Transnationalism in Action:
Exploring Practices in Switzerland
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1 Introduction

Although the theoretical literature on transnationalism is substantial, the empirical basis on which it is based is rather thin and mostly composed of anecdotal observations. There are few systematic empirical descriptions of immigrants’ transnational practices. This is particularly true in continental Europe where research on this phenomenon is still underrepresented (Rogers 2000). Comparing transnational studies in the US and Europe, Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) points at the fact that in Europe the attention is focused on receiving countries as well as on ideologies and politics, whereas in the US, by contrast, the accent is placed on the sending countries and on grassroots transnationalism.

Our paper intends to contribute to fill this gap in European research by concentrating on grassroots transnationalism. It is basically an ethnographical account of transnational activities in Switzerland based on an analysis of “Turkish” and “Portuguese” community actors in order to identify major patterns of transnational activities and to develop explanatory hypotheses on the political and economic factors that condition the creation and reproduction of transnational activities.

The focus of our research is not on communities, but on transnational practices. Relying on Portes’ distinction of activities, based on an actor’s typology (Portes 2001) “activities initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, be they organized groups or networks of individuals across borders”, will be regarded as transnational, whereas activities and programs of nation-states will be considered international and activities of large-scale institutions such as corporations or churches will be defined as multinational.

We define transnational practices as activities carried out by immigrants that involve at least two countries: these include activities between country of residence and country of origin and/or ancestry as well as activities in third countries, whether or not they involve co-ethnics. These activities should be important enough for them to have a social impact that generates social structures. They should also last over a certain period of time in order to make it possible to observe the “perpetuation” of the immigrants’ experience. Though such practices may also have a symbolic value, the main purpose of our study is to identify the material aspects of transnational practices in particular.

The three fields of observation on which our analyse focuses are the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres and their relative impact on the birth and the possible evolution of transnational immigrant groups under specific conditions. They can be analyzed using the variables time and scope that
measure the institutionalization and strength of the transnational ties, and specify the level of analysis (Portes et al. 1999; Van Amersfoort et al. 1984).

Our systematic and comparative appraisal of transnational activities of Turkish and Portuguese communities in Switzerland allows us to establish a typology of activities and their main features as a basis for a comparative analysis. This process is largely inspired by the current epistemological approach in anthropology (Brettell and Hollifield 2000; Joppke and Morawska 2003).

The paper we present here is the product of a larger pilot-study; a systematic description of Turkish and Portuguese immigrants’ transnational practices in Switzerland (the larger project comprehends several European countries) that should be seen as the first step in the formulation of an empirical basis for comparative purposes across immigrants’ groups.

1.1 Epistemological stand

Our epistemological position is based on the continuous construction of hypotheses, in accordance with the inductive analytical approach, which is particularly useful for exploratory studies as this one. Therefore, a first step should involve what Morawska (2003: 164) defined as exploring diversity. This means a systematic gathering of information on the existing forms of transnational ethnic groups, their generating and sustaining mechanisms, and the adaptation of immigrants and their offspring in three spheres. Research will be informed at this level by a flexible analytic frame or a set of theoretical concepts used as heuristic guideposts and adjusted as the evidence accumulates, rather than by the pre-existing theoretical models.

In the second phase, it was necessary to identify patterns of similarities and differences in the investigated transnational migrant groups (Turks and Portuguese). Here the purpose, as in any comparative social science approach, is to identify causal links which allow to see a relation between a certain configuration of causes and their outcomes. Since the existence of transnational migrant groups has been assumed to be context dependent, these identified patterns of similarities and differences should be treated as transitory, specific for their time and place.

As a third step coherent theoretical models have to be constructed to explain the generating, sustaining and transforming mechanisms of the transnational phenomenon deriving from the information gathered in the preceding phases.

This inductive analytical approach allows for the continuous construction of hypothesis. A mix of methods will be used in order to construct a comparable inventory of transnational practices (Bühler-Niederberger 1991). Exploring the diversity of transnational practices means to systematically gather information
on this phenomenon, to observe their generating and sustaining mechanisms, and the adaptation of immigrants and their offspring to changing realities.

1.2 Survey method

Our study entails three compatible research approaches: document analysis and expert interviews as well as narrative, biographical interviews with transnational actors. This makes it possible to get an overall picture of various transnational activities, their causes and dynamics. The information gained from these empirical approaches is incorporated into a process of continual dialogue of theory formation, in which the development of the theory alternates with the continual inspection of the data material (Kleining 1995: 250). By doing this the specific characteristics of this extensive phenomenon can be comprehensively examined and can be structured from a theoretical perspective. The end result of this continual dialogue is the “theoretical saturation” (Kleining 1995: 267).

