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The Kosovar Diaspora in Switzerland: Construction of Identities between Media Use and Diasporic Traits

Abstract

This paper, drawing on experience collected from a research project, describes the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland, and it presents a research model which can be applied when studying processes of social and cultural construction of identities, in particular with a focus on media consumption. The paper discusses the role of media in the processes of construction of social and cultural identities and how migrants' media use influences on the one side identification processes and multiple senses of belonging, and on the other side how the exposure to different cultural media products affects the cultural identities of individuals.

After a definition of the theoretical framework, the paper presents the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland and the central issues its members must face. It then presents some practical examples of the modalities of operationalization of the central concepts in our empirical research. Finally, it discusses the research model adopted.

Key words: social identity, cultural identity, media use, diaspora, Kosovo, Switzerland

Rezumat

Această lucrare, care are la bază un proiect de cercetare, descrie diaspora kosovară din Elveția și prezintă un model de cercetare care poate fi aplicat în studierea proceselor de construcție socială și culturală a identităților, mai ales cele de consum media. Articolul discută, pe de o parte, rolul media în procesele de construcție a identităților sociale și culturale și felul în care folosirea media de către migranți influențează procesele de identificare și sentimentele de apartenență multiplă, și, pe de altă parte, cum expunerea la diferite produse culturale media afectează identitățile culturale ale indivizilor.

După definirea cadrului teoretic, sunt analizate diaspora kosovară din Elveția și principalele probleme cu care se confruntă aceasta. Prezentăm apoi câteva exemple de operaționalizare a conceptelor centrale în cercetarea empirică, pentru ca în final să discutăm modelul de cercetare adoptat.

Cuvinte-cheie: identitate socială, identitate culturală, uzaj mediatic, diaspora, Kosovo, Elveția

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1. Introduction and theoretical background

This paper, drawing on experience collected from an ongoing research project, describes the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland, and it presents a research model which can be applied when studying processes of social and cultural construction of identities, in particular with a focus on media consumption. We need to understand whether and how media play a role in constructing and negotiating social and cultural identities, whether by maintaining the identity from a given home country or by fostering the creation of new forms of identities.

After a definition of the theoretical framework, we will present the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland and the central issues its members must face. We will then present some practical examples of the modalities of operationalization of the central concepts in our empirical research. Finally, we will present our research model.

In the last three decades, Western societies have experienced the growth of transnational migration movements, an increased connection and inter-connection between communities, and an intense territorial mobility of individuals that together have led to a reconfiguration of society and to new social formations. This has attracted the interest of politicians, of civil society in general, and of academic researchers. Several policies have been promoted, many theories elaborated and research carried out under a variety of monikers: the idea of multiculturalism, which was the paradigm adopted at policy and academic levels in the late 20th century (e.g. Vertovec, 1996; Turner, 1993; Glazer, 1997; Hall, 2001); the vaguer and depoliticizing notion of “cultural diversity” (e.g. Nikoltchev, 2008; Kerr & Titley, 2008) and “*super-diversity*”, a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced” (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1024); the concept of cosmopolitanism, and more in detail the idea of “methodological cosmopolitanism” where “dualities of the global and the local, the national and the international, us and them, have dissolved and merged together in new forms that require conceptual and empirical analysis” (Beck & Sznaider, 2006; 2010); the concept of transnationalism, or as Vertovec defines it, “the cross-border and homeland links maintained by migrants”, now increasingly easy to maintain thanks to developments in particular in media and information and communication technologies (ICT), as well as in lower cost travel and mobility, which allow dispersed groups to stay “in close daily contact with each other or with events in their homelands and other diasporic locations” (Vertovec, 2010, p. 89).

Regardless of the labels used, we experience the socio-cultural context in which people and groups referring to different cultures coexist in the same geographical space. We are witnessing the growth of diasporic identities (Brubaker, 2005) within national communities, and a consequence of this phenomenon is a further deterritorialization of social relations and networks (see e.g. Castells, 1996). On the whole, these evolutions disrupt the moderately stable relation between social structure, cultural configuration and geographical location that distinguishes traditional societies. As noted by Giddens (2000), we are therefore confronted with changes that involve experiencing new cultural differences which will add themselves to those previously existing within each society. Wieviorka (2004) further underlines that cultural differences are not only reproduced, but are in the constant process of being produced, which means that fragmentation and recomposition are a permanent probability.

For these reasons, it is important to focus our attention on diasporas and develop a theoretical and methodological framework to study them and to understand the challenges they must face in the contemporary society.

