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Digital transformation social spaces of Romanians and Moldovans in Berlin¹

Abstract

This study focuses on the online community of Romanian-speaking mobile migrants who live or regularly return to Berlin. Engaging with theories on transnationalism and social media, this article addresses how digital transnational social spaces contribute to international migration. On the basis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected during 2020-21, it is argued that the social media groups of Romanian-speaking migrants are community spaces which strengthen ties between the members, thus facilitating international migration. Digital transnational social spaces carry meaning to the migrant community, state institutions and social networks, as well as to researchers; while, for migrants, the existence of Facebook groups lowers the threshold of integration and allows the strengthening of social ties. Engaged institutions could rethink their communications strategy by considering a more active presence on social media, while the platforms could use digital communities as targeted audiences. Finally, the research is enriched with a deeper perspective on the impact of social media on international migration.

Keywords: transnational social space, digital transnational space, social media, Facebook groups, Romanian-speaking migrants, Germany, Berlin

Introduction

In our currently interconnected society, where people, ideas and goods travel, migration and migrant communication behaviour have become an inherent part of academic research. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact across the globe through a high death toll and by reducing mobility, forcing people to an increased use of digital communication in their personal and professional life. Among all groups, migrants were one of the categories among which the impact was the highest, having been forced to reduce or stop travelling between origin and residence countries and being at risk of lessening their integration in host societies.

Based on published statistics, Germany was the most frequently chosen country for emigration by Romanians in 2019, with a percentage of about 23.3% of the total number of emigrants. Furthermore, out of the 883 670 Romanians living in this

¹ This article was originally published in July 2023 in a Special Issue of *Sociologie Românească* on Romanian workers at home and abroad: <https://revistasociologieromaneasca.ro/sr/issue/view/2023-1>. It is reprinted in this issue of the *SEER Journal*, with minimal editing to reflect our own house policies, by kind permission of the editor-in-chief and editorial team of *Sociologie Românească*, as well as of the author.

country, representing 6.6% of all foreigners,² more than 25 000 have settled in the capital, forming the sixth biggest migrant community. The migration relevance of the capital (the third top region within Germany after Baden-Württemberg and Bayern in 2021), matched with the specific needs related to integration in a big city, are some of the reasons why this group was chosen for research.

The target group comprises the online community of Romanian and Moldovan nationals, with a clear distinction between the groups within the diasporic community remaining a challenge. For example, many migrants originating from the Republic of Moldova acquired Romanian citizenship to access the EU-wide labour market, thus statistically belonging to the generic ‘Romanian diaspora’. In the context of transnationalism, integrating multiple temporalities into the migration experience has become part of the daily lives of Moldovans, especially among domestic workers in Italy (Cojocaru 2021).

Taking into consideration the theories on (digital) transnational social spaces and social media in the context of migration, this article explores the structure and content of Romanian language Facebook groups. Using this approach, we start from assumptions which go in line with more recent theories on migration studies; these support the existence of translational social spaces (Faist 2000; 2006; 2017) and stress the importance of social media in facilitating international migration (Dekker and Engbersen 2014: 13). Thus, we ask how interactions in these spaces can contribute to international migration. Through this material, the wish is to bring a linguistic and mediatic focus into play. Furthermore, interest is directed toward the meaning of the size of social media groups and their content for the community, for state institutions, the digital platforms themselves and also for researchers active in the field. In this attempt, the research uses new data but also already compiled statistics, focusing on the quantitative aspects of digital transnational spaces (i.e. Facebook groups). At the same time, qualitative nuances are included, as the author was involved as a participant and observer inside the Facebook groups under analysis. This implies a close relationship with the involved actors (the administrators of the social media groups and particularly active members) because of the regular online and offline interactions.

This article argues that Facebook groups are digital transnational social spaces where social ties are being strengthened through attempts at mutual support: asking and responding to questions on topics related to integration. Discussing about finding a job, an apartment or a German language course facilitates integration and eases the path for newcomers, especially since information is delivered in the native language and misunderstandings can easily be clarified.

The structure of the article includes a theoretical framework in the first part, followed by methodology, data analysis and conclusions, together with a final discussion.

2 As at the end of 2022. Source: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Integration/Tabellen/auslaendische-bevoelkerung-altersgruppen.html>.

