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**Working Paper**

# In Russia we were Germans, and now we are Russians - dilemmas of identity formation and and communication among German-Russian Aussiedler

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**FS III 99-103**

# "In Russia we were Germans, and now we are Russians." - Dilemmas of Identity Formation and Communication among German-Russian Aussiedler

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**Abstract**

This paper reports preliminary findings generated by a German-Israeli research project on the production and consumption of media by and for ethnic and minority communities. It discusses questions of social integration of ethnic minorities and mass media with respect to dilemmas of identity formation and communication among German-Russian Aussiedler. In the conceptual part, it is assumed that integration must be seen as a complex process of reciprocal social exchange between minority and majority communities, in which self-definitions and other-definitions play a crucial role. The media enter the picture as the negotiations of group identities are based on communication in the public sphere. Mass media create a social and political reality, thereby providing a reference system for both majority and minority communities. Against this background, identity politics and mass media functions are examined on the basis of focus group discussions with German-Russian Aussiedler. Identity politics among Ethnic Germans is fundamentally linked to the dilemma that, on the one hand, as full German citizens they belong to the majority society in legal terms. On the other hand, because of their cultural heritage, the experience of migration and language barriers, they feel excluded from the majority community to which they want to belong so badly. Concerning the role of mass media, we found that identity formation, as it is revealed by the orientations of Ethnic Germans, is not made an issue whatsoever in either minority media nor majority media. Not even the media produced for Russian-Germans in Germany touch on questions of identity or self-location of the minority vis a vis the majority. Instead, the minority media are full of practical cookbook-recipes of how to behave properly in a stereotypically-portrayed German society.

**Zusammenfassung**

Im Mittelpunkt des Beitrages stehen erste Ergebnisse eines deutsch-israelischen Forschungsprojektes über die Produktion und Rezeption von Medien durch ethnische und kulturelle Minderheiten. Die Frage der sozialen Integration ethnischer Minderheiten und die Rolle der Massenmedien in diesem Prozeß werden mit Blick auf die Dilemmas der Identitätsbildung und Kommunikation von Russlanddeutschen Aussiedlern diskutiert. Im konzeptuellen Teil des Papiers wird soziale Integration unter der Perspektive von Inklusion und Exklusion von Minderheiten diskutiert. Soziale Integration wird als komplexer Prozess gegenseitiger Austauschbeziehungen von Minderheit und Mehrheit konzipiert, in dem Prozesse der Selbstdefinition und Fremddefinition eine wesentliche Rolle spielen. Die Medien sind entscheidende Größen in diesen Aushandlungsprozessen, weil sie eine gemeinsame soziale und politische Realität herstellen und dadurch das entscheidende Referenzsystem für die öffentliche Aushandlung kultureller und ethnischer Identitäten bilden. Vor diesem Hintergrund wird die kulturelle und ethnische Identität, die Medienumwelt und die Mediennutzung russlanddeutscher Aussiedler untersucht. Empirische Basis sind sechs Gruppendiskussionen mit Russlanddeutschen in Bersenbrück und Berlin. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, daß die Gruppenidentität der Aussiedler mit dem Dilemma zusammenhängt, daß diese einerseits aufgrund ihrer deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit zur deutschen Mehrheitsgesellschaft gehören und sich andererseits wegen ihres kulturellen Erbes, der Erfahrung der Migration und Sprachproblemen ausgeschlossen, d.h. nicht als „richtige“ Deutsche “ akzeptiert fühlen. In bezug auf die Rolle der Medien zeigt die Studie, daß die Identitätsprobleme der Russlanddeutschen weder in den Aussiedlermedien noch in den deutschen Mehrheitsmedien auch nur annähernd repräsentiert sind. Vielmehr zeichnen sich die russischen Zeitungen für Russlanddeutsche dadurch aus, daß sie die Probleme ihrer Leser banalisieren und boulevardisieren.

# "In Russia we were Germans, and now we are Russians." - Dilemmas of Identity Formation and Communication among German-Russian Aussiedler

Barbara Pfetsch

## 1. Introduction

This paper[1] reports preliminary findings generated by a German-Israeli research project on the production and consumption of media by and for ethnic and minority communities. The project aims to assess and compare the role of mass media in processes of social integration of four minority communities in Germany and Israel. Of central importance here is the question of how the media contribute to the construction of identity of the minority groups under study. As prominent as questions of identity politics, multiculturalism and social integration have become in a globalized world, one should note that there is hardly any research on the topic, neither in theoretical nor empirical terms. As a consequence, our approach to the issue is inductive. In order to establish the role of media in identity formation and social integration of minority groups, our project will assess the situation and experience of the specific group under study and explore the status of the minority group in relation to the majority group. Against this background, the media environment, media use and media functions of majority and minority media are examined. The inductive approach not only describes the microcosm of the specific population, but deduces from it the dimensions and intensity of the problems of integration which will be linked to the question of the media's role in more general terms.

This paper is restricted to one of the four groups under study in the general project: the so-called Ethnic Germans (German-Russian Aussiedler) who migrated from the former Soviet Union. It is organized around four themes: First, it offers some theoretical remarks on the concepts of integration and identity formation as they relate to our research and the design of the study. Second, it provides some basic information on the circumstances of the Ethnic Germans and the general problematique of this group in the context of German

[1] I thank Robert Sumser, Wright State University, Daton, Ohio for many discussions on the problem of identity formation in Germany. Moreover, I am most grateful for his help with editing this paper. I also thank Anat First, Hebrew University, Jerusalem for her critical remarks and comments on the paper as it was presented to the ICA conference 1999 in San Francisco.

immigration policies. Third, it presents some preliminary findings from focus group discussions with German-Russian Aussiedler purposively sampled to include three age cohorts (young, medium, old), different structures of residence and density of the minority community (city, countryside), and length of stay in Germany after migration (less than 4 years, more than four years). Though this data is essentially qualitative in nature, the objective of the group discussions was to gain insight into the subjective perceptions of the Ethnic Germans concerning their collective identities, their experience with the majority society and their assessment of minority media. Fourth, some findings are reported about the media environment and media use of the German-Russian Aussiedler. It must be emphasized that the findings here are preliminary. The focus group study is but the first step of the overall project, which is designed as a multi-level study with surveys and a media content analysis still to be completed. However, the data from the group discussions facilitate understanding the general problematique of the mass media's role in identity formation and social integration.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### *2.1. Integration, Identity Formation and Mass Media*

Studying the role of mass media in social integration of minorities requires the conceptual clarification of the notion of integration which underlies our research. While integration is widely agreed upon as a core concept of sociology, the number of approaches, definitions and meanings of integration in migration studies is legion. Thus Esser (1980:19) notes that the problem of finding a precise definition of integration results from the fact "that the position of migrants to the host society can take every possible relation of people with their social environment: conflict, marginalization, segregation, adaptation of behavior and values, interaction, status acquisition etc. It is no accident, therefore, that the integration of migrants is connected with a variety of terms with sometimes identical, sometimes differential meaning, such as acculturation, assimilation, absorption, amalgamation, adaptation, accommodation, integration and so on." Moreover, ideological persuasions can determine which aspects of integration are stressed and thus effect public policy. For example, Robert Park's model of the "melting pot" (1950) equates the term integration with total adaptation of the minority to the majority society. Yet, as many Western

societies now advocate cultural pluralism, more complex notions of integration have been acknowledged. This insight has triggered different approaches:

(1) Because integration refers to a multi-dimensional process it manifests itself in different domains of society, the most important of which are the legal and political, the social and economic and the cultural domains. From this sectional point of view, one can differentiate between economic, social, cultural etc. integration and study the policies that societies develop to deal with the specific problems that appear in each domain. For instance, the socio-structural approach to integration basically deals with questions of economic equality, housing problems, policies of anti-discrimination and equality of opportunity of minority members. In this rather traditional sociological approach, it is presupposed that integration is a process that can hardly be achieved within one generation.

(2) The model of integration as a reciprocal process between members of the minority and majority views integration as a process in which minority members are acknowledged in their specific cultural identity and perceived as members of a discrete community by the surrounding society. For instance, the Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problems (1986) states that integration is a process which on the individual level of the migrant must lead to a state of stable behavior, self-assurance and personal well-being in his or her new environment. This approach stresses that integration not only refers to structural prerequisites but involves the subjective perception of migrants as they confront their new environment.

Because both approaches point to different sides of the same coin, it is important to note, if we are to understand integration, that there is a structural political, legal and economic dimension as well as a cultural and social dimension of identity formation. The structural dimension is particularly relevant when it comes to discussing broader social changes in the light of globalization, notions of citizenship in the framework of the nation state and immigration policies. The second dimension of identity politics is of particular interest if we want to conceptualize the role of the media in the integration of minority communities in pluralistic societies. Moreover, it is important to stress that integration is not a one-sided problem of the minority; instead it must be seen as a process which involves both, the

minority and the majority. Majority and minority are active participants of a complex, multilateral and multi-polar process of reciprocal social exchange.

Contemporary studies of ethnicity view the formation of ethnic communities, the development of ethnic cultures and the stabilization of personal and group identities as facets of a single process which shapes the social and political role of minorities (Castles/Miller 1993; Solomos 1997). At the core of identity politics are processes of boundary drawing between dominant groups and minorities. Thus, becoming an ethnic minority "is not an automatic result of immigration, but rather the consequence of specific mechanisms of self-definitions and other-definitions which affect different groups in different ways" (Castles/Miller 1993:29). Other-definition refers to the "ascription of ...characteristics and assignment to ... social positions by dominant groups. Self-definition refers to the consciousness of group members of belonging together on the basis of shared cultural and social characteristics ... Some minorities are mainly constructed through processes of exclusion (which may be referred to as racism) by the majority. Others are mainly constituted on the basis of cultural and historical consciousness (or ethnic identity) among their members" (Castles/Miller 1993:27).

In this perspective, the formation of collective identities is based on the selective processes of memory and remembering, so that a given group recognizes itself through its recollection of a common past (Solomos 1997:19). Moreover, cultural values play a significant role as source of identity and as boundary markers vis a vis the majority: "Ethnic cultures play a central role in community formation: When ethnic groups cluster in specific areas, they establish their own spaces, marked by distinctive use of housing and public areas. ... For members of ethnic minorities, culture plays a key role as a source of identity and as a way of organizing resistance to exclusion and discrimination. Reference to the culture of origin helps people maintain self-esteem and personal identity in a situation where their capabilities and experience are undermined" (Castles/Miller 1993:33).

Against this background, the formation of identities is an active process which is closely linked to the inclusion and exclusion of social groups. At the heart of these processes of inclusion and exclusion is the concept of solidarity which refers to the subjective feelings of integration that individuals experience for members of their social group.

> ”At a basic level after all identity is about belonging, about what we have in common with some people and what differentiates us from others. Identity gives one a sense of personal location, and provides a stable core of one’s individuality; but it is also about one’s social relationships, one’s complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become even more complex and confusing. .... At the center, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others“ (Solomos 1997: 15-16).