This paper is grounded in the context of Switzerland, which is a very specific and diverse country in the middle of Europe, and not part of the European Union. It is a federal republic divided into 26 cantons with 7.87 million permanent residents (FSO, 2011). One of Switzerland's peculiar characteristic is its multilingualism, which lends itself to cultural fragmentation as well: 63.7% of the population speaks German as a first language, 20.4% French, 6.5% Italian, 0.5% Romansh (the four are national languages but only the first three are official languages) and 8.9% of the Swiss population has "another" first language (FSO, 2011). In fact, among the permanent population, the number of non-citizens is continuously growing: In 2010, Switzerland registered 52,300 non-citizens more than in the previous year, and non-citizens reached 22.4% of the entire population. 62.4% of permanent resident non-citizens are from EU-27/EFTA countries¹. Beside two prominent groups coming from neighboring countries (Italians at 16.3% and Germans at 14.9% of the permanent non-citizen populations), there are considerable numbers of migrants from Portugal, the countries of the former Yugoslavia, France, Turkey and Spain. The reasons for migration are diverse but a prominent role is played by "work", both for EU-27/EFTA migrants and for those coming from other countries. Moreover, over the course of the last decade, more than 40,000 people per year have obtained Swiss citizenship through naturalization, and they appear in statistics as Swiss. People with a migratory background living in Switzerland thus make up more than the 22.4% of permanent residents who are non-citizens. Other data help us in picturing the context: 26.4% of permanent residents in Switzerland were born outside of the country and later migrated to Switzerland; two thirds of them have a foreign passport. Among those born in Switzerland (73.6% of the permanent residents), 6.4% have a foreign passport, which means that they are second or third-generation non-citizens. (FSO, 2011)

The transnational migration movements are now part of our society, a phenomenon persisting through time as a defining factor in social life (see D'Amato & Fibbi, 2008). When people move from one cultural context to another, many aspects of life in the new society are unfamiliar, but migrants may ultimately adjust to the norms and values of the new society. This process of adaptive transformation is commonly called *acculturation* (Gordon, 1964; Hsu, Grant & Huang, 1993). This term was first defined by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, p. 149): "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups", and has been used in anthropology for over a century. Psychologists and social psychologists consider acculturation as the adaptation of the perceptions, attitudes, and cognitions of the individual to the new cultural settings (Berry, 1980, 1988; Taft, 1963; Weinstock, 1964).

In this context, the study of collective and social practices of immigration is necessary in order to ascertain integration policies, which can reduce inequalities and instabilities and foster social cohesion. One of the issues to form part of these practices is media consumption. We have already had evidence of the significant role played by media, the increasing importance of communication technologies and the creation of a transnational media space. Media can, in a diversity of ways, contribute to the creation of what Morley (2001) defines as simultaneously occurring processes of homogenization and fragmentation.

According to Hsu, Grant and Huang (1993), immigrants must (re-)acquire a set of social skills, ranging from language competency to work practices, which are accepted and experienced in the host society to reduce their isolation and uncertainty. These social skills are obtained through a combination of interpersonal and mass communication. As early research has

shown, immigrants depend heavily on host society's mass media, particularly television, for information about language and culture in the new society (DeFleur & Cho, 1957; Kim, 1988; Richmond, 1969; Won-Doornink, 1988, Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). As shown by De Block *et al.* (2004) the use of media from the host country may facilitate integration, help in negotiating new identities and in acquiring a new language and in the acculturation process in general. On the other hand, the existence of ethnic mass media may be viewed as evidence of the persistence and distinctiveness of ethnic groups.

According to Carøe Christiansen (2004) the development of media and ICT creates a *transnational perspective* through which the continuous use of media from host and home society can be regarded as a transnational social practice that allows valuable connections between different cultures. Depending on individual or social context the mediated cultural elements are interpreted differently and used as symbolic resources to constitute a specific identity and, in certain cases, to prepare to reside in a foreign country.

As Rydin and Sjöberg point out, media have a role in the process of cultural motion (as experienced by people in the process of migration), and "there is even support for the claim that media and communication technologies play a crucial role in the processes of cultural transformation, as media create spaces for maintaining and negotiating various identity processes" (Rydin & Sjöberg, 2008, p. 9). Without a doubt, media constitute an important element in the environment in which we live, and the development of media played a fundamental part in the rise of modern societies. At the same time, our society is now experiencing an increasing and massive development of information and communication technologies, which are broadly modifying the society itself.

Within this scenario, media use and consumption can be considered on the one hand for information, cultural enrichment, acquisition of contents, and on the other as an experience itself. As Georgiou states, media represent an element which is contributing to modify the structure of our society: "[t]he diversification of cultural and political affairs within and across countries, next to the vast growth of more varied media production and consumption, have significantly altered the roles and meanings of the nation, citizenship and media culture" (Georgiou, 2007, p. 11).

For these reasons, in the last few years, the link between diaspora and media studies has been strengthened and, as Cohen points out, today we can adopt a broader definition of diaspora. In fact, "transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination" (Cohen, 1997, p. 26). It is in this context that cultural mobility – and therefore the role of media and new technologies – has become an important element alongside physical mobility and migration.

