theoretical concepts. In other words, the analysis was produced by confronting concrete observations and general models of interpretation (Schwarz, 1993). To do so, I used several categories related to the concepts of stereotypes (Azzi & Klein, 1998; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996), social homophily (Lin, 2001; McPherson et al., 2001) or integration (Esser, 2001; Föbker et al., 2016; Gordon, 1964; Safi, 2006). These categories allowed me to capture the processes of formation of social representations of the community and the evolution of sociability preferences of Russian-speaking migrants in Switzerland.

Results

Two strategies, one objective: integration

The desire to integrate into Swiss society lies at the heart of the discourse of the individuals interviewed, but two opposing strategies for integration emerged from the discourse. For several people, integration followed the relatively linear process we find in the literature, with a search for contacts at the beginning of their stay, then a detachment from these links and the creation of new links with locals and other foreigners settled in Switzerland. Thus, the early stages of life in Switzerland are marked by the search for a strong Russian-speaking environment, both for linguistic reasons and to obtain some emotional support and information necessary for integration. Subsequently, these initial ties become weaker, particularly as their language skills and knowledge of Swiss society increase, which corroborates previous findings (Bennour & Manatschal, 2019; Föbker et al., 2016). The integration of these people appears to have been achieved while the greater closeness that some participants may have felt with other Russian speakers in comparison to the relationship with the locals disappears. These changes in the social circle also appear, for some, when they change their social environment, especially in the case of students who, for some of them, had many ties with other Russian-speaking students that tended to lose their strength and then disappear following the end of their studies.

However, another pattern of integration also emerged from the interviews and takes the form of an integration “by avoidance” of the Russian-speaking community. Indeed, several

interviewees explained that they preferred to avoid contact with other Russian speakers as much as possible in order to learn the local language and integrate in the Swiss society. In that perspective, community relations, even if they are perceived as potentially useful from an informational point of view, are mostly considered as a hindrance to integration and should therefore be limited or avoided. These two quotes illustrate this situation:

There is always this story of those who want to integrate and this story of the economic cost or opportunity cost of coming to meetings with Russian speakers, which means maybe not going to a meeting with locals, this “I don’t want to hang out with my own people too much”. (Oleg, 25 years old, Lithuania)

I remember that for example I saw the advertisements of a Russian association on the boards at the University. I never participated in all that because I said “no, I already have this Russian-speaking friend, it's nice, it makes me happy. But no more!”. So yes, I kind of limited it. Because otherwise, you can dive into this Russian-speaking space permanently and like that the years pass and you don’t progress in French! (Vita, 33 years old, Estonia)

This avoidance strategy can take different forms. For example, a certain indifference towards other Russian speakers may be manifested, i.e., contact will not be directly avoided but it will not be sought either. Other participants, on the contrary, took a more marked approach by avoiding speaking Russian in public places so as not to be “recognised” as such or chose to stay away from certain places where they knew some Russian speakers tended to meet. It was for instance the case of young people avoiding clubs or bars they were considering “too Russian”.

Integration is therefore a value and an objective put forward by the actors, especially since it is accompanied by a very critical discourse towards Russian speakers who would remain “locked” in the community and who would not try to learn the local language. However, it appears that once the actors felt integrated in Switzerland, several of them, especially those who had avoided contact with other Russian speakers, sought contact with Russian speakers again. This attitude change can occur several years after arrival in Switzerland and takes the form of a “return” to the community through leisure activities in Russian, a renewed interest in certain practices, particularly culinary ones, as well as a greater willingness to meet Russian speakers. This second integration strategy thus has an interesting temporal aspect that has not been sufficiently considered in studies of community relations and migrants’ needs.

A shift in attitude

This paper is based on the observation that those people who had explained that they had been very reluctant to meet Russian speakers for years changed their attitude and started to seek out activities in Russian and to socialise with other Russian speakers. This discontinuity in actors’ behaviour towards the Russian-speaking community finds its source in several events that I will develop here. Firstly, transitions in the actors’ life course, such as marriages⁴, impact on the actors’ sense of integration and their relationship to the community. Secondly, external events such as political tensions in the origin country can also influence individual’s sense of belonging both in the Russian-speaking community and host society. The third element analysed here is

⁴ The transition to parenthood is also an important factor in changing attitudes towards the community. However, the choice was made in this paper to deal mainly with the issue of the feeling of integration and its role in community relations. I have therefore chosen to leave this aspect aside.

the issue of stereotypes, which played a significant role in participants' willingness to meet other Russian speakers.