According to Alexander (1988:78), inclusion can be seen “as the process by which previously excluded groups gain solidarity in the ‘terminal’ community of a society.” It is important to note that “inclusion refers to *felt* solidarity, not simply to behavioral participation. Moreover, it refers to those feelings that, extending beyond family and friends, create the boundaries of acknowledged ‘society’. ... Inclusion can be measured by the degree to which the terminal community has become more ‘civil’ and less ‘primordial’. The latter refer to the five seemingly natural ties that structure solidarity – race, territory, kinship, language, even religion... Civil ties, on the other hand, are more mediated and less emotional, more abstract and self-consciously constructed. Instead of referring to biological or geographic givens, they refer to ethical or moral qualities associated with ’social’ functions and institutions” (Alexander 1988:79-80).

The more self-definitions and other-definitions and values transcend primordial ties, the more they need to be established through communication. Thus, there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other. To be „us“, we need those who are „not-us“ (Solomos 1997:20). Communication on various levels is the central mechanism of socialization and the construction of cultural identity. Communication is the means and the end of social integration and the peaceful coexistence of many groups in pluralistic societies. Among the different forms of communication (as there is primary communication in the family and secondary communication in groups), mass communication gains its relevance in processes of integration by creating a social and political reality that provides a reference system for both majority and minority communities. The second argument to focus on mass communication lies in the role of mass media as institutions in the sense that they can serve as communication channels (or mobilization agents) for groups in voicing their issues and creating a discourse within the minority community itself as well as within the majority culture.

Traditionally, communication research maintains that one of the central functions of mass media systems is to integrate society and enhance national solidarity. With the notion of cultural pluralism, however, the approach to the study of mass communication and culture shifted: Instead of examining the impact of mass communication on the integration of minorities in the sense of adaptation to the dominant culture, the emphasis now is on how minorities use the media to maintain their unique identities in pluralistic societies. This perspective is even more salient as mass communication has undergone profound changes since the late 1980s which have led to a proliferation of media channels and messages, as well as to dense networks of communication around the world. Today, in addition to the function of mass media to integrate society, new communication technologies contribute to diversification and hence to pluralistic tendencies even to the point of division, contention and conflict (Schudson 1994). While the proliferated media landscape provides opportunities for minority communities to create their own media, it also facilitates the disintegrative tendencies within the traditional nation-state.

While the differentiated or even fragmented media landscape provides a chance for minority communities to establish their own communication channels which may serve as forums for identity formation, we also need to examine the dominant media which are seen as forums of the discourse of the society at large in which identity politics is negotiated in terms of ascription of characteristics and assignments of social positions. This discourse is particularly relevant as it is related with manifest and symbolic processes of social inclusion and exclusion. As van Dijk (1989:203) notes, “mass media play a very specific role in the distribution and acceptance of ethnic ideologies”. Regarding the mainstream media in modern Western Societies, van Dijk (1989) detects an elite bias in news coverage of ethnic minorities: minority groups are inadequately or only negatively represented or not represented at all. Thus, such representations may well enhance or legitimate tendencies of exclusion of minority groups.

Against this theoretical background, our research project attempts to study the production and consumption of minority media as compared to majority media and thereby answer the following questions in regard to the minority groups in Germany and Israel:

- What are the nature and strength of the major components of cultural identity of the four communities and to what extent are they related to or distinct from the central value systems of their two respective societies?
- What are the existing mass media in Israel and Germany created (a) by the majority for minority groups, and (b) by minority groups for themselves; what are the policies underlying these organizations; and what are the relationships between these two sets of organizations?
- What are the characteristics of the genres and contents of the various media created for and by the minority groups? Which components of the dominant ideology, ethnic values, as well as aspirations towards national solidarity and ethnic-cultural autonomy can we identify?
- What are the patterns of consumption and reception of cultural and media products by the minority groups? What is the scope and frequency of media-related activities, their social uses and consequences and how are they viewed by the minorities?
- What policy implications, if any, can be derived from the study for contemporary developments in both Israel and Germany?

### *2.2. Plan of the Study and Status of Focus Groups*

This paper is concerned with the identity politics and mass media of the particular group of the German-Russian Aussiedler on the basis of information from focus groups only. It is important to point out that this is only one part of a multi-level project. In order to measure the various elements involved and their complex inter-relationships, the study will employ a multi-method approach. Several instruments will be utilized in the following three areas of the study: (a) The institutional and organizational analysis is set up to record the media environment of the minority groups. (b) The content and repertoire analysis will yield data on the representation of the minority in minority and majority media as relates to the self-definition and other-definition of each group and the discourse on identity politics. (c) Audience and reception analysis draws on focus groups and survey research on self- and other perceptions as they are associated with the creation and maintenance of group identity (e.g., attitudes, values, rituals, holidays, symbols, etc.) and media use.

The status of the focus groups within the study is to qualitatively assess the range of opinions that are held in a specific group with reference to identity construction and

perception of their collective situation. It is the aim of focus group analyses to gain information on the subjective perception or interpretative screen of group members which is shaped by their personal experiences and a particular cultural heritage.

By using focus groups we are dealing with two related processes[2]:

- the interpretative transmission of public discourse to the private world of actors at the cognitive level;
- the meaningful construction of action which reproduces social relationships, that occurs when actors use personal experience to interpret their environment.

Variations of focus group discussions have been used to address such research questions. While focus groups served as interpretative transmission of public discourse in audience research in the mass communication tradition (e.g. Merton/Kendall 1946; Kitzinger 1993, Eldrige 1993; MacGregor/Morrison 1995), they have been used to reconstruct social action by the framing tradition (Gamson 1992). In our research project both aspects were relevant, as our aim was twofold: First, as we asked the respondents to discuss matters which could be related to their group identity, we aimed at understanding their cognitions as perceptions of actors in reproducing social relationships like in the framing tradition. Second, since we also assessed the groups' opinion on mass media and their contents, we wanted to gain insight into the public discourse as represented in the minority groups perspective. Through the focus groups we intended to come to an understanding of the qualitative range of opinions and meanings that relate to identity formation of the specific minority.

In methodological terms, we use the qualitative information that is retrieved by the focus group technique to construct indicators of identity formation and problems of integration which will be included in surveys. As the samples used in focus groups are relatively small, it is not possible to claim representativeness in any meaningful quantitative sense. However, the issues of discussion and the opinions raised on those issues help to design the categories of the survey questionnaire. The surveys then enable us to assess whether the opinions retrieved from the qualitative instrument are only marginal or represent the

[2] The following assessment of the focus group research method has been developed by Paul Statham, Science Center Berlin for Social Research, in an unpublished working paper. I thank Paul Statham for sharing his thoughts with me and for giving me valuable advice as regards focus group research.

“mainstream” opinion of the minority group. It is important for the interpretation of the audience data that we can relate the qualitative findings to quantitative data.

In the discussions we aimed to gather information on four clusters of topics:

**(1) Modes of personal communication, communication networks and contacts within and between ethnic minority and majority**

The issues of discussion were:

- communication in the family, the minority community, the neighborhood, the work place, in public spaces;
- communication contacts and with local Germans;
- communication and contacts with people who stayed in the former Soviet Union;
- making friends with local Germans.

**(2) Self- and other perceptions – symbolic boundary markers of group identity;**

The issues of discussion were:

- collective historical experience of Ethnic Germans in Russia and Kasachstan;
- personal situation in the Soviet Union and motives of exit;
- ethnic and religious traditions;
- stereotypes of minority held by the majority;
- stereotypes of the majority.

**(3) Perceptions of problems of ethnic relations and immigration**

The issues of discussion were:

- the role of language and language problems;
- acceptance and experience of discrimination;
- obstacles to integration.

**(4) Assessment of ethnic and minority media and their use**

The issues of discussion were:

- media use before migration;
- current media use;
- salience and function of specific minority media;
- perception of portrayal of the minority in the majority media.

The participants of the group discussions were sampled as to represent different criteria and social conditions. We set up three requirements which we presumed to represent

different backgrounds, experiences and perceptions as relates to the question of identity formation and minority/majority relations:

(a) *Socialization background/biographical status*, operationalized as age of respondents in three categories:

- 18-25 years (young people before building a family);
- 30-50 years (mid-career status);
- 60-70 years (end of career/retirement).

(b) *distance vs. closeness to the new culture*, operationalized as length of stay in Germany in two categories:

- newcomers (people who have been in Germany between 12 and 24 months);
- people who have been in Germany for more than four years.

(c) *social environment of integration* as regards to the place of acculturation and confrontation with the majority community, operationalized as place of residence in two categories

- a big city (Berlin);
- small town or countryside (Bersenbrück).

The variation of the three criteria makes up for a study design of the six focus groups as indicated in the following scheme:

Figure 1: Design of the Focus Group Study of the Ethnic Germans

| Age | Length of stay in Germany | |
|---|---|---|
| | 12 - 24 months | 4 - 7 years |
| 18 - 25 | Berlin (1) | Bersenbrück (4) |
| 30 - 50 | Bersenbrück (2) | Berlin (5) |
| 60 - 70 | Berlin (3) | Bersenbrück (6) |

The focus groups took place in January and February 1999. The groups comprised between 6 and 10 people. In addition to the above mentioned dimensions, each group included male and female respondents, with women slightly over-represented. The groups were recruited by persons such as social workers, interpreters, teachers in social institutions like churches, community centers or civil organizations who work with Ethnic Germans. The sessions were held in German, but in each session a Russian interpreter assisted the researchers. The respondents were asked to speak up if they had problems understanding the questions or

following the discussion. In these situations, the interpreter stepped in and translated what was said. The sessions were audio-taped and the transcribed, so that full texts were available for analysis.

Each discussion lasted about two hours. In the first section of the conversation we introduced ourselves and explained the purpose of the group discussion to the participants. We did not tell the group our full analytical objectives but that we were doing a research project on the media in processes of integration and that we came to find out the opinions of different people. They were assured of confidentiality and other ethical concerns. We began the discussion by asking participants directly about their customs, their modes of communication, experiences with migration and settling down as well as their perception of the situation of Russian Aussiedler in Germany. This section lasted about 90 minutes. The second part of the discussion was dedicated to the media. This section started with a set of questions about media use in Russia and in Germany. Then we put up cards with the names of specific Russian media and asked the participants if they were familiar with the title, whether they used it and how they evaluated it. The very last part of the discussion was dedicated to opinions about how the majority media portray the Aussiedler.