Transnationalism and social media: a theoretical approach

On transnationalism and migration

Theories of migration are evolving together with the realities of a topic which has become embedded in day-to-day practices and media headlines. While initial research shed light on the numerical character of migration to the US, research has shifted towards the processes and individual or group experiences around the globe.

At the turn of the millennium, Portes (1997) identified the five key themes in international migration research

1. transnational communities
2. the new second generation
3. households and gender
4. states and state systems
5. cross-national comparisons.

As mass transportation and the means of communication spread around the globe, easing inter-state migration, the ties and relations that migrants developed grew in size and sometimes in intensity, with some feeling even more connected to their former homes than their host societies. Migrants have been reconceptualised as ‘transmigrants’ in a groundbreaking study on the transnational paradigm (Basch et al. 1994) which proved how migrants keep extensive links with their home (and other places) while becoming integrated (or not) in their host societies.

When considering the vast spectrum of migration studies, transnationalism refers to migration processes. In terms of topic clusters, migration-related diversity (26%) and migration processes (19%) comprise the two largest clusters in terms of the volume of published research (Pisarevskaya et al. 2020). As stated above, migration studies had a clear statistical and state-oriented approach at the beginning, a trend which lessened and allowed reorientation. For instance, judging by the ‘age’ of topics, calculated as average years weighted by the proportion of publications within a topic each year, ‘migrant demographics’ (in 22nd place), followed by ‘governance of migration (45) and ‘migration statistics and survey research (46) are the oldest. The newest topics include ‘mobilities’ (14) and ‘intra-EU mobility (48) (Pisarevskaya et al. 2020). Overall, there are multiple developments which indicate a paradigmatic shift in migration studies, possibly caused by criticisms of methodological nationalism. If migrants cross borders more easily and stay in contact with family, friends or newly acquired acquaintances, what happens to the web of links that are involved? Transnationalism shifts attention away from geographies of migration and nation states, giving way since the 2000s to ‘mobilities’, ‘diasporas and transnationalism’ and ‘identity narratives’ (Faist 2006).

A special place has thus been given to the connectivity of migrants within ‘transnational social spaces’ which represent ‘continuous and dense sets of trans-boundary social and symbolic ties’ (Faist 2000). More explicitly:

Transnational social spaces, transnational social fields or transnational social formations usually refer to sustained ties of geographically mobile persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation states. (Faist 2006: 3)

Among the four types of transnational spaces – small groups, particularly kinship systems; issue networks; transnational communities; and transnational organisations – the focus group for this research is considered to be a transnational community of different intensity ties. Transnational communities, like social media groups, can evolve at different levels of aggregation.

This article tackles the junction between transnationalism and social media, taking a closer look at what we consider to be digital transnational social spaces (Christiansen 2017); namely, Facebook groups of Romanian-speaking migrants which have settled in the German capital. A special role is naturally played by technology, which provides scope for strengthening transnational ties, working on social and cultural capital and engaging in political action (Almenara-Niebla 2022; Labayen and Gutierrez 2021; Marlowe 2019). The smartphone, an essential item for migrants, also facilitates the creation of connections, allowing people to plan and organise their trips, keep in touch with family members and bridge the challenges of integration. Storing images and sharing them is, for instance, part of the affective practices of refugees who need to bridge emotional gaps and traumatising experiences in an ‘affective networked space’ (Aziz 2022). The target group is not subject to forced migration, although it is subject, at times, to movement restrictions, but the social and emotional burden increases and puts pressure on community members to find and participate in innovative means of communication.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also occasioned an intensive process of rebordering and has intensified migration control (Moze and Spiegel 2022), bringing transnational movement almost entirely to a halt. Entire cities were contained, filtering at border crossings was strictly implemented, while passage was conditioned by vaccination. Only mobile migrant workers deemed essential or desirable were allowed to cross the border, seasonal Romanian workers in German agriculture being one of them.

As a consequence of the purported ‘migration crisis’ in 2015-16 and the following pandemic, ‘digital migration studies’ (Leurs and Smets 2018; Sandberg et al. 2022) have secured a place in the realm of migration.