Selected communities

We studied two immigrant communities established in Switzerland, namely Turkish and Portuguese communities. These two groups share several characteristics: they have experienced both economic and politically driven migration; both have established second and third generation populations. We study if and how the Turks and the Portuguese differ and/or converge in terms of transnational activities, and we explain these differences and/or convergences.

Interviews with experts and transnational actors

The study is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with community experts and knowledgeable actors (see appendix 1). We have investigated the transnational practices by meeting and interviewing: a) selected individuals who, due to their involvement with the Portuguese and Turkish communities, can provide valuable information about these communities’ practices; b) first and second generation immigrants who are directly involved in transnational activities in all three fields studied, namely economic, political and socio-cultural.

For the Portuguese community, the interviews were carried out primarily in two cities (Lausanne and La Chaux-de-Fonds), which host an important share of this community in the country. As regards the Turkish community, most of our interviews were carried out in the cities of Bern, Basel, and Zurich, all of which host a large Turkish population. These are also cities where a number of Turks (all naturalized) are active in the local parliament. A focus group with 5 immigrants has been carried out in Fribourg in order to examine possible socio-cultural transnational activities.
2 The Turkish and Portuguese communities in Switzerland

Transnational activities are strongly linked to the context in which immigrants are living. This context is determined not only by existing structural opportunities in both receiving and destination country, but also by immigrants’ migratory history, their social and professional integration level, their position on the labour market as well. That’s why it is important to present, even if briefly, some descriptive features of the communities we studied.

2.1 The Turkish community

A Typology

Until the end of the 70’s, Turkish people emigrated to Europe mainly for socio-economic reasons, but following the military coup d’Etat of September 1980, the motivations for Turkish emigration became more diverse. In addition to the traditional economical emigration, people left Turkey also for political reasons (e.g. opponents of the regime ready for going into exile). Several thousand people thus sought refuge in Western Europe, and particularly in Switzerland. Since 1986, the Turkish Government’s repression of the Kurdish community further increased the wave of refugees into Switzerland. After the “guest-workers” and “political refugees” who fled the Turkish regime, the Kurdish refugees are forming a third group of Turkish citizens living abroad. The number of residents of Turkish nationality in Switzerland more than doubled within ten years: from 38’626 in 1980 to 81’655 in 1990 and had reached the number of 83’000 in 2000 (OFS 2003).

Let us have a look at these three socially and economically different “Turkish” immigrant categories. The socio-professional profile of political refugees who arrived in Switzerland in the beginning of the 80s was very different from that of their fellow countrymen who had arrived as “guest-workers” earlier in the 70s. In contrast to the “guest-workers”, who were most often unskilled and rural origin, the refugees were often university and high school students or university graduates. They came from larger cities and were seriously committed to the political struggle in their home country. Refugees of Kurdish origin differed from these refugees since their exile resulted from ethnic violence against them. Somehow, Kurdish refugees shared certain features with the first group (the “guest-workers”), and certain other features with the second group (refugees who fled the military regime). They resembled the first group with regard to their socio-economic profile and their rural origins, and they also experienced similar conditions of forced exile as the second group,
although the political motivation of “Kurdish refugees” was more ethnic than ideological (Bozarslan 1990).

It is very important not to lose sight of the complexity of this apparently homogenous "Turkish community" living in Switzerland. The different reasons for leaving Turkey go hand in hand with various migration projects. The various community networks have diverse orientations, material and symbolic resources and also different kinds of relationships with the country of origin. This impacts the community in a number of different ways when they seek to integrate into Swiss society. Because of the diversity of their parents’ migratory paths and of their perception of social reality, even the second generation is far from forming a homogenous group. They display different characteristics in terms of integration and identity building into the host society.

**Demographic profile**

The Turkish community is characterized by stability in terms of status: out of the 83’000 (5.5 % of the foreign resident population) people of Turkish nationality living in Switzerland in 2000, 22% had residence permits valid for a year that were renewable, while 74% had permanent residence permits, which gave them greater access to social rights. The naturalization rate of the Turkish immigrant population has increased since the 80’s, reaching 1.8% (Piguet and Wanner 2000), which is relatively high compared to the national average of 1.02% for all immigrant groups. Since Turkey accepted dual nationality in 1992, applications for naturalization have risen considerably. The interest for naturalization is high among Turks (more than 80%). Naturalization mostly concerns second generation youth.

There is a high level of endogamous marriage among Turks. This is not visible in the marriage statistics, however. Relatively few marriages are entered into and registered in Switzerland. Most marriages take place in Turkey.