# 3. The German-Russian Aussiedler in Germany

## *3.1. The General Situation of Aussiedler*

The community of the so-called Aussiedler or Ethnic Germans comprises migrants from East- and Southeast Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, the former USSR, Rumania and former Yugoslavia) who are entitled to German citizenship due to their ethnic origin. (Art. 116 of the Grundgesetz, Aussiedleraufnahmegesetz of 1990 and the Spataussiedlergesetz of 1992). Between 1950 and 1996 3.69 million Aussiedler came to Germany. While from the mid 70s until 1986 there was an annual immigration of about 50.000 Aussiedler, this number tripled in the following years. In 1990 about 400.000 Ethnic Germans entered the country. German authorities reacted to this massive influx by establishing an immigration quota, which limited the maximum actual number of admissions to 225000 per year. Since 1997, the number of Aussiedler has declined considerably, so that in 1998 only 134.000 people came over. While the earlier generations of Aussiedler during the 70s and the 80s

came from Poland and Rumania, since 1991 the vast majority have come from the former Soviet Union. Of the 2.3 million people who arrived between 1987 and 1996, 1.4 million were from the former USSR. In the late 90s practically all Aussiedler originated in Russia and Kasachstan (table 1).

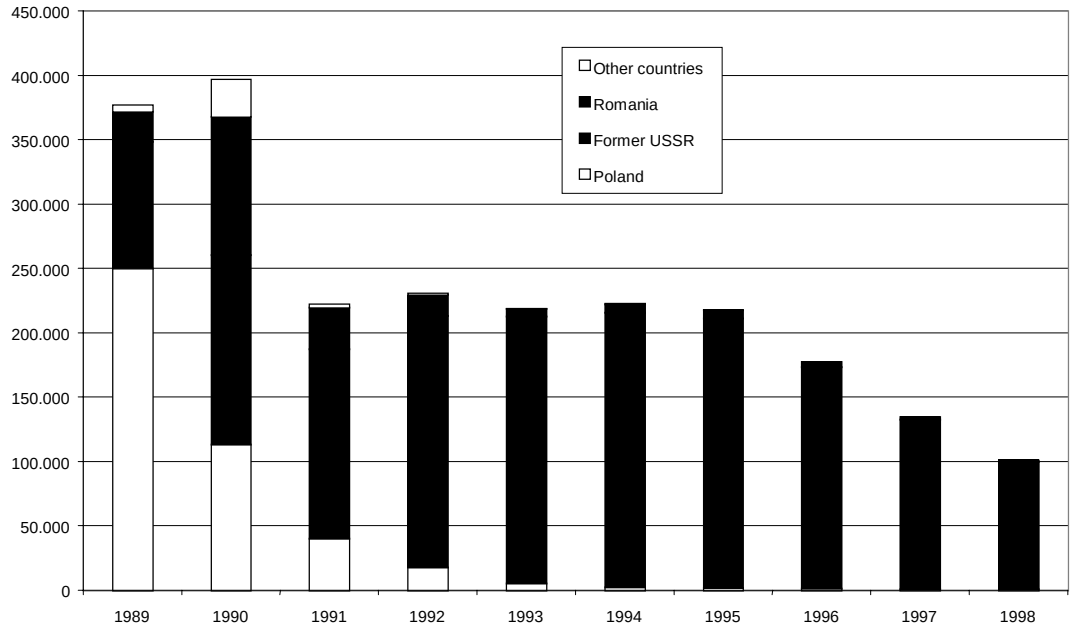
Table 1: Immigration of 'Aussiedler' to Germany (year and homeland)

| Year [1)] | Poland | Former USSR | Rumania | Other Countries | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1989 | 250.340 | 98.134 | 23.387 | 5.194 | 377.055 |
| 1990 | 113.253 | 147.455 | 107.189 | 29.178 | 397.075 |
| 1991 | 40.129 | 147.320 | 32.178 | 2.368 | 221.995 |
| 1992 | 17.742 | 195.576 | 16.146 | 1.101 | 230.565 |
| 1993 | 5.431 | 207.347 | 5.811 | 299 | 218.888 |
| 1994 | 2.440 | 213.214 | 6.615 | 322 | 222.591 |
| 1995 | 1.677 | 209.409 | 6.519 | 293 | 217.898 |
| 1996 | 1.175 | 172.181 | 4.284 | 111 | 177.751 |
| 1997 | 687 | 131.895 | 1.777 | 60 | 134.419 |
| 1998 [2)] | 528 | 99.498 | 1.016 | 31 | 101.073 |

1) 1989 West Germany only, since 01.11.90 including East Germany.
2) 1998 is estimated by counts across the first ten months.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden.

Figure 2: Immigration of ‘Aussiedler‘ to Germany (year and homeland)



Generally speaking, the large emigration of Ethnic Germans in the late 1980's and early 1990's was connected to the breakdown of the former Soviet regime. The policies of Glasnostj and Perestrojka provoked an opening of the borders, so that after 1987 large numbers of Ethnic Germans were permitted to leave their homeland. As the economic and social situation in Russia and Kasachstan worsened and the political situation became unstable, the number of Ethnic Germans who requested exit visas grew sharply. The large waves of immigration into the mid-nineties decreased the number of prospective emigrants to 1.5 million Ethnic Germans who still live in Russia and Kasachstan.

Figure 2 shows that the number of Aussiedler coming to Germany began to decline in 1996. There are several reasons for this development (Ohliger 1999:2): Many Ethnic Germans live as a national minority in the National Republic of Kasachstan where their cultural autonomy is still threatened. However, instead of moving to Germany, many of them (and particularly those who are married to Russian partners) prefer moving to Russia. Another reason is that the Federal Government subsidizes the German communities and cultural and social institutions in the German districts of the former Soviet Union, so that the economic and social situation for the people has improved. In addition, many prospective emigrants hesitate to leave their homeland, as they have become aware of the problems of Aussiedler in Germany, such as long-term unemployment and social marginalization. Finally, the most significant reason for the declining numbers of Aussiedler has to do with the obligatory language test which was introduced in 1996 as part of the entrance permission. About 40 percent of the visa applicants were denied entrance into Germany because they failed the language proficiency test.

The population of the Aussiedler is different from the population of local Germans in terms of age and profession (Migration in Zahlen: 235). As for age, the demographic composition of migrants from Russia shows that 35 percent are children and teenagers, compared to 20 percent of the local German community. The percentage of senior citizens over 65 among the Aussiedler is 7.4 percent compared to 15 percent among the local Germans. This means that people who possibly join the working population (people between 18 and 65) among the Aussiedler lies at 65 percent while it is only 58 percent among the local Germans. It might be due to the larger number of children and the high

estimation of family values, that the average household of an Aussiedler family comprises 4.4 individuals, while it is only 2.2 among the local Germans. The professional background of immigrants mirrors the economic structure of their homeland. Thus, 23 percent of the immigrants in 1995 (Migration in Zahlen: 241) worked in the service sector, a small number of about 4 percent came from the agricultural sector, while 19 percent worked in the industrial or vocational branch. If one compares the educational level of Ethnic Germans in Russia with the average Russian, Ethnic Germans have a higher level of education (Dietz 1992). Among Ethnic Germans, 25 percent have a university entrance degree as compared to 13 percent in the Russian population. This explains the quite good professional position and social status of Ethnic Germans in Russia among which there were many technicians, teachers, employees and qualified workers (Dietz 1992:152). Nonetheless, education and professional experience do not protect a large number of Aussiedler from unemployment as soon as they are in Germany. The number of registered unemployed Aussiedler per year lies between 100.000 and 160.000. In 1995, there were 128.000 unemployed, which is about half of the total number of immigrants from Russia in this year (Migration in Zahlen: 245).

When entering Germany, the Aussiedler are obliged to register with the General Federal Agency in Cologne which assigns each person to one of the 16 states (Länder). After a short period of about two months in mandatory housing facilities for Aussiedler, where they have access to assistance regarding the problems of transition and legal help, the immigrants move to an assigned city of residence where they are obliged to live for a minimum of two years. Considerable ghettoization results, on the one hand, from the government's practice of settling the Aussiedler in distinct communities and neighborhoods and, on the other hand, from the desire of the Aussiedler themselves to dwell with their families. Once established, there are no further legal or material privileges for the newcomers, except for a six month free German language class, designed to enable the immigrants to compete in the labor market or school system.

When Russian Aussiedler are compared to other immigrants to Germany, they stand out because of their strong family ties. According to a representative panel survey among immigrants to Germany (Socio-Economic Panel 1997), two thirds (66%) of the Aussiedler either arrived with or later joined their families; this only applies to half (50%) of other

migrants. And among those who came without family, 26 percent had contact with relatives or friends in Germany prior to their arrival. Two thirds of the Aussiedler also settled in the same city where their relatives or friends lived. The close family ties and networks of friends provide a support structure during the transition period (table 2). About one third of Ethnic Germans enjoyed the help of their family or friends in matters of finance and housing. Half of them were provided with information on Germany and help with the public service system.

Table 2: Support of German-Russian Aussiedler by Family Members, Friends and Relatives in Germany

| Support was provided concerning ... | |
|---|---|
| Accomodation | 16% |
| financial assistance | 27% |
| finding a place to live | 33% |
| finding employment | 18% |
| help with public services | 51% |
| general information | 55% |
| no assistance | 21% |
| N = 165 | |

Source: Socio-economic panel, sample of immigrants (1995)

One of the crucial variables which is connected to the problems of the Aussiedler is language. Opportunities to speak and write in German has been limited among Ethnic Germans in Russia. For instance, German schools were banned in the Soviet Union since World War II and the German language was prohibited in public in the 1950's. Only very old people had learned proper German in school, while the younger generations were to pick up the language in the family or church. The very young generations have great problems with German and many of them do not speak German at all. One member of the 60-70 year focus group in Bersenbrück explained it in the following words:

"Our children came from school and spoke Russian. They prefer to speak Russian, because they were told that the Germans were fascists and racists altogether. Our children hardly wanted to understand German, because they were afraid, and then they forgot it." (G6/164-168)

Not surprisingly, the introduction of a language proficiency test as mandatory part of the application procedure for an entrance visa has lowered the rate of admission significantly. Among the Aussiedler who have arrived in the 1990's, according to the Socio-economic

panel study, the vast majority (75%) did not give up the language of their homeland, but speaks both German and Russian, depending on the situation. Most of the Aussiedler say they speak Russian at home and German in public and in the workplace. Moreover, their language competence is much higher in Russian than in German: Regarding German 61 % of the Aussiedler claim at least good speaking capability and 40 % say they were at least good in writing. By contrast, almost every Aussiedler (94%) is fluent in Russian, and 79 percent are at least good in writing (table 3).

Table 3: Language Practice and Proficiency of German-Russian Aussiedler

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Language in daily life | | | |
| | Speaks German only | | 17% |
| | Speaks Russian only | | 8% |
| | Speaks both | | 75% |
| German | | | |
| | | Speaking capability | Writing skills |
| | very good | 7% | 6% |
| | Good | 54% | 34% |
| | so-so | 33% | 47% |
| | Rather bad | 6% | 11% |
| | not at all | 0% | 1% |
| Russian | | | |
| | | Speaking capability | Writing skills |
| | very good | 63% | 56% |
| | Good | 31% | 23% |
| | so-so | 5% | 14% |
| | Rather bad | 1% | 5% |
| | not at all | 1% | 2% |
| N = 108 | | | |

Source: Socio-economic panel, sample of immigrants (1995)

### *3.2. Collective Identity as perceived by the Aussiedler*

In the theoretical part of this paper, it was stressed that the development of ethnic cultures has to do with the stabilization of personal identities and group identities. The construction of group identity has been viewed as a process of boundary marking through self-definitions and other-definitions. The processes of self-definitions constitute a basis for

belonging together. This group solidarity is produced and enhanced on the basis of shared cultural and social characteristics and a cultural and historical consciousness.