Social media as spaces that host transnational ties

The network of migrants flexibly crossing borders expands, often intensifies and searches out de-territorialised social spaces to remain active. Social media has become a necessary space for identity formation, information exchange, community building and political activism, appearing as a possibility for democratising global communication. Social media are ‘online applications containing user-generated content, which are part of an open (or semi-open) network infrastructure enabling social networking’ (Dekker and Engbersen 2014: 403) and which create ‘a new type of space between mass and interpersonal communication’ (Schmidt 2013). Among their multiple forms, this article focuses on Facebook as the space of analysis, a social network which has grown into becoming a multimedia platform (Schmidt 2013) integrating videos, photos and music. Platform members are not only connected with each other but, in their exchanges and online communities, they employ multimedia.

For mobile migrants, social media has become part of their daily lives, playing an important, if not at times decisive, role in their decision-making. Four functions

of social media have been identified, including, as Dekker and Engbersen comment (2014: 406):

1. enhancing the possibilities of maintaining strong ties with family and friends
2. addressing weak ties that are relevant to organising the process of migration and integration
3. establishing a new infrastructure consisting of latent ties
4. offering a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial.

Thus, empirical findings have concluded that social media are transforming migration networks and, in that way, lowering the threshold for migration. Social media has changed the nature of migrant networks by allowing an infrastructure consisting of latent, weak and strong ties to support migrant experiences abroad. The ties can be created and maintained within groups, where a closer and more specific interaction takes place, often including topics of general interest and where pioneer migrants become a source of information for newcomers, easing their access to information.

Starting from the assumption that social media facilitates international migration, this article aims to question the size and structure of the digital transnational spaces of Romanian-speaking migrants based in Berlin. More specifically, it inquires about the number of pages and groups, their categorisation based on relevance to integration and the topics brought up for discussion.

Although research on social media groups has been published, the focus is placed on rather different dimensions of migrants' lives and migrant networks, including the emotional, identity-related and political. For displaced people, online spaces are vital in helping produce identities and communities, as they create identities which are more a reflection of the imagined reality than current life (Witteborn 2015). Furthermore, Sreenivasan et al. (2017: 106) suggest that mobile phones allow Sri Lankan refugees to keep dialogue open while they 'create a virtual community for the refugees, to some extent replacing the physical community they left behind'. And, for Czech Roma, 'the online place becomes a site for collaboration, activism, and ultimately, a place of resistance', and 'spaces for organizing and identity', in the context of marginalisation (Hatef 2022).

Taking a step aside from forced migration (refugees), we return to the Romanian-speaking diaspora which mostly represents work migrants inside the European Union and who are endowed with free movement rights and unrestrained access to the labour market. We are focused on finding out how their (digital) transnational social spaces are structured on social media (Facebook), by investigating their groups and the topics (content) which populate them. At the same time, it is important to outline their significance for the community, state institutions, the digital platforms themselves and in the context of wider research.

Methodology

Starting from the assumptions that migrants create transnational social spaces and that social media facilitates international migration via the sharing of information on the destination country, the research sought to establish how these phenomena are shaped in this particular case.

Having access to statistical data on migration, the number of Facebook users and the type of questions posed by group members, descriptive statistics are used with social observations included to fill out the picture. Descriptive statistics refer to the ‘methods used to obtain, from raw data, information that characterizes or summarizes the whole set of data’ (Berger 2016). The method includes gathering data on the number of Facebook users and their distribution within different groups based on their dimension and relevance in the process of integration (or inclusion). Additionally, data on the type of questions posed within the observed Facebook groups is included. A standardised list of twelve topics relevant to integration was pre-defined by a collective of social workers with previous experience in social counselling and made open to additions based on the ongoing data gathering exercise.

Data gathering (over 2020-21) was possible due to a professional Facebook profile with which the author became a member of the analysed social media groups related to Romanian-speaking migrant groups in Berlin. In contrast to Facebook pages or profiles, groups allow members open or private interaction and the exchange of information based on their own experience, but also give experts within the community the possibility to intervene and combat disinformation.

In addition to data on groups, information on their topics of interest was collected using the open source digital tool Vtiger Community Edition. The questions asked and those answered by social counsellors within the project ‘New in Berlin Plus’, financed by the Berlin Senate, were introduced into the software allowing detailed analysis of the topics of interest within the community. This approach made the inclusion of more general questions unmanageable as their number was high, thus making it impossible to weight integration-relevant questions against general topics of discussion. Nevertheless, details on this have been included in the data analysis section, based on personal observations during data gathering, which brought qualitative contributions to the initial quantitative approach.³

Considering the sociocultural context of this study, the author was aware of positionality – being both an insider and an outsider of the Facebook groups under analysis, as well as in time, through reputation building and possibly co-contributing to increasing the topics under discussion. Nevertheless, this distortion should be minimal and should not affect the overall results.