The medial perspective on the study of processes of cultural transformation has already been adopted, not only in relation to the construction of a national sentiment but also with regard to questions of identity and belonging. Media are one of the factors responsible for the processes of formation and deconstruction of identities, which are based, in the case of immigrants, on processes of sustaining bonds with their country of origin and of engaging with their new country. Diasporas are strongly dependent on connectivity, and they find in media technologies and in mass media in general a crucial factor for their own identity, for the creation and consolidation of their own *imagined community* (Tsagarousianou, 2004, p. 52). Today people have access to transnational media and to media from other countries. Immigrants

have access to media from both their countries of origin and their adoptive countries, as well as to other nations' media.

Under these conditions, the role of ICT should be highlighted in linking transnational diasporic communities, in creating channels of information between home and away, and in enhancing coherent identities (Mandaville, 2001; Miller & Slater, 2000; Rai, 1995). The notion of translocality describes the multiple senses of belonging and is employed by Goldring (1998) and Smith (1998) with regard to migrants. Newer, cheaper and more efficient modes of communication enable migrants to maintain collective identities and practices (Hannerz, 1996; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Portes et al. 1999), and this has relevance for the cultural identity of immigrants. At the same time, as a specific target of the newest integration practices, these newer modes of communication enable new forms of participation in the host society through e-inclusion (see Nedelcu, 2008). Mass media and ICT have a direct, clear impact on the way identity is constructed. They provide new cultural contents fostering the development of new forms of cultural identity, whether global, local or hybrid. As Meyrowitz (1989, 1997) and Altheide (1995) claim, electronic (mass) media reorganize the sites of social interaction and social activity, weakening the connections between geographical and social space and reconfiguring the processes of community formation and the resulting collective identity.

The present text has been inspired by several studies on the role of media in identity construction among immigrants and diasporic people and by the centrality of the issue of identity in contemporary multicultural society. As de Leeuw and Rydin (2007, p. 175) have pointed out, we need to focus on the processes of cultural transformation that are taking place in our society where an "increasing number of people are negotiating their identities between continuity and change, between similarity and difference [...] with references to both the new place and to what has been left behind".

We argue in favour of the adoption of a media perspective as a compelling viewpoint. Media and new communications technologies offer increasing possibilities today. If "[b]roadcasting [...] brings us into intimate contact with events in faraway locations and makes available different identifications with its 'territories of transmission' at a regional, national or trans-national level" (Moore, 2000, p. 36), we need to understand whether and how media affect the settlement process of migrants within the adoptive community.

2. The Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland

The Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland offers an appropriate basis for understanding how social and cultural identities are historically reconfigured in the migration context and the media's role in this process. To pursue this understanding, a presentation of the historical conditions of migration to Switzerland from Kosovo needed. We will then describe the different social and cultural diasporic processes observed in connection with the country of origin. Lastly, we will observe these persons' settlement and immersion in Switzerland. These introductory elements of description allow us to present our model of the relationship between identity construction of the Kosovar diaspora and media use.

The immigration from the Balkans in Switzerland has undergone three phases. The first wave of migration of Kosovars into Switzerland started in the sixties. Composed of low-skilled laborers, immigration from Kosovo happened alongside that of Croatian and Serbian skilled workers who were employed in professional fields characterized by a lack of work-

force in Switzerland (including physicians and engineers). However, Kosovar migrants in Switzerland remained a minority among immigrants from Yugoslavia until the eighties.

Political upheavals and economic stagnation in Yugoslavia during the 1980s caused a second wave of migration from Kosovo to Switzerland. This wave consisted of low-skilled males, recruited mainly in the sectors of construction, hospitality, agriculture and industry. These workers came mostly from rural areas of Kosovo.

In the first years, Kosovars entering Switzerland received a seasonal status². This type of immigration, which considered the stay as temporary, was congruent with the objectives of the Swiss authorities (rotation of the workforce) who welcomed foreign laborers who came to work in Switzerland without their families for a period of years and were then replaced every few years by other seasonal workers (Aarburg, 2002).

The third wave of the Kosovar immigration in Switzerland took place during the 1990s. During this phase, there was a large increase in the number of Kosovars in Switzerland. This phase is characterized by a process of family reunification, made possible by the transformation of seasonal status into a residency permit (Gross, 2006), but also by the arrival of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing the political and socio-economic situation which prevailed in Kosovo at that time, and who thereby circumvented the policy of “three circles” which had prevented the Former Yugoslav citizens from emigrating to Switzerland (Leuenberger & Maillard, 1999; Burri-Sharani et al., 2010)³.