Against this theoretical background, the following section of the paper reports findings of the focus group discussions regarding the perception of Aussiedler which shed light on the formation of group identity and the problems thereof. The statements of the respondents were analyzed with reference to the following dimensions.

(1) **Common Past and Common Traditions.** The historical consciousness expresses itself through the recollection of a common past and common traditions and in the situation of migration through perceptions of the homeland and ties which still exist.

(2) **Cultural Characteristics**. The cultural and social characteristics which constitute a feeling of belonging together can be assessed by the core values and ties between group members as they live in a situation of diaspora.

(3) **Boundary Markers**. Since the formation of a group identity always involves the other, the processes of boundary marking can be reconstructed by orientations about the majority and in the case of a pluralistic society by orientations towards other minority groups.

(4) **Communication**. As collective identity is a multi-dimensional process, conflicts and contradictions are likely as self-definitions and other-definitions come together. These problems, that arise through the definition of others and the situation of minorities when confronted with the dominant culture, are reconstructed by looking at problems of communication and integration as perceived by the Aussiedler.

## Common Past and Common Traditions

When the common past of the German-Russian immigrants is discussed, it is important to note that the general experience of the Aussiedler as a collective is that of a permanent minority status: The basic constellation of the Ethnic Germans is that they have always been a minority in Russia, and that they are perceived as a minority in contemporary Germany:

"In Russia they called us Fascist Pigs and here, they say we are Russian Pigs. One does not know where one belongs." (G4/130,136)

This statement of a young Aussiedler from Bersenbrück is quite typical for the general situation in which most of the Aussiedler now find themselves. Similar statements came up in every focus group, together with sentiments of estrangement or disappointment about the treatment of the Aussiedler in their new homeland. I shall come back to this point.

As an ethnic minority in Russia, Ethnic Germans tried hard to preserve their language and their specific cultural traditions which were sustained either by religious practices or by cultural and familial traditions. This was all the more difficult, insofar as the German minority in Russia had been resettled several times, which meant abandoning their houses, churches and community buildings and starting over again somewhere else. Moreover, Ethnic Germans were harshly discriminated against until the mid-1960's. They are still discriminated in Kasachstan, where ethnic conflicts are current. This collective history is preserved in the memories of the Aussiedler in quite different forms and naturally the perception of their cultural ties varies strongly according to age: For the very young generations, German culture and heritage are rather abstract categories, insofar as their formative years took place in the Soviet Union. In contrast, the collective consciousness of the mid-age group was influenced by two contradictory forces: They had to combine a secular life and career in the Soviet Union, while at the same time being under the strong cultural influence and heritage of their German families. The generation of people over 60 experienced expulsion and resettlement as well as cultural discrimination which strengthened their sentiments of a distinct cultural minority and enhanced their feelings of belonging together.

This general pattern of different experiences in the Soviet Union is well expressed when it comes to the recollection of common traditions of Ethnic Germans prior to emigration. We assessed this experience in the focus groups by asking our respondents about their traditions. We were particularly interested in celebratory and festive occasions in Russia and Kasachstan, and the ways how they held their festivities. We also inquired whether they saw themselves in the position of maintaining those traditions in contemporary Germany.

For the very young respondents between 18-25, the perceived difference in cultural traditions and celebrations does not reflect the German heritage, but rather their primary

socialization in a Communist society. Thus, young adults recall that they tended to celebrate secular and political occasions, instead of specific German holidays. They recollect, for example, participating in various school-sponsored demonstrations (International Labor Day on May 1st, Revolution Day on November 7th, International Women's Day on March 8th). They recall wearing school uniforms and marching together with their classmates. Moreover, the young respondents celebrated all the Russian holidays, such as New Year's Day. All of them agree that those traditions no longer play a role in their current life. Yet, what they find is that Germans and the Russians have different styles of celebrating. They say that the style in Russia was much more "festive and solemn", with much food and games, while in Germany it is "only drinking and alcohol".

The contradictory cultural pressures in Russia on Ethnic Germans is well portrayed in the recollections of collective traditions and holidays among the respondents between ages 30-50 years. Particularly those who came from the countryside in Russia and Kasachstan report that as Ethnic Germans they used to celebrate Christian holidays with their family while at the same time participating in the festivities of the orthodox Church and the official holidays of the Soviet state.

The recollections of cultural traditions among the older generations of Aussiedler are mixed, depending on religious affiliation. Our focus groups included two groups of older respondents: The group representing the countryside (Bersenbrück) consisted of members who belong to the protestant church and were quite religious. In fact, except for one woman, all of the participants belong to the local protestant community, in which they are a distinct rather fundamentalist subgroup. These members not only attend the regular community services but gather in a special "Betstunde". The tradition of the Betstunde started among very religious Ethnic Germans in Russia as secret practice during the time when the Soviets discriminated against Christians. The second group came from Berlin and had not previously known one another. In contrast to the Bersenbrück group they exhibited quite secular attitudes. The dimension of religious versus secular was decisive for the recollection of the cultural traditions in Russia. The members of the religious group say that they had celebrated all Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, and that they have followed this tradition for most of the time rather secretly. For these older people, the

freedom to practice their religious traditions now is praised as one of the predominant motives to leave Russia. Thus one woman said:

"Here we are free. We can do what we want. We can celebrate Christmas, we can go to Church and we can read the bible." (G5/32-34)

By contrast, the participants of the other group only recollect celebrating German Christmas in Russia as a specific German tradition. As they have spent most of their life in Russia, they also claim to have celebrated secular and political holidays, such as the Russian version of Father's day and Mother's Day.

Although the cultural traditions of Ethnic Germans in Russia were recollected quite differently and no longer play a role for most of them, the reasons to leave the country still have to do with their status as ethnic minority in the former Soviet Union. The perceptions that Ethnic Germans as a collective group have no future in their homeland is seen as result of a long history of discrimination and of belittlement, which some participants did not only characterize as a collective history but as their own experiences. This perception of not having a future was mostly combined with statements about the economic instability or even misery in Russia and Kasachstan. The most frequent arguments were that people have been working without getting paid and that food and consumer articles were scarce. For the younger generations, the main reason for emigration lies in the prospects of social-economic mobility vis-a-vis the improved educational and employment opportunities in Germany. However, most of these young people have not made the decision to come to Germany on their own, but followed the verdict of their parents. Those have instead experienced that life in Russia has become "bad" or "difficult" since the late 1980's.

Every age-group reported experiences of belittlement as members of the German ethnic minority. Among the 18-25 year olds, one young woman reports that in the small village where her family lived, there was much hatred against the few Germans who lived there and that German children were beaten up in school. In the groups of the 30-50 year olds, the participants state that they have been belittled in their workplace and called names because of their German origin. An other woman said that Ethnic Germans were looked down upon for speaking German in a public place, such as in the bus. And two of them reported that since the large exodus of Germans from the Soviet Union in the late 1980's, they have been confronted with the pressure to go as well because colleagues were

expecting to take their jobs. Apart from these social pressures, several participants stated that they have been raised “as Germans” and that they wanted the opportunity to keep their cultural traditions and native language.

For most participants, the decisive reasons to leave Russia were, on the one hand, the desire to maintain German culture and, on the other hand, to improve one’s economic circumstances. This is best expressed in the following statement of a woman in the group of the 30-50year olds in Berlin:

> “Many (local) Germans think that we came to Germany because of the good food, because of the social conditions and the affluence and that we wanted more etc. But this is not true. Maybe this plays a role, but for most Russian-Germans it was such that they wanted to keep the language or learn German. And therefore, our family has been fighting for that and for the German Republic in Russia. We were hoping that our Republic will be reconstituted and that we could keep our language then. But this didn’t happen. And when I was fighting for our cause and had to realize that this political request did not ever come true, I was very desperate. And then I understood, that our only chance to keep German is not to stay, but to go to Germany. And because the situation was bad economically, it also played a role that we were at the edge with our children. I was working in a gymnasium, but I have not been paid and I have 5 children.” (G5/131-147)

## Cultural Characteristics

Since they have lived in Germany, most of the participants’ traditions do not matter to them any more, except for German-Russian weddings. The respondents mentioned weddings as a specific and typical cultural tradition among the Aussiedler in Russia and in Germany. It was stated that the Aussiedler have kept their distinct and quite traditional and old-fashioned wedding celebrations to this day. This statement corroborates the findings of a study on cultural traditions of Aussiedler from Russia in contemporary Germany, namely that “weddings are the strongest element of cultural perseverance” (Boll, 1995:123): “Weddings as semi-public events are opportunities to demonstrate the others (locals) the own culture (which is perceived by some Aussiedler self consciously as high standing) and to act ’culturally’.” This study finds that there is a tendency of “folklorisation” of weddings, as they are used to demonstrate typical patterns of a specific Ethnic German folk culture. By contrast, the weddings of the local Germans are perceived as well-organized and stern events. One participant of the young group in Bersenbrück said that the locals “over-organize” their wedding parties and everything is planned and very professional. But

given the lack of sponteneity, she didn't even dare to dance. Another young woman of this group who married a German man reported:

"We celebrated our marriage. It was a very nice wedding, but after all, you saw the differences. We had a band, which was playing songs in Russian, German and English. But you realized, that the locals were only hanging around at the bar and wanted to drink beer. And the Aussiedler are more or less easy going people who enjoyed to come together and they took a bottle, vine or vodka, it doesn't matter, but they were sitting in circles and talking with each other. And with the dancing and so on, they really appreciated the Russian music." (G4/1025-1033)

It is not surprising that weddings, as primarily familial events, are central to the demonstration of a distinct Ethnic German culture. Family values are held in high esteem among Russian Germans, and most of the respondents stress that a strong motive to come to Germany was either to stay with their family or to rejoin their family which had left Russia earlier. One women in the Berlin group of 30-50 said:

"All our relatives were here and you don't think much, you just follow them. We were the last to leave. They have experienced what is called „the future in Germany". And if one of the family or of the relatives leaves, then the second and the third leaves as well and only very few stay. You didn't think about whether it is right or wrong, you just go. You don't want to be on your own there, what can you do? And all the relatives of my husband were here and all my relatives as well. We were alone and then we did not think much but left the country." (G2/500-509)

The emphasis on family values is a typical characteristic of Ethnic Germans. According to a study by Baum (1999:8-10) on German-Russian immigrants, the family was the "uncontested patriarchic community in a situation of small communities in rural areas like the Wolga, in which the German language, culture and religion was contained like in a bubble of air". Family values refer to a strong command and control of the children which was easy insofar as housing conditions were such that usually three generations lived in one flat. Parents typically determined the profession and spouse of their children. Moreover, there was no question that children were to marry and start a family at a very young age. Parents insisted upon upholding typical "German values", such as industriousness, cleanliness, moral integrity, and sobriety. These values created a certain "national pride" among Ethnic Germans in the former SU.