**Labour market situation**

Turks in Switzerland work mostly in unskilled jobs in the secondary sector. In fact, two out of three Turks (65%) have worked in this sector in 1990 (Piguet 2005). The metallurgical and machine industry absorbed almost half of the workers in this sector; while in the service industry, immigrants from Turkey were employed mainly in the hotel, cleaning, body care and hygiene industries.

The Turks are much more affected by the unemployment than other groups, particularly the Swiss nationals. 14.9% of the Turks in the age category 15 to 64 are unemployed as opposed to 2.8% of native Swiss.

According to a study on discrimination in the labour market, the second generation Turks follow the Albanian speaking group as the second most concerned group in regards to discrimination (Fibbi et al. 2003). In addition,
immigrants from Turkey are the most spatially segregated group living in Swiss urban areas, in Zurich for example (Arend 2000).

2.2 The Portuguese community

A Typology

The Portuguese have experienced three principal migration paths (See, Table 1). First, until the mid 1970s, the Portuguese fled their country primarily for political reasons: that is, most (not all, of course) of those who abandoned Portugal until 1974 did it because they wanted to be free to express their ideas and because they wished to organize an opposition to the dictatorial regime. The Portuguese immigrants that entered Switzerland in that period were often highly politicized: their socialization with both their community of origin and their new community (the Swiss) largely occurred through their involvement in political activities. In those years (1960s and early 1970s) Portuguese associations started spreading in Switzerland, and most of these created real political spaces where people met to discuss and debate about issues with one another, but also to organize political action. Some of these Portuguese were also involved in pro-immigrant associations actively engaged in negotiations with the Swiss authorities and institutions about the immigrants’ rights and welfare services. For this generation of Portuguese living abroad, the reference to the home country was an important part of their everyday activities. They lived in Switzerland but their public sphere of reference, as we would call it today, was made by Portugal and by the Portuguese communities living abroad.

The second type of Portuguese immigrants – those who left the country after a democratic system was established in 1974 – consisted of individuals whose primary reason for moving out of their home country was an improvement in their economic situation; their move was caused by a legitimate desire of social mobility (Peche 1989-1990). These immigrants were not very interested in politics; they did not intend to socialize with their fellow citizens through highly politicized associations as their fellow countrymen had done in the past. Moreover, their social and educational capitals were poorer than those of their fellow citizens fleeing from Portugal during the dictatorship. This second type of immigrants sought associations that offered recreational and leisure opportunities, together with support in getting started in the new country (language courses; assistance in bureaucratic needs; etc.).

With time, therefore, the political associations disappeared completely and were replaced by social clubs where people could meet to drink, eat, play billiards or watch television – or as one of the interviewees put it more succinctly – “to live my Portuguese hour.” This type of immigrants were still
very attached to the home country, thus, their recreational and self-help associations formed an integral part of a dense transnational network.

The Portuguese immigrants who only just arrived in Switzerland in the last years and months constitute a third type. They are young people whose main reason for leaving their home country is still an economic one. However, compared to their fellow citizens arrived in the eighties, the current immigrants are better equipped in terms of social and educational capital for coping with the new reality: they have a good knowledge of Switzerland upon their arrival; many of them arrive already having learned one of the languages speaking in Switzerland; some of them have a well-developed network of acquaintances and ties in the cities of the host country.

Table 1: Typology of Portuguese immigrants and effects on the development of transnational practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Immigrants</th>
<th>Role of associations</th>
<th>Evidence of trans-national practices</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political immigrants (until 1974)</td>
<td>Strong presence of political associations and advocacy groups</td>
<td>Wide network of people and associations, strong transnational practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic immigrants, after 1974</td>
<td>Support and assistance associations, offering also recreational and leisure opportunities</td>
<td>Transnational practices existing in cultural and social spheres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic immigrants, from the late 1990s</td>
<td>Pure leisure associations (bar, restaurants, sport clubs)</td>
<td>Transnational practices very limited to the socio-cultural sphere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic profile

From the middle of the 80s, Switzerland became the preferred destination of Portuguese immigrants. Between 1984 and 2006, the migratory balance of the Portuguese who entered Swiss territory with an annual or permanent permission was of 118’419 individuals. As a result, the Portuguese became the third community residing on Swiss territory, after the Italians and the Serbs. At the end of December 2006, 173’477 Portuguese resided in Switzerland. Almost 70% of them held a permanent permission. Nearly 75% of them live in French-speaking Switzerland.