Today, 10% of the total Kosovar population lives in Switzerland. Until the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Kosovars were registered within Swiss statistics together with other groups from the country of Yugoslavia. In 1970, 24,971 immigrants from Yugoslavia were living in Switzerland. In 1980, the number had risen to 60,916, and tripled by 1990 to a total of 172,777 people. It is currently difficult to give precise figures on the actual number of immigrants from Kosovo in Switzerland (Burri-Sharani et al. 2010). According to the Federal Office for Migration (FOM), in 2007 there were 155,000 Kosovars (the vast majority of them ethnic Albanians); and recently, Micheline Calmy-Rey, President and Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, declared in an interview for the Radio Television of Kosovo that there are 170,000 Kosovars in Switzerland. In addition, about 40,000 people of Kosovar origin are naturalized Swiss citizens.

The difficulty in knowing the exact number of Kosovars in Switzerland is due to the fact that Kosovars held Serbian nationality until 1999. In addition, changes in their current status (through the naturalization process, particularly of the second generation) and the existence of persons in irregular situations further complicate the task (FSO, 2004).⁴

The Kosovar Albanian speaking diaspora has been present in Switzerland for more than four decades. Switzerland was a major destination for the Albanian speaking immigration from the former Yugoslavia, originating mainly from villages in Kosovo, but also from Macedonia, southern Serbia and Montenegro, the most underdeveloped regions in the former Yugoslavia. This immigration was an important factor in improving living standards in Kosovo, a region that has faced high population pressure (Roux, 1992). As suggested by Aarburg (Aarburg 2002; Aarburg & Gretler, 2008), in the early stages of Kosovar migration, seasonal immigrants lived in the outskirts of the host country, which also explains the fact that prior to 1990 Swiss citizens had little awareness of the presence of Kosovars in Switzerland. For these immigrants, the vast majority of whom were men, the point of reference was Kosovo, where their family, in the broad sense of the term, stayed and relied on their economic support.

Kosovar immigrants planned to return to Kosovo in the medium term. At the beginning, they lived in modest socio-economic conditions in order to save money to reinvest in Kosovo.

vo, where they built family houses and bought land and agricultural technology, as well as funding relatives' (expensive) weddings⁵.

This link with the country of origin was also an important factor in the large Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland choosing to support political demands in Kosovo to oppose the political and military domination of Belgrade. The result was a particularly active political mobilization of the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland on the Albanian national issue in the former Yugoslavia, which in particular took the form of an active political and community life (political clubs, publications, lobbying, public demonstrations, etc.) with regard to political developments in the country of origin (Iseni, 2008).

During the 1980s, many Kosovar nationalist actors, facing persecution by the Yugoslav regime, sought asylum in Switzerland and Germany. Since then, they have conducted intensive campaigns from abroad and remotely pursued numerous nationalist activities in the Balkans. In the absence of a democratic political space and heavy persecution from the Yugoslav and later Serbian governments, the Kosovar Albanian immigrant elite has continued to struggle for the recognition of the "Republic of Kosova" from various European capitals where they enjoyed freedom of speech and could perform lobbying activities. This dynamic has led in particular to the creation of militant networks in support of independence for Kosovo and to a powerful political mobilization for the national cause, which has direct implications in the political development of the Albanian cultural area of the former Yugoslavia. This movement, targeted exclusively at the home country, has resulted in reduced integration into host societies (Torche, 1989).

During the 1990s, the nonviolent Albanian resistance in Kosovo and the internationalization of the issue of Kosovo, led by the charismatic leader Ibrahim Rugova, were in large part funded by the diaspora, through a voluntary tax (3% of income). The main creators of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerged from the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland. This diaspora has also strongly supported the KLA through financial contributions and enrolling as volunteer fighters in the KLA's conflict against the Serbian army from 1998 to 1999 (Hockenos, 2003). These patterns of support were similar in the conflict in Macedonia (2001) and also to some extent in the Presevo Valley in southern Serbia (2000–2001).

It should also be noted that the Kosovar diaspora has been and continues to be a major force in the socioeconomic well-being of Kosovo: in 2009, 422.7 million euro, or 11% of Kosovo's GDP, came from remissions of the Kosovar diaspora living in Western countries (USAID-UNDP, 2010). The same diaspora has also been responsible for rebuilding the country after the devastating conflict that took place in 1998 and 1999.

Human mobility, community political networks and media products seem to have a central function as part of the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland in maintaining connections with the country of origin and the political investment of the immigrants in favor of the ethnic Albanian identity. With regard to media, several magazines have been published since the 1980s, the largest one being *Zeri i Kosovës*, the organ of the Movement for the Republic of Kosovo. This journal is focused entirely on the political mobilization of the diaspora on the matter of the status of Kosovo and of ethnic Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, local radio broadcasts are periodically transmitted in Switzerland, Western Europe and the United States. The Kosovar diaspora is informed daily about the political developments in Kosovo and elsewhere through international low-frequency radio stations such as "Radio Zagreb", "Voice of America", "Deutsche Welle" and "Radio Free Europe".