Data analysis: the structure and content of digital transnational social spaces in the Romanian language

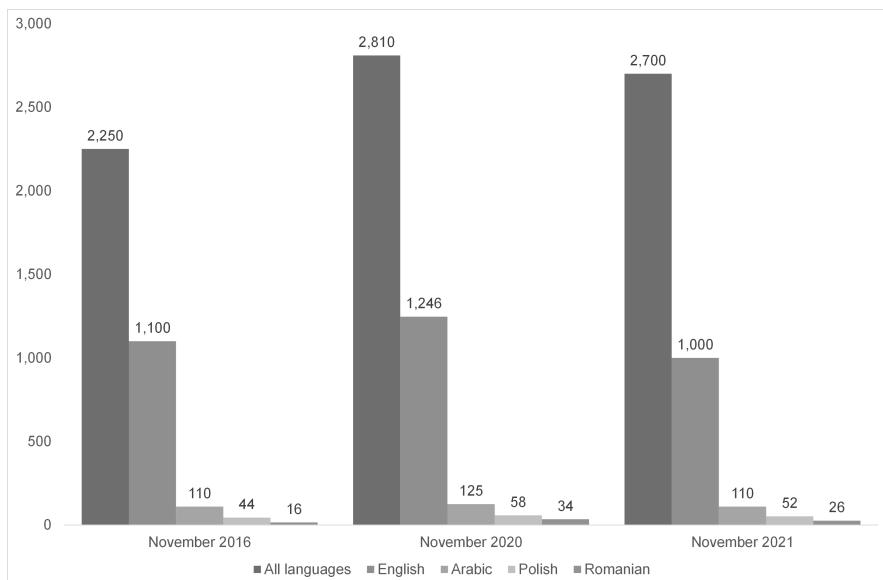
The first dimension of the transnational social space of Romanians in Berlin which presents interest to the study is its size. Because of the growing number of Romanians migrating to Germany and specifically to Berlin, the need for communication in the native language has increased. Social media offers a space of interaction

³ Some of the statistics included in this article have been published as part of annual project reports abstracted from the theoretical framework of this article, which places a bigger emphasis on the relationship between theory and practice, and without the focus being placed exclusively on a single language community.

where people of different backgrounds can exchange knowledge on general or specific integration topics (work, language and access to social, educational and medical services). Chart 1 illustrates the number of Facebook users from this community in relation to the general migrant population and other language communities in the same geographical place in 2016, 2020 and 2021. Between 2016 and 2020, the language community almost doubled in size but, afterwards, experienced a decrease caused by the pandemic.

One aspect of interest is the comparison between the offline transnational social space and its digital version on social media. According to Statistisches Bundesamt (Federal Office of Statistics), 26 330 Romanians were living in Berlin in June 2021 while a total of 26 300 Facebook and Instagram users spoke Romanian and were in the capital at the same time: the data indicate an almost perfect overlapping of social media users and migration statistics. This comparison suggests that the number of social media users could be considered an alternative indicator of immigration. While migration statistics are made public at specific times and require institutional processing, social media reflects the mobility of migrants and their belongingness to multiple socio-cultural spaces. Nevertheless, as social media is changing, with more platforms being used (WhatsApp, TikTok), relying on the data provided by one social media platform remains useful, but more is needed in the long term.

Chart 1 - Total number of Facebook and Instagram users located in Berlin based on the used language: English, Arabic, Polish, Romanian. Comparison between November 2016, 2020 and 2021 (000)

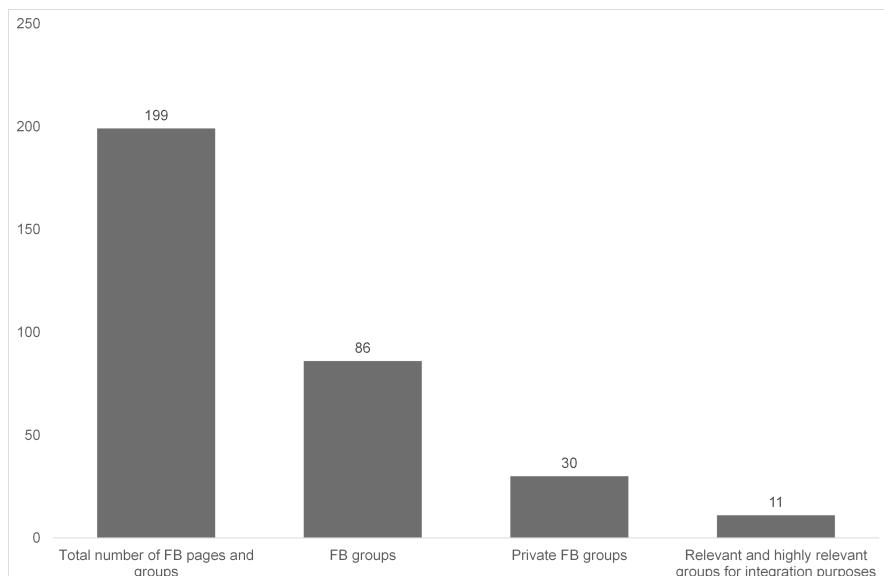


Source: Facebook; Minor – Projektkontor für Bildung und Forschung (Project for education and research).

On Facebook, the digital transnational social space of Romanians is structured in pages and groups, their total number reaching 199 units. Latent, weak or strong ties can be created within the 86 groups which could be categorised based on criteria such as size, type (private, open) and relevance to the process of integration. For example, out of this total of 86 units, 11 (12.7%) are considered relevant or highly relevant for the integration process, with the rest being dedicated to topics such as transportation, beauty services and advertisements for many products. Within these 11 most relevant groups for integration purposes, social ties can develop while support for mutual help during integration becomes visible. The topic-oriented analysis below will mostly include data from these most relevant groups, but is not limited to them.

With the largest group reaching 13 996 people and the lowest having just three members between 2020-21, the average number of members per group ($N= 86$) is 1,634. Given the notable differences between the extremes, this number should be understood as referential, obtained in the pursuit of measuring the central tendency (i.e. the location of the distribution) of the whole set of collected data. This descriptive approach, as opposed to inferential statistics, limits itself to creating a picture of the information gathered, without any generalising reference to the wider population from which it was taken.

Chart 2 – Structure of Facebook groups associated with the Romanian community in Berlin, 2020-21



An interesting aspect remains the difference between the size (based on the average) and the relevance for integration purposes of the different groups. These

differences include the description (Romanians as opposed to Moldovans) or the areas in which there was the most acute need for information (work, rent, parenting).

The ten most numerous Facebook groups places ‘ROMANI IN BERLIN’, ‘Romanii din BERLIN’ and ‘Moldovenii In Berlin’ as the biggest virtual community places of interaction, each having more than 10 000 members. A surprising drop in numbers occurred in the summer of 2021, a moment which coincided with the approaching summer vacation and a lower need for information exchange within the diaspora. Another interesting dimension is linguistics. While there are several groups structured around the identity mark of ‘Romanian’ or ‘Moldovan’, three of the ten most relevant groups are social spaces of reference for job search and rent: ‘locuri de muncă Berlin’, ‘Chirie în Berlin’ and ‘Locuri de muncă în Berlin’, all including the clear toponymic reference.

On the other hand, the most relevant groups for migration and integration are not the biggest in size, but they are the most active in this area. Only three out of ten accounted for more than 5000 members, with ‘Moldoveni in Berlin’ proving a constant increase. Although very small in size, the groups ‘Mamici romance in Berlin’ and ‘Parinti in Berlin’ have built solid communities of mothers and parents which handle questions about health, the school system (especially access to nurseries), offer donations, invite one another for walks in the neighbourhood or anonymously ask for advice even in the case of domestic violence. These groups demonstrate the intense communitarian side of social media and its potential truly to bring people together and create networks of support. Furthermore, the contrast between the size of the digital transnational spaces and the strength of ties between the members can differ – the smaller and more specific the group, the stronger migrant connectivity becomes. While the numerical data does not indicate it, direct sociological observation of the groups does suggest such a conclusion.

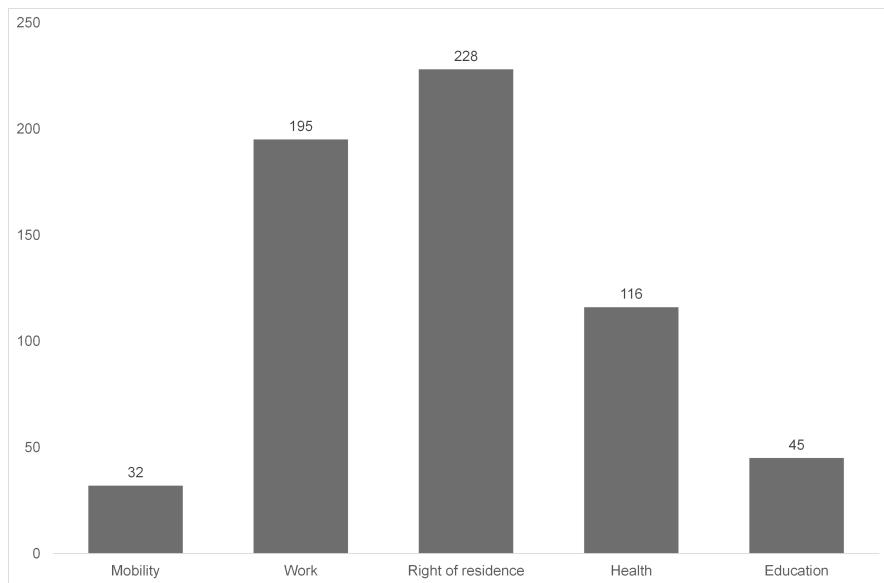
The second level of analysis refers to the most frequently asked questions that members pose in social media groups. The Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictions on travel had a significant impact on this area, as did the differences between countries with high or low numbers of infections. These questions, together with their responses, were collected from all groups, due to random sampling, but were often naturally concentrated inside the most relevant groups concerning integration. Also, questions of high interest were followed by an engaged response, creating small clusters of question-answer interaction.

As Chart 3 indicates, the top five topics of interest included right of residence (37.2%), work (31.8%), health (18.9%), education (7.3%) and mobility (4.5%), with the total number of answered (not only posed) questions reaching N= 612. The number of questions asked within Facebook groups is much larger, but this could not be fully processed within the research.

The selection of questions used a standardised list of twelve topics which included: 1) social issues; 2) work; 3) residence regulations; 4) health; 5) accommodation; 6) education; 7) family; 8) consumers’ protection; 9) finances; 10) language; 11) mobility; and 12) other.

As observed, the issue of residence remains relevant, despite the EU membership of Romanian citizens, because of the much more limited access of Moldovan mi-

Chart 3 – Most frequently asked and answered questions in Facebook groups in the Romanian language



grants to the European labour market and the travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

Work-related questions included the search for jobs and workers' rights. In this case, a clear distinction should be made between highly skilled migrants, who very seldomly used Facebook for job search, and medium to low skilled Romanian speakers who often asked simple questions and wrote shorter sentences such as 'I am searching for a job' or 'I am looking for work, other than in cleaning and construction'. This category of migrant workers was focused on earning money by taking jobs which did not require rare skills, nor advanced German. Recommendations would come from peer migrants active in the labour market. This visible part of migrant interest sheds light on vulnerable groups which migrate temporarily and primarily for financial reasons.

Other questions referred to health. Here, women frequently acted as carers for their families and were in search of doctors offer medical services in Romanian or asking questions about access to health insurance. During the pandemic, many migrants were also looking for answers related to vaccines and access to state institutions or even doctors.

On another level, 'education' included the search for nursery or school places for children, the recognition of qualifications or the search for (additional) training in Germany.

The ‘mobility’ category included questions such as ‘how and where can I submit my driver’s licence for recognition in Berlin?’ and ‘how can I get from place A to place B, if I am new here and need to arrive early in the morning at the airport?’.

Furthermore, one of the most important integration aspects remains the possibility of renting a room or an apartment. Housing has been much debated topic in Berlin in the last few years, with rental prices soaring and gentrification pushing workers towards specific neighbourhoods in the capital. ‘Mietendeckel’, an attempt to impose rent controls, (implemented between February 2020 and April 2021), has been declared non-constitutional by the Federal Constitutional Court. Consequently, the problem of finding affordable places to rent still affects the city population, and especially migrants, the hardest.

Chart 4 – Questions on rent-related issues

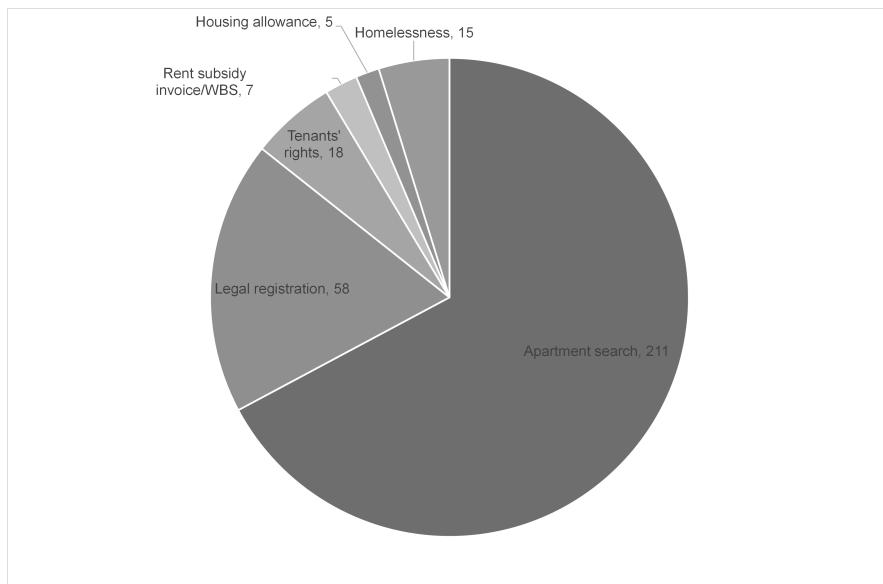


Chart 4 illustrates all topics of interest related to rental: registration; searching for an apartment for rent; tenant rights; accommodation entitlement certificate; rent subsidies; and homelessness. It highlights the leading priority taken by the search for housing in Berlin (211 answered questions), followed by the question of legal registration with the local authorities and the rights of tenants. Information about how and where rented apartments can be found is available including in native language, but the problem lies with the small number of available apartments, the high number of people interested in them and the bureaucracy of the application process. The system is strictly structured, posing high accessibility thresholds for newly relocated migrants and giving them few alternatives: temporary accommodation in the initial phase; and then poor living conditions at an affordable price, moving to specific

areas or even relocating back to their home countries because of the impossibility of finding a suitable and affordable place.

No less interesting or relevant are the sub-topics within all twelve integration themes, captured in Chart 5.

Among these, questions related to the consular services of the Romanian embassy in Germany were particularly relevant, with 67 answered questions including issues related to access or requirements. Although not directly part of the integration process (or of inclusion), obtaining identity or new travel documents for adults or their children from the Romanian consulate is of primary importance. Access to appointments is a challenge because of the lower digital skills of users, the limited number of appointments available and the system according to which they are offered, as well as the difference between users' needs and the personnel within the consular apparatus available for processing the requests. Thus, a growing diaspora not only requires services in the host society but, in the case of people who have retained their Romanian citizenships, also needs a functioning state beyond its borders. This type of issue is specific to countries with a considerable and growing migrant community in Germany, such as Bulgaria and Poland. The digitalisation of consular services covers parts of migrants' needs but, without proportional and adequately trained human resources, it risks leaving many needs unmet or out of reach. Social workers in Berlin are thus forced to offer services not only in relation to the German state, but also to the Romanian. Inter-institutional dialogue does provide the tools for communicating about the problems faced by the community and the search together for common solutions (voluntary support, empowering users and teaching them basic digital skills). In the case of the Romanian embassy and consulate, openness towards dialogue and the will to find innovative, if not structural, solutions are at least present.

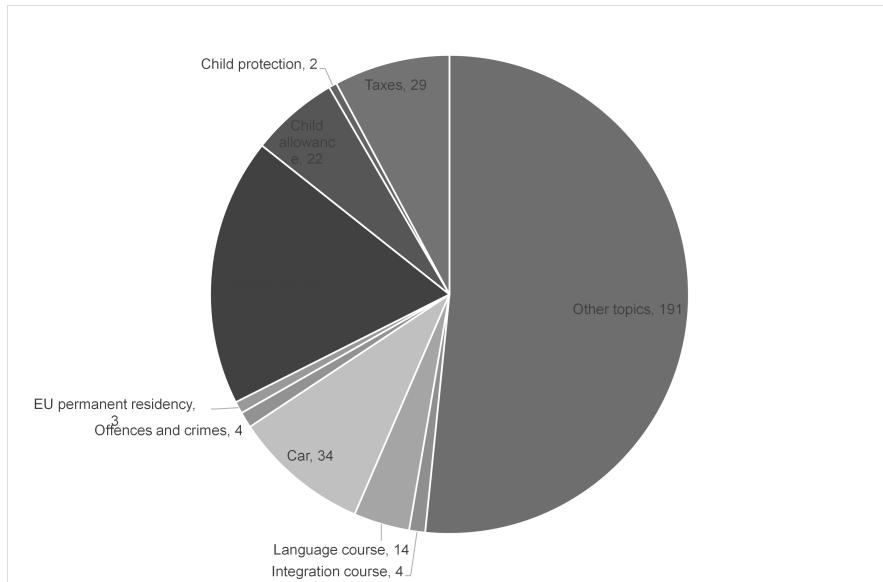
In the case of the consular-related questions, the number does not reflect the (temporarily acute) emergency surrounding people's questions and their implications for all aspects of our lives: our IDs and passports are gates towards travel, allowing us to access social services and cultural rituals (such as travelling for a wedding or baptism).

Discussion and conclusion

In line with theories of migration which propose the existence of transnational social spaces (Faist 2000; 2006; 2017) and digital transnational social spaces (Christiansen 2017) which evolve on social media, this article has explored the size and content of Romanian-speaking Facebook groups, concluding that the number of users is comparable with migration statistics and that the questions posed in those groups activate latent ties to facilitate integration and international migration.

The findings not only come as a confirmation of the existing literature but contribute to its particularities. In this case, the digital transnational space is fragmented into 86 different groups which vary in size. The findings on the number of Romanian-speaking users from Berlin echoes the results of similar research which came to the conclusion that 'the number of newly arrived migrants in Berlin who used Facebook sank, while the pandemic slowed down in 2021' (Alfahel et al. 2021b: 31).

Chart 5 – Sub-themes on aspects of migration in Berliner host society



At the same time, the size of the observed Facebook groups expanded, pointing out the ‘increasing connectivity and need for information among users’ and echoing the observations of Şanlıer Yüksel (2022: 1838) who argues that ‘the digital space of flows accommodates affordances to overcome information precarity [...] a condition of information instability and insecurity’. In times of insecurity, mobile migrants turned to each other in a natural attempt to cope collectively with crisis.

Echoing previous findings (Dekker and Engbersen 2014), these findings about the topics discussed in social media groups support the idea that migrant networks act as facilitators of international migration. Through reaching out to members of the same community, migrants acquire information on how to navigate better the challenges of the host society. Sharing unofficial information nevertheless includes the risk of disinformation, a dimension which was augmented during the timeframe for the research. Still, this is proof that accessing the labour market, housing, health services and education eases the process of integration/inclusion and thus acts as an encouragement to future migrants.

The findings have multifold significance for the community, for state institutions, for the digital platforms and for researchers.

Firstly, awareness of the existence of a support network alleviates social pressure and migratory stress for the members of social media groups. By reaching out to fellow migrants, group members activate latent ties or make weak ones stronger while interacting on the platform. People who are part of the same digital community interact with each other at first, leading to those who barely know each other communicating more often.

Secondly, for state institutions the presence and activity of migrants on social media is an indicator of the information behaviour developed by the target group. For those institutional actors directly involved in the infrastructure of integration, reflections on it could trigger a rethinking of their communication strategies. For instance, they could communicate closely with group administrators who also play the role of gatekeepers and control information posted on the group noticeboards. At the same time, they are in a position to identify key people, such as those active in the community, and suggest collaborations on awareness or information campaigns. If implemented in a coordinated way, those social workers who practise digital street work might well become bridges between migrants and state institutions.

Thirdly, for the social media platforms, the users who are supporting their existence and that of the groups provide an ideal context for data gathering or targeted advertising, offering the possibility of increased monetisation. Even so, this viewpoint needs to be critically assessed since it increases the already massive power of social media. Users are co-creators of the content and deliver valuable information to the media giants – this requires a sustained debate in society on how their activity might be better regulated.

Finally, this article enriches the state of current research by adding more insight into how digital transnational social spaces contribute to international migration. While previous studies have supported the important role that social media plays in migratory movement, only a few studies have managed to deliver refined data on a specific language community located in one of the biggest European capitals.

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