The naturalization rate of the Portuguese immigrant population was 0.8% in 2003, which is relatively low compared to the national average of 2.4% for all immigrant groups (Piguet and Wanner 2000).
Labour market situation

Portuguese immigrants in Switzerland mostly work in unskilled jobs in the service sector, especially in the hotel trade, catering trade, cleaning services and hygiene industries. From the point of view of the socio-professional category, almost 65% of Portuguese immigrants belong to the worker category in the whole active population (Wanner 2004). Compared to the Turkish immigrants (14.9%), however, the Portuguese are less affected by unemployment (4.8%); still, they are more affected by it than the native Swiss (2.8%) (Haug and Wanner 2005).

According to a recent study (Piguet and Roger Besson 2005), the proportion of entrepreneurs among the Portuguese seems to be also less important when compared with the Turks. Piguet explains this lack of motivation for entrepreneurship by the return-oriented-migratory project of Portuguese immigrants. In addition, contrary to the Turks, Portuguese second generation immigrants are not significantly concerned by discrimination in the Swiss labour market (Fibbi et al. 2003).

After this descriptive section about the Turkish and Portuguese communities, we will focus on the meaning and diffusion of transnational practices among Turkish and Portuguese immigrants in the following chapter.

3 Transnational practices: results by community

3.1 Turkish immigrants’ transnational practices

According to the experts and transnational actors we interviewed, there is a very large variety of transnational activities in economic, political and socio-cultural spheres among Turkish immigrants and refugees. Analysing here all these activities is beyond the purpose of this paper. In order to have an idea of those activities, we present them in various tables we annexed (see appendix 2).

In this section we want rather to discuss most important characteristics observed of Turkish immigrant’s transnational activities. Before to do that, it seems important to explain shortly why Turkish immigrants are so strongly inclined to become transnationally active. There are several motivating factors encouraging the Turks in Switzerland to take part in transnational activities and they change of course according the sphere studied.

Our analysis shows that the engagement in transnational economic activities is related to a long term strategy aiming at an economic insertion in the host country. Beyond this common reason, getting around some difficulties on
entering the labour market (e.g. lack of qualification or prejudice from the natives) is a decisive part of this strategy for some actors.

For most transnational entrepreneurs economic motivation (a better future) is predominant. This is not surprising because it fits in with the logic of doing business. What is very interesting to observe is that some immigrants’ becoming transnationally active is a result of an individual strategy developed in order to face integration and discrimination difficulties with which they are confronted.

As far as the social field is concerned, the preservation of the bond with the country of origin constitutes a major motivation for Turkish immigrants’ social practices. The establishment of this bond is very strong for the first generation and justified by a certain number of sociological occurrences such as living according to their cultural and social traditions, staying informed about the events in Turkey (reading Turkish newspapers, watching TV and listening to the radio, looking at Turkish websites on the internet), preserving a feeling of solidarity with regard to their family, neighbours and fellow countrymen, and finally, aiming at an individual return project.

In addition, some transnational social activities are intellectually-motivated. Indeed, an important number of second generation immigrants consider themselves as social actors who use transnational social activities to support their social emancipation.

The possibility of commercializing certain types of social activities is another incentive for some immigrants. There are several individual organizers or small companies that organize leisurely evenings (musical or theatrical performances with artists from Turkey) which cater to Turkish immigrant interest in Switzerland. This commoditization of culture is also observable in the media and information sector.

Concerning the political sphere, the most widespread motivation is the ideological or religious identification with a movement or a political party in the county of origin. The Turkish and Kurdish immigrants bring in their ideological and religious issues from where they come from and organize their political activities around these issues in Switzerland. For the majority of the former-refugees (Marxist or alternative left), ideology is the main mobilizing factor for their transnational activities. At the same time, religious beliefs seem to be an important motivating factor for the first generation, especially as concerns immigrant workers and their children. In the same way, identification with an ethnic group in Turkey constitutes another stimulus for transnational political commitments, in particular as regards the Kurdish activists who support their ethnic cause in Turkey.
Let us have a look at some characteristics of Turkish immigrant’s transnational activities.

The transnational activities of the Turkish "guest-workers" of the 70s were primarily (but not exclusively) of an economic nature (sending remittances, purchasing property in the country of origin, for example). The arrival of Turkish refugees during the 80s diversified and enriched the transnational activities, especially in the political field (engagement in trade unions and the creation of solidarity associations with Turkey and other European political actors). Simultaneously, economic immigrants started to identify more with political issues concerning Turkey. After a certain time, the refugees played a consistent role in the diversification of the socio-economic transnational practices by setting up structures allowing them to transfer their knowledge obtained in exile. As for the people who emigrated for ethnic reasons (the Kurds), it is their ethnicity which characterized their transnational activities.