During the 1990s, two Albanian newspapers were launched in Germany and Switzerland, *Rilindja* and later *Bota Sot*, and became the preferred channel of communication for the Koso-

var government in exile. In the late 1990s, other newspapers and magazines became available on newsstands throughout Switzerland and Germany. At the same time, through the emergence of satellite channels, Radio and Television of Kosovo's television programs are broadcast from outside of Serbian territory as a result of the embargo against ethnic Albanian Kosovars established by Slobodan Milosevic in Kosovo.

It appears clear that media were used in order to reinforce a Kosovar Albanian national identity within the diaspora in Switzerland. The impact of media in the construction of a de-territorialized Kosovar – and by extension ethnic Albanian – identity seems to have played a central role. Media have also influenced the political changes in the countries of origin, particularly in Kosovo and Macedonia. It seems reasonable to conclude that, well into the late 1990s, Kosovar media produced and consumed in Switzerland were produced with the objective of maintaining and strengthening ties with the country of origin.

The last element to be considered to describe the Kosovar diaspora is the process of settling in Switzerland. An early process of family reunion of Kosovar migrants in Switzerland started in the late 1980s. In spite of this, Kosovar immigrants in Switzerland continued to support the idea of returning to their country of origin until the late 1990s. The mobilization for the political cause of Kosovo also kept them in a suspended position between the country of origin and the host countries.

However, with the improvement of the political situation in Kosovo following the NATO intervention, and in particular following the arrival of a second influx of immigrants from Kosovo, the project of settling in Switzerland in a long-term perspective started to become a reality. During the war in Kosovo in 1999, IOM registered a negative attitude towards the idea of returning to Kosovo among Kosovar families in Switzerland (IOM, 1999). In parallel with the progressive sociopolitical “stabilization” of Kosovo can be observed the beginning of a process of settling in Switzerland. Most of the Kosovar population in Switzerland appear to desire to stay in Switzerland indefinitely.

Various factors appear to influence the inclination of many Kosovar immigrants to settle in Switzerland (Focus Group, 2010). The first is clearly the lack of prospects in the country of origin due to chronic underdevelopment, as well as political instability and a lack of social and professional perspectives. The second factor is related to the new dynamics of integration and acculturation in the host country which are leading to a redefinition of the relationships of the Kosovar diaspora within the host society. The integration process seems to be characterized by a renegotiation of the identity of immigrants as a meeting point between the culture of the country of origin and of the host country. The differentiation from the social and cultural identity of the country of origin and the birth of a sense of belonging in the host society are crucial factors in the choice to stay in Switzerland in the longer term.

Different concrete indicators of the process of settling in Switzerland can be observed. These include a decline in associations linked to the country of origin and the emergence of new forms of association, now addressed to the host country and the needs of the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland. The strong propensity for naturalization, the acquisition of real estate in Switzerland, and a decrease in investment in real estate in the country of origin seem to confirm this change. The abundance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Switzerland and the investment in the education of children are additional indicators in favor of the hypothesis of long-term settlement of the Kosovar community in Switzerland.

In conclusion, the old and new sociological reality of Kosovo offers an ideal case study with which to propose a model for understanding the role of Kosovar media and the media of the host country in the process of identity transformation.

3. Social identities, cultural configurations and media consumption

In this third chapter, we will present the main concepts of our research project, and define how those were operationalized in relation to the case of the Kosovar diaspora in Switzerland. Those concepts are: social (and ethnic) identity, cultural configurations, media consumption and the perception of integration.

We consider that ethnicity, social identity and culture are not one single social phenomena, but are actually three discrete and sometimes conflicting elements. In the definition of the self of individuals, different elements coexist and take on varying levels of relevance depending on the context and situation.

The concept of social identity is defined by social identity theory as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his membership to a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Essentially, it is a subjective feeling of belonging to a particular social group (e.g. the nation, the ethnic community, the company, the religious community, a sports team, etc.). Individuals have different social identities (or identifications) in relation to the different social groups to which they belong, and these have different salience in different contexts and situations.

The feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group, or in other words ethnic identity, is a specific type of social identity. The major paradigms of immigration research have considered ethnic groups as consistent communities characterized by a peculiar culture and a shared identity. This position assumes the unambiguous and given character of ethnic identities, essentializing them as given and fixed and therefore not taking into account the complexity and hybridity of contemporary social categorizations and identifications. Our definition, by contrast, following that originally laid down by Barth (1969), considers ethnicity as a subjective definition of ethnic group boundaries instead of relying on an objective culture defined by outside observers. As summarized by Wimmer (2009), the boundary-making approach considers ethnic groups as the outcome of a potentially reversible social process of interaction between majority and minority, in which the actors themselves define which indicators are the relevant markers to define their ethnic group. In other words, the members of the ethnic group themselves define the salient indicators, e.g. common history, language, phenotypic traits or cultural elements, that distinguish a member from a non-member of the ethnic group. Ethnicity is here seen as a subjective sense of belonging which, drawing on Weber (1978), is expressed in the idea (and not necessarily in the fact) of a shared culture, history or phenotypical similarity, the social relevance of which depends on the context that defines its salience. Ethnic boundaries result from the actions of actors on both sides of the “border” and therefore great weight is placed on social interactions, and in our case on mediated interactions.

In order to investigate this aspect empirically, we used non-suggestive semi-structured interviews with a top-down approach to identify aspects of identity. At first, we asked the interviewee to present herself freely. That way, the person was free to decide which elements she deemed to be the most important in order to define her identity. Among those elements that could be important for her in the definition of herself could be traits of personality, a current profession, a national or ethnic identity, etc. This was further validated through the twenty statements test. This is a simple technique commonly used in order to assess an individual’s sense of self. During the twenty statements test, the participants provide twenty self-concepts by completing the phrase “I am...”. This test is based on the assumption that each individual has multiple selves that can be detected by self-reporting.

After the phase of self-reporting, the different social identities that emerged were further analyzed in order to define their centrality and salience. Following the construct of Lalonde and Cameron (2005), we conducted our empirical analysis along three lines. At first, we analyzed the ingroup ties within the social group, in particular in terms of what the interviewees feel they share with ingroup members, including their perceived ties and sense of belonging. After that, we investigated the centrality of these ties for the interviewee. Here we observed the contexts in which the interviewee thinks about herself as a member of the group and how much this has to do with her image of the self. Finally, we explored the ingroup affect and the emotional significance attached to the sense of belonging to a specific social group.

With regard to ethnic identities, we sought to define the level of identification by investigating the seven constructs identified by Driedger (1975), Phinney (1990) and Rosenthal and Feldman (1992): self-identification, use of language, network of friendships, religious affiliation, endogamy, festivities and celebrations, and eating habits.

The cultural configuration is the patrimony of cultural elements, such as values, norms, customs, traditions, attitudes, and worldviews, which are shared by the members of a particular group. The configuration represents the average of the group. No two individuals within the group share exactly the same cultural elements; some individuals may even oppose certain cultural elements while sharing other sometimes contrasting cultural elements referring to other social groups to which they belong. The cultural elements that, according to members of the ethnic group characterize their “ethnicity”, are those the individuals within the group themselves define as subjectively relevant and may not correspond to the “objective” definition an outside observer could make of the cultural configuration of the group itself. During the interviews, we aimed on one hand at understanding what are the cultural elements that the interviewee considers as characteristic of the particular social groups she belongs to, and on the other hand at understanding whether the interviewee as an individual thinks that she herself shares these same cultural elements. In order to undertake an external observation of the cultural configurations of the interviewees, we also submitted a preliminary questionnaire in which we tried to identify the personal cultural configurations of our interviewees based on the questions of Inglehart’s World Values Survey and of Poglia’s PNR 56 project (Poglia & Galeandro, 2009).

The analysis of media consumption is a kind of glue between the elements described above. With regard to social and ethnic identity, we are interested in understanding how media foster or inhibit the attachment to certain forms of identities, as well as how people use certain types of media content to feel part of or to differentiate themselves from members of certain social groups.

More concretely, we will consider the relations between the sense of ethnic and hybrid belonging discussed by the interviewees and the media contents they consume (TV, radio, newspapers and internet), as well as the motivation in choosing such media contents and if and how the interviewees follow the news from Kosovo and Switzerland. Moreover, it is interesting to verify if there is a relation between the sense of identity and the relationships maintained through media and in particular through ICTs.

With regard to cultural configurations, we are interested in how the media allow the acquisition of certain cultural contents (knowledge – including linguistic knowledge – information on rules and norms, world views, etc.) and whether the choice of using a determined media content is in any way related to the fact that an individual shares some cultural elements with it. More concretely, we will consider the relation between the consumed media

contents (TV, radio, newspapers and internet) and the language of media use, in order to understand if there is a cultural bond between media content and the use of language, and if language is a motivation of choosing media contents. Moreover, we will explore the role of media in language acquisition and in acquiring knowledge about Switzerland. We will relate the consumption of media contents with what interviewees state about the way they acquired knowledge about the country where they live and the languages of the country.

In order to identify these aspects, we identified the media diet (Prario & Cola, 2008; Cola & Prario, 2009) through a preliminary questionnaire and identified the semantic roles attached to media consumption through our interview. Looking at the media diet means considering the consumption of media as a whole, and not each medium separately, since the set of media constitutes the environment (cultural, political, economic) within which each individual operates. In the case of a diasporic group, the media diet can be constituted not only by several media (devices), but also by media from several countries. Therefore, it is important to consider at first the media diet and secondly the semantic roles attached to the choice of any specific medium and content consumed.