We found all those aspects either implicitly or explicitly articulated in our focus groups. Thus, one of the respondents of the mid-age group in Berlin said that the cohesion in her family was very strong. She mentioned that her parents expected her to marry a German man. She said she was lucky to have found a German man, so that everybody in the family was German.

## Boundary Markers

When Russian German immigrants enter Germany, they find themselves in a situation where they are confronted with a majority society to which they belong in legal terms as full citizens, but from which they are culturally distinct. Thus, the local Germans are the main reference group of the Aussiedler, and the perceptions of them serve as boundary markers for the minority group and as such strengthen the feeling of belonging together as group. As processes of boundary marking always result from the self-definitions and the actual or perceived other-definitions, in their subjective view, the Aussiedler have to defend their specific place in society against other minority groups, for example other migrants from Russia and other ethnic minorities who live in Germany. In the eyes of Germans, the Aussiedler are often not acknowledged as "real Germans" but put, rather, in general categories like "Ausländer" or "Russian immigrants". Thus, in their subjective definitions, they have to find arguments to set their own group apart from the others. This general constellation is the background to differentiate the perceptions of collective identity regarding boundary marking in terms of boundaries towards (a) the local German majority culture; (b) other Russian immigrants to Germany; (c) other "Ausländer" which refers to all other minorities who live in contemporary Germany.

### *(a) Boundary Markers Towards The Local German Majority*

Basically, there are two general clusters of orientations which can be regarded as boundary markers of German-Russian Aussiedler towards the local German majority and which stem from the subjective feeling of a strong, but closed community with an ordered system of values and morals and from the "national pride" as Germans. First, the realization of the difference in the core value system, characterized by rather liberal civic attitudes and a less rigid moral system, quite often contributes to a general estrangement or disillusionment about their new homeland. Second, there is a general feeling among the German-Russian immigrants that they are not perceived and treated as "real" Germans, but in public perception are put together with other foreigners who live in the country.

The perceptions of local Germans by Russian Aussiedler were generally very modest and rather uncritical. When asked about their opinions of local Germans, there was a kind of "official" gratitude for the opportunity to live in the Federal Republic. However, in the

course of the discussion about expectations prior to immigration and their actual fulfillment, the comments and remarks between the lines showed disillusionment and estrangement. Their background of a rather rigid and closed system of values and morals led many of our respondents to express their surprise about the loose drinking and smoking habits of local Germans and their frustration that the local Germans did not turn out to be as clean, as punctual and as religious as expected. While these impressions surfaced in all groups, they were strongest among the older respondents. A typical comment was made by one woman in the 60-70 group in Berlin:

"Many smoke. In January we were together in a Cafe and there were many young German men. They sit around and they drink one and drink two and smoke, that is not good in this air. There are also many dogs. There are much more dogs in Moscow, this is beyond comparison. But it (the dog shit, bp) does not lie around. After all, the dogs in Moscow aren't clean dogs either, but it is somehow regulated and not allowed, and then people don't do it. Everywhere else it is dirty, and there is a lot of garbage, and rats and things. But the dog shit, this is something, when there are much more dogs in Moscow. " (G3/626-636)

One young man of the Berlin group of 18-25 year olds talked about the "bitter truth" in Germany, which in his eyes has to do with cleanliness and the Germany punctuality. But from what he sees, everyone is unpunctual in Germany; either they are too early or to late, for example at the Sozialamt.

The very religious members of the old group in Bersenbrück did not so much talk about drinking, cleanliness, and punctuality, but instead expressed their frustration with low church attendance. One man said:

"God is open, God's word is open. You can go to church, but what you find here is that the church is empty. In Kasachstan, one had to do everything secretly. And here, the door is open and there are few, who come. " (G6/473-475)

Although no one commented on local German family values, the study of the Osteuropainstitut (Baum 1999:9) finds that the Aussiedler have particular problems with what in their eyes are "loose" civic and sexual morals. Particularly troubling to them is the fact that in Germany many couples live together without being married. Such behavior is, in their eyes, unacceptable. Because people married and had children at a rather young age in the German communities in Russia, the practice of couples not legalizing their relationship was unheard of.

The second cluster of orientations towards the local Germans which give the Russian German a distinct feeling of being different, refers to their self-definition and national pride as “real Germans”. For most of the respondents this has to do with the language. They think that if they speak with an accent or dialect they are easily recognized as Russians and denied their right to live here. There was a widespread agreement in all groups that the language is the main problem for Aussiedler when confronted with the local Germans. One respondent of the 18-25 group in Berlin put it:

“There is always trouble because of the German language. People get upset, because most Aussiedler don’t understand German. They are not against us, but they think, we call ourselves Germans and don’t speak German.” (G1/354-457)

One of the young woman said that the expectation of the local Germans is that they speak German and that their status as Germans is threatened if they do not speak the language:

“They say, you are German, then you have got to speak German.” (G1/113)

Since the newcomers in our focus groups, particularly those who are still attending language classes, do have a hard time learning the language properly, they experience blows to their self-esteem and sometimes even public discrimination. Almost all participants in the focus groups still cling to Russian as the language spoken in private homes and among friends. The participants in the mid-generation focus groups are still very appreciative of Russian language and insist that their children keep Russian as a second language. It was interesting to find that two members of the mid-age group in Bersenbrück reported that problems with local Germans and discrimination of their children in school were provoked when Aussiedler chose to speak Russian, even if they were fluent in German. One woman said:

“The teenagers protest in the Russian language, they don’t get along with Germans as quickly. It is not easy for them, and they show it in school as well. And they keep on speaking Russian in class. The teacher gets upset ... As I see it, it is not only a problem of discipline, but I believe, more like protest. Protest about the fact that they are not treated equally compared with the locals. And they feel that very deeply and they protest. And the forming of groups, that is protest as well.
Another example is, that in our town hall, they were getting angry that the Russian Germans come as Germans and cannot speak the language. That a public official ever dares to scold somebody in this way! We were raised as such that we give in easily and put our heads down and even say thank you, despite the fact that we are entitled to the service by law. But the civil servants take advantage of that immediately. And then they play power games. .. I have experienced that myself when I went to the employment office because I wanted to study.” (G2/1006-1024)

Because Aussiedler feel discriminated against because of their linguistic problems, language works as a strong boundary marker. It was a shared opinion among Russian-Germans in all groups that people in public stare at them if they speak Russian, so they think it is wise to either not speak-out loud in public or not speak at all.

One of the 60-70year olds in Berlin says:

"If we speak, we act more tactic, we don't talk loud. My grandson always says, quiet! When we were using the S-Bahn the other day, we saw that the Turks were speaking up loudly, that we don't do." (G3/496-499)

In the group of the 60-70 olds in Bersenbrück, there was a similar comment:

"The problem is, that if we sit in the waiting room of the doctor's practice, we would like to speak about Germany as well as about Russia or Kasachstan. But that does not happen. We better sit still." (G6/789-792)

In the same group, the reason given for not speaking up in public is that one does not want to provoke negative emotions. One man in the 60-70old group in Berlin puts it this way:

"I do not want to provoke negative emotions by speaking loud, not that I am embarrassed to speak with an accent, but there is a certain Angst." (G3/507-508)

A young woman in the Bersenbrück group of 18-25 makes a statement that corroborates such fears:

"Some people really react lousy. I would say. Some even swear at you. There was an incident: We came from school and some students were behind us and talked Russian loudly. And then there was an old grandmother, maybe around 60, and she said, "you assholes, you are in Germany". Well, I mean, I found that a grandmother who bitches a boy who could be her grandson and calls him an ass, because he was speaking in Russian ..." (G4/938-944)

*(b) Boundary Markers Towards Other Russians*

Because Aussiedler perceive language as a strong boundary marker toward the majority society, they feel the need to justify their ethnic identity as Germans by drawing a line between themselves and other Russians. They feel they have to make clear that even if they share the language with other Russians, they do not belong to them. This ambivalence towards the Russian language is best expressed in the statement of a participant in the mid-age group from Bersenbrück:

"I don't like it, if people speak Russian. The local Germans take that negatively and use it against the Russians. And we are upset because they call us Russians." (G2/1088-1090)

One young women in Bersenbrück group expressed her disappointment about local Germans not differentiating correctly between the groups:

I believe, the German people have to tell young people and others that Aussiedler are the same people as Germans. Aussiedler or foreigners, it doesn't matter, some people believe that they are monsters. When I was in 2nd grade, a 8 year old girl came to me and said: "Why are you so skinny? I thought Russian people were fat and ugly" and so on. They don't know how Germans look." (G1/495-501)

The boundary marking against Russians is also present in the Aussiedler community. Particularly the older Aussiedler, who have been in Germany for a number of years, seem to have reservations that Russians come to Germany and enjoy the privileges of the Aussiedler status. The Ethnic Germans, who are married to Russians, are regarded skeptically. A young women in the Bersenbrück group of young adults reported that older Aussiedler question the legitimacy of their immigration. She says:

"Sometimes, if I speak with older people, say 60, 70 years old, they ask me why are you here? And it is particularly because of my Russian spouse. Why is he here? And they say: They are not German. (G4/1342-1344)

While the legitimacy of Russians who come to Germany is even questioned in the Aussiedler community, another strong motive for drawing a boundary against other Russian immigrants is that they do not want to be associated with the negative stereotypes about Russia which they are anticipate among Germans.

"I think the Germans think about the Russian Germans that we have lived in Siberia where it is very cold and that we are all very poor people who have no education. But this is not true. And they think, that we all like to drink Schnaps which isn't true either." (G3/563-567)

In particular, it is a point for Aussiedler in Berlin that they have nothing to do with the Russian Mafia:

"On one hand, those who don't know us, think that all Russians are the same. On the other hand, we don't know how other people are treated. The new Russians, which come to the KaDeWe with their millions, maybe they are treated differently, but we do not have anything to do with them. ... It is of course that the Russian Mafia is quite big in Berlin, so that people are afraid of the Russian Mafia." (G3/585-590)

*(c) Boundary Markers Towards Other Foreigners*

For the German-Russian Aussiedler the problem is not only that the local Germans sometimes put them in the same category as other Russian immigrants but that they are regarded as foreigners in a country which they perceive as their new and everlasting homeland. They feel that they still have to defend their status as an ethnic minority against

other foreigners who live in Germany, but in their eyes do not belong to the German community. When we confronted the focus groups with questions about other minorities in Germany and asked them to compare the Aussiedler with other immigrants, we realized that processes of boundary marking are also working as regards to the Turkish population in Germany. The perceived necessity to set the Aussiedler apart from the Ausländer on the basis of the Ethnic German identity is expressed best in the statement of a participant of the 30-50 year old focus group in Bersenbrück:

"It is the same like in Russia. If a Turk comes into a shop and talks in Turkish, nobody looks on him. But if one speaks Russian, everybody turns his head ... There is something different about this: He is Turkish, but we are Germans and speak Russian. The local Germans say, they are German but why do they speak Russian?" (G2-1092-1097)

For the Aussiedler it is self evident that they are not foreigners, so it is a painful experience for them when they are put in the same category with other ethnic groups. One of the Bersenbrück youngsters complained:

"The people do not differentiate between Aussiedler and Ausländer. Many say, you are Ausländer, are you?" (G2/1246-1247)

When it came to the attitudes about other minority groups, there was a general reluctance among the participants to open up and express their opinions. Only the young participants were prepared to speak without hesitation about the relationship. In the discussions, two points were made: First, that the relationship among the different groups is not without tensions and that there is competition between the ethnic groups as regards the distribution of benefits or privileges in German society. Second, there is a perceived hierarchy between Germans, Aussiedler and other foreigners.