This diversification of the reasons to emigrate reinforced the material and moral resources of the members in each group, and facilitated transnational activities at the collective and individual level.

Another diversification can be observed in the perception and function of transnational ties. These are no longer related to the objective to return to Turkey but rather are geared towards improving or changing their living conditions and that of their children. During the 80s the first generation sent their children to finish their schooling in the country of origin with a perspective of preparing the whole family’s return to Turkey. Turkish immigrants and refugees still continue to use this strategy in order to give their children a possibility for higher education, which is not necessarily ensured in Switzerland.

Although the various groups of immigrants (economic workers, political and ethnic refugees) can, for a certain period, be identified more with one type of transnational activity that with another, it is important to stress that the transnational activities they developed are not necessarily dependent on the type of migration (economic or political reason): each group simultaneously weaves transnational ties in the economic, political and socio-cultural fields. However, the generation factor seems to be an explanatory variable for several transnational practices, but not unavoidably for a specific transnational field. The Turkish second generation is involved in transnational practices in all spheres (economic, politic, socio-cultural) in various degrees.

Contrary to the first and second generation, the retired Turkish immigrants are not significantly involved in transnational activities. This is partly because the Turkish immigration to Switzerland is very recent and the retired population is still relatively small. According to our experts, many of them do not have Swiss citizenship and continuously face visa problems (with a resident permit,
they do not have the right to leave Switzerland for more than 6 months) and health problems which restrict their mobility.

Another characteristic of Turkish transnational activities is that they are extremely entangled and complex: in certain cases, social or religious transnational activities can be linked to an economic activity and outcome. For instance, an immigrant association created in order to organize social activities in the host society gets involved in the collection and transfer of funds that aims at producing economic solidarity or local development in the country of origin.

In addition, the transnational ties also reflect a change of appreciation and perception of immigrants and refugees by private and public actors in the country of origin. Contrary to what used to be the case until the middle of the 80s, both public and private actors currently think of immigrants as potential resources in financial, political and social terms. As a result of this shift, a certain number of "immigrant-related-activities," which involved the immigrants and refugees in Switzerland, have begun to be conceptualized in Turkey.

The Turkish state, for example, has become directly involved as an active participant in certain kinds of transnational activities. It both sets up and transforms already existing structures created by immigrants with the general goal of increasing a lobbying structure to improve Turkey’s image in Switzerland, or to support the official position of the state as regards the Armenian and Kurdish questions. It also oversees many transnational activities in the religious field (activities of Diyanet).

NGOs in Turkey also establish transnational ties with the immigrants and refugees, sometimes leading to organic structures in the host society. NGOs active in humanitarian and/or social fields are especially eager to mobilize the immigrants and refugees to set up the formal structures (supporting committees) and to get moral and material support. Some go even further by creating a sub-branch of their organizations in the receiving country.

In effect, this “new perception of the immigrant” among the different actors of the country of origin can be considered a stimulating element for the practice and persistence of transnational ties.

One could suppose that the "immigrant-related-activities" developed with the support of the country of origin would preferably involve more less well-integrated immigrants or refugees than well-integrated ones in the host society, because the former could feel less concerned by (and thus less committed to) their activities in the host society. If we look at the case of the Turkish immigrants and refugees we can observe that this is not always the case. On the contrary, it appears that immigrants with a better socio-economic situation
and a relatively high educational level are those more involved in transnational activities. That means that being well integrated does not exclude a strong identification with the country of origin, nor does it exclude the development of transnational activities and identities. In other words, the transnational identification does not generally appear as a function of the immigrants’ structural position in the host society. Similarly, a successful integration does not inevitably produce a dissuasive effect on the transnational identification. However, such an outcome also means that to be politically or socially engaged requires some material and nonmaterial resources.

Ad hoc activities that Turkish immigrants organize for environmental or humanitarian causes in their country of origin appear as a new transnational practice. Its main characteristic is that it involves Turkish immigrants and their organizations in several receiving countries, especially Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Despite the gap that separates the Turkish second generation from the country of their parents, we observe an important transnational identification among members of the second generation, in particular in the field of economic and socio-cultural activities, but less in the political field. Their transcultural resources and skills (fluency in home language, professional skills, migratory experiences, etc.) seem to be better recognized in a transnational context than in the national context of the receiving country.

It should be pointed out that Germany seems to play important role in Turkish immigrants’ transnational activities in Switzerland. Germany appears as a kind of headquarters thus making Turkey’s role less important for a number of transnational activities.