- *Formation of couple and mixed marriages*

A first factor that modifies the relationship to the community among the interviewees is the formation of couples, particularly mixed couples. This seems paradoxical, especially as mixed marriages are perceived as a sign of integration or even assimilation (Gordon, 1964; Safi, 2006) and that mixed marriage are “believed to decrease the significance of cultural distinctiveness” (Song, 2009: 342) between the partners as well as for their offspring. However, the interviews revealed that Russian-speaking migrants who had settled in Switzerland and had married a native tended to seek contact with other Russian-speakers afterwards. This leads to an important change in behaviour, as these same people had explained that for years they had avoided contact and even hid the fact that they were Russian-speaking to some extent. These two extracts from the same interview illustrate this change:

[In 2009] We met with this girl, Natasha, after the world hockey championship. And then, because I didn't want to have Russian friends... We wrote to each other, we saw each other once in the Russian shop. And then we didn't keep in touch. Because I also said, when she proposed me to go and see things, I told her that I'm not really interested in doing things with Russian speakers.

[In 2019] I looked on Instagram at the Russian girls who live in Geneva. There are quite a few girls who organise things, I went to these meetups. Afterwards, I decided to go to the yoga class, the teacher, she's Russian speaking. And we have a lot of Russian speakers who do this class. I like this atmosphere, when I go, and because afterwards, we go for a coffee, it's just Russian speakers. But I like it, because on the other side, on my husband's side, it's more French-speaking people. I often see his family. So I think it's balanced that my network is Russian-speaking and then I have his network which is French-speaking. (Elizaveta, 31 years old, Russia)

The fact that they had daily contact with locals encouraged them, to some extent, to have personal contacts and friendships with Russian speakers. This situation happened to people already well established in Switzerland, mastering the local language and being integrated through studies or work as well as local partner. One hypothesis to explain this phenomenon is that the persons feel sufficiently integrated, particularly because of their daily interactions with their Swiss spouse. They therefore do not feel the risk of being “locked in” the Russian-speaking community, which is a behaviour they strongly criticise. Thus, developing contacts with Russian speakers is not perceived to be detrimental to integration as it is already “achieved” in people's mind. By integrating these temporal variations in the analysis, it is possible to obtain a finer vision of the way integration is perceived and experienced by the actors. It corroborates Song's (2009) conclusion that mixed marriages should be examined more closely in order to question the sometimes simplistic relationship found in the literature linking mixed marriages and integration.

- *The political situation in the society of origin*

Another factor that emerged during the interviews and which explains certain variations that have appeared over the years among certain actors with regard to their representation of community ties, is the political factor. This aspect mainly appeared from 2014 onwards, following the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the international sanctions. The political

issue is very present in the actors' discourse to explain their sociability preferences as well as their feelings of distance or closeness in terms of community membership. While some people declare themselves to be well integrated, they started developing a discourse according to which they no longer adhere to Western values and feel disappointed in the host society after many years of living in Switzerland. Swiss media coverage of the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine, the position of Switzerland and of the "West" in general towards Russia, and the perceived "hypocrisy" of "Western societies" are all factors that have led some respondents, albeit a minority, to move towards other Russian speakers.

As a result, they will tend to re-establish links with other Russian speakers, but only with Russian speakers who share their vision and political interpretation of these events. Here again, the aspect of integration is central as the actors declare themselves to be well integrated and underline the efforts they made to do so. They also stress the positive vision they had of the host society, a vision which they currently refer to as naive. Without questioning their "structural integration" (Gordon, 1964), they voluntarily change both their social and emotional integration (Esser, 2001), in modifying both their social networks and feeling less a part of the host society. The following example describes this phenomenon:

Interviewer

So it means that during almost 20 years, you avoided having contacts with Russian speakers. Is that right?

Denis

Yes! You know... I wanted to integrate completely, with Swiss people, to make myself fully Swiss! And it made me de facto sick... That also made problems with my wife, she is Swiss and I said: "no, I don't accept certain things and I have to speak out loud against certain things". So there was actually a come back to the Russian root de facto. So it was never planned but de facto it happened! [...] You know, when I came to Switzerland, I had what I call today naive understanding about democracy, about peace, about human rights, whatever. In the meantime, I say there is no democracy in Switzerland and I can justify... for instance, about Russia only bad things are reported... Only bad things are reported and no positive things come in the Swiss big press. (Denis, 47 years old, Kazakhstan)

This passage clearly shows that the interviewee's initial aim was to integrate in Switzerland, but that he gradually felt a gap between the society in which he lives and his political vision. This is interesting as it contradicts the findings that social integration of migrants, meaning a feeling of belonging in the host society, increases with increasing time in the host country (Kearns & Whitley, 2015). Although this attitude remains very much in the minority, especially when it is linked to the issue of integration, the political situation, and in particular the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine, has played an important role in (re)defining the sociability preferences of many interviewees.⁵

The overcoming of certain stereotypes and the discovery of a certain social homophily

The last element that I will address in this analysis is the overcoming of certain stereotypes and the discovery of a social homophily among the actors. These two elements have an important impact on the integration process as well as on the actors' willingness to socialise with other

⁵ Several people explained that they had tried to avoid contact with other Russian speakers following these events for fear of being confronted by people with a bellicose or even imperialist Russian discourse. As a result, people who were in contact with Russian speakers or who did not try to avoid contact adopted an attitude of mistrust and avoidance.