One of the youngsters in Bersenbrück stated.

"Foreigners live in a totally different world. Sometimes there are problems and most often, the problems are between Aussiedler and Turks." (G4/1305-1307)

A man in the mid-age group in Bersenbrück stressed the competition between the Aussiedler and the "other" ethnic groups:

"What they get or what is given to them, is taken away from us. For instance, just now in the discussion about the dual citizenship or the immigration laws, which we have to keep in mind in the long run. You find them as rivals." (G2/1124-1128)

There is a general belief among Russian-Germans that there is an ethnic hierarchy in Germany which governs the status of majority and minority groups. One young man of the Berlin group of 18-22 said:

"We rank second. The first rank belongs to the Germans, then it is us, and then the Ausländer. They treat you better than Ausländer."
Q: "But equal?"
"No, not equal." (G1/586-591)

This perception is also expressed in a statement of an older woman in the group of 60-70 in Berlin who reports that her German neighbors thought she was a Turkish woman because she has rather dark skin and dark hair and speaks with a strong accent. She mentioned this in passing and so was asked to elaborate. She reported:

"If I talk to them, they say that, because I have a different accent and they think I am a Turkish woman. And the Germans they say, why are you so dark? And I say, many people in Germany are dark as well, my mother and my father were dark, too. I say, I am a German from Russia. And then they say, but you speak well. " (G3/600-605)

The respondents in our focus groups did not express open aversion to foreigners in Germany, but it became clear that they have ambivalent views towards them. This is corroborated by the study of Baum (1999:46-48) which finds that the vast majority of Aussiedler from Russia think that there are too many foreigners in Germany. This study finds widespread reservations against foreigners among Aussiedler. Moreover, there are diffuse fears of foreigners which are often connected with condescending judgements about them.

## Communication

The perception of cultural differences and boundaries in the German society among the Aussiedler constrain the inter-personal communication. When we asked the focus groups to talk about their contacts with local Germans, the answers were quite diverse as regards to the amount and intensity of personal communication. The patterns of communication and contacts of Ethnic Germans with the members of the majority community vary strongly according to age, city of residence and length of residence in Germany. Despite these variations, there is a general finding as regards to the quality of those contacts. Even if the Ethnic Germans have frequent exchanges, the relationships are rather occasional or

superficial. The respondents agree that the cultural difference between themselves and the German majority does not permit the establishment of real friendships with local Germans.

As for age, it appears that there are frequent contacts between young German-Russians and local Germans. For those respondents in the Bersenbrück age-group 18-22 who came to Germany more than four years ago and who go to school here, many contacts and exchanges with local Germans in school were reported. However, the respondents agreed that the relationships with their local classmates are not very intense. They prefer to spend their free time with other Aussiedler. One young man said:

> "In our free time we are among Aussiedler, there are groups which consist of Aussiedler for the most part, because one would not feel comfortable with the Germans." (G4/628-630)

When they reflect about the nature and quality of their relations and communications with local Germans, the young adults report that different cultural background makes it hard to feel close to them. One young man claimed that, given the different life-styles and mentalities, there were no common issues between them. Another young man of the Bersenbrück group of 18-25 said:

> "I think that we are different because of our culture. Like in school, if I want to talk about my problems freely, I could not do this with a local like I can do this with an Aussiedler. He (the local German, bp) would not understand me, I believe. But I don't know, I have not tried it with a local. You have to know local friends to do this. I do not want to directly speak about myself in front of them, maybe only a little bit. But to really speak out of my soul, I would only do this with an Aussiedler ... It is the feeling, that you are close to these people, that you are familiar with them. I feel a certain belonging with them." (G4/875-889)

There are hardly any close contacts between local Germans and recent arrivals in the 18-25 year-old age group. These respondents find that German society is "pretty much closed up" and that people here seem to be afraid of them. They find it very difficult to make friends because, in their eyes, the mentality here is different. Contacts with locals is rather occasional. For instance, interaction occurs in the immediate neighborhood, in the elevator, in the gym or while walking the dog. In contrast to young Aussiedler in Bersenbrück, who find that older Germans are particularly unfriendly towards them, the young adults in Berlin claim that old people are quite open. For them, they are the only Germans who will to talk to them.

The communication patterns in the group of the 30-50 year olds from Bersenbrück, who have been here since the early 1990's, depend on the neighborhood and employment

circumstances. Most of these respondents have quite frequent contacts with local Germans, either through work or through leisure activities in, for example, sports clubs or choral societies. Those who live in neighborhoods with a majority of local Germans report regular chats in the yard. However, those who live in neighborhoods with a large Aussiedler community report communication with local Germans at work only. Even though daily interaction with local Germans seems quite normal, members of this group report that they are confronted with many prejudices which limit their contact or lead to a certain ambivalence. One man reported about the conversations at his workplace and said:

"(the local Germans at work think, bp) ... that we and our parents empty the social security system. And you get the feeling we Aussiedler are responsible that it is so bad here. It is not expressed openly that the Aussiedler are bad or take away the money or so. But there are small things, details sometimes, which can be understood in the way, that it is only the Aussiedler who take the money." (G5/1208-1214)

Another man from Bersenbrück reported that his contacts with local Germans have declined over time:

"The violence between local Germans and the Aussiedler has been growing ... We live in a neighborhood where only locals live. I want to say, earlier we had many contacts. I am a member in a sports club and the whole club came over to my house and we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary etc. Nevertheless, we made the first step and had good relations with many local families. But somehow we lost touch, I don't know why." (G2/805-812)

As in the group of young adults, members of the mid-age group suggested that even after having lived in Germany for many years there was a distinct feeling of detachment from German society. Almost all respondents expressed this sentiment. Even though they have managed to settle down, find work and buy a house, they nevertheless do not feel at home in Germany. As respondent in Bersenbrück put it:

"The most important point is the feeling of being at home, but we Aussiedler don't feel that." (G2/2282-2283)

This feeling of detachment raises problems of personal well-being and self-confidence among some of the members of the mid-age group. For some Aussiedler, these perceptions sometimes lead them to question their decision to come to Germany. One woman said:

"I don't know, one is homesick for days and somehow depressed. And then you think about it and you ask yourself whether you have done the right thing. I don't know, but it happens sometimes, that I am depressed and I sit around and say, I was stupid to have left, I should have stayed. There are these moments, and then it gets better. My children say, "Rubbish". The children think differently, they have a different view, even if this hurts sometimes." (G2/1151-1158)

Among Russian-Germans, the sense of being different or excluded from the majority culture is related to problems of integration. Fuchs' study (1999) of Ethnic Germans who arrived in the mid or early 1980's shows that even after ten years 29 percent of the Aussiedler perceived large cultural and value differences between them and the local Germans. These differences responsible for having second thoughts about their decision to come to Germany.

While the respondents in the mid-age group in Bersenbrück do have contact with locals, members of the comparable age group in Berlin, who have come to Germany only recently, have very little or no communication with locals. None of them reported to have close friends among the local Germans. One man in this age-group from Berlin said:

"Contacts with local Germans are fine, but at home or among friends, no thank you." (G5/363)

The general pattern holds true for the 60-70 year-old focus group: frequent communication and close contact among themselves and little or superficial contact with locals. In Bersenbrück, the general reservations towards locals were expressed by the following comment:

"The local Germans don't understand us, and we don't understand the local Germans. This is a problem, why we cannot make contacts with them". (G6/781-783)

Another woman said:

"The Germans from Russia understand each other much better. If I would try, I had more contacts maybe. But talking is always somehow strenuous. We understand each other well, we know what we say and which problems we have. With the locals, it is different. I don't know, about what I should talk to them." (G6/721-726)

For the older people the lack of communication with locals is easily compensated by frequent and intensive contact within the group. The very religious people in Bersenbrück have continued their tradition of gathering regularly in the Betstunde where they read the bible and pray. For the older people in the secular group in Berlin the situation is different insofar as they do not join religious groups, but rather meet regularly among themselves in the community center where the language classes are held. Indeed, most of the respondents of the focus group participate in the various activities offered in the community center, such as dancing or singing in a choral society. Interestingly, even though local German

seniors also join in such activities, Aussiedler develop friendships almost exclusively among themselves.

To summarize the communication patterns of the German-Russian Aussiedler, one finds that the perception of not belonging to the cultural majority does restrain the communication between immigrants and members of the host society. The frequency of inter-personal communication depends on the length of stay in Germany as well as on the situation in the workplace, neighborhood and school. Those who have been here for more than four years and who work or go to school report frequent contact with local Germans in daily life. However, there is a reluctance to become friends with local Germans even among those who have successfully established themselves. Newcomers tend to have little contact with local Germans except for those they meet on the street, in social institutions or public offices. It is no surprise then, that close contact and communication are restricted to members of the Aussiedler community itself.

## 4. Media Environment/Media Use

Studies of processes of migration and ethnicity stress that the mass media play a crucial role for ethnic minorities, as there is a great need for information about their native country and the country of settlement (Husbands 1998:26). The mass media help newcomers stay in touch with their homeland and establish ties to their new environment. Moreover, as most of the migrants do not speak the language of their country of settlement, they are particularly dependent on mass media in their own language. The needs of the migrants are usually fulfilled by minority media. However, the longer the migrants stay in their new homeland, the more they are confronted with the mass media of the majority society. Thus, the general media environment of migrants consists of the majority and minority media. In the process of integration, majority media and minority media can be supposed to have different functions. The minority media cater to the immediate needs of information and surveillance of the specific group of migrants especially in the transition period of settling down. Concerning the more complex aspect of identity formation of the minority group, the minority media, on the one hand, are the major mediation systems for the self-definition of the specific group. The majority media, on the other hand, are a

crucial factor when it comes to the other-definition of the group by the majority society. One can assume that majority society images and stereotypes of the minority are basically conveyed through the public discourse which takes place in the majority media. As a consequence, if one is to study the role of media in identity politics, one has to examine both minority media and majority media.