According to our informants, transnational activities are sustainable and may well increase in the future because of Turkey’s wish to join the EU, which might motivate immigrants and local actors in Turkey to establish better equipped transnational ties. At the same time, the health and education sectors could also become new spheres for transnational practice. Interviewed experts and actors underline that many immigrants go to Turkey because of healthcare. Similarly, some immigrants use internet facilities to benefit from e-learning opportunities offered by Turkish universities.

The dynamics of the transnational identification of the Turkish immigrants and refugees in Switzerland are complex as the transnational identification takes place in highly varied forms and is determined by a multitude of external and internal factors. The many actors, each with different strategies and hopes (country of origin, receiving country), are intertwined in a complex logic of interaction.
3.2 Portuguese immigrants’ transnational practices

The relatively weak transnational embeddedness of the Portuguese community is remarkable. Economic transnational activities exist in their usual form; remittances, the acquisition of property and importation of goods. The common economic transnational practices are those which involve the remittances given to purchase property or to support family members. Usually the money is sent by a formal means (through a bank or post office). The Portuguese banks, which developed a network of agencies and credit representatives in Switzerland, are specialized in the transfer of migrant’s money to their bank accounts in Portugal. The remittances intended for the purchase of property is not to purchase property for themselves but to invest their savings securely. The Portuguese immigrants’ economic transnational practices in Switzerland are also apparent in areas of economic activity, such as the importation of various types of Portuguese goods (food goods, books, CD/DVD, furniture, decorative objects, travel agencies, etc).

However, the diversification and intensity of their economic operations are unstructured and not coherently organized, which suggests that the Portuguese community has a deep-set mistrust of the business network offered by the Swiss community.

On the other hand, their trust seems greater as concerns the social and cultural sphere: the Portuguese community gives particular attention to education, in particular when this helps to maintain and enforce the ties with Portugal. Language and culture have the power to thicken the community beyond a merely economic existence in Switzerland.

In Switzerland there are several Portuguese schools. In fact, the Portuguese have organized a well-structured system of schools where children are educated according to the curriculum prescribed by the Swiss public school system, to which courses from the Portuguese educational system are added. Of course, the institution and the community responsible for the organization of these schools and courses have to maintain solid contacts with Portugal: they need up-to-date teaching programs, textbooks, staff members, etc.

Another strong transnational tie is provided in the religious sphere by the Catholic Church, maybe the very first transnational actor in Western history. Their institutions ensure a religious and cultural continuity with the past and the survival of those traits that are worth passing on to the next generation.

Through the availability of its rooms and through the organization of social events, the church allows the Portuguese to meet among themselves on a regular basis and to help one another. On the other hand, the Portuguese Catholic mission in Switzerland assures the maintenance of the links with local churches in Portugal; this is useful for the immigrants who wish to get married.
or get their child baptized in Switzerland as they need to retrieve the necessary documents that are kept in these parishes (interview n.1). Moreover, weddings and baptisms very often take place in Portugal for practical reasons (relatives and friends still living in the country) and also because of the strong attachment to the country of origin. This provides another interesting piece of evidence of a transnational activity that is common across generations and types of immigrants.

But our analysis showed that the transnational character of this activity is losing ground, in particular when certain major religious events such as weddings or baptisms are considered.

On the other hand, as was confirmed by several interviewed actors, all the activities in the social sphere developed by immigrants’ associations that aim to maintain a link with Portugal continue to have a certain importance for the first generation, but they do not elicit much interest on the part of the second generation.

A particularly surprising observation was the complete absence of any consistent form of political transnationalism in the Portuguese community.

This lack of involvement in politics may appear even more astonishing if we bear in mind that: a) the Portuguese can vote from abroad and b) the Portuguese state acknowledged the importance of its diaspora by deciding that, 4 out of 230 members of the Parliament have been elected by Portuguese living abroad (respectively 2 for Europe and 2 for the rest of the world). This suggests that the Portuguese diaspora has a strong interest in Portuguese politics. Moreover, since 2000 the Portuguese state enlarged the franchise of the diaspora by allowing the Portuguese living abroad to vote in the presidential elections. But the Portuguese living in Europe do not seem to be very interested in politics: in 2002 only 162 612 Portuguese living abroad (out of 5 million!) registered to vote and 75% of them did not vote during the last political elections (Cardeiro 2004).

Beyond the lack of political involvement at the transnational levels, the Portuguese community does not appear interested in Swiss local politics. Despite the fact that in some Swiss cantons (6 out of 23, among which there are cantons in which interviews were carried out) foreigners can take part in local politics. Even second generation youth born in Switzerland and holding double citizenship do not appear interested in Swiss politics, hence they do not use the franchise in the receiving country.