Russian speakers. Although the participants in the study did not mention feeling discriminated or stigmatised, some of them did underline certain negative stereotypes that existed towards “Russians” and that had an impact on their relationship with other Russian speakers. Some people explained that they had avoided socialising with Russian speakers from the beginning of their life in Switzerland and tried to integrate as quickly as possible in order not to be assimilated to these stereotypes. This is what following statement reflects:

It's the reputation... I think I was trying to get away from a certain reputation that the Russians might have here. I'm talking about the vision that people had, it seems to me. It was linked to the mafia, KGB, people who were a bit brutal. That's it... Or, as far as women are concerned, women who are there just to find husbands or who are prostitutes who dance in cabarets... Well, that's what I heard too. It's not very nice to hear. And not to be associated with that, with the mafia, KGB, all that... the brutal men. You know, those brutal men, with the super short hair. They all look like, like Mafia enforcers! It was more like that. And also, the fact that... I wanted, somehow, to pass myself off as a Westerner. (Mikhail, 31 years old, Russia)

While this example is particularly telling, several people mentioned jokes about Russian stereotypes that they had been subjected to. Jokes can also be seen as subtle discrimination, more difficult to recognise and ambiguous, but which can have an impact on the person's sense of integration (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). This attitude of distancing oneself in order not to be associated with a negative image (Wacquant, 2008) also explains the behaviour of some actors who sought to limit contact with other Russian speakers. This corroborates what Kopnina (2005) found in her study on the Russian communities in London and Amsterdam. In addition to the negative intergroup stereotypes described above, it turned out that several interviewees had negative stereotypes of Russian speakers in Switzerland as well. This aspect had also led to an avoidance strategy on their part. These stereotypes were related to behaviour that was considered impolite or to a lack of education and cultural capital. Indeed, several people mentioned that they had avoided contact with Russian speakers for years because they perceived the latter as superficial and not always integrated into local society in terms of habits and customs:

The Russians... Sometimes you don't want to communicate with the Russians, I don't know, because sometimes you're ashamed, you're ashamed of their behaviour. [...] Sometimes, people are rude, I don't like it. And so, when I am among the people here and I hear someone speaking Russian, I don't immediately say that I am Russian. I wait a little bit. I'll see how it goes. And then I'll decide if I want to talk to him or if I'll stay hidden because I don't want to have anything to do with this person. [...] I think they understood that when you're not at home, you have to respect the people around you and the rules of the countries where you are. But I don't like people, when they come to the country, you work here, you live here, your children grow up here. So you can't just say: "Yeah, I'm doing it like at home, at home like before. I don't care". You can't say that anymore because you're not at home anymore. Sometimes I see that among Russians. There is no respect. (Daria, 30 years old, Russia)

Indeed, several people indicated that they had avoided social contact with other Russian speakers for a long time, considering that they did not fit in with the relationships they wanted to build. However, and this is where it is interesting to consider temporality, several participants stressed that they had overcome these stereotypes over time, through fortuitous encounters with other Russian speakers. These encounters, which enabled them to challenge their stereotypes, often took place several years after their arrival. After having avoided contact for a long time for the reasons mentioned above, some people had their beliefs challenged as they found themselves in front of Russian speakers with whom they shared certain values, a similar idea of integration and life in Switzerland as well as a similar cultural capital.

My attitude towards Russian speakers changed when I saw that there were far more different people than just rich kids or strange businessmen living here. That there were quite normal people like me with whom I shared a number of common cultural references and a cultural background. (Mikhail, 31 years old, Russia)

It is therefore a form of socializing based on social homophily, e.g., on social similarity, where cultural capital has tended to play a major role in the interviewees' willingness to meet with other Russian speakers. We see here that the issue of overcoming negative stereotypes by the interviewed actors, facilitated by the understanding of social homophily, is also linked to the perception of the integration of the Other and his/her adherence to certain local values. The development of links with other Russian speakers was thus made possible by the recognition of a social homophily, a recognition that was possible over time.

A sense of integration for a renewed community interest?