Finally, concerning integration we based our analysis on the self-reports of our respondents, and did therefore only evaluate the individual perception of one's own integration. In order to do so, we operationalized the indicators identified by Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003). The authors identify four levels of immigrant integration: socio-economic integration, cultural integration, legal and political integration, and attitudes of recipient societies. For the purposes of our research, the indicators presented in the following table were deemed relevant and consequently selected for our research (in particular, concerning the sub-indicators, some were selected from the formulation of Entzinger and Biezeveld, some others derived by our operationalization of the main four categories):

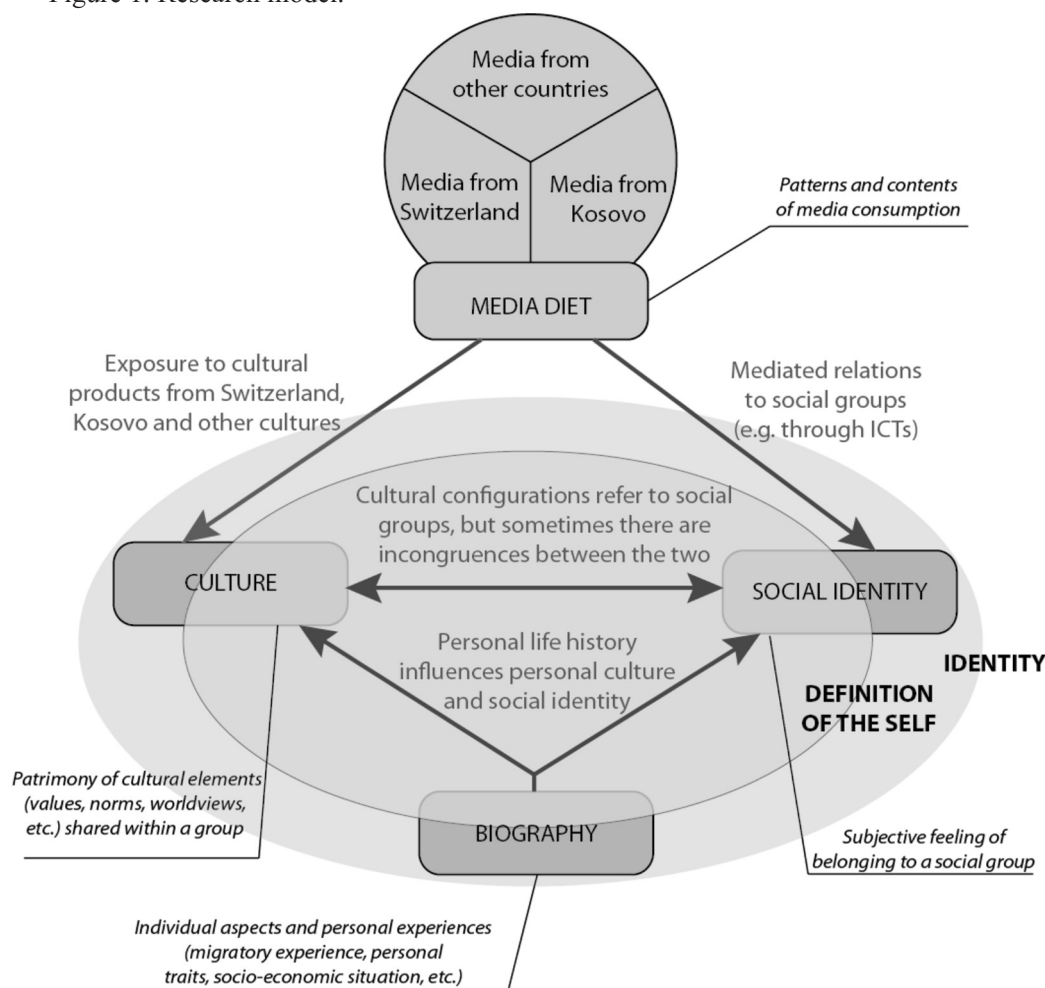
Table 1. Indicators of integration (based on Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003).