The political fervour of the 60s and 70s, when many Portuguese refugees found asylum in Switzerland and continued to be committed to a political vision that they sought to apply in both countries, has waned since a democracy was established in Portugal.
Our interviewees agree that three elements could improve our understanding of the situation. First, the Portuguese living in Switzerland seem to believe that their political participation (voting, for example) is not useful for the outcome of Portuguese politics.

Second, and linked to the first argument, some of our interviewees believe that there is a strong mistrust towards politics and politicians within the Portuguese community. A sentence we heard often was: “there is a high level of corruption among Portuguese politicians”, which explains why so few wish to become involved in politics. A third explanation is that the cost of political (conventional and unconventional) participation is high, which does not make the effort of getting involved worthwhile. Indeed, the Portuguese living abroad are not permitted to use electronic voting systems (and Presidential elections are only available through postal vote).

The transnational activities of the Portuguese immigrants, which are summarized in Table 2, show that the immigrants’ engagement in transnational practices is very limited and has a sporadic character. Some practices are altogether excluded, remittances, for example. To what extent this is a characteristic of homogenous communities, composed of first generation immigrants and a small number of second generation immigrants who are still at school, remains to be answered by further research.

On the other hand, it is also interesting to observe that, in the case of Portuguese migrants in Switzerland, having a return project in a middle term probably does much to dissuade immigrants from engaging in transnational practices.

Table 2: Portuguese immigrants’ transnational activities in various fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Individual/ Familial</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic</strong></td>
<td>• Remittances</td>
<td>• Sporadic events in order to collect funds for local projects in the country of origin such as the renovation of churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Real-estate investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Business activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-cultural</strong></td>
<td>• Speaking the language of country of origin</td>
<td>• Immigrants’ associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Practicing the language of origin and attending Portuguese culture courses</td>
<td>• Consummation of Portuguese media products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td>• Limited voting participation in Portugal</td>
<td>• Portuguese political party representation in Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sporadic participation to political activities</td>
<td>• State structures (Portuguese embassy and consulates)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Conclusion: putting the results into perspective

Starting point of our research was the epistemological interest in recognizing, to which degree immigrant groups maintain significant ties to the country of origin over time as well as to identify in form of a pilot study patterns of transnational activities and develop frames which could explain the creation and endurance of those practices. The aim of our study was not to test different approaches on transnationalism, but to explore empirically the shapes that transnational practices may or may not adopt.

That’s why it was important to reconstruct the main sociological parameters of Turkish and Portuguese communities in order to understand the condition under which they operate transnationally. Doing this, it was instantly clear that a major epistemological problem could derive from a narrow essentialist conception of these communities. Already the concept of “Turkish immigrants” hides the different social, ideological and political stratifications of one of the most recent immigration groups in Switzerland. Moreover, different types of resources, but also different migratory projects affect and influence the way how Turks and Portuguese perceived their relation vis-à-vis the integration into Switzerland and consequently the transnational activities.

We discovered a high diversification of transnational activities among the Turkish community. Their arrival through different waves and legal paths took to the development of a variety of practices that fitted best in the different spheres with their status, their socio-economic, cultural, and political situation. Times going by, the function of transnational ties may not be any longer related to a return project, but to the establishment of better life conditions in the place they chose to live. But even the belonging to the second generation doesn’t inhibit the evolution of such transnational practices: a persistence of these activities are perceived going beyond the adherence to a particular age group.

On the other hand, to be embedded in more than one society is for large parts of the Portuguese community not a primary issue but represents an important individual dynamics in particular when it comes to the question of identity transmission in a transnational context.

Some of the most relevant findings of our exploratory study are the following:

- Transnational activities evolve and get their strongest momentum when immigrants have already reached a certain degree of integration and are in possession of the necessary material and non-material resources;
Transnational activities can in certain cases be the consequence of migrant’s deliberate strategy linked to the integration processes;

The results of our study cannot support the hypothesis according to which transnational activities, especially in the social and economic spheres, are explained by the strong interest of the immigrants in directing their migratory project towards returning home to their country of origin (the Portuguese in Switzerland, a group that shares to a large extent such plans and inclinations, have proved to have rather weak transnational ties);

In the political field, a longer sojourn seems to reduce the immigrant’s interest for the political activities oriented to the country of origin, but increase one oriented to the receiving country (Switzerland);

A strong loyalty felt by immigrants towards their country of origin does not imply disloyalty towards the receiving country, and vice versa;

Interconnected are not only the activities, but also the types of transnationalism. Immigrants are not only able to invest themselves in more than one field, but these economic, political and socio-cultural spheres are related to each other;

Whatever type of transnational practices will be put into action, the social capital of the immigrants (e.g. their education, job experience, social networks etc.) is an explanatory variable for those practices;

The transnational activities are not restricted in their geographical space between the host-country and the country of origin. Third countries may also play a stimulating role in enforcing transnational practices (Germany, for instance, is such a country used by the Turkish community in Switzerland).