Several people said that they had avoided contact with Russian speakers for several years. Among them, some kept one or two close Russian-speaking friends whom they had met soon after arriving in Switzerland, but had carefully avoided other contacts, for example by avoiding certain places they associated with a Russian presence or by trying to hide the fact that they were Russian-speaking. Integration, and in particular learning the language and discovering the culture and norms of Swiss society, was put forward as a justification for not seeking Russian-speaking contacts and avoiding being “locked” in the community. The second main aspect put forward was that of stereotypes and the bad image that these people might have of other Russian speakers established in Switzerland. The issue of social representations as well as the impression of a lack of social homophily played an important role in the avoidance behaviour of individuals, and in particular of those who migrated to Switzerland in the 2000s and early 2010.

A feeling of integration into local society, coupled with the discovery of a certain social homophily by the actors, were therefore important factors in the changes in the sociability of the individuals described in this paper. Indeed, it is by feeling integrated into the local society, due to the knowledge of the language, a professional activity or a Swiss spouse, that the interviewees indicated that they started to socialise with other Russian speakers, years after their arrival. The feeling of integration felt by the individuals – as well as their structural integration when we take into account the criteria of integration present in the literature – has in a way favoured a renewed interest in community relations, mainly in the field of leisure, and a favourable disposition to be in contact with other Russian speakers. By integrating a temporal perspective into the analysis and in focusing on the actors' agency, it was possible to highlight this phenomenon of increased interest for community ties. The concept of agency was particularly useful in that it allows to highlight these micro events (the individual preferences), while linking them to a specific context, whether it be marriage, a political situation or the overcoming of certain prejudices.

It is also interesting to note the differences in behaviour observed in terms of sociability preferences according to the decades of migration of individuals. Indeed, the vast majority of people who migrated to Switzerland in the 1990s emphasised the fact that they had actively sought to establish links with Russian speakers and that they maintained these relationships, often as friends, until today. In contrast, a significant proportion of those who migrated in the 2000s and up to the mid-2010s explained that they had avoided contact with other Russian

speakers as much as possible during the first years of their life in Switzerland before, for several of them, renewing certain community ties. This comparative aspect is beyond the scope of this paper and is not included here. However, future research on these changes in attitude according to the context of migration⁶ would be necessary in order to better understand the needs to which these community ties respond, the role of the size of the migrant population in this process of community sociability or the role of social media in these behaviours.

What's next after 'integration'?

20 years after the publication of Cwerner's major text calling for greater consideration of time and temporality in the study of migration, this aspect is still often ignored by researchers. This is particularly the case in the situations of "invisible" migrants who are considered to be well integrated. However, the variations observed in the framework of this study show changes in attitude towards the migrant community depending on the life stage of the individuals, external factors such as the political situation or the overcoming of certain stereotypes. In this study, it was observed that although integration is a key value for the interviewees, it can take different forms and, above all, change over time. If, after a migration, contact avoidance with Russian speakers is perceived by some as necessary in order to integrate, this situation evolves over time, depending on needs, and life events. We can see here the fluidity and opportunism of actors according to their life events and objectives (Johnson-Hanks, 2005).

Of course, I am aware of the limitations of this research, which amounts to an exploratory study of a phenomenon largely absent from the analysis of migrant integration. The theoretical framework would certainly deserve to be refined in the future by integrating more broadly issues related to the sense of belonging and identity (Webb & Lahiri-Roy, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Furthermore, this is not a longitudinal study where I was able to observe these variations directly. As a result, I was obliged to rely on the actors' discourse to carry out this analysis and in particular on their discourse regarding their sociability preferences at the beginning of their stay in Switzerland, especially in relation to the discourse on community avoidance. However, as some of the participants were long-time acquaintances, I was able to judge to some extent the veracity of their statements.

Considering these temporal variations allow to better understand the needs of migrants in certain spheres of their lives and which have a role on their well-being. This study of the preferences in terms of sociability of Russian speakers in Switzerland and the relationship with the Russian-speaking community is placed at the micro level of analysis. In this way, the complexity of integration and the social preferences of migrants are more accurately captured. Taking into account the discontinuous temporality offers a grid of analysis allowing to conceive and make intelligible the complexity of these social phenomena.

Furthermore, the main objective of this paper was to reflect more broadly on the non-linearity of integration or, more precisely, on phenomena that are not considered by integration theories and that put the agency of actors back at the heart of the analysis. In this way, this paper contributes to the literature on the post-migration experience of migrants and their integration

⁶ Having also conducted interviews with Russian speakers who migrated to Switzerland in the 1960-70s, mainly through marriage, the desire to meet other Russian speakers was even more present in the discourse of these individuals than for those who migrated after 1991.

process, while at the same time highlighting the fluidity of social behaviours towards a migrant community.

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