Socio-economic integration	Cultural integration	Political and legal integration	Self-perception of the level of integration
- Professional situation - Revenue - Level of education - Housing situation	Attitudes towards rules and norms of the host country, e.g.: - Family composition - Gender equality - Freedom of religion, expression, etc.	Status of residence	Feeling of being accepted by the members of the host society
	Frequency of contacts with individuals from the host and origin countries: - Ethnic associations - Participation in social activities - Meetings with autochthones - Contacts through media (media contents, virtual networks)	Participation in the political and social life	Individual feeling of being integrated in the host society
	Endogamy		
	Linguistic skills		
	Cultural practices (food and celebrations)		

The first level, i.e. socio-economic (or structural) integration, is the most widely shared and accepted. This indicator is related to the access and participation of migrants in the labor market, and to the factors that stimulate or inhibit this aspect such as education and language proficiency. Other aspects relate to access to housing and social assistance. These indicators have the advantage of being easily measurable through the use of such variables as employment, income levels and educational achievement.

The second level, i.e. cultural integration, is more problematic because of the difficulty in quantitatively measuring these aspects. At the same time, cultural integration is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of integration. Another problem is that of the level, or the intensity, of these variables required in order to actually achieve integration. It is now widely accepted that it is necessary to avoid complete assimilation of cultural differences. At the same time it is also generally agreed that a minimum sharing of cultural elements should be reached to enable dialogue and peaceful co-existence. The limits of this “minimum sharing”, however, still require more precise definition.

Figure 1. Research model.



The third level is that of legal and political integration. Various instruments exist for the measurement of integration policies and their impact (for example MIPEX, the Migration Integration Policy Index). This particular area is related to the exercise of political and social rights and duties of immigrants. Among the indicators, Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003) place the ability to be naturalized and statutes of residence and participation in political and social life (although this last aspect, in the present authors' view, could also be included in socio-economic integration).

The last level concerns the attitudes of the host society. This aspect, and in part the previous one as well, are not included in our research. Integration is conceived as a two-way process involving both the host society and its migrant groups, but the present study focuses on the analysis of the individual reality of migrants experiencing integration.

4. Research model and conclusions

The complexity of diasporic phenomena requires researchers to take into consideration numerous aspects and issues, and there are of course several perspectives which allow for the study of diasporic identities. Some of these aspects are linked to a specific diaspora, whereas some others have a broader relevance and are shared by several diasporas. Our research model, presented in the diagram in Figure 1, tries to reflect the complexities of identities negotiation in diasporic contexts and proposes to investigate them in relation with patterns and contents of media consumption.

As the research model shows (Figure 1), there are some key elements to be considered and among them, *identity* is surely the central one. We conceive it, as discussed in this article, as the aggregate of cultural elements, social aspects and personal (migratory) background, with a specific attention to the individual perception of one's own identity, what we define as *definition of the self*. The combination of all these issues contributes to the creation of the identity of individuals. In addition, our research model contains another important element that, we argue, can be related to identity and in particular can contribute to shaping identities: the media. Therefore, we consider media use as a perspective from which to study identity formation in diaspora contexts. As underlined in the first section of this article, different scholars have presented at theoretical level the role played by media in the creation of different forms of identities. Our study aims at analysing how different media contents and typologies of consumption foster or inhibit different feelings of belonging, be it in relation to the country of origin, to the host country or to new, hybrid forms of identity. At the same time, the identity transformations that migrants experience are reflected in the media consumption of the group under study. When talking about media in relation to a diaspora, we refer to a broad variety of media, considering both the media of the origin country and the media of the host country. Their relative importance and role in identity formation represents, in other words, our perspective. The semantics and emotional significance attached to media use influence and at the same time are influenced by social identities, which find in media consumption a strong place where to solidify pre-existing identities or to even create new, hybrid ones. At the same time, media propose cultural products to the audience and are therefore a catalyst of the ever occurring changes in cultural configurations. Finally, those phenomena cannot be understood or explained without taking into consideration the particular life histories of individuals.

Notes

¹ EFTA – European Free Trade Association is an intergovernmental organisation set up for the promotion of free trade and economic integration to the benefit of its four member states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) – Source: www.efta.int.

² This consists of a permit which allows the holder to work in Switzerland for nine months in a year, while for the other three months the person is obliged to leave the country.

³ The “three-circle” model proposed by the Federal Council in its 1991 report on the policy towards foreigners and refugees sets criteria for recruitment of the foreign labor force based on considerations of geography and culture, politics and national economy. The inner circle (or the first circle: states of the EU and EFTA) allows for the free movement of persons. In the middle circle (or the second circle, currently including the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with the potential subsequent addition of the states of Central and Eastern Europe), a limited number of foreign persons can be recruited. In the outer circle (or third circle: the “rest of the world”), there is normally no recruitment possible, except in exceptional cases of highly qualified specialists.

⁴ See also “370’000 Ex-Yugoslaves en Suisse. Qui sont-ils vraiment?”, *L’Hebdo*, N° 37, 9 September 2004. In 2003, without subdivisions, 351,960 individuals from ex-Yugoslavia were registered. Today this number is expected to be in excess of 400,000 individuals.

⁵ Financial help and solidarity were not limited to close relatives, but included the extended family and distant cousins as well.

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