In our study of German-Russian Aussiedler we aim to analyze the media environment of this group in both respects; that is, we shall study the contents of minority media as well as the discourse on the Aussiedler in the majority media. The following section, however, is devoted to the minority media environment of the German-Russian Aussiedler. We began our examination of the general media environment of the Aussiedler by collecting data on all Russian media available in Germany. In the first phase, we collected more than 50 newspapers, as well as material on radio and television programs and - together with experts - tried to form an impression as to the nature and importance of these media. From this material we selected a number of rather widespread and important media and asked the respondents in our focus groups to tell us (a) whether they know the title or program; (2) whether they used it in Russia or now; (3) how they would characterize the content of the specific medium. We also asked the respondents to identify which German media they use and, in their opinion, the character of minority group representation in those media. The concluding section of this paper will describe the media environment of German-Russian Aussiedler in relationship to the Russian media in Germany; for example, which media are most frequently used by the focus groups. Finally, there will be a short section on the opinions expressed by the Aussiedler about the portrayal of this minority in the majority media.

### *4.1. The Media Environment of Russians in Germany*

The 2.3 million Russian-German Aussiedler who have come to Germany since 1989 constitute a considerable audience segment for newspaper publishers and the electronic media. Since the mid 1990’s, the market for Russian mass media in Germany has boomed. When we started out looking for Russian media in the newstands in Berlin, we found that there were more than 50 titles available. The Russian media can be categorized according

to audience and place of publication. Of the 54 titles available, 14 are produced in Russia and shipped to Germany. Among them are the European editions of the dailies Prawda, the Iswestija and weekly and monthly magazines which cover a broad variety of issues. In addition, there are political magazines such as Moskowiskie Nowosti or Obstschaja Gaseta, but also tabloid-style magazines such as Tschstnaja Schisn or women's magazines such as Schenskie Dela. For German-Russian Aussiedler, the most popular title among the newspapers from Russia is the weekly, Argumenty i Fakty.

The media landscape of Russian print media produced in Germany is both dynamic and diverse. Most of the titles were only introduced in the mid 1990's, and some of the early publications have already been discontinued. The publishers are usually small companies in various German cities or associations like the Landsmannschaften or the Society of Jews from the GUS. Most of the papers appear either weekly or monthly, some even less frequently. The 40 newspapers which are produced for Russians in Germany can be roughly categorized in three groups. The first and largest group includes more than 20 newspapers and weekly or monthly magazines which specifically target the Aussiedler communities in the various Länder. For instance, Caravan is published in Berlin, Kontakt is produced in Hannover and Heimat-Aktuell is out of Hamburg. Two of the magazines for German-Russian immigrants, namely Kristiansaja Gazeta and Rein Info, cultivate the readership of the religious members of this minority. The monthly, "Volk auf dem Weg", is the official magazine of the Association of Aussiedler ("Landsmannschaft") in Stuttgart and distributed to their members. The second group comprises about 10 newspapers for the Jewish-Russian immigrants. Among these media are Nascha Gaseta by the Society of the Jews from the GUS, a magazine for culture and politics called Serkalo Sagadok, and Kypr, a monthly newspaper for the Russian Jews in the area around Cologne. The third category includes about 10 Russian titles which have a general appeal to Russian immigrants. The circulation of the Russian newspapers and magazines varies between 1.000 and 60.000 copies.

Most Russian newspapers aim to cover the specific problems of immigrants from Russia in Germany. Their quality, however, varies widely. In his comparison of the Russian press with newspapers of other minorities in Germany (such as those of the Croatians, Serbs or Albanians), Schmidt (1999:18) found that the quality of the Russian papers is rather low,

with boring headlines and poor layout and photos. In contrast to the papers of other migrant groups, the Russian press tends to neglect politics, but is rich in banalities such as crossword puzzles, beauty tips, a most detailed television program, articles about dances and service information (like how you deal with the public authorities or what you need to know about insurance), and letters to the editor. The most extreme example of this is Woprosti I Otweti ("Questions and Answers") which is filled with practical advice on daily life in Germany. Examples are: how to rent a flat; what to do, if you want to buy a house; what are your legal rights as Aussiedler; how to file your taxes; what are the traffic rules and how you operate the parking meter. In any case, the vast majority of Russian newspapers devotes most of its space to classified ads, such as for travel agencies, translation bureaus or special book stores. Moreover, most of the papers feature large sections of personal ads. There are only few exceptions to this general picture. Even the weekly newspaper Wostotschni Express, which has a circulation of 35.000 copies and which tries to present serious information on Russia and Germany, devotes much space to ads as well. The monthly Eurasiatische Kurier, the bimonthly EZ and the weekly Express try to be open for serious information on current issues and politics, history and entertainment. While most of the minority newspapers for the Aussiedler are in Russian, some titles are bilingual, and a few others appear in German. For instance, the religious Rein Info is predominately filled with reprints of German articles and includes a German language course.

### *4.2. Media Use of German-Russian Focus Group Respondents*

The data on media use, which we collected in a standardized questionnaire suggest that of all Russian media only the newspapers are used to a significant degree. However, there are variations between the age groups (table 4). It is particularly the 30-50 year old respondents who report to read about four Russian newspapers regularly. The 60-70 year old Aussiedler as well as the 18-22 year old members of the focus groups use about two Russian newspapers regularly, with the older respondents reading slightly more issues than the young adults. The young Aussiedler are generally very low in Russian media use; they report hardly listening to the radio or watching television. The 60-70 year olds seem to prefer Russian radio and television, but on a generally low level. The data on media use

allows two conclusions: The German-Russian Aussiedler of our focus group discussions are generally very low in using the Russian mass media, and if they use Russian mass media at all, it is basically the newspaper. It must be noted at this point that the data are by no means representative for all Ethnic Germans, but rather only represent the behavior of the respondents of our focus groups.

Table 4: Media Use of German-Russian Focus Group Respondents: Average Number of Russian Media Used [1)]

| Media | 18-25 years n=20 | 30-50 years n=13 | 60-70 years n=16 | Total n=49 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Read (Russian) newspapers | x=1,90<br>s=1,55 | x=3,85<br>s=2,51 | x=2,31<br>s=2,70 | x=2,55<br>s=2,34 |
| Heard (Russian) radio programs | x=0,95<br>s=1,43 | x=1,08<br>s=1,75 | x=1,37<br>s=1,75 | x= 1,12<br>s=1,60 |
| Watched (Russian) TV programs | x=0,85<br>s=1,09 | x=1,46<br>s=2,18 | x= 1,38<br>s=1,71 | x=1,18<br>s=1,63 |

1) The figures indicate the mean (x) and the standard deviation (s) for counts of Russian media which the respondents have used.

Of the 54 Russian newspapers available in Germany, we selected 18 print media, which were rated by experts as most important or most widespread among Aussiedler. These were included in a questionnaire which the respondents filled out following the group discussions. Newspapers read by the Aussiedler vary strongly according to age group, except for Argumenty i Fakty which seems to be favored to a considerable degree by all respondents. Interestingly enough, the most prominent paper among our focus group respondents is a Russian broadsheet and not one of the typical German-Russian minority papers. Argumenty i Fakty is a weekly which is produced in Moskov and distributed in Germany as well. It is one of the few newspapers in Russia which is supposed to be independent. Argumenty i Fakty is, in fact, not a Communist newspaper; it became prominent during Perestroijka, and since then has enjoyed high credibility. The contents of Argumenty i Fakty is quite diverse: On the one hand, it looks like a tabloid; on the other hand, it carries serious information and critical reporting about current issues. It is easy to read and includes both entertaining and practical sections as well as news. For instance, we analysed one of the copies of Argumenty i Fakty and found headlines such as “Astrology:

helpful or harmful?", as well as critical reports on the manipulation of the Russian press (with an interview of the Dean of the school of Journalism of the Moskov University), and on the mafia in Russia. There were also reports on prominent movie stars, pop bands (Modern Talking), crossword puzzles, health issues, weather, television programs, letters to the editor and classified ads and personal ads. The many pictures varied as much in quality as did the articles.

Table 5: Use of Russian and Aussiedler Printmedia (per cent) [1)]

| Newspaper | 18-25 years n=20 | 30-50 years n=13 | 60-70 years n=16 | Total n=49 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argumenty i Fakti | 45 | 61 | 37 | 47 |
| Inostraniec | - | - | - | - |
| Itogi | - | 8 | 25 | 10 |
| Literaturnaja Gaseta | 15 | 8 | 6 | 10 |
| Niediella | - | 15 | - | 4 |
| Schenskie Dela | 10 | - | - | 4 |
| Alster | - | - | - | - |
| Deutsch-Russiche Zeitung | 15 | 39 | 25 | 25 |
| Euroasiatischer Kurier | 5 | 31 | 6 | 12 |
| Heimat aktuell | - | 23 | 6 | 8 |
| Russkaja Germanija, Russkij Berlin | 35 | 23 | 19 | 27 |
| Samowar | 5 | 23 | - | 8 |
| Semljaki | 30 | 69 | 13 | 35 |
| Volk auf dem Weg | 5 | 23 | 38 | 20 |
| Vostotschnij Express | 20 | 62 | 31 | 35 |
| Wedomosti | 35 | 8 | - | 16 |
| Wir in Deutschland | - | - | 25 | 8 |
| Total | 220 | 393 | 231 | 269 |

1) The figures indicate the percentage of respondents who have used the newspaper ‚sometimes' or ‚very often' (multiple response).

In regard to the question of identity politics and the media, the finding that Argumenty i Fakty was the most frequently read newspapers among our respondents permits the conclusion that the ties to the homeland among Russian Aussiedler are still fairly strong. They are eager to keep up on the current events in Russia, even though their reality is in Germany. It is also important to note that Argumenty i Fakty is particularly prominent among the mid-age group and among young people between 18-25 years of age.

Another quite frequently used newspaper among the respondents between 30-50 years of age is Semljaki, a Russian tabloid which is produced for Aussiedler in Germany. The paper appears monthly, has a circulation of 60.000 copies, and is in line with mainstream Russian media. It carries articles about various festivities of the Aussiedler community (for instance, a beauty contest among Russian German women), service articles, humor and classified and personal ads. Another frequently used paper in this mid-age group is Vostotschnij Express which is quite similar in content to Semljaki. The paper is very much focused on entertainment and daily problems of the Aussiedler. Some of the articles are in German. The more serious articles refer to the activities of the Landsmannschaft, whose stance is rather conservative. 30 pages out of 50 are classified ads.

While the Russian newspapers which are used by the 30-50year olds are rather unpolitical, the Wedomosti, which is read by about one third of the young group, contains predominantely information about Russia and the political and cultural development in the former Soviet Union. Wedomosti is a weekly paper for Russian immigrants and is produced in Dortmund. It is tabloid in form and has less than 20 pages. Another rather short newspaper, which is quite common among the young Aussiedler, is Russkij Germania/Russkij Berlin. This Russian weekly appears in Berlin, but has offices in Munich, Bremen and Düsseldorf and sells about 10.000 copies. It aims to provide information on current events, arts and leisure, and sports in Germany. Moreover, it is keen on service articles and questions regarding the transition of newcomers (legal advice etc.).