Finally, and in getting to the end of this conclusion, it is to emphasize that the range of transnational practices undertaken by immigrants is rather rich in form and content. We tried to grasp its major dynamics, even if some fields could not be approached in this study. But what comes clearly out, is the total social fact that transnational practices transcend the importance of the nation state, even if they are dependent on specific national factors.
List of references


professionelle des personnes d'origine étrangère en Suisse. Neuchâtel: OFS.
Appendixes

Appendix 1: Activity fields of the interviewed experts and actors

Table 3: Number and activity fields of interviewed Turkish experts and actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Interviewed experts</th>
<th>Interviewed actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Function/institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Economic    | 5       | Turkish embassy, commercial and economic attaché / Swiss-Turkish Chamber of Commerce / Bank expert / Economic promotion | 3    | • Textile import  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • Jewelry import  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • Döner-kebab import and export |
| Political   | 2       | Former-member of a cantonal parliament/ members of cantonal parliament / Swiss political party member or activist / Kurdish political activist | 3    | • Two members of cantonal parliaments  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • Member of Swiss Green party |
| Socio-cultural | 8 | “Diyanet” religious foundation/ Socio-cultural associations’ manager or activist / Internet newspaper editor / cultural centre staff / women’s centre manager | 5    | • Staff member of a cultural centre  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • President of a Turkish solidarity foundation  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • Editor of a newspaper in Turkish  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • Responsible for a real-estate investment project  
|             |         |                                                                                |      | • Focus-group with participants in socio-cultural activities |
| Total       | 15      |                                                                                 | 11   |                 |
### Table 4: Number and activity fields of interviewed Portuguese experts and actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Interviewed experts</th>
<th>Interviewed actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Function/institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>- Some members of business association and of the Consulate in Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Priest, Portuguese Catholic mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Director of a Portuguese centre and “second generation” representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Community leader and former refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Owner of a Portuguese travel agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>- Some members of Portuguese and Swiss political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Politician in both Swiss and Portuguese parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>- Some members of a Portuguese football club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Community leader and former refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Owner of a Portuguese travel agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 2: An overview of Turkish immigrants’ economic, socio-cultural and political activities**

**Table 5: Turkish immigrants’ economic activities in Switzerland**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Solidarity oriented** | • Remittances  
• Financial aid for collective funds |
| **Investment oriented** | • Purchase of properties  
• Creation of “immigrant companies”  
• Small business (retail trade, hotel management, etc.)  
• Collective investment funds |
| **Business (transnational logic)** | • In the field of tourism and leisure (travel and tour-operator agencies, musical companies, concerts, etc.)  
• Export – import  
• Transferring human capital (opening a psychotherapist centre, vineyard construction, etc.) |
| **Ethnic businesses stimulating transnational business** | • Catering trade, retail trade, leisure and production in receiving country |

**Table 6: Turkish immigrants’ socio-cultural activities in Switzerland**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday activities</strong></td>
<td>• Reading newspapers, watching TV, listening to the radio, surfing the internet, communication, etc. in the language of country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charity oriented activities</strong></td>
<td>• Supporting existing charity activities in the country of origin as well as people of the village or city of origin by various means (financial, logistic, and training, etc.). Foundation as an institutionalized structure used for these objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Leisure activities** | • Wedding celebrations  
• Cultural events such as music or theatre performances |
| **Intellectual activities** | • Organization of events allowing for the exchange of intellectual ideas between immigrants and intellectuals of Turkish origin living outside of Switzerland |
| **Religious activities** | • Setting up of religious organizations or associations  
• Organization of pilgrimages to Mecca  
• Raising funds for the sacrificing of animals in the country of origin, or in another country during Islamic festival of sacrifices |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country-of-origin-oriented</strong></td>
<td>✤ Conventional participation: individual voting practice during the national election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Being involved in the political entrepreneurship such as political parties, organizations, associations and movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Ad hoc activities: collective mobilization for humanitarian and/or environmental causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Host-country-oriented</strong></td>
<td>✤ Institutional participation in municipal parliaments or local consultative councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Involvement in Swiss organizations defending immigrants’ rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Integration into Swiss political parties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>