Older Aussiedler remain loyal, to a considerable degree, to the newspaper of the Russian Landsmannschaft, titled Volk auf dem Weg. This newspaper, free for members of the Landsmannschaft, appears monthly and carries articles about the activities of the association. Information is provided as regards the transition period, language test and the rights of Ethnic Germans as a collective group. The political stance of Volk auf dem Weg is conservative to right wing, and its articles have a certain religious undertone. Volk auf dem Weg appears in German and, like all other newspapers for Russian Germans, it carries a large section of personal ads. 30 out of 70 pages are filled with personal ads such as birthday announcements and obituaries.

Table 6: Use of Russian Radio Programs (per cent) [1)]

| Radio | 18-25 years n=20 | 30-50 years n=13 | 60-70 years n=16 | Total n=49 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stimme Rußlands | 5 | 8 | 31 | 14 |
| Radio-1 Ostankino | 10 | 23 | 13 | 14 |
| Radio Rußlands | 5 | 23 | 31 | 18 |
| Radio Majak | 25 | 15 | 19 | 20 |
| Radio Liberty | 10 | - | - | 4 |
| Stimme Americas | 15 | - | - | 6 |
| Deutsche Welle | 15 | 23 | 38 | 25 |
| BBC, London | 10 | - | 6 | 6 |
| Multi-Kulti SFB | 5 | 15 | - | 6 |
| Total | 100 | 107 | 138 | 113 |

1) The figures indicate the percentage of respondents who have used the program ‚sometimes' or ‚very often' (multiple response).

Table 7: Use of Russian TV Programs (per cent)[1)]

| TV | 18-25 years n=20 | 30-50 years n=13 | 60-70 years n=16 | Total n=49 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ORT | 10 | 23 | 19 | 16 |
| NTV | 10 | 23 | 6 | 12 |
| RTR (Kanal Rossija) | - | 15 | - | 4 |
| Pressexpress | - | 8 | 6 | 4 |
| Russki Berlin | 15 | 15 | 19 | 16 |
| Evropazentr | - | 15 | 6 | 6 |
| Russisches Kulturprogramm, Spreekanal Berlin | 25 | 31 | 37 | 31 |
| Russisches Fernsehen in Deutschland, Spreekanal Berlin | 25 | 15 | 44 | 29 |
| Total | 85 | 145 | 137 | 118 |

1) The figures indicate the percentage of respondents who have used the program ‚sometimes' or ‚very often' (multiple response).

As for Russian radio, there are only three channels that are used by our focus group respondents at least to some extent (table 6): Radio Majak, Radio Russlands and Deutsche Welle. The Deutsche Welle is a public broadcasting station which features special cultural programs for international audiences in different languages. Radio Majak and Radio Russlands are public Russian channels from Moskov which can be received in Berlin on

medium and short waves. The reluctance to listen to Russian radio programs does not, however, mean that the Aussiedler are generally low in their use of radio per se. Instead, many of them report listening to German channels. Younger respondents prefer various commercial and public channels which feature pop-music, while the older Aussiedler report to listen to channels which broadcast Volksmusik programs.

Interestingly enough, the Russian television programs enjoy rather modest popularity among our focus group respondents (table 7). The only offerings which are used to some degree are the programs of the open channel Spreekanal, which features two cultural programs in Russian on a weekly basis. The Russian satellite channels NTV and ORT, on the other hand, enjoy rather low rates of attendance among the Aussiedler.

Our finding that the respondents of our focus groups are rather reluctant to use Russian radio and television channels must not be interpreted, however, that they are generally indifferent to these media. We know from the group discussions that Aussiedler use, to a considerable degree, German radio and television channels. However, we found that the amount of time people spent watching German television varies according to age and degree of religious enthusiasm. For instance, members of the group of the 60-70year old respondents in Bersenbrück said that they hardly ever watched television. The respondents who were younger and less religious, in contrast, reported quite frequent viewing of German television. The Aussiedler, and particularly the women among them, prefer the programs of the commercial channels, Pro 7 and Sat1 for movies and drama, soap operas and sitcoms. All respondents report low frequency of watching television news. Our own findings on television use are supplemented by a Boll's study (1995:124-126) who reports that the Aussiedler in his sample were quite keen on those programs in the two major public television channels ARD and ZDF which feature information on the former Soviet Union (for example, Auslandsjournal). He also found that German-Russians satisfy their general need for information on local German culture by watching tv game and quiz shows. Most popular among the Aussiedler are programs which present German Volksmusik and German hit-songs. Boll's study also found that Aussiedler are quite skeptical about German television news programs because they appear to them as too leftist.

### *4.3. Deficits of Minority and Majority Media*

The general picture of the media environment of the German-Russian Aussiedler and the patterns of media use point to several deficits of minority media and majority media in regards to identity politics of this minority group. We found, for instance, that there were hardly any minority media available that seriously treated the problems of the minority in its confrontation with the rather different cultural majority. The media which address issues pertaining to Ethnic Germans are rather lowbrow and simplistic when it comes to the negotiation of identity. Instead of enhancing a serious discourse within the minority community about the quite obvious problems of belonging, they reduce identity politics to practical cookbook-recipes of how to behave properly in a stereotypically-portrayed German society. Those minority media which supposedly take the identity problem of the Aussiedler seriously, such as the Landsmannschaft, treat it either as folklore or as an issue of a rather conservative lobby group. Both approaches do not contribute to bridging the gaps between the minority and the majority which shape the perceptions of the Ethnic Germans. Instead, the portrayal of the minority in its own media rather enhances these gaps.

When asked about their perception of the German majority media, the Aussiedler express disappointment on two points: First, they note that local Germans know hardly anything about the Aussiedler and their problems and they charge the media as responsible for this deficit of information. Second, they claim that the media fail to adequately cover the Aussiedler and their background. From their point of view, few stories about Aussiedler establish a realistic image of the group. These perceptions are directly linked to the processes of boundary marking towards the majority and other immigrant groups. It is most disturbing for the Aussiedler that the German media put them in the same category like other immigrants, such as asylum seekers. They think that the German media are responsible for insinuating that they are economic refugees who only draw on state programs. Furthermore, they claim that their desire for equal treatment and full acceptance as “real Germans” is, in their eyes, undermined by mainstream media coverage. Despite those general opinions about the majority media’s responsibility for the unfair and inadequate representation of the Aussiedler, some members of the focus group in Bersenbrück were quite critical of the local press. They criticized the daily local newspaper

for associating the Aussiedler with criminal activities. In their mind, this contributes to negative sentiments of the local Germans towards them.

One further remark on the deficits of the media's role in the identity politics of the German-Russian Aussiedler: neither the majority media nor the minority media use their potential for such self- and other definitions which could contribute to the inclusion of the minority group. While the minority press fails to keep up with the complexities of the Aussiedler's collective identity, the majority press does seemingly not use its potential for creating an adequate discourse which would lead to a realistic other-definition of Aussiedler by the majority society.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper discussed questions of social integration of ethnic minorities and mass media with respect to dilemmas of identity formation and communication among German-Russian Aussiedler. In conceptual terms, the notion of integration is related to inclusion and exclusion of minority groups which are the core of identity politics. It is assumed that integration must be seen as a complex process of reciprocal social exchange between minority and majority communities, in which self-definitions and other-definitions play a crucial role. Identity formation is linked to processes of boundary marking which set the minority group apart from other groups in society by referring to their distinct collective history, common values or cultural practices. The media enter the picture as the negotiations of group identities are based on communication in the public sphere. Mass media create a social and political reality, thereby providing a reference system for both majority and minority communities. Thus, the media are institutions that portray and shape the public exchange between minority and majority and the discourse on majority minority relations. In this perspective the media can legitimize or de-legitimize the demands of the minority and its request to maintain its distinct cultural identity, regardless of whether legal inclusion into society is granted or not. Moreover, the media provide a chance for minority communities to establish their own communication channels which may serve as forums of negotiation of identity politics. However, when examining media functions in processes of

social integration, one has to differentiate between majority media and media for and by minority groups.

Against this background, identity politics and mass media functions are examined on the basis of focus group discussions with German-Russian Aussiedler. Although the research is based on a small sample and is of qualitative nature, the exploration allows to gain valuable insight into the respondents' perceptions of their collective situation, their cultural practices, processes of boundary marking and communication. Identity politics among Ethnic Germans is fundamentally linked to the dilemma that, on the one hand, as full German citizens they belong to the majority society in legal terms. On the other hand, because of their cultural heritage, the experience of migration and language barriers, they feel excluded from the majority community to which they want to belong so badly. Two factors are responsible for the subjective perception of exclusion:

(1) As many Aussiedler have problems with the German language or speak with an accent, they feel discriminated in public and not accepted as "real" Germans.
(2) There is a clash of social values and cultural practices between Aussiedler and local Germans insofar as the previous images of "Germanness" and the expectations regarding better social conditions have not always come true after immigration. Thus, what we find are feelings of disillusion and estrangement which enhance processes of boundary marking not only against the local German majority but in particular against other Russian immigrants or Ausländer. Another finding is that the self-perception and other-perceptions of Ethnic Germans vary with age, religious enthusiasm and length of stay in Germany. It is particularly the mid-age group of people between 30 and 50 that most frequently revealed problems of self-location and adjustment in their new homeland.

Concerning the role of mass media, we found that identity formation, as it is revealed by the orientations of Ethnic Germans, is not made an issue whatsoever in either minority media nor majority media. Not even the media produced for Russian-Germans in Germany touch on questions of identity or self-location of the minority vis a vis the majority. Instead, the minority media are full of practical cookbook-recipes of how to behave properly in a stereotypically-portrayed German society. The Russian media, which address issues pertaining to Aussiedler, are rather lowbrow and simplistic, and avoid the dilemmas

of identity formation of their audience. The German majority media on the other hand, in the view of the Aussiedler, neglect them at all or are accused of negatively portraying them. One can conclude from these findings, that so far the media have failed to contribute in any significant way to the serious negotiation of identity politics and that the public discourse on Aussiedler questions does not refer to problems of identity as viewed by the minority on the receiving end. However, this conclusion must be preliminary as the results from the focus group discussions are qualitative in nature. It shall be the aim of the survey study to find out whether our findings apply in general terms.

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We ask for a 1 DM-postage stamp per paper from all those who wish to order WZB-papers and who live in Germany. These stamps contribute to the shipment costs incurred. All persons interested in WZB-papers from abroad are kindly requested to send one "Coupon-Réponse International" (international reply coupon) for each ordered paper. The coupons can be obtained at your local post office.
The reasons for these measures are the high increase in the number of ordered papers during the last months as well as the cut in funds imposed on publicly financed institutions like the WZB. We do ask for your understanding and hope that you will comply with the above mentioned